

## James 4:7-17

### “What Repentance Looks Like”

James was writing to a people riddled w/conflicts. Wars/contentions, strife & divisions. People gunning for position, preeminence, wanting prestige & prominence among & above their peers. Wanting to be recognized as wise & understanding, the “gifted of God” teacher in their midst. In short, many were wrestling w/the destructive problem of pride. – But what he’s ultimately leading up to is that for all of these problems that they’re having in their relationships w/*one another*, it’s really only indicative or symptomatic of a much deeper problem that they have in their relationship w/*God*.

Remember that “royal law” that James reminded us of back in Ch 2? “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If you remember right, when Jesus made clear that all the law & prophets were summed up in only 2 commands, He said that the 1<sup>st</sup> & the *greatest* commandment was this, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*”<sup>1</sup> The greatest priority of your life is to make sure that things are right between you & God. That you’re loving Him w/all your heart, w/all your soul, & w/all your mind. But the 2<sup>nd</sup> is like the 1<sup>st</sup>, “You shall love your *neighbor* (whomever happens to be near you or around you) as yourself.” Treat others w/the same kindness, compassion & consideration that you would have extended to you...

These 2 commandments are connected to one another. The one necessarily affects & impacts the other. As the body of Christ, if I’m not right w/God, then I can’t be right w/you. Things are out of order. What then is the necessary course of action? A restoration & reconciliation in my walk/relationship w/the Lord.

Last week we looked at the *cause* & the *consequence* of the wars/fights & being worldly in our ways. Today, James establishes the *cure*... As the curtain closed on our time it was w/these words in Vs 6, “*God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” – & Let’s recall what that *means*. God “resists” or “sets Himself in battle array against” the “proud” (the one who shows [or considers] oneself over or above others) but gives “grace” (His unearned/undeserved favor) to the “humble” (the one who esteems the needs of others above their own). It’s not that one’s humility *earns* God’s grace, but it sets them in the position to *receive* the grace that He freely gives.

### Vs 7-10

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<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 22:37). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Note how many imperatives, how many *commands* are packed into this short section of scripture... “Submit to God”, “Resist the devil”, “Draw near to God”, “Cleanse your hands”, “Purify your hearts”, “Lament, mourn & weep”, “Let your laughter be turned to mourning, your joy to gloom” & “Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord”. You want to know what repentance looks like? ☺ This is it.

It begins w/*submission* to God. James says, “Hey, in light of the fact that God sets Himself against the proud, but offers grace to the humble, there’s only 1 appropriate course of action... *Submit to God! Surrender to God! Subject yourself to His authority in & control over your life! Recognize Him as your King & begin receiving the benefits of His reign! ... If you think about it, it’s truly amazing that the world refuses to submit to God. It’s no small wonder, that even as believers we struggle to fully submit to God...*

Think about how masterfully destructive Satan’s strategy has been over the last 150-200 years... To promote the idea, the theory, the hypothesis that God is not our Creator. & He doesn’t care if you want to believe that we came from a big bang, that we somehow evolved, that our planet was seeded by aliens, or whatever set of random cosmic coincidences... But the fact that people will so readily, almost universally reject the reality of God as our Creator has put it in their minds that they don’t have to *submit* to Him.

Think about it. If you truly believed that God was your Creator. That there was an almighty God in heaven who formed and fashioned you, who placed the breath of life in you. He was the reason why you exist... you would readily understand that on some level you have some obligation to submit to Him, to honor Him, to obey Him. But man doesn’t like that... & it’s a tragedy. Man has put *out* of their mind the One who *gave* them that mind. Man has placed out of their sight, the One who gave them eyes. They’ll look to nearly anything or anyone other than Him... God gave man legs, but man has walked away from Him... They use the breath He gave them to curse both Him & those whom He created in His image...

& Listen, there’s a sense in which rebellion or resistance can be seen as courageous when you’re under the rule of a tyrant. But that’s not God. God is good, He has thoughts of peace toward you & not of evil, to give you a future & a hope. But rather than submit to God & resist the devil... Most people *resist God & submit to the devil...* Because the terrible truth is that to resist *God* is to submit to the *devil...* There’s no neutral zone...

“Therefore (on the one hand) submit to God.” (On the other) “Resist the devil.”

The one constitutes the other. If you don't *submit* to God, you won't *resist* the devil. Order yourself under God's control & take your stand against the devil. Paul said that like this, "*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles* (the scheming strategies) *of the devil.*"<sup>2</sup> (Then he goes on to elaborate upon the armor of God). But we're to be strong *in the Lord* & in the power of *His might*. We're to *resist* (or take our stand against) the devil (through prayer, through worship, through God's word, through fellowship w/God's people) & he will flee.

