

"Staying the Course"

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 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.

(James 5:19-20 NASB)



Today we come to study the last two verses in the book of James, which is a book that gives us a lot of practical teachings. It's this little book that Martin Luther called, "The Epistle of Straw." Luther's quote was, "St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it." Many argued the claim that it contradicts Luther's doctrine of "justification through faith alone" (*Sola fide*) which Luther derived from his translation of Romans 3:28.

~Book of James~

This is a book that struggled to be canonized and recognized as inspired, but is loaded with practical teachings on how to live the ever-day Christian life. I love the book of James just because, it is so practical, short and to the point. James doesn't "beat around the bush" as the saying goes. He identifies himself in verse one as "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," (James 1:1 NASB) and James was traditionally understood as "James the Just," the brother of Jesus. James was probably the oldest brother of Jesus since he heads the list of siblings in Matthew 13:55.

~James Leadership and Knowledge!



As many, James misunderstood Jesus in the beginning, as recorded in John 7:2-5, but was later a leader of the Jerusalem council. (Acts 15) He was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after His resurrection, (I Corinthians 15:7) Paul called him a "pillar" of the church. (Galatians 2:9) When Peter was rescued from prison, he

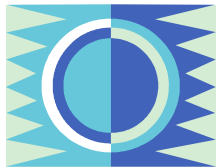
told his friends to go tell James. (Acts 12:17) James was well established as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ and well known to the Apostles and the Christian Leaders of the day. I would observe that he was strong in the faith and well thought of for his leadership, discernment and knowledge.

~Written to Believers~

This epistle of James was written to what appears to be Believers or Christians and may have been written to the Jerusalem Church, which was scattered after Stephen's death. (Acts 8:1, 11:19)

~James' Heart~

Today we want to look at the last two verses in the book of James, chapter 5 and verses 19 and 20. *"My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth*



and one turns him back, 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." (James 5:19-20 NASB) In

verses 19-20 James closes his book with an encouragement to pursue people who have wandered from the truth. Remember he is writing this epistle to believers who are still in the faith and in the church. It's more than just turning back one that strays from the truth; it's turning a sinner from his sinful ways to a saved relationship with Christ. This I believe was something that was heavy on the heart of James as he ends his practical book.

After all, "Isn't this what Jesus came to earth for; to save lost souls?"

~Three Important Issues~

We see three important issues from these last two verses in James that we would like to discuss today.

- I. Believers Can and Do Stray from the Truth.**
- II. We Have an Obligation to Pursue our Wayward Brother.**
- III. We Have a Responsibility to Pursue Lost People.**

Let's get started.

I. Believers Can and Do Stray from the Truth.

- I. Why do people wander from faith in Jesus and the truth of God's Word? We want to review five reasons why people stray.
 - i. When people fall into error and wander away from Christ and truth, they usually go through a process.

A. They choose to keep the wrong company.

"Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

(1 Corinthians 15:33 NASB)



We all don't want Christians running around with others that are corrupt and do not have the same values as maybe you and I. How many times have you heard parents say, "I wish that guy or gal wouldn't come around us, they will corrupt us and their values are different than ours?" Or have heard some wise person say, "Nothing good can come out of this relationship." Or another to say, "I told them this would end up as no good." You know what I'm saying! Just as Paul said in Corinthians 15, *"Bad Company corrupts good morals."* It's still true today. One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel. It only takes one to corrupt. Be careful who your friends are!

B. They have entertained wayward thinking too long.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (James 1:13-15 NASB)



Even in our own denomination we have had ministers to fall by the way and walk away from the truth. In the late 1800's the editors, William Brinkerhoff and B. F. Snook, of "The Hope of Israel" which is now the Bible Advocate joined the Universalists. (Has the teaching that all people will be saved and end up in heaven. Some Universalists also do not believe in the deity of Christ)

These ministers strayed from the Church of God (Seventh Day) after many productive years, and were sometimes later preaching for the Universalists.

C. They willfully choose to stray from what they know is right.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21 NASB)

~Story – Robert Robinson~



Has anyone here heard of Robert Robinson? Probably not, he lived in the 1700s and at the age of twenty he reformed his ways and became a Methodist preacher.

He wrote the song “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” as well as several others, but this was the most well known. In the fourth verse of the song he penned these verses.

Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

Robinson later converted to Unitarianism, which for one thing denies the divinity of Jesus Christ, one of the core beliefs of Christianity.

~Robert Robinson Story~

The story is sometimes known of Robinson, that one day while traveling in a stagecoach, a lady was humming this song and asked him what he thought of the hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” He responded, “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feeling I had then.”

He walked away, strayed from what he knew was right.

D. They allow their beliefs to become warped.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

(1 Timothy 4:1 NASB)

I know of a small church in my home town that has had two instances in the last several years, where the two ministers of this church left the faith. Their beliefs became warped. In the first one a few years ago the pastor had a homosexual relationship and he is now out of the ministry and living with his partner. The same church had their next pastor that had been there several years to become interested in another woman while he was married. He is now out of the ministry. Pastors that was well liked and respected. They both walked away from the truth and what they knew to be biblically correct.

E. They have a world view change in which faith is rejected.

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13 NASB)

~Story – Charles Templeton “The Case for Faith” by Lee Strobel~

Have you ever heard of Charles Templeton? Have you ever heard of Bron Clifford? Have you ever heard of Billy Graham? Well Charles Templeton and Bron Clifford were on the same platform as Billy Graham and preaching in auditoriums in 1945 of up to 30,000 people at one revival. You probably never heard of Charles Templeton or Bron Clifford because they “walked away from the truth, they turned their backs on God.”

