

The Epistle of James

Lesson # 13 Submit, Resist and Be Humble

James 4:7-10

Date: June 21, 2015

I. Submit

James 4:7a

As we saw in our last lesson, submission to God and to His authority is a major key to living the Christian life. Note these introductory verses: Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; Philemon 1:1; James 1:1; II Pet. 1:1; Jude 1:1 [HCSB] – see what they all have in common? Other epistles begin like II Cor. 1:1. My point is this; godly men, exemplified by those who wrote our NT, considered themselves not to be great towers of authority on their own, but they realised that they were slaves (bond-servants in other versions) of God, doing His bidding.

I would argue that most of the problematic [ie. wrong] decisions we make result from our resistance to the Lordship of Christ in our lives. We simply do not see ourselves as slaves of Christ! We tend, instead, to see ourselves as ‘partners’ with Him in the gospel and we are; capable of independent thinking and decision making that too often results in either direct sins of commission or omission or at least sketchy versions of something sub-obedient. Note Jesus words in JN 15:1-11 - “*apart from Me you can do nothing.*” “In Me” refers to union with Christ.

Look with me at Romans 6:1-23. Do you notice here in this chapter that there are more references to slavery than any other chapter in any other NT book? (9 x) The predominant theme in Romans 5-6 (and some would argue, 7 also) is our sanctification. That is also what James’s burden is for us in 4:7-10. Look back at v. 4, and now, v. 7. “Submit yourselves therefore to God”, and v. 10, “Humble yourself...you.”

David Platt, in his commentary on Jamesⁱ, says that 5 imperatives radiate outward from v. 7 on this idea of submission:

1. Resist the devil forcefully – v. 7b
2. Seek God repentantly – v. 8 (cleanse your hands, purify your hearts)
3. Pursue purity holistically – v. 8 (let your laughter be turned to mourning)
4. Treat sin seriously – v. 9
5. Trust God completely – humble yourself.

We will develop these things as we go through this lesson, but for now let’s continue to think about this idea of submission to God.

All the things in these 4 verses relate to our submission. Probably a good way to understand the concept of submission is to realise that not only do I, as a person apart from Christ, not have all the answers, I don’t have any answers. If left to live on my own, I would mess it up entirely, no matter how much economic or cultural success I

might achieve, because I have missed the most important aspect of life – eternity. Note Prov. 14:12-13 & LK 12:15-21.

Is lack of submission to God not the missing element in modern day ‘Christianity’? In what disciplines of our lives does our lack of submission to Christ present our most glaring failures? That may manifest itself differently in each person (cf. Heb. 12:1), but the categories are certainly identifiable aren’t they? Loving God – where is your heart on Sundays and Wednesdays? Are you finding reasons not to be found under the authority of God’s Word and in fellowship with your brothers and sisters? How often do you read God’s Word on your own? Do you show love to others by calling them, visiting them, helping them? Do you pray regularly? Are you an ‘average’ Christian?

Here’s what Robertson McQuilkin says about being average;

“Average is not necessarily normal. For example, the average temperature of patients in a hospital may be 100 degrees but such a temperature is not normal. So it is with the Christian life. The average experience of church members is far different from New Testament norms for the Christian life.

The normal Christian is characterized by loving responses to ingratitude and indifference, even hostility, and is filled with joy in the midst of unhappy circumstances and with peace when everything goes wrong. The normal Christian overcomes in the battle with temptation, consistently obeys the laws of God, and grows in self-control, contentment, humility and courage. Thought processes are so under the control of the Holy Spirit and instructed by Scripture that the normal Christian authentically reflects the attitudes and behavior of Jesus Christ. God has first place in life, and the welfare of others takes precedence over personal desires. The normal Christian has power not only for godly living but for effective service in the church. Above all, he or she has the joy of constant companionship with the Lord.

But what is the average Christian experience? Many church members typically think and behave very much like morally upright non-Christians. They are decent enough, but there is nothing supernatural about them. Their behavior is quite explainable in terms of heredity, early development, and present circumstances. They yield to temptation more often than not, lusting when their body demands it, coveting what they do not have, and taking credit for their accomplishments. The touchstone for their choices is self-interest, and though they have a love for God and others, it does not control their life. There is little change for the better; in fact, most church members do not expect much improvement and are little concerned by that prospect. Scripture is not exciting, prayer is perfunctory, and service in the church demonstrates little touch of the supernatural. Above all, their life seems to have an empty core, for it does not center around a constant, personal companionship with the Lord.”ⁱⁱ

At what point does it dawn on us that verses like these should exemplify our motivation and attitude for submission: Gal. 2:20; I Cor. 6:19-20; 10:31; I Pet. 1:13-21. If you are going to call yourself a Christian, step all the way into that role and all the implications of it. But don’t do it lightly. Notice Jesus’ words in LK 14:25-33.

