

A Trustworthy Relationship

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I think you are going to see how much God does work at weaving things together, with the sermonettes you have heard today.

If you will open your Bibles, we are going to quickly go through a number of scriptures that are very familiar to anybody who has been called to their specific place within the body of Christ. They are so familiar because they remind us of the incredible privilege that each of us has been individually and specifically given at this time. However, as I read them, I ask you to focus more of your attention on *hearing the words* rather than reading. And as you do so, please keep this one question firmly in your minds: Am I as convicted that these words apply to my brethren that have been carefully placed by the Father into the specific spots within the body of Christ, as I think they do to me? Or, has pride overwhelmed us?

If this really was our individual conviction, then our total perspective on life within the body of Christ would be one of righteous living as an outgoing service and benefit to the whole. There would be no schism among the elect of God but rather absolute trust in the Father to do His work.

We will begin in Ephesians 1 and look at a number of scriptures without comment. But please stay focused on the question at hand. “Am I as convicted that these verses apply to my brother and sisters, as they do to me?”

Ephesians 1:15-23 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His

inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 2:4-10 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

I Peter 1:2-7 [E]lect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade

away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 1:13-16 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

I Peter 1:22-23 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.

I Peter 2:5 [Y]ou also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

I Peter 3:8-13 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from

speaking guile; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?

What incredible blessings God has bestowed in separating a people now to be holy as He is holy! But before we go any further along in this sermon, I want you all to ask ourselves the question again: Do we really believe God is making this a reality for all whom He has called, or do we see our calling as unique only to ourselves and maybe a few others we deem worthy of our time, effort, and trust?

You may consider this a silly question but, brethren, I think it is a very serious question that each one of us needs to be asking ourselves as we approach the Passover and our examination of the sacrificial life that we are called to emulate in every way: How much of the division within God’s church is coming from us and a carnally deceived heart that, in reality, sees ourselves as more special, of higher quality, than other parts of the body of Christ who also have been specifically chosen and strategically placed by the Father?

While thinking about this, also consider a fact: That the carnal mind that we are battling within ourselves is always trying to protect our territory, so we put up walls. The most precious territory to be had lies within the territory of our place within the body of Christ and the blessings that go with it, specifically given to us for the purpose of being given away to the whole body. If we have allowed Satan to deceive us into faithlessly building walls because we do not trust one another and can only see the need to protect our territory, we trample underfoot the sacrifice of Jesus Christ because it is only through His sacrifice and faith that these blessings have been made available to us for sanctified service—a service that is uncommon to the carnal man.

I want to give you a small list of the blessings that God gives to His elect, the gifts as noted from the verses we just read. And please consider the precious trust we have been given through Jesus Christ to completely share everything we have faithfully and without reserve and without walls.

We need to understand this is about one of the most miraculous changes the elect can and must make now, as God is carefully watching over His people. He is watching to see if we are trusting one another, both implicitly and explicitly, because we trust the Father and His work in us, His handpicked group that He has blessed almost beyond comprehension, called together. We must do this with the understanding that the god of this world is doing everything he can to destroy that sacred trust and the unity of the brethren.

Satan is the one driving us not to intimately trust our brethren who he is accusing day and night, as it says in Revelation 12:10. So, with hearts of faithful children, we must be firmly convicted that each one of those called now have been blessed and measured together with the following gifts in preparation for the return of our older brother, exactly as our Father has purposed.

We have been blessed with these gifts:

We all have access to the Father in prayer.

We all are working toward complete faithfulness.

We all have been given wisdom and revealed knowledge of Jesus Christ to the degree God has determined.

We all have hope as inheritors of the Kingdom.

We all have the power of God through Jesus Christ.

We all ought to fill the body of Christ exactly where the Father wants us.

We all have mercy through Jesus Christ and are alive together with Him.

We all are seated firmly with Jesus Christ in heavenly places as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

We all are perfectly fitted by God to grow as one into the holy temple as God's dwelling place. We all are the elect of God mercifully kept by His power and ready to be revealed as the body of Christ.

We all endure customized testing as the precious, purified gold of God.

We all are being created holy as God is holy.

We all are living stones with Jesus Christ being built into the house of God.

We all are chosen, royal, special, and the people of God.

We all are to be single-minded with God and treating one another with tenderhearted courtesy. And possibly, most important to this message, we are all under the watchful eyes of God who is seeing what we are doing.