~Chuck Templeton~

One seminary president, after hearing Chuck Templeton preach one evening to an audience of thousands, called him “the most gifted and talented young man in America today for preaching.” As a matter of fact, in 1946, the

National Association of Evangelicals published an article on men who were “best used of God” in that organization’s five-year existence. The article highlighted the ministry of Chuck Templeton. Billy Graham was never mentioned in this article.

~Chuck Templeton turns to be an agnostic~

Chuck Templeton decided to go to seminary to learn more and came out an agnostic. (Agnostic – one who is not committed to believing in either the existence or the nonexistence of God or a god.) Later on in his older years Templeton wrote a book by the title “Farewell to God.” He remained



fascinated with the life and philosophy of Jesus the man, even if he no longer felt Him to be Jesus the divine. Templeton moved to Canada and in the late '90s was interviewed by Lee Strobel for his book, “The Case for Faith.” At that time Templeton was dying of Alzheimer’s. The author said Templeton looked up at him with tears in his eyes and said, “I miss Him,” “I miss Him.” He missed Jesus, his one time savior and companion. This promising young evangelist rejected the truth.

~Bron Clifford’s Story~

How about Bron Clifford? Remember he was also with Billy Graham. By 1954, Clifford had lost his family, his ministry, his health, and then his life. Alcohol and financial irresponsibility had done him in. He wound up leaving his wife and two children. At just thirty-five years of age, this once great preacher died from cirrhosis of the liver in a run-down motel on the edge of Amarillo. His last job was selling used cars in the panhandle of Texas. Folks, he walked away! He turned his back on God. Just remember, people do walk around.

~The Enemy~

“The enemy tries to distort truths of God to deceive believers to walk away.”
“And sometimes it works, as it did in these men’s life.”

II -We have an obligation to pursue our wayward brother.

I. We are our brother’s keeper. (Genesis 4:7-9)

- i. There are many references in the New Testament scripture that clearly teach we are responsible for our brothers and sisters spiritual well-being. Today, I want to share three.

~Jesus Said~

*"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17 NASB)*

Jesus said – Confront your brother or sister privately, if that doesn't work, go with a witness or two. If no restoration before the church, treat them as you would unbelievers.

~James Said~

My friends, if any followers have wandered away from the truth, you should try to lead them back. If you turn sinners from the wrong way, you will save them from death, and many of their sins will be forgiven.

(James 5:19-20 CEV)

~Paul Said~



My friends, you are spiritual. So if someone is trapped in sin, you should gently lead that person back to the right path. But watch out, and don't be tempted yourself. You obey the law of Christ when you offer each other a helping hand.

(Galatians 6:1-2 CEV)

Paul said– The godly, spiritual leaders should confront the brother or sister in a spirit of gentleness with the goal of restoration-not exposure. Remember, we are to be careful that we do not become tempted and fall with them back into sin. We have to be stronger spiritually than our fallen brother or sister.

~A Most Difficult Area~

- i. This is probably one of the most difficult areas of obedience for us- we want to be Mr. or Mrs. Nice Guy or Gal.
- ii. We don't want to offend anyone. We don't want to interfere. We don't want to confront people that have strayed.
- iii. If we want to fulfill the law of Christ, we are to carry each other's burden- we are only brother's keeper. (Genesis 4)

III - We Have A Responsibility to Pursue Lost People

II. Helping Lost People Find Christ.

- i. I believe James is moving into the area of the pursuit of not just people who have walked away from Christ, but closes his book with a last verse that includes lost people in general.

“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.” (James 5:20 NASB)

- ii. Nothing comes closer to the heart of God than lost people.
 1. God sent Jesus into the world so that lost people would be saved.
 2. Jesus established the church so that lost people would be saved, have a place to go to be cared for, nourished, matured, and then released to go back into the world to help save other lost people. Point them to Jesus.
- iii. There is one place in the Scriptures that says heaven celebrated; (that I know of)

1. ‘When a sinner repents.

“I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7 NASB)



This celebration in heaven has to do with lost people being saved. #1 priority.

iv. People who answer the call to bring lost people to Christ do two things according to James:

1. They save him from eternal death, and they cover over his sins by his repentance.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls.”

(Proverbs 11:30 NASB)

Conclusion:

Action Steps:

- ➡ **1. Let’s pray for ourselves that God will not allow us to wander away for the truth.** Remember Peter. He denied Christ three times.
 - ➡ **2. Let’s pray for others who have wandered away from the truth. That God will some how convict their hearts to see Jesus with fresh eyes and a fresh understanding.**
 - ➡ **3. Ask God to reveal the people in your life who have wandered away from Christ and ask God to show you what you could do to help bring them back.**
 - ➡ **4. Be intentional when it comes to lost people. Determine you are going to begin working with them to help them find Christ.**
 - ➡ **5. Ask God to give you a plan, then, work God’s plan!**
 - ➡ **6. Think right now who those people may be. You probably have a loved one or a co-worker or friend that needs Jesus Christ.**
- ➡ **AMEN**



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July 12, 2008

Dewey E. (Obed) Fox, Bond Servant, of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Many notes and outline was taken from the message given in June 2008 at the Denver Church of God (Seventh Day) by Pastor Mike Vlad while I was there for MTS pastor credits. He graciously let me use his outline and some notes. I added to or took away as needed for this message. Thank you Pastor Vlad.