

“Sound the Trumpet!”
James 5:19-20

July 21, 2013

A. Major Interpretations – who is the wanderer?

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^A Galatians 5:4, 2 Peter 2:20-22 – but in each case the read the context

^B Luke 22:32

^C Ezekiel 33:1-11

^D 2 Timothy 2:19

^E John 14:6

^F Galatians 6:1, 1 Peter 3:15, Matthew 11:28-30

^G Proverbs 10:12, 1 Peter 4:8

^H Galatians 6:2

—{1}. **James 5:19-20. Sound the Trumpet!**

A. Major Interpretations

- a. who is the person described here as erring from the truth?
- b. depending upon where they stand in respect to the various theological fences that have arisen through the years, interpreters frequently take quite opposing view of how these last two verses in James are to be understood. And each, to my mind, in some way fails to give full justice to the text. Let me set out the three most popular approaches, of necessity somewhat simplified because of time.
- c. who is this one that is spoken of as wandering from the truth?

2. An Unbeliever?

- a. Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary^{—{2}} takes this view
- b. It is clear from the words “my brothers” that James addresses this last exhortation to believers. It is also apparent that he speaks of the possibility that one of them may “wander from the truth.” Verse 20 gives reasons to believe that the truth from which the wanderer turns is the saving truth of the gospel. James' purpose in these closing verses is to encourage Christians to make an effort to bring the wanderer back.
- c. Two worthy results of such an accomplishment are cited.
 - (A) First, it will “save him from death.” That this cannot be physical death may be inferred from the literal translation of the Greek text: it “shall save his soul from death.” So it would seem that spiritual death is in view. Since Scripture teaches that once a person is regenerated he can never be lost, it may be assumed that this hypothetical wanderer is not a genuine believer. He would be one who has been among the believers and had made a profession of faith, but his profession had been superficial. To bring him to genuine faith in the truth is to save his soul from eternal death.
 - (B) The result of bringing the wanderer back is that “many sins” will be covered. Genuine faith brings full forgiveness of the wanderer's sins; and they are covered, never to be held against him again. As difficult as it may be to win such a person to saving faith, the eternal results make it infinitely worthwhile.
- d. but, as we see, not everyone agrees with Professor Burdick that this ‘death’ is necessarily spiritual death,

nor that this 'truth' is the gospel message – indeed, that would imply the person once accepted it

3. A Christian Once Saved but Now Lost?

- a. those holding this view follow the same basic argument
- b. however, they balk at the statement that 'Scripture teaches that once a person is regenerated he can never be lost'
- c. to this end they quote such texts as
 - (A) Galatians 5:4 – "You have been severed from Christ, ...you have fallen from grace"
 - (B) 2 Peter 2:20-22 – "the last state has become worse for them than the first"
- d. Dr Donald Carson attributed these words to his father, a minister: "A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text." and both of these texts (and others) are used in that fashion, trying to prove their point
 - (A) Galatians 5:4 reads in full, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." – it is unwarranted to equate the phrase 'fallen from grace' with being lost; it is not – the context, and Paul's entire argument in the book of Galatians, is simply this, that having been saved by grace, how can you add to that salvation by works of the law? To do so is to fall out of dependence on grace into the clutch of law
 - (B) the passage in Second Peter is not talking about the regenerated but rather of those who have come to a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then 'turn away from the holy commandments delivered to them' (verse 21) – for various reasons, from external and internal pressures; although hearing the gospel they reject it
- e. so as the premise that a person can be saved then lost is false, this interpretation must be rejected

4. A Back-Slidden Christian?

- a. R. V. G. Tasker, Professor of New Testament Exegesis, University of London ^{-{3}} hold this view
- b. 'For one convert him (AV), the R.S.V. (and others) has 'one brings him back,' which is preferable. It is assumed that the erring brother is a converted Christian, and that he has only temporarily left 'the narrow way which leadeth unto life', and has to be brought back by personal contact from 'the broad way that leadeth to destruction' into the way of truth. It is not asserted that he is spiritually dead (as would be the case with an unbeliever) or is going to die, but that he is in a dangerous condition. ... The word

convert, ... has an interesting parallel in Luke 22:32, ("but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.") ... Our Lord is there assuring the backsliding Simon Peter that He has prayed for him ... and says to him "when thou art converted ... strengthen thy brethren."