In Eph 4 Paul tells us that we're not to give "place" or "*opportunity*" to the devil. There you are, you're at home. You're thinking about coming to church when suddenly your head starts hurting, your kids start whining (whatever the case may be). But it causes you to say, "You know what, forget it, let's just stay home." *There's an opportunity for the devil to take advantage of. So don't be surprised when headaches come regularly, coincidentally every Sunday morning, or the kids start throwing a fit... something causes you & your spouse to fight... you get the idea. If he sees that these are the things that will keep you from being in the word, or in fellowship, or in worship, he'll have found a way to slow down & interrupt your walk w/God.*

But if you don't give him that opportunity, you resist that temptation, you forge on & set your heart to be w/God's people, getting into God's word, you'll find, he'll flee. Submit to God, rely on the grace of God, resist the devil & he will flee... But if we won't submit to God... we can't effectively *resist* the devil.

*I should also say this. The devil loves loopholes. He will flee, but there's no guarantee for how long. You may find yourself needing to resist him (in the same area) again & again throughout the course of your life. It's not a one & done, "I resisted him, glad that's over forever" kind of deal. Therefore, be strong in the Lord & in the power of His might. Our fight isn't finished until we're face to face w/J.C.*

& As a sidenote here, the bible doesn't teach in any way that a believer can be possessed by the devil or a demon. Nor is it required of a third party to be set free from demonic oppression. Now, an *unbeliever* can be possessed, & it may very well take a believer to be instrumental in seeing them set free... & I'm not saying it's not wise to have other believers praying w/you & for you in a situation in which you're struggling in spiritual warfare.

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<sup>2</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Eph 6:10-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I'm simply saying that God has given *every believer* the same (more than sufficient) tools to resist the devil & be free from his oppression. The bible is clear (write it down, read it later, Col 2:13-15) J.C. disarmed demonic powers/principalities having made a public spectacle of them through the work of the cross... The blood of J.C. has made you more than a conqueror in Jesus name. In Christ you don't fight *for* victory, you fight *from* victory... remember that!

& Though we're all susceptible to spiritual warfare, remember that it's generally the sheep that strays to the fringes of the fold that it finds itself being devoured by the wolf. The closer the sheep is to the shepherd, the safer it is... What's the application? Vs 8...

"Draw near to God... & He will draw near to you." It's both an invitation & a promise. Let's look at this like the final piece of the puzzle. The follow through, or the finish line of of the 2 previous imperatives. It's not going to do you much good (in the end) to submit to God & resist the devil's attack if you then fail to draw near to God... Or maybe I should say it this way. **Am I truly submitted to God or resisting the devil if I decide to keep my distance *from* God rather than drawing near *to* God? If I'm satisfied out on the fringes of the fold, it's probably only a matter of "when" not "if" I'll find myself repeating old patterns of the flesh, walking in ways of the world, being "taken captive" by the devil. The whole point of submitting to God & resisting the devil is so that I can then *draw near to God.***

Trust me when I tell you that as a believer it behooves you (& only benefits you) to get as close to God as you can possibly get! & Here's the precious promise. When you set your heart to draw near to God (again, be it in prayer, worship, the word, confession of sin, fellowship, seeking godly counsel, the general demeanor of your life) God will draw near to you.

What a difference between the old covenant & the new. Under the old covenant there was a definite distance that God demanded of His people. He told Moses, **"Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."**<sup>3</sup> When God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt & gathered them around Mount Sinai, He told Moses to have a boundary set around it so that the people couldn't approach it. The idea being, "Don't draw near." Sinful man had to keep his distance from a Holy God... But now, under the new covenant, God says to man, "Draw near to Me & I will draw near to you." – That ground, those boundaries have been bridged by the blood of J.C. & We are invited to draw near to God based on the atoning blood of Jesus shed on our behalf.

<sup>3</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ex 3:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You see what this says, right? It says, God wants a relationship w/you. Yes, He will save you. Yes, He will forgive you. But those things are the means to the end He's looking for, to *draw near* to you...

& As much as drawing near to God serves as the follow through on our previous imperatives, it's also what the exhortations of the *rest of the Ch* are *predicated* upon. Drawing near to God serves the purifying of our hearts/hands. It shows us the true nature of our sin, it causes us to build up others rather than tear down others, it keeps us mindful of the eternal perspective & desirous to do the right thing before God & before others.

You see, James says, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your hearts you doubleminded." But these things are under the umbrella (w/in the context) of *drawing near to God*. It's in drawing near to God that our hands are cleansed, our hearts are purified. We don't clean up our lives & come to Him. We come to Him, draw near to Him, He cleanses us. (& We should note that the hands & the heart are in concert. My belief will be displayed in my behavior).

The idea behind this word "purify" is one of faithfulness. "Be true in your heart toward God", as opposed to loving the world & being unfaithful to God in your heart.

