

Humbly Submit
James 4:6-10
ABC 7/14/19

The story's told that an Englishman was seated on a train between 2 ladies arguing about the window. One claimed she'd die of heat if it stayed closed. The other said she'd expire of pneumonia if it was opened. The ladies called the conductor who didn't have a clue how to resolve the issue. Finally, the gentleman spoke up. *1st, open the window. That will kill the one. Then close it. That will kill the other. Then we'll have peace.* That's one way to settle a quarrel! The world has many ways to resolve conflicts like this. But invariably, they leave God out. God tells us His ways aren't our ways (Is 55:8). His ways are higher than our & often run opposite to our ways. If we want true & lasting peace in our relationships, then we need to resolve conflicts God's way. His way for resolving conflicts isn't to give us superficial tips to achieve outward peace. Rather, God goes for the heart, our heart. When our ways please Him, then we have a foundation for resolving conflicts with