II. Resist

James 4:7b

As we submit to God in (really) what amounts to full repentance, repentance demands that we turn our backs on that which draws us away from God. James says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” How do you resist one you cannot see unless you comprehend what devices he uses in your life to hook you? It will take spiritual discernment because Satan and his minions do not come to us as who they are. Notice II Cor. 11:12-15. And we are exhorted in I JN 4:1-6 to test every spirit. Satan comes to us in the guise of teachers, pastors, voices (to some), concepts or theologies that are anti-Christian but sound really good and biblical. He can work tempting things into our lives as idols and flat out lustful visions to draw us away from godliness and holiness. Be thinking. Be on your guard – he prowls around seeking whom to devour – cf. I Pet. 5:6-11.

According to Sydney H.T. Page, regarding both James 4:7 and I Peter 5:9,

“James and Peter take it for granted that Satan will assault believers. Resistance would not be necessary if one never came under attack. The type of attack Peter had in mind consisted primarily of persecution, with the accompanying temptation to apostasy. The context in James suggests that he was thinking of temptation more broadly, but especially temptations associated with selfishness and pride.

The command to resist the Devil implies that believers will be able to stand their ground. In fact, James attaches a promise to the command, assuring his readers that if they do resist the Devil, the Devil will flee from them.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Resistance is not to be pugilistic however. It is not carried out the way some charismatics “rebuke” Satan or a demon by praying to that demon; “get away from me you demon of lust”, or “you demon of tobacco” or some other idiocy. But what does it look like to resist the devil? A possible clue is the word translated “resist” here in our text. The same Greek word is used in both I Peter 5:9 and Eph. 6:13, but in Ephesians, it is translated “stand your ground”, a defensive posture – cf. “put on the whole armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to “stand your ground”. In fact, look at the whole passage of Eph. 6:10-20, and cf. Jude 8-10.

The sense of this entire passage has to do with 1) the realisation that we are at war with an unseen force – a scheming, intelligent devil (v. 11) and an unseen army of demonic angels (v. 12); 2) the day (our lives) have the potential to be evil if we do not recognise the battle’s tone and source and prepare to meet it (v. 13); 3) we must stand firm against this (now) identified source of the enemy of God and us (v. 13); 4) we have spiritual weapons to help us defend ourselves (v. 14) – belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, gospel of peace as our shoes (v. 15) = readiness; shield of faith to extinguish the flaming darts of the enemy; the helmet of salvation to protect our minds; the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) as our only defensive and offensive weapon (v. 17), then (v. 18) praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. This is to keep us alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. This is an immensely important chapter for us to be aware of and to practice daily.

It is of such immense importance that it inspired William Gurnall (a contemporary of C.H. Spurgeon) to write and publish “The Christian in Complete Armour”, an intensive and extensive commentary on Ephesians 6, which in my 2010 edition^{iv}, runs to 1,245 pages! But the key point of the passage is v. 10, “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and the strength of His might.”. This is precisely James’ point back in James 4:7 – “Submit yourselves to God”; “Draw near to God” (v. 8), “Humble yourselves before God (v. 10). Ephesians 6 gives us a step by step way to do just that, and it reads as if this not a one-time procedure but a daily event for the believer. So we thereby, resist the Devil when he or one of his demons attempts to trip us up with temptations to sin, with temptations to befriend the world, to pull back into ourselves rather than reach out in love to others, to cherish our own “passions” (4:3b) rather than to cherish and savour Jesus Christ. Resist him and he will flee. Kent Hughes comments, “These are the weapons: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God – and any believer who resists with these will put the devil and his armies to flight! This is not arrogance. This is the truth! You and I can resist the devil if we wear the armor God provides.”^v If we resist, he will move on to easier targets, which is one reason that Eph. 6:18 tells us to pray, “making supplication for the saints and in vv. 19-20, our leaders.