With these things in mind, turn over a few chapters in I Peter and consider if we are really doing this end-time work, because this is the end-time work for God's church.

I Peter 4:7-19 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.

If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Our great God is faithful to be placing people exactly where He wants us. He is creating the body of believers who are becoming the fullness of the body of Christ, complete at Jesus’ return, from the weak of this world, so that when all is said and done no one except God can take credit at what happens. This is an important thing to keep in mind as we trust God in learning to trust one another. Every one of us is going to fall one way. But do we trust our Father enough to know that He will work it out? And are we trying to help when we have the opportunity?

Our faithful God proclaims the end from the beginning; and He sees us as we *will be*, not merely as we are. We should be trying to do the same toward one another or there will be no unified body of believers at Christ’s return. But, of course, brethren, no unified body of believers at Christ’s return is an impossibility because it is not going to God’s plan. His plan will succeed but individually we could get failed unless we learn now to faithfully trust one another and, by extension, God, in humility.

Now before we go any further in this sermon, I would like you to turn to one of my favorite scriptures in all of God’s marvelous words of instruction to us. Please turn with me to Malachi 3. In Malachi, we see a gifted people rebuked by God because they had become arrogantly self-centered and at times actually contemptuous of one another. Their infidelity and hypocrisy in personal relationships belied the truth of their relationship with God. Yet, here in verse 16, God reminds us what His precious gifts will be doing with what they have been given in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ and the Day of Judgment.

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.

The *NIV Study Bible* comment on this verse says:

Those who have not given way to doubts and cynicism, talk with each other. In the face of widespread complaining against God, they sought mutual encouragement in fellowship.

So just as a point of reference, in time and activity this verse precedes, let us read from verse 17 through the end of chapter 4. Following the brothers talking one to the other, God says:

Malachi 3:17-18 “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.”

Malachi 4:1-6 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts, “that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” says the Lord of hosts. “Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

Now let us turn over to James, the book we have already been in today. Keep what we just read in mind about God listening to His righteous jewels.

James 5:7-12 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the

earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.

As we go through the remainder of this sermon, there are a few very important instructions to be gleaned from these six verses. They will keep us in unity if we make God’s perspective of life our perspective of life and faith, and trust in Him and one another.

1. God’s faithful work and patience in bringing His precious crop to fruition is actually part of His work to establish faithful patience in us.
2. We condemn ourselves by grudgingly accepting our duties within the household of God while criticizing the dutiful service of others. Remember Malachi 3:16, brethren: God is listening.
3. We always need to remember God is absolutely sovereign and is working things to an end perfectly in His compassion and mercy, no matter what we feel may be going on (as we have already heard today).
4. Personal integrity is the absolute key to not abusing the gifts and falling into the terrifying judgment of God. You will see in a minute why I think James saw this as so important.

There are four men named James who are mentioned as possible authors of this epistle. But the one who most agree penned the letter is James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ. Of course, he would have been younger than Jesus, being one of the children of Mary and Joseph following Jesus’ miraculous

birth. But he may have been the oldest and closest to Jesus' age with the unique view of Jesus that no one else had, except maybe Mary. Although during Jesus' life, James and the rest of his siblings did not accept Him as the Messiah (as you can read in Matthew 13, Luke 7, and John 7), God makes a point of apparently singling him out (as recorded in I Corinthians 15: 4-8) as one of those who bore witness to the resurrected Christ. By the time the apostle Paul, who recalled this event in I Corinthians 15, had dealt with James, he had been placed by God into a position of stewardship over God's church in Jerusalem (as you can read in Acts and Galatians).

It is important for us to consider these things as we look at his epistle because it may help us to understand it from the unique perspective James had concerning his elder brother Jesus Christ, along with an event that he probably was witness to later on. This letter is not something that any Christian—any member of the body of Christ, any of those preparing for Jesus Christ's return—should take lightly because God had prepared James to give very specific instructions to those within the body of Christ.

The MacArthur Study Bible Introduction to the Epistle of James states:

James, with its devotion to direct, pungent statements on wise living, is reminiscent of the book of Proverbs. It has a practical emphasis, stressing not theoretical knowledge, but godly behavior. James wrote with passionate desire for his readers to be uncompromisingly obedient to the word of God.

