

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part thirteen

Teaching #1828 - Sunday, September 20th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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RESISTING THE DEVIL AND SUBMITTING TO GOD - LEARNING TO LIVE THE EXALTED LIFE

James 4:7-10 - "Submit yourselves therefore 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] Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

The reason these verses matter is made clear in the concluding verse from last week's teaching - **James 4:6** - "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" It's easy to think grace falls from God's hand the way snow falls from the sky. But that isn't so. God gives His grace to **"the humble."**

This is an important and often overlooked insight. We all know grace is for *sinful* people. But not all sinful people will experience the full measure of God's grace. Grace isn't automatically bestowed to sinners. It's bestowed to **humble** sinners - sinners who are honest with themselves and with God.

That's why the next logical words from James' pen are **"Submit therefore to God"** (7), and, **"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord...."** (10). Today's text is all about submitting to God in order to receive His grace. Everybody needs God's grace. But not everybody *receives* grace.

"God gives grace to the humble.....Submit therefore to God" (4:6-7). At once we're all meant to see that connection between **deliberate submission** and **free grace**. This is not a **contradiction**. Grace is **free**. But it is never **unconditional**. In fact, **salvation** itself is free. The Bible says it's not of works so no one can boast. But, while free, it is **conditioned** upon repentance. This is where James is going as he prepares the people to receive God's **free**, yet **conditional** grace. Free grace comes from honest humility before God.

This text is so important. There's a whole distorted movement in the evangelical church that thinks you magnify God's grace by de-emphasizing discipline, purity and holiness. People will often come up to me and say I go to a **grace** church. You and I, according to this teaching, are to relax and enjoy God and be released from the rigors often associated with the Christian life, as though the call to **grace** and the call to **diligence** were mutually exclusive calls. James corrects this murky thinking in today's text.

1) THERE'S MORE TO THE RECEIVING OF GRACE THAN BEING CLEANSED FROM THE GUILT OF SIN

James 4:7 - "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

How do you know if you've received God's grace? Or, to put it into more commonly used terms, what makes a person a **"believer"**? This must be a very important question because we've seen James deal with it in various forms already in this letter:

James 2:14 - "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"

James 2:19 - "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"

Demons are believers. Where is James going with this? If being a believer isn't just a matter of **claiming** to be a believer, what is it? How **do** I know if I've received God's saving grace? James said, in our last week's teaching, God **gives** grace, and we're meant to see the **freeness** in that term. We don't **earn** grace. God **gives** it - **James 4:6** - "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

If God **gives** grace, then I **receive** grace. And in the very first words of the very next verse - the first verse of our text today - James tells us what **grace receivers** look like. They **submit** to God and they **resist** the Devil - **"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"** (4:7).

Grace doesn't take all the **verbs** out of your life. You **submit** to God with every ounce of strength you have. You **resist** the

Devil with a passion and zeal of a committed exerciser trying to lose fifty pounds. Grace doesn't bring *relaxation*. Grace doesn't bring *indifference*. Grace fuels the *verbs* in your life. Grace punctuates and activates diligence and submission and creative counter-cultural devotion and committed discipleship in my daily life.

2) SUBMITTING TO GOD IS MORE THAN JUST TRYING TO DO WHAT HE SAYS

James 4:7-8 - "Submit yourselves therefore 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.

There is a reason so many find it *hard* to submit their lives to God, and James is going to try, very specifically, to pin-point some of the problems. I see this order in James' thoughts. *First* there is the over-arching concern of this whole passage. If we are recipients of grace we show it by *submitting to God* (6-7).

I think I'm meant to pause and pray over that command. I think James means for me to see the strangeness of *Christians* being told to *submit to God*. Ponder the deception that can thrive in all our religious hearts, that we can think about being *saved* and *going through all the religious stuff we do in church* and still live substantial chunks of life *not* submitted to God! This is James' primary thought.

