

“Spiritual Maturity: Connection with God by Rescuing a Soul”

James 5:19-20 (NAS)

- 19** My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,
20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

THE LAST WORD

This is the final command from James at a long list of commands given for our SPIRITUAL MATURITY. As such, it holds a special place of consideration.

It is also the last of the 5 commands in reaction to our “unfair world” as described in 5:1-6, and the last of the 5 ways we are to CONNECT with God’s character.

In these 2 verses, we the “brethren” are called to a ministry of reclamation – a rescue mission to the wandering and the lost. This is the highest call to the follower of Christ – to connect with Jesus in His role and ministry as “Savior.” We cannot be a savior – there is only one – but we can be an agent in pointing people to the Savior.

In a sense, this is the “gold star” of spiritual maturity, or the “extra credit point” in connecting with Jesus. There is no more blessed privilege, duty or responsibility in the Christian life than pointing one toward the provision of the cross and the hope of the resurrection. **This is SPIRITUAL MATURITY and CONNECTING WITH JESUS on the highest level, and well deserves the position of James’ final challenge to SPIRITUAL MATURITY.**

THE DUAL TARGET

There is question and division among commentators as to whether James is speaking of a Christian straying from the truth and needing to turn back - or of a nonbeliever needing to turn to the truth for the first time.

V. 19 (“if any among you strays”) seems to favor speaking of a wandering believer.
V. 20 (“he who turns a sinner from the error of his way”) might favor speaking of a nonbeliever.

In my estimation the debate is meaningless. Our call and challenge are to point all sinners to Jesus, whether they are prodigal Christians or lost non-Christians. And God is equally pleased with either endeavor!

A lost sheep can describe either a wandering believer or a lost nonbeliever – and God is all about rescuing lost sheep.

THE DUAL RESCUE

Note from v. 20 that we, the spiritually mature, are to be in the (1) “save a soul” ministry and a (2) “cover a multitude of sins” ministry. Or, in other words – our ministry of rescue is all about souls and sins – these are the two things to which SPIRITUAL MATURITY must be especially alert.

1. What soul needs rescue?
2. What sin needs covering?

Net result: when we point one back to Jesus, or to Jesus for the first time, (1) a soul gets rescued from either the death of a damaged testimony or the death of eternal separation from God and (2) sins get forgiven and covered by the blood of Jesus. To both, God receives the glory!

Note: “save his soul” means the soul of the one saved – not the soul of the rescuer. “cover a multitude of sins” means the sins of the one saved – again, not the sins of the rescuer

This RESCUE is given as the responsibility of each INDIVIDUAL – not just of the church body as a whole. Each of us are called to a ministry of rescue.

We must ever be on “Spiritual 911 Alert”!

TRUTH IS THE MARK

Note that it is “straying from the truth” (v. 19) or “error of his ways” (v. 20) that is the problem. TRUTH, for the Christian is not just an intellectual belief, but a **MORAL RESPONSIBILITY**. James in his letter has made it clear that the TRUTH of the gospel is not just something to be believed, but something to be done.

The Bible speaks of LOVING the truth (2 Thess. 2:10)
 OBEYING the truth (Gal. 5:7) and
 DISPLAYING the truth (2 Cor. 4:2)

It is an ACTION - not just an ATTITUDE.

So, it is that “strayers” or “sinners” depart from the truth, not so much in their failure to believe something, but by their actions of disobedience. Often, to stray from the truth or disobey is just to DO NOTHING - not go the church or not read the Word or not talk to God or not get involved, etc.

Hebrews 2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

The Greek word for “wander” or “to stray” is *planao*, from which we derive the word “planet,” a heavenly wanderer.

THE “ERROR OF HIS WAYS”

1. The “hard heart” (Luke 8: 5, 12)
2. The “shallow heart” (Luke 8: 6, 13)

3. The “infested heart” (Luke 8: 7, 14)

All of these could describe both the “wanderer” from the truth or the “lost” from the truth. And all of these kinds of hearts can be found in the church as well as in the world.

For the ministry of rescue, we must discover

4. The “fertile heart” (Luke 8:8-15)

5 STEPS TO A MISSION OF RESCUE

Proverbs 11:31 ... He who is wise wins souls.

1. LOVE - We must love the wanderer and sinner, not judge or despise him/her

Our rescue must be out of LOVE – not of duty, judgment or accomplishment

Proverbs 10:12 Love covers all sins.

2. INTEGRITY - We must possess what we wish them to have. We must be authentic in our desire to restore and reclaim them for God.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.

3. PRAYER - Restoration and rescue must ultimately be done by God. We don't just need His assistance – we need HIM.

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death.

4. CONFRONTATION - Few people like to confront, and fewer are Godly at it. Yet Scripture clearly calls us to confrontation.

Romans 15:14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another.

5. RECONCILIATION - This final step in the invitation to a restored or new relationship with Jesus. It included confession and forgiveness and “next step” direction.

2 Corinthians 5:18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.