

• *How to face unjust treatment from fellow Christians*

1. We must learn not to be bitter

• *We have to learn to leave the matter with God totally*

2. We must learn to follow the example of the saints of God throughout the history of the church

• *In the Old Testament – the prophets are the heroes*

• *They lived close to God and heard His voice*

• *Patient*

• *The example of Job*

• *Many troubles – the worst was the criticism of his friends*

• *Eventually God had mercy and intervened*

James is telling us how to face unjust treatment from fellow Christians. We might think that we should not need such advice but we do. Sooner or later every Christian will find something disappointing in other Christians! We are very slow to understand each other and often we treat each other badly. So we all need to know how to face ill-treatment, even from fellow Christians. James has told us that we often have to do nothing! We must not fight back against immature Christians by being as immature as they are. James continues to give us the details.

1. **We must learn not to be bitter.** *‘Brothers and sisters, do not complain against one another or you will be judged. See the Judge is standing at the doors!’* ^{□1}. The greatest troubles involve people. It is bad enough when circumstances are against us, but it can be even worse when a close friend or a fellow-Christian turns against us. Here in James’ time, rich Christians were badly treating poorer Christians. There was a terrible temptation for the poorer Christians to be bitter. But we never get very far in the Christian life unless we develop a forgiving spirit. We have to learn not to complain, not to get bitter. We have to learn to leave the matter with God totally! God will act for us – but only if we leave the matter to Him! The farmer does not get a good harvest until he waits to the very end of the rains!

2. **We must learn to follow the example of the saints of God throughout the history of the church.** *‘Brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and of patience’* ^{□1}. *Think of it. We congratulate those who have persisted amidst conflict* ^{□2}. When you read the Old Testament it is the prophets who are the heroes. Most of the kings were backslidden politicians. The priests were just people who looked after the temple, keeping the ritual going along nicely! It was the prophets who were the great men. They lived close to God and heard His voice. Then they shared what they had heard from God. Then they were persecuted by their fellow-Israelites! Then they had to leave their lives in the hands of God. It required great patience.

Another example is Job. *‘You have heard of the perseverance of Job, and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. You see how that the Lord is full of pity, and is merciful’* ^{□1}. Job went through many troubles but the worst of it all was receiving criticism from his friends. Even his wife turned against him. Again and again they accuse and slander Job. Job had to endure it without slandering them in the way they slandered him. The great line in the book of Job is 42:10. ‘The Lord turned around the fortunes of Job, when he prayed for his friends. And then the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before’. Job had to wait for God to act. And while he was waiting he had to control his temper and not hit back at the friends who were dealing with him so unjustly. He had to learn to pray for those who were treating him so badly. Eventually God had mercy and intervened. But we all have to wait for God’s intervention. We shall miss a lot of blessing if we fight back for ourselves instead of leaving our case in the hands of God.

□1 5:9

□1 5:10
□2 5:11a

□1 5:11

3. Amidst our troubles we must control our instinct to hit back

• In a situation of controversy those who are right are in as much danger as those who are wrong!

• The danger is the menace of self-righteousness

• They will become self-righteous and will miss the blessing that is coming to them

• If you cannot do much about your situation, leave it to God and do nothing but pray

3. Amidst our troubles we must control our instinct to hit back. *'But, my brothers and sisters, above all things, do not use an oath when you talk to others. Do not swear by the heaven, or by the earth, or by any other oath. Instead let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No" be no, or you will be condemned'*¹. In any situation where the Lord is doing anything there will always be controversy. Often one group of Christians will attack another group of Christians. Here there were rich Christians discriminating against poorer Christians. Clearly it was the rich Christians who were in the wrong. But there is an important principle here: Christians who are not backslidden must be careful not to attack verbally Christians who are backslidden. This is so important. James says this is 'above all things'. **In a situation of controversy those who are right are in as much danger as those who are wrong!** The danger for the 'spiritual ones' is self-righteousness and the misuse of the name of God. They are likely to say. 'As sure as God is God, He will judge you.' They are likely to use the name of God to 'get at' their backslidden friends. James says 'Don't do it. Don't use the name of God self-righteously. Just talk simply and clearly without using religious, self-righteous language. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No" be no.'

The danger when you know you are right is the menace of self-righteousness. But God hates self-righteousness as much as He hates any other kind of sin. The poor in James' situation were behaving well. The rich were behaving badly. But if the poorer Christians start to become self-righteous and they start talking badly and threatening the others ('I swear it. God will judge you!') then they will miss the blessing that is coming to them.

When others treat you badly, do what you can to clear yourself. If you find you cannot do much about your situation, then leave it to God, and do nothing but pray. Pray for your enemies especially. Guard your tongue especially. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No' be no, and God will bless you and vindicate you.



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