

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

SUBMITTING OURSELVES TO GOD II

Read James 4:7-12

Introduction

In the chapter 3, James talked about wicked tongues and heavenly wisdom. He said heavenly wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, fruitful, impartial, and sincere. He also said that peacemakers reap a harvest of righteousness.

In this passage, James begins by talking about the opposite of peace, which is war—quarrelling, fighting, and killing. Then he rebukes adulterous people who are being friends with the world and gives an exhortation on how to live as Christians. As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers in God's house, not troublemakers or war-makers. Most of us have been guilty of causing strife among God's people and in our own families. Right? Why is that? Of course, it's because many of us are carnal and that's what carnal people do—sin. They fight, they argue, they cause trouble because they—we—are all self-centred and proud. Let's be quick to listen to James and learn what to do to live out a God-approved life.

Submitting Yourself to God

“Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (vv7-10)

1. Submit to God

Here's the general principle. To "submit oneself" (hypotassō) means to come into voluntary obedience to a person, to bend your will to that person's. If you've been proud you need to voluntarily (not only under duress) bend your will to God's will. It is a wonder that the world does not submit to God. I have heard much of the rights of man: but it is well also to consider the rights of God, which are the first, highest, surest, and most solemn rights in the universe, and lie at the base of all other rights... Here are suggested reasons why we should submit to God:

- We should submit to God because He created us.
- We should submit to God because His rule is good for us.
- We should submit to God because all resistance to Him is futile.
- We should submit to God because such submission is absolutely necessary to salvation.
- We should submit to God because it is the only way to have peace with God.

2. Resist the devil... and he will flee from you

The word "resist" is Greek anthistēmi. It means "be in opposition to; set oneself against; oppose." Our problem too often is that we are double-minded, clinging both to our selfish desires and a desire to please God. We must clearly take a stand against the devil and at the same time let go of the desire that gives him power over us.

What is the relation between the devil and temptation? Does the devil make you do it? Satan certainly tempted Jesus at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan dangled before Jesus perverted means to accomplish legitimate ends. Certainly, eating when he was hungry, gaining recognition as a spiritual leader, and reigning over the earth were part of Jesus' plan. But Jesus' way was

a different way, a less direct method of achieving the same goals. Satan takes legitimate desires and twists them. The desire for sex, for example, can be twisted into pornography or sex outside of marriage. Good desire, wrong fulfillment. The desire to feed one's family can be fulfilled by stealing or by hard work. But work is not the easy way.

The devil plays on our own desires (James 1:14-15) and tries to convince us that shortcuts will get us there better than the right way. Resisting the devil means to stop flirting with his temptations. To say "no" to him and "yes" to God. "He will flee from you." Strange, isn't it, what great power a little word from a humble believer can do to the devil. Satan can be set running by the resistance of the lowliest believer who comes in the authority of what Jesus did on the cross.

Also, to solve the problems of carnality and the strife it causes, we must resist the devil. This means to stand against devil's deceptions and his efforts to intimidate. As we resist the devil, we are promised that he will flee from you.

3. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you

The call to draw near to God is both an invitation and a promise. It is no good to submit to God's authority and to resist the devil's attack and then fail to draw near to God. We have it as a promise: God will draw near to us as we draw near to Him. What does it mean to draw near to God? Suggestions include:

- It means to draw near in worship, praise, and in prayer.
- It means to draw nearby asking counsel of God.
- It means to draw near in enjoying communion with God.
- It means to draw near in the general course and tenor of your life.

What is the problem with double mindedness? So long as we entertain thoughts of sin, and serve them tea in our living room, we relegate God to the porch. When we flirt with sin in our minds, we necessarily break off fellowship with the Father. So, resisting the devil (the negative) is followed by drawing near to God (the positive), resolving our double-minded condition.

There's a promise in this verse, too. If we will draw near to God, that is, turn our wills to doing his will, then he will draw near to us, empowering us to follow him, and often, giving us a sense of his presence. We don't always experience the joy of His presence -- even when He is very present. Sometimes our emotions or other conditions block that spiritual awareness.