Then, *second*, he *explains* what submitting to God is all about in *two more sub-points*. Submitting to God is, in the first place, *resisting the Devil* (7). And secondly, it's *drawing near to God* (8).

- a) **"Resist the devil" (4:7)** - This is not what I would have placed first. But James is emphatic. After saying *"yes"* to Jesus Christ, the first word divine grace brings and empowers is *"no."* You can't say *"yes"* to submitting to God without first saying *"no"* to the devil. And if you *try* to say *"yes"* to God, at any point, without *first* saying *"no"* to the devil and the world you become *"adulteresses"* by default:

James 4:4 - "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

We looked at this in depth last week. These adulterous people aren't people who don't love God. That is *not* James' point in that fourth verse. These are people who *do* claim to love God, but who, in what seem to be such innocent, tolerant words, are *"friends with the world."* These are people who have said *"yes"* to God without saying *"no"* to the world or the devil.

This is not some isolated quirk from a prudish apostle. The whole Bible calls us to remember just how *prominent* and *central* and *crucial* this teaching is:

Titus 2:11-14 - "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

The grace of God has come to us in Jesus Christ! **What does it do?** **Titus 2:12** - "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...."

Grace *renounces* ungodliness. *That's* what Jesus' grace does. Do you just see *forgiveness* in grace? Or do you see a *training camp*? Grace makes us *more negative* about certain things than we would be on our own. *That's* James shocking reminder about what happens when God *"gives grace to the humble"* (4:6). And the reason that's shocking for us is we've come to believe that the *mark* of humility is being *open* and *tolerant* to almost everything. We think humility means *not being against anything*.

But that isn't humility at all. That's just laziness and worldliness. Humility isn't *mere openness*. Humility - humility before *God* - is bowing to His revelation and authority *against* the tide of un-acceptance and criticism from the world who sees God's truth as bigoted and restricting and narrow and intolerant.

This concept is unfolded even more in the Scriptures:

Psalm 1:1-2 - "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

James orders his words about receiving God's grace and resisting the devil along the same lines as the Psalmist. These verses are all about ordering your life **submissively** according to the will of God. David describes a man who lies awake at night, but not because he can't sleep, or is finishing a movie or novel. He's awake because he's anxious to **know God's will - God's direction** - for his life. He's devouring the law of God.

Will he find God's will and way? Yes, he will, but not just because he burns the mid-night oil over the law of God. He will **find** God's will, and he will be enabled to **enjoy** God's will, because, **before** he opened God's law, he **turned his back on the "counsel of the wicked,"** and he **walked away from "the way of sinners,"** and he **ignored the stinging words of all who would be "scoffers"** of absolute, divine truth (1).

In other words, he was **humble enough**, not to be turned away from the Lord by the mocking, scoffing pressure of peers. **Ego** wasn't directing his life. **God** was.

So if you want to **receive God's grace at all** you will manifest it by **submitting to God**. This is not just **agreeing** with God, but **submitting** to God. And, says James, to submit to **God** you must first of all **resist the devil and abandon the concept of ever fitting in friendship with the world**.

- b) **"Draw near to God" (4:8)** - This is the second component of submitting to God. First you **"resist,"** then you **"draw near."** Here too, James expands on what he means - **James 4:8** - **"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."**

Notice how James continues to analyze the nature of **submitting to God**. First it means saying **"no"** - **"resisting"** the devil and friendship with the world. Then, second, it means **"drawing near"** to God. And **"drawing near"** to God means dealing specifically with **"double-mindedness"** - **"Purify your hearts, you double-minded(8).**

This is a very careful description of the **kind** of purity of heart James has in mind. Notice the link between purity of heart and **double-mindedness**. James isn't thinking primarily of a **filthy** heart. He's speaking of a **divided** heart. This is a heart that may not have a trace of immorality or theft or violence in it. But it's a heart split between **two** devotions rather than just one.

