

Chapter XVII

GO TO NOW, YE RICH MEN

At the close of the fourth chapter of the book of James, James wrote, *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.* This translation does not faithfully represent James's description of the Jews of the *diaspora*. In the Greek text the word translated *rejoice* is *kachaomai*, which means *to glory or boast*. The word translated *boastings* is *aladzoneia*, which means *false pretension, imposture, quackery*, but can also mean *boastings*. *Imposture* would have been a better choice of words for the translators.

Consequently the text should have read, *You boast in your imposture: all such boasting is evil.* In other words they were all show with no substance. They were spiritual impostors, and a part of their imposture was the judgment of others to justify themselves. They also justified themselves by their material possessions -- claiming the possession of wealth was proof of the blessings of God. This imposture is consistent with the Jewish mind as it is revealed in Scripture, and it is consistent with human nature. Therefore the apostle Paul warned Timothy: *For the love*

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of money is the root of all evil... (I Timothy 6:10) Paul's statement is more accurately translated: *At the root of all of the evils is the love of money.* Further, Paul revealed, men who are *greedy of filthy lucre* are not qualified for the ministry. They are:

... proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. (I Timothy 6:4-5, emphasis mine)

It should be apparent that the possession of material wealth has nothing to do with godliness. The concept, *gain is godliness*, has come from an extrapolation of the law based upon the assumption that material wealth is a blessing. According to the extrapolation, if one had the blessing (wealth), it was because of his devotion to the law. This extrapolation ignores two important factors. First, no Jew had the ability to perform the deeds of the law. Second, wealth was more commonly obtained by a violation of the principles of the law than it was by adhering to its principles. Thus James described the Jews in their imposture:

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. (James 5:1-6)

James used the manner in which the Jews had gained their wealth as evidence against them. They claimed to be justified by the law, but they had gained their wealth by cheating their servants of their just wages. They were steeped in their imposture, calculating every abuse according to the loose structure of *the commandments and doctrines of men*.

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Thus James wrote of a future day of judgment to arrest the Jews, *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.* This statement is a prophetic disclosure of the miseries that shall come upon the nation of Israel during the great tribulation period, *the time of Jacob's trouble.* At that time men shall seek death and will not be able to find it (Revelation 9:6). They shall cast their silver into the streets, and their gold shall be removed. Wealth will provide no deliverance in those evil days (Ezekiel 7:19).

This present age is an age of grace. God is extending His mercy that men might be saved; but in the great tribulation, Israel and the nations of the world will be judged for their rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior. In those terrible days no one shall be able to justify themselves with their wealth nor hide themselves in robes of self-righteousness.

Man's material possessions and wealth are tenuous at best. Everything man possesses wears out, grows old and becomes useless. Man also grows old and dies. What is the advantage then of riches, or what is the advantage of a cloak of self-righteousness? These things may provide some temporal comfort and prestige, but they cannot provide a proper relationship with our God. Thus our Lord said:

... Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:15-21, emphasis mine)

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Man argues that it is necessary to work and to provide for one's family and for one's old age. He asks, *What is wrong with amassing a little wealth?* There is nothing wrong with the proper use of one's resources, given the right priorities. Even so our Lord said:

Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:27-32, emphasis mine)

With these words our Lord did not encourage the Jews to idleness, but spoke of those things which take precedent: *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mark 8:36-37)

Yet the Jews to whom James wrote had cheated the laborers who reaped their harvests in their lust to accumulate more wealth. They boasted that they loved their neighbor as themselves, but this was hardly evident in their dealings with their servants. They did not pay their laborers what they had promised just so they could lay up wealth for themselves. Rather than mourning over their fraud, they boasted they were righteous, and the evidence of their righteousness was the very wealth which they had extorted. Their perverted view of the law (according to *the commandments and doctrines of men*) stripped the law of its *schoolmaster* role. This made the law of none effect as a vehicle to bring them to Christ.

The Jews to whom James wrote are akin to some of our present-day television evangelists. They tell their audiences, *If you want a lot, give a lot.* They use the greed of their viewers as a

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motive to get them to support their ministries. Then they have the audacity to boast, *All that they have is from the blessings of God*. Thus Peter warned:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. (II Peter 2:1-3, emphasis mine)

The circumstances which brought about the behavior of those Jews in James's day may be different from the circumstances with which we are confronted in our day, but the sin is the same. The self-righteous still justify their avaricious nature by calling their wealth *the blessings of God*.

James said to them, *Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter*. In other words, they grabbed all they could for themselves in order to satisfy their greedy natures. They gorged themselves on all that they desired as though it were *butchering day* on the farm. Anyone who has lived on a farm understands this statement. Butchering day always provided those present with any cut of meat they wished and as much as they wished (especially before refrigeration).

The abundance possessed by the wealthy had been obtained at the expense of those who labored for them. The laborers went without in order for them to be fat. Therefore the cries of the laborers reached the ears of the Lord of host. Still the Jews persisted in claiming to be just and holy before God. Still they claimed to have kept the whole law and to be righteous before God.

In the name of righteousness, James said, *Ye have condemned and killed the just (Jesus*

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Christ); and he doth not resist (Greek: *antitasso*: to post in adverse array, as an army; to battle against) *you*. Even though the nation of Israel had killed their Messiah, God was not waging a warfare against them, but rather was standing with open arms of grace, ready to receive anyone in the nation who would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of God is indeed WONDERFUL!