- c. there is no thought at all in this that Peter ever lost his salvation, nor that he was at that instant still an unbeliever: Christians can backslide
- d. the word 'soul' in connection with this death does not necessarily mean spiritual death; indeed, countless times in Scripture, the Hebrew word nephesh (or soul) is used simply with the meaning of life or self
- e. moreover, just a few sentences back about physical sickness being the result of sin in the believer's life, so there is no reason to exclude verse 20 from speaking about physical death
- f. so, there is much in favour of this interpretation

B. Ezekiel and You: Watchmen

1. A Prophet to the Exiles

- a. reading through the book of Ezekiel, which includes
 - (A) marvellous visions he had of God and the spiritual temple
 - (B) messages to Judah as it was exiled into Babylon
 - (C) the doings of some of those exiles
 - (D) and, personal glimpses into Ezekiel's own life
- b. you discover the really deplorable, sinful state of God's people
- c. Ezekiel is called a watchman, a word translated into the Greek OT as skopos – one who watches
- d. this is the same word to which the NT writers added the prefix, epi-, giving episcopos, translated overseer or bishop; a spiritual position
- e. in the passage we read from Ezekiel 33, God begins by describing the role and responsibility of a watchman on the walls
 - (A) that if an enemy attacked it was his duty to warn the people
 - (B) his job is to sound the trumpet
 - (C) if he should fail, he is guilty of their destruction
 - (D) but with Ezekiel, God turns from a civic responsibility to one that is spiritual: the enemy of which

he is to warn is sin

f. now the point I want to make is that in Ezekiel, it was to Ezekiel alone that God designated this responsibility; BUT,

2. A Word to Us

a. begins with 'Brethren' – what he has to say is to every believer who is part of the church of Jesus Christ

(A) it is not just to an episcopos, to a pastor, to a deacon, or so on

(B) but it applies to each one of us

(C) if we see someone wandering from the truth

(D) our duty is clear: sound the trumpet

b. these verses also leave a lot open to interpretation

(A) we have already spoken at length on who is this wandering one

(B) but James also uses very indefinite terms throughout

(1) who is the one turning the wanderer back

(2) who is the one to be let known?

(3) who is the one delivered from death?

(4) whose sins are they that are covered?

(5) the NIV translators, who seem to dislike ambiguities, remove some of these questions (which can be answered readily from the rest of Scripture) but the Greek is very indefinite on them

c. but why did the Holy Spirit leave so many things open to question in these verses; why didn't He draw it all up in a neat, tidy package so that we could tick it off as 'Oh yes, here is where it applies.'?

3. The Essence of the Instruction

a. but walking in the Spirit of God does not consist in following nice, tidy packages of instructions – English on one side, French on the other

b. but of truths whereby we can test whether the spirit that is speaking to us is the Spirit of God or the spirit of Satan, and distinguish them

c. so James gives us a picture of a situation

(A) one that is part of our congregation – we may think him to be a Christian or perhaps a seeker –

one who can talk comfortably about the truths of the gospel – perhaps even on the church roll

(B) *'Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."' (2 Timothy 2:19)*

(C) so we see such a person who does not abstain from wickedness

(D) what are we to do?

d. the problem is not whether he was ever saved or never saved – but that this person needs to come or to come back to Christ

e. the heart of the instruction to us is to seek to turn this person and their life around; bring them back to the truth

f. we are to sound the trumpet

C. "Bring Them Back"

1. The Truth

a. the western culture in which we live – inherited from the Roman and Greek cultures that preceded it – generally looks upon truth as an intellectual exercise, a matter of logic,

b. or even in these more recent days, as a matter of personal choice, opinion or comfort: truth is what seems true to me: it's all relative

c. but truth, according to the word of God, is not simply what is in our heads, what we reason or think – it is absolute

d. our faith is based upon facts, as found in God's inspired word

e. our faith holds to moral truth: some actions are right, some are wrong and again, these are revealed in God's word