Double-mindedness is how Christians get **away** from God. This is why these people need to **"draw near"** to Him. They haven't **rejected** Him. They haven't **denied** Him. They still **affirm** Him and **praise** Him and **worship** Him. But they've gradually become careless.

James has already given us a list of symptoms of their **double-mindedness** in this letter. They don't **act on what they hear from God's Word (1:22-25)**. They **bless God and tear down brothers and sisters with the same mouth (3:9-12)**. They **fight and quarrel with Christians to get their way and protect their rights - even though they've all been forgiven so patiently by Father God (4:1-3)**.

These are just James' examples of dozens of patterns of behavior that become addicting and habit forming in the lives of millions of church-going people. And James' whole point is these things don't just make us **inconsistent**, though they do that for sure. His point is they **separate us from God**.

The **"drawing near"** that James commands isn't the drawing near of **conversion**. These people are professing Christians. And it isn't the drawing near of **worship**. That needs to be said because we have come to **always** think of drawing near to God in terms of **worship** in today's church. And worship **is** drawing near to God, as long as it is worship from **"clean hands and a pure heart."**

James is describing, as he will make abundantly clear in the next two verses, drawing near to God in **repentance**. O, how we try to do everything **but** this repenting! How many people will sit in **worship** services, either feeling bored or guilty or frustrated trying to **"work up"** some kind of emotional sense of God's **"presence"** simply because they

only think of approaching God in *worship*, and never in terms of *humble repentance*.

3) RENEWAL ISN'T THE TOP BLOWING OFF, BUT THE BOTTOM FALLING OUT

James 4:9-10 - "Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**"

What kind of blessed mourning is this? Did James get this idea from Jesus - "**Blessed are those who mourn....**"? It's quite a commentary on the contemporary church that there is almost nothing in these verses we can even get a handle on. They might as well be written in a foreign language - **until you get to the last five words** - "**....and He will exalt you.**" That's something we all want. Only we don't make the connection with the road James outlines in the previous words.

Don't find true contentment in anything but Christ. Don't go to church early on Sunday just so you can have the bulk of the day for your own pleasures. Don't allow family or money or sports or entertainment or success make you content in this world.

Church, let God decide how He will exalt your life. Listen to these words from James because he didn't just make them up. He spent a lot of time with his brother, Jesus. Then he had years of pastoral experience to mull over some of the things Jesus said. Things like:

Luke 6:21 - 25 - "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. [22] "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! [23] Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. [24] "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. [25] "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry." "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."

So here's the deal. Are those words from Jesus *positive* or are they *negative*? Is a sermon like this *harsh* or is it *loving*? Well, you tell me. Was anybody more loving to sinners or saints than Jesus?

The real question is **how do God's greatest blessings of grace come?** Remember the context verse that led into this whole passage of Scripture - **James 4:6** - "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" How do we make a highway for the grace of God in our lives? Is there any issue more positive and life-giving in all the world than that?

So, in closing, when you see those seemingly harsh words, "**....Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom**"(9), don't see them as the prudish pronouncement of a fun-hating God. Let me give you a much better and more Biblical picture to leave church with today.

Think of Peter. Think of Peter after he denied Jesus three times. Think of Peter who knows he just betrayed - betrayed as surely and painfully as did Judas - His Lord. He couldn't just **shake that failure off**. He stopped everything else, cancelled every other appointment, turned off the TV, turned off his smart-phone, silenced his twitter account, and he found a good place to **weep, mourn, and wail**.

Then Jesus - the resurrected, all-powerful Lord - comes to Peter and **exalts** him. O how Jesus loves lifting up the repentant! How He loves to help and elevate those who are contrite and broken.

This message is hard for us to receive. Ironically, it's the **church** that has made it hard for people to be exalted by God because it's the **church** that has trained us that everything must be **up** and **light** and **positive**. But if you can get past all the trends and the hype, there is still a sure-fire way to come home again. Give this process **time**. And give this process **silence**. Draw near with tears. Let God exalt your repentant, broken heart.