Bryan Chapell, in his commentary on Ephesians says, “All of these warnings tell us that the apostle clearly wants us to prepare for spiritual realities the rest of the world may not see. Satan is at work through dark forces that are in the world before our eyes: evil leaders, decadent pursuits, poverty, injustice, racism, promiscuity, and materialism. The Evil One who parades as an angel of light blinds us to the devastating effects of these forces. He deludes or distracts us with selfish interests to convince us that we must accept these evils for the sake of personal liberty, pleasure, and power that are supposed to bring happiness.”^{vi}

III. Cleanse and Purify

James 4: 8-9

James counsels us to draw near to God, the antithesis of sinful man’s desire. Sinful men want to do what Adam and Eve did when they committed sin – hide from God; avoid Him. JN 3:19-20 illustrates this perfectly. Yet drawing near to God is what we are to do as believers who now love Him – JN 3:21. We are no longer afraid that our thoughts and actions will incur God’s wrath (Rom. 8:1) and our own painful guilt.

We know that God preserves His own – Phil 1:6; 2:13; JN 10:26-30; 6:35-40; Rom. 8:29-39 – and yet we are to work out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12) in “fear and trembling”. How we do that is described by James here as “Cleanse your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep.”?

The first couplet, “cleanse and purify” – the first is external, the second internal, almost a non-literary parallel to Rom. 12:1-2. The same order is there – present your body as a living sacrifice first, then a renewal of the mind, in order to discern God’s will. Clean up your life and your thinking. James is still talking to believers here. He would not be telling unsaved people to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts as

if they could do so and thus become Christians! No – this has to do with believers and the things believers need to be doing in the course of their perseverance and sanctification – cf. Heb. 12:1-4.

The works [cleansing of our hands] we do are not to be a cause for boasting, but as we are told in I Peter 1:7; 2:11-12; 4:9-11, 12-16; MT 5:14-16; our works are designed to glorify our Father in heaven, not us.

Likewise, purifying our hearts is a concept not found only in James. Our heart is the seat of our motives and intentions, and double-mindedness (James 1:5-7) is an indicator of weak faith. A weakness in true faith does occur if we let our guard down. We are exhorted repeatedly in Scripture things like; “Call on God to guard your ways, etc. see Ps. 39:1; put no worthless thing before your eyes (Ps. 101:2-4); “keep a close watch on yourself and your teaching (I Tim. 4:16); “seek things that are above” (Col. 3:1-7; 3:15,16,17 and so on.

In Psalm 24:3, David asks the question and in v. 4, answers it. (+ see vv. 5-6). Do you see how both concepts are found here in the same verse? There are many other verses which help us see how to proceed down this road James wants us to be on. Note Romans 13:14; I Cor. 6:18; 10:14; I Tim. 6:11-12; II Tim. 2:22; and cf. Gen. 39:6-12. The remedy for fighting sin, impurity and double-mindedness is to flee immorality. Identify it and avoid it. Don’t allow yourself to be dragged in by temptation.

Verse 9 – The desire for a pure heart leads logically to sorrow over sin. Daniel Doriani comments; “There is fleeting joy for those who indulge in sin and fleeting sorrow for those who break with it, but it is far better to mourn for a season and rejoice forever...The truly penitent man grieves and mourns his sin whether he is caught or not. That is the grief that leads to healing (Luke 22:62). That is the mourning Jesus blessed when he said, “Blessed are those who mourn” (Matt. 5:4).”^{vii} See II Cor. 7:10.

What does it mean to be “wretched”? (ESV) [“miserable” – NASB, HCSB, “lament” – NKJV; “grieve” – NIV] The Canadian Oxford dictionary defines the term as: adj. 1. Unhappy or miserable; 2. Of very poor quality; 3. Ill or unwell; 4. despicable; 5. Used to express annoyance.

As we see so often in James, and as definition 1 above relates, we could go right back to the Sermon on the Mount – MT 5:3,4,6,8 – This is not to say we ought to be unhappy for the sake of being unhappy, because as believers we are to be joyful (Phil. 3:1; 4:4), but our wretchedness should be a device that leads us to seek the One the Gospel tells us can dispel our wretchedness and give us new life; or restore the joy we’ve lost as believers who have unconfessed sin in our lives. IOW, we repent of our sins and seek God as part of our submission to Him. Note Heb. 3:12-18 (cf. disobedience = unbelief). And see Heb. 10:26-31.

As we allow our “laughter to turn to mourning and our joy to gloom”, there is an end in mind. This is not saying that we need to go around with sad faces and ‘woe is me’ attitudes. This is probably an allusion to some of the OT Prophets who often used

words like ‘grieve, mourn and wail’ to depict reactions of those suffering God’s judgment (Isa 15:2; Jer 4:13; Hos 10:5; Joel 1:9-10; Micah 2:4). It is also used in the OT to refer to the prophets’ call to God’s people to repent from their sin (Joel 2:12 for example). Paul uses similar imagery in II Cor. 7:10 & I Cor. 5:2.^{viii}

James’ exhortation to “turn your laughter into mourning and joy to gloom” is a reminder not to be casual about sin, because then we presume too much on God’s forgiving and merciful nature. The joy James refers to is not the rejoicing Paul refers to in Phil. 4: 4 (which is a rejoicing that our sins are dealt with). James is talking about “superficial and temporal joy that comes when we indulge in sin.”^{ix} Moo adds, “True Christian joy can never be ours if we ignore or tolerate sin; it come only when we have squarely faced the reality of our sin, brought it before the Lord in repentance and humility, and experienced the cleansing work of the Spirit.”^x

IV. Humility: The Master Key James 4:10

This chapter began with James’ answer to the question of v. 1. It boils down to selfishness. By v. 6, James quotes Prov. 3:24, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble...”, and now, in v. 10, “Humble yourselves...will exalt you.” The way up is down. Christianity has a lot of counter-intuitive notions that run completely counter to the world’s way of doing things. For example, “If you don’t hate father and mother, you are not worthy of Me”; or “sell all you have, give to the poor and follow Me, and you will have treasure in heaven”.

James 4:10 is one of those places – ‘humble yourselves and you will be exalted (by God)’. In a human sense, this spills over to our own experience in relationships. No one likes arrogant, proud and boastful people – except themselves. We prefer humble people and we should be striving to be so ourselves – cf. LK 14:7-11.

We must be humble before God, & repentant, as we recognise our spiritual poverty or we’ll never acknowledge our desperate need of God’s control over our lives. Notice how this is illustrated as a contrast in LK 18:9-14. Do we operate in our own strength? No. See Psalms 121:1-2 – from where does my help come? There are plenty of examples of humility in the Scriptures – like I Cor. 10:12; Romans 12:3 for example.

Oswald Sanders, best known for his daily devotional, “My Utmost for His Highest” was a prolific writer, and one book he wrote is “Spiritual Leadership”, another very helpful book. In it, he recorded this illustration, citing Samuel Brengle, who had just been introduced as ‘the great Dr. Brengle’;

“If I appear great in their eyes, the Lord is most graciously helping me to see how absolutely nothing I am without Him, and helping me to keep little in my own eyes. He does use me. But I am so concerned that He uses me and that it is not of me the work is done. The axe cannot boast of the trees it has cut down. It could do nothing but for the woodsman. He made it, he sharpened it, and he used it. The moment he throws it aside, it becomes only old iron. O that I may never lose sight of this.”^{xi}

This is a good reminder of our role in the Lord's work. Humble yourself before this amazing God!

ⁱ David Platt; Exalting Jesus in James; B & H Publishing, 2014; loc. 1688 of 2294 / Kindle version

ⁱⁱ Robertson McQuilkin, editor – Free and Fulfilled; Thomas Nelson, 1997, pp. xi – xii

ⁱⁱⁱ Sydney Page, in Fallen, Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson (eds), Crossway, 2013, pp. 239-240

^{iv} The Christian in Complete Armour; William Gurnall. Hendriksen Publishers, 2010, Peabody MA

^v R. Kent Hughes, James: faith That Works, Crossway, 1991, p. 186

^{vi} Bryan Chapell; Ephesians; Reformed Expository Commentary, P & R Publishing, 2009, p. 335

^{vii} Daniel Doriani, James; reformed Expository Commentary; P & R Publishing, 2007; pp. 150-151

^{viii} Douglas Moo, The Letter of James, Eerdmans, 2000, p. 195

^{ix} IBID, p. 195

^x IBID, p. 195-196

^{xi} Samuel Brengle, as cited by J. Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, Moody Press, 1967, pp. 57-58