f. but most importantly, our faith is based upon the One who is True, who in assuring His disciples in His final hours as their Rabbi, said in John 14:6, *'I am the Way, the Truth and the Light.'*

g. so bringing back a back-slidden believer is first of all a restoration of fellowship with Jesus Christ, and if it be that this person had never known such fellowship – did not yet truly believe – then lead him to Christ and to accept Christ's offer of salvation, full and free

h. only then can one speak of reformation of manner of life in order to be in step with moral truth, as

taught for example in James' letter

2. Fetch Them Back

- a. that English word 'fetch' is delightfully full of meaning and it applies in a very meaningful way here
 - (A) properly speaking it is said to someone who is in your presence
 - (B) it means they go from where they are, get someone or something and then bring back to into your presence
 - (C) can we not use it in this instance of bringing a person to Christ – either from being back-slidden or for the very first time?
- b. we are to go and get them and bring them where we already are: before setting out in such an undertaking, ensure that you yourself are first walking in daily fellowship with God

3. Go in Humility

- a. Galatians 6:1 is deeply imbued with this thought: 'Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.'
- b. and Peter has this to say respecting our witness to an unbeliever, 'but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;' (1 Peter 3:15)
- c. the church has been accused, and perhaps rightly so, of being the only army that shoots its own wounded – that will certainly be the result if you should approach such a person with a self-righteous spirit
- d. consider the words of Jesus Himself in His invitation to sinners: 'Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' (Matthew 11:28-30); gracious, loving words

4. Save Lives – Cover Sins

- a. why is the Holy Spirit so vague about the position in Christ of this wanderer from the truth, whether they

- are saved or not?
- b. well these words apply no matter what and the Holy Spirit can choose to apply them to our hearts as He sees fit under varied circumstances
 - c. for the believer it will rescue them from the possible chastisement of sickness and even death to which 1 Corinthians 11:30 refers
 - d. for the unbeliever it can transport them from death into the kingdom of the Son of God and the assurance of eternal life
 - e. even the matter of covering sins can apply to both circumstances
 - f. in one situation it is that which is found in Proverbs 10:12, '[Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.](#)' – there cover means to clothe over or to veil from view
 - (A) this is the sense 1 Peter 4:8 uses it, '[Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.](#)'
 - (B) James has just spoken about confessing sin and praying for one another – so the wanderer can be brought back into fellowship, with God and with believers, without broadcasting far and wide as in the daily tabloids every thing that they have done wrong
 - g. in the second sense, the covering is that done by God
 - (A) that covering which takes place by the atoning work of Christ
 - (B) where, by His bearing our punishment for all our sin, God in looking at us, sees not our sin – the entire multitude of them, past, present and future – but the righteousness of Jesus Christ
 - (C) so sin is forgiven; guilt is taken away; fellowship is realised
 - h. whether it be the one who is returned to Christ, or the one who is instrumental in that return, what a joy to know of a life saved, of sin overcome

D. Conclusion

1. James: Practical Christianity

- a. This letter is not a theological treatise in the way that Romans is
- b. but it does not contradict such epistles of Paul in any way
- c. it is a book of Christian theology put into practice, of how the one who belongs to the Lord, Jesus Christ, should obey their Master

d. so it gives examples of specific ways in which a Christian can fall prey to the tempter and to slide back from their fellowship with Christ

2. James' Closing Message

a. is thus so appropriate

b. that as each member of the body of Christ matures, they become sensitised to what displeases God, to what hurts the body

c. so as themselves to avoid such things

d. to sound the trumpet to warn others

e. and to manifest concern for any who fall, to 'Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.' (Galatians 6:2)

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Except as noted otherwise, quotations are from the New American Standard version, used by permission. Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon.

Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in *(braces)*. Version identifiers are:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

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| BM | - | Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870 |
| EBC | - | The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6 |
| EGT | - | The Expositor’s Greek Testament, <i>James</i> , by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.) |
| Lange | - | Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.) |
| NICNT | - | The New International Commentary on the New Testament , <i>Commentary on the Epistles of James and John</i> by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8 |
| TYN | - | Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, <i>The General Epistle of James</i> , by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956 |
| Kerux | - | The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com . |

2. EBC, *in loc*.

3. TYN, *in loc*