Being raised in the same house with his brother Jesus, who was a perfect example of a man, certainly prepared James for the work God would give him later in the body of Christ (as did the incident we are going to look at in a minute). I believe both of these situations were part of the preparations in James' life to shape the epistle he wrote in passionate desire for his readers to be uncompromisingly obedient to the Word of God. They are of critical importance for us today for preparing in unity for Jesus Christ's return.

One more thing to keep in mind about James is written about James in Herbert Lockyer's book *All the Men of the Bible*. In explaining his reasons for believing that this James was the one who wrote the epistle, he writes:

The way the language is written in passages in the Bible indicate this James was a relationship within, rather than without, the immediate family of Joseph and Mary.

Hold on to that thought, brethren, because we too have the opportunity to have a relationship with Jesus Christ from within rather than without. He goes on to say:

His epistle give an admirable summary of practical duties incumbent upon all believers” [this is another interesting thought, brethren]. Believers are only those called now who are no longer subject to Satan’s deceit and unbelief.

Finally, Lockyer writes something that is so important to all within the body of Christ that I am convinced that James picked this up from observing his older brother’s constant source for His wisdom. Lockyer writes:

Because of [James’] habit of always kneeling in intercession for the saints, his knees became callused like a camel’s. Thus he became known as the man with camel knees.

As we will see in a minute, the epistle of James is written specifically to the elect of God and how they develop a relationship of trust with the gifts they have. Throughout the book, James shows that prayerfully seeking God’s guidance in every situation is key to success within the body of Christ.

But, first, let us turn to that event that I was talking about.

Acts 5:1-11 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came on all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”

Then she immediately fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

What was James thinking as he sat with all that feared, following the immediate execution of judgment for sin? How long did he think about this and seek God’s guidance to understand it in tandem with the words and examples of merciful compassion that his brother had lived throughout His life—a compassion so great that it extended all the way through his brother’s final prayer to His Father from the stake: “Forgive them, for they know not what they do”?

James’ epistle is more than a group of direct and pungent statements of wise living. It is the inspired Word of God written by a man who clearly saw the balanced mind and character of God firsthand and knew that only a carefully developed relationship through prayer could firmly establish trust in interpersonal relationships among the brethren.

Acts 4:32-37, which led up to the situation with Ananias and Sapphira, shows us that the brethren had taken their abundance and were sharing their gifts. As we know, this was not about the society of socialism, but faithful members of Christ recognizing all they had spiritually and physically were gifts from God to be used with compassion and wisdom to serve the whole

body. We know from Peter's remarks in the next chapter, it was up to each individual to decide what to do with what they have been given. How they use what they had was not for show or wealth redistribution, but to learn to make godly decisions how best to serve within the body of Christ.

Now in consideration of James' unique perspective, please turn with me back to James 5 and we will be reading the verses following the last verse we read (in verse 12): "But above all . . . let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No."

James 5:13-20 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sin, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Brethren, trust is a two-way street with our Father directing traffic. And it is our responsibility to seek His direction in handling these difficult relationship issues with proper judgment, compassion, and mercy towards one another through prayer. In every one of these specific events, as we all learn through the years, we have our chance to experience from both sides, as a dear friend of mine reminded me a few weeks ago. Sometimes we will be the one in need and sometimes we will be in the position to supply the need. But both positions are going to require us to drop our defenses and make ourselves vulnerable, trusting our brethren who are right there with us

in our circumstances, relying together on the direction of our compassionate and merciful Lord.

It is interesting that James makes note of Elijah as someone carnal like us yet acting in faith. But he only mentions his prayers for drought and rain. If you take the hint and read I Kings 17, you will see that through three-and-a-half years of drought, Elijah found himself in a number of situations where he was severely tested as one in need and one who is able to supply the need. And it was only through prayer and closeness to God he was able to get through it.

Through every one of our life's events in the body of Christ, prayer and walking according to the direction God gives is the answer. It will even give us the opportunity to know what to do, to help each other to keep from wandering from the truth, in a right way.

James began the epistle in chapter 1 by telling us that God has brought us all together of His own will, to be made perfect and complete, swift to hear and slow to speak, and to be doers of His Word. He ends the epistle with practical applications for those who will faithfully trust and look up for one another. And he ends with the words "covers a multitude of sins": Five words, brethren, which nicely sum up what we have already read, came from the apostle Peter in I Peter 4.

I Peter 4:7-11 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Have a wonderful Sabbath, everyone!