He says, "Lament & mourn & weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning & your joy to gloom." He's not saying that as believers we're all gloom & doom, devoid of any joy. The Bible teaches just the opposite, that the joy of the Lord is your strength. Jesus gives *true* joy (unspeakable & full of glory). What he's saying (keep the context) is, "Quit celebrating sin & see it for what it is! Be sober & serious, turn from it & put it out of your lives!" Too often we'll make jokes about our sin when we should be in mourning over our sin... & It's as we draw near to God that we're able to see our sin for what it truly is. It's there that we're convicted & broken & compelled to find cleansing through the blood of J.C. It's that same principle that Jesus spoke of when He said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.*<sup>4</sup> There's inherent blessing in recognizing who we are *before* God, being broken over our sin in the *sight* of God...

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." God *resists* the proud, but gives *grace* to the humble. The way up, is down. The lowly one becomes the lifted one.

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<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 5:3-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

David said it this way, *"I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps."*<sup>5</sup> In Isaiah 57 we read, *"For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'"*<sup>6</sup>

God is more than able to humble you if that's what's required. Much better that we humble *ourselves* in the sight of the Lord, & He will lift us up.

### Vs 11-12

Again, if I'm drawing near *to* the Lord, humbling myself in the sight *of* the Lord, I'll recognize my own sin for what it is... Therefore I won't be slandering, incriminating, criticizing or coming against others. It goes back to; getting right w/God will result in being right w/ people. Jesus said it like this, *"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*<sup>7</sup> Isn't interesting how we so readily see in others what we're absolutely blind to in ourselves? I'm not going to take the time to necessarily elaborate on any one example. **But I've had people come to me about things, either they think they see in me or someone else (& that happens from time to time), but it will completely blow my mind because often the very thing they point out is so obvious or out of control in their own lives, they just can't see it!**

But Jesus would say, "Hey, examine your own heart/life in the sight of God 1<sup>st</sup>. Deal w/the issue in your own life before you concern yourself w/what's happening in someone else's life." Now, we know that James isn't saying that we should turn a blind eye to sin, or pretend nothing is wrong when something is. **The bible is clear on such matters. But there's no way that I can know the inner motives of the heart of another & that's what he's talking about. The only One who can judge the heart is the One who knows the inner secrets & motives of the heart & that's God.**

When I set myself as judge/jury & hangman, then I assume the position of God.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 40:1-2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 57:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 7:3-5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I set myself over/above the law. What law? That same law of love he brought up in Ch 2. If I'm slandering/speaking against someone, I'm not loving my neighbor as myself, I'm setting myself over them. Remember, it's pride that causes me to set myself above another (God resists the proud). When I'm walking in humility, it just won't be in me to arrogantly judge another.

### Vs 13-16

Do you see the common thread of contrasting pride & arrogance with humility & dependence upon God? & To reiterate the point, he's not saying that we shouldn't have plans or think about the future. He's saying that we shouldn't pridefully presume upon a path, but we should humbly depend upon the Lord.

We forget, we're not in control, *God's* in control. We start talking about what we'll do in a year from now, we don't even know what'll happen tomorrow! We measure our lives in years. Moses said, *"So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom."*<sup>8</sup> "For what is your life?" When you're young, you feel like you'll live forever. You get a little older you begin to realize the vulnerability & the brevity of life. David wrote, *"Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am."*<sup>9</sup> (You might write it down & look it up later, Luke 12:16-21).

We live & move & have our being only at God's permission. He's the Giver & Taker of life. So, rather than presume arrogantly, let's live in humility. Acknowledging our dependency upon the Lord... Our life is like a wisp of steam that vanishes so quickly, that's why it's so important that live our lives w/a view toward eternity.

### Vs 17 Close

James is big on being a doer of the word, not a hearer only. He's laid out a litany, a listing of the kinds of things that should constitute our lives as believers. & He's been speaking of such things all throughout his letter. But just in this Ch he's established our responsibility to submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse our hands, purify our hearts, to see our sin for the offense that it is & turn from it. **To walk in humility & not speak ill of other brothers & sisters & the seek the heart of God in our planning rather than presume upon a path arrogantly. Now he says, "You know that if this is what you *should* do, but you choose *not* to, it's sin."**

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 90:12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 39:4]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's sin of *omission*. There's sin of *co-mission*, (doing what's wrong). This is the sin of *omission*, (not doing what's right). When I know something is the right thing to do, yet I choose *not* to. It's sin just the same as knowing something is the wrong thing do, yet I *choose to*.

God help us to live life w/a view toward eternity. To lead lives of repentance. Loving God w/all our heart, all our soul & all our mind... & loving one another as ourselves.

### Prayer Points

God we thank You for Your word. The plain instruction & practical application. I pray that we be found as *doers* of Your word from the heart. Loving You, loving others, walking in humility, our lives bringing You glory.

You know what repentance looks like. Submit to God, don't be found fighting *against* God, unconditionally surrender to Him. Draw near to Him & He will draw near to you. He wants a relationship w/you, but it's only found in J.C. who has loved you & given Himself for you. Turn from your sin, trust in Him today.