In the new covenant, God says to the sinner: "Draw near to Me and I will draw near to you." Now the ground between God and the sinner has been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and we can come close to God on the basis of that blood.

This also shows what God wants to do for the sinner. It doesn't say, "Draw near to God and He will save you" or "Draw near to God and He will forgive you," though both of those are true. But what God really wants is to be near man; to have a close relationship and fellowship with the individual.

4. Wash your hands and purify your heart

James commands us sinners to "wash your hands." What does this mean? He tells us to "purify our hearts," but isn't God the only One who can cleanse us? James is well aware of the necessity for God's grace! What he's talking about in this exhortation is our job in this process.

"Wash your hands, you sinners" recalls the Prophet Isaiah's message from God to his people:

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good...." (**Isaiah 1:16-17**)

Washing one's hands is another way of saying, "repent," stop doing wrong. We see a similar figure in the Book of Revelation. John sees a multitude in heaven wearing white robes and praising God. One of the Elders tells who this group is: "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (**Revelation 7:14**). No, they didn't save themselves. But they "washed" their robes, they turned from their sin, and were cleansed by Christ's sacrifice on their behalf.

"Purify your hearts, you double-minded," is the second part of this directive. We must stop doing wrong (wash our hands), and then turn our wills decisively to God's will (purify our hearts).

On Mount Carmel, Elijah challenged the people: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). The doublemindedness must go. We must decide which way to go and turn to it wholeheartedly, as the Psalmist cried, "Unite my heart" (KJV, Psalm 86:11), "Give me an undivided heart" (NIV). No longer is our will divided, but now our will is "integrated" with our faith and love for God, and we gain "integrity" again.

5. Lament and mourn and weep

True sorrow for sin is not being sorry that you were caught, but sorry that your heart was so hard that you could commit this affront to God. So long as sin is just in the moral category of "bad deeds," it can be looked at as an unfortunate phase of our lives. But when sin is looked at as a proud and independent spirit that stands up to God and deliberately goes the opposite way to His, then we see its personal and ugly side. It is not only morally wrong, but also personal rebellion against the One who loves us. It violates a personal trust, a personal allegiance, a spiritual marriage vow. It is about a relationship. Adultery is bad because it is a taboo sexual relationship. But it is devastating because of what it does to the relationship between husband and wife. We are "married" to God, and our flirtations with the world are in defiance of our Husband.

The appropriate response is grief (lamentation). It is more than acknowledging our sin; it is owning up to our guilt. I know that talking about guilt is not politically correct. But a sense of guilt is the necessary precursor to genuine heart repentance.

6. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up

James has been talking in this chapter about roots of pride and an independent spirit within us: selfishness, hedonism, flirting with sin, spiritual pride that thinks we know better than God what's good for us. The antidote is to recognize our rebellions as foolishness, acknowledge them ("confession"), turn from them ("repentance"), and come before God again as his humble servants, rather than his independent-minded subjects. "Humble yourselves!" is a command. It requires submission to God -- and an ongoing humility in contrast to a life lived in rebellion against God.

The second half of this command is a promise: "He will lift you up." God doesn't want a bunch of grovelling, servile disciples, but those who can stand before him with joy. He wants and promises to lift us up out of our guilt and misery to a place of wholeness and right standing ("righteousness"). Healthy Christianity isn't guilt-ridden, but joy-filled!

Critics and Pickers

“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (vv11-12)

Humbling ourselves and getting right with God must result in our getting right with other people. When we are right with other people, it will show in the way we talk about them. So, we must not speak evil of one another and not judge our brother. Speak evil translates the ancient Greek word katalalia. “Katalalia is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves.”

This sin is wrong for two reasons. First, it breaks the royal law that we should love one another. Second, it takes a right of judgment that only God has.

When we judge our brother, we put ourselves in the same place as the law, in effect judging the law. This is something that we have no authority to do, because there is one Lawgiver — so who are you to judge another? This is an extension of the same humility that James writes about in this chapter. When we have proper humility before God, it just isn't within us to arrogantly judge our brother.