



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Kerang

FAITH AND DEEDS

A BIBLE STUDY FROM JAMES

TESTING AND MATERIAL THINGS – RICH IN GOD

READ JAMES 1:2-18

In our study up to this point we have seen the following:

The first main section of James 1 (verse 2:18) is about the testing of our faith and what it produces. We have discovered that the Bible indeed talks about:

- The testing of our faith (verses 2-12)
 - What testing produces – maturity and joy (verses 2-4)
 - How to be victorious in times of testing – faithful prayer (verses 5-8)

In the study for today the Bible teaches us about testing and material things – rich in God (verses 9-11)

READ JAMES 1:9-11

The Christian Church is the family of God. The Church is not *likened* to a family; it *is* a family. It does not operate *like* a family should, rather, every other family should take from the Church its analogy for daily life:

- its members have a Father;
- they *have* and *are* brothers and sisters;
- they care for one another;
- they are cared for by the Father;
- they share in one another's pain and joy;
- they are bonded by the same blood which purchased them;
- and they seek one purposes: to glorify God.

Paul writes about this in Ephesians 2. **READ EPHESIANS 2:19-22.** What do we learn from these verses?

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The same idea is also found in **EPHESIANS 3:14.**

For this reason James calls a member of the church a “brother”. The person is a member of the family, a Christian.

It is most possible that the Christians who fled Jerusalem after the persecution that broke out after the stoning of Stephen, had to leave with little or nothing possessions. This was then part of the testing, or trails, in material things: their faith in God was testing in the absence of material things. They joined congregations where others did not have the same experience: these were settled in their business pursuits and did not lack in material things. James 1:9-11 deals with these people.

READ JAMES 1:9-10.

I think the ESV (English Standard Version) has a better translation than the NIV. The ESV reads:

“Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.” (James 1:9–10, ESV)

The NIV “paraphrases” somewhat and comes up with:

“The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.” (James 1:9–10, NIV)

What do you think is the “lowly brother” (or “humble circumstances”) referred to in this verse?

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James 1:9-10 are parallel verses, one contrasting the other. The “lowly” (or “humble”) of verse 9 is contrasted with “rich”, while “exaltation” (or “high position”) is contrasted with humiliation (or “low position”).

The plain message of the text is: *there are times that the Christian will experience difficult times and have to sacrifice material things.*

Prosperity theology

A new, unbiblical line of teaching these days is the “Prosperity Doctrine,” “Health and Wealth,” “Name It and Claim It,” or “Blab It and Grab It” (the latter term tends to be used by those who criticize this teaching). God wants you to be rich (and/or healthy), but He can not bless you unless you first send money (also known as a “seed-faith offering”) to whichever televangelist or teacher tells you about this scheme. Perfected by Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Marilyn Hickey, Benny Hinn the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. A central tenet of the prosperity gospel is that God wills the financial prosperity of every Christian. If a believer lives in poverty, he/she is living outside God’s intended will. “You must realize that it is God’s will for you to prosper”¹

John Piper comments:

*The great tragedy of prosperity-preaching is that a person does not have to be spiritually awakened in order to embrace it; one needs only to be greedy. Getting rich in the name of Jesus is not the salt of the earth or the light of the world. In this, the world simply sees a reflection of itself. And if it works, they will buy it.*²

¹ Kenneth Copeland, Laws of Prosperity, p. 51

² http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2007/1993_Prosperty_Preaching_Deceitful_and_Deadly

READ MATTHEW 13:7,22. What is the reason why the seed in these verses do not grow to fruition?

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READ 2TIMOTHY 4:9. What happened to Demas is the same thing mentioned in Matthew 13:22.

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All is not what it seems

What should the Christian think about the providence of God when he has to sacrifice material possessions?

READ JAMES 1:9-10 AGAIN. What in your opinion does “exultation” and “humiliation” mean?

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Both the “lowly” and the “rich” should *boast* in their “exultation” and “humiliation”. What do you think this “boasting” means?

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Let’s put two verses together to work out this *boasting*. **READ JEREMIAH 9:22-23** and also **1CORINTHIANS 1:31**. How are these verses linked?

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The operative clause is “in the Lord”. Both the “humble” and the “rich” brother should always be boasting about one thing: whatever their circumstances, they are “in the Lord”.

The “poor” is “rich” because

- he is in the Lord, and to the Him belongs the earth and everything in it (**PSALM 24:1**);
- the Lord provides to his elect all they need (**PHILIPPIANS 4:19, PSALM 23:1, 2CORINTHIANS 9:8**)
- nothing in this world is of eternal value (**1PETER 1:18-19, MATTHEW 6:19**)

The rich is poor, because

- he, like the poor, will pass away like a wild flower (**JAMES 1:10**)
- he has nothing in this world which can really enrich him (**LUKE 12:32-33, 1TIMOTHY 6:6**)
- he has a treasure that “can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for” him (**1PETER 1:4**)
- earthly treasures can become a deadly trap (**1TIMOTHY 6:10**)

READ JAMES 1:11. The term “about his business” (NIV) or “pursuits” (ESV) is the same used in 4:13 where it talks about the uncertainty of “what will happen tomorrow”.

What is the warning underlying this verse?

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