

James 3:14 “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. **15** This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. **16** For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. **17** But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. **18** Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

4:1 “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? **2** You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. **4** Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **5** Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? **6** But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." **7** Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. **8** Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9** Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10** Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

The Confession of the Church

- This morning we continue our lessons from the Book of James for Reformed Churches with the Confession of the Church, where James is again brutally honest with the Saints!
- This will carry over into next week when we will speak about the wonder of our forgiveness, which is the Good News we all need to hear over and over!

Together, James is showing us the practical implications of Jesus coming to save His people from their sins and His adorning us as His Bride, the Church, through which the Spirit will fill the earth with His Kingdom. As we move into chapter four of this Epistle, we are going to learn the importance of confessing our sin and the glory of forgiveness: We will learn that just as James has been brutally honest in this letter to the Saints, that we must also be brutally honest when confessing sin before our Holy God.

- We will consider what it means to be humble before God
- We will consider the Biblical examples of what it means for God to lift us up or to exalt us.
- This will help us understand why confession of sin is an important element of Covenant Renewal worship each Sunday
- We must also learn to approach God humbly day by day as we present ourselves for his service.

In our text, I dropped back into chapter three to see the context, where we learned the importance of having God the Holy Spirit as our pilot:

- Having the right pilot takes us to the right places!
- But now James appears to turn on the Saints as we move into chapter four...

4:1 “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

- James draws this immediate contrast to remind us about being a broken people.
- He reminds them and US that we must always be honest about our fallen state!

Something James first mentioned in chapter one: “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” [verse 14]

- This is where the WRONG wisdom will always take us!

We must not ask for what we want, but rather ask for what God wants!

Asking not for our pleasures but for the good works He desires us to do!

- “you ask...that you may spend it on your pleasures”

Contrasted with the principle that Paul gives us in Ephesians 2: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

James then continues his challenge:

4:5 “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

- Is this the same James who calls those Saints “my beloved brethren” back in chapter one?
- Has some new group appeared that are “adulterers and adulteresses?”

NO James is addressing the same Saints! Here James is simply being very consistent with other Biblical examples of how serious our sin is according to God’s standard of holiness:

- Jesus said that hating our brother = murder:

Matthew 5:21,22 ““You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment... whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.”

- Jesus said that lusting after a woman = adultery:

Matthew 5:27,28: ““You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”

- In a similar manner, the Apostle Paul describes his covetous heart in Romans chapter seven as an example for us all AND as the entrance to the glories of chapter 8...

Romans 7:7,8 “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.” *Give kids the example of a “do not throw rocks” sign being posted near a picture window*

Much of Romans 7 is devoted to Paul’s discussion of the remaining power of sin in our lives:

- **James is here reminding the Saints that we must face this struggle head-on.**

James is brutally honest with these Saints and then reminds them of the importance of proper confession: Verses 5b-7: “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

- God’s desire is that we seek the wisdom that is from above.
- AGAIN, even this desire is a gracious gift from God.
- We cannot produce the faith, will or power to resist the devil in our own strength: We are fully dependent on God’s grace.
- This is why James tells the Saints that “God GIVES more grace:” Just as Paul said!
- And James tells us how that grace will impact our lives...

Verses 8-9: “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.”

- This is why our order of worship begins with the call to worship and immediately moves to the confession of our sins.
- What James presents IS the Biblical picture of confession.
- We can see examples of this throughout the Bible!

Isaiah coming before God’s throne: Isaiah 6:5: “So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts."”

King David when Nathan confronted him with his sins: Psalm 51:3-5

“I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight-- That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.”

- Lest someone say this is what happened under the Old Covenant, look at how John reacts to the Risen Christ in Revelation chapter one: “when I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead!”

And Paul gives the example of his own life for Timothy... AND for us all:

1 Timothy 1:12 “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

Finally, we come to verse 10 which is the basis of a very famous praise song: “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

- We all want to be lifted up, but just what does it mean to humble oneself in the sight of the Lord?

We can think of those examples that I just gave [explain], but we also have an important passage from Luke’s Gospel account which perhaps gives us the best picture of what James is driving at here:

Luke 18:9 “Also [Jesus] spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others...”

- He was of course speaking to those proud religious leaders of His day... Or anyone today who thinks James and Paul are speaking to someone else!

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- It is easy to see that we should NOT be proud and boastful like this Pharisee!
- However, there is an important lesson we must learn from James, and this parable of the publican:
- Proper humility is NOT simply the absence of pride or boastfulness.

What we often fail to teach is just what it means to be properly humble before God... a critical omission.

- Are we truly confessing our sin?
- Where is the brutal honesty that James & Paul & Jesus say must be a part of true humility?

Perhaps the best way to understand this is to think about how we should come before a King [not easy for Americans 😞]

- We could come properly bowing before the King.
- Or we could come with improper boasting or arrogance.
- This does not leave just sitting nearby as a good option!
[there was not third person in that parable!]
- Again, the goal is to BE humble in the same way that publican was, not just avoiding the sins of the Pharisee!
- Immediately after the account of the publican & Pharisee, Jesus uses the example of little children to teach His disciples some of the great lessons of the faith:

It should remind us that we see in the proper Biblical correction and discipline of our covenant children how our relationship to God and ongoing confession is manifested.

We discipline our children because they ARE members of our family: Being “bad” does not mean they lose their family name or even a seat at the family table. –
Same with all us with our baptism and feasting at the Lord’s Table!

- Proper Biblical correction helps the child deal with the power of sin in their lives, with some pain.
- Proper confession enables us to deal with the power of sin in our lives, with some brutal honesty!
- As adults we should learn these lessons and properly confess our sins before our Holy God, facing head on the the struggles the Apostle describes in Romans 7.
- And then we can cry the “Abba Father” and claim the promises of Romans chapter eight.

As I mentioned, James is explaining the reality of Jesus coming to save His people from their sins which we will soon celebrate extensively with the season of Advent!

- **But we must always be remembering that it was OUR sins that made it necessary for Him to come and that our failings put Jesus on that cross!**
- **Remembering our need for the Savior just as we do each week in our Covenant Renewal Worship.**

The Church calendar is important because it takes us through the same cycle each year, just as worship does each week like the sun that rises each day!

- **Reminding us that we serve the faithful God of the Covenant!**

One who as we are told in Psalm 103 “knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”

- **We will look at that Psalm in great detail next week when we focus on the joy of forgiveness!**

To fully experience that joy we must learn our lessons about confession:

Verse nine should come to mind, which is not one we usually memorized...

“9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”

When we come to understand this challenge and to properly confess our sins and come before God with that kind of humility...

Then He will truly lift us up to a life filled with true laughter and real joy!

Communion Meditation:

Judges 13:15 “Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You." 16 And the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord." (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord.) 17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" 18 And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" 19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Lord. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on-- 20 it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar--the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. 21 When the Angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the Lord. 22 And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" 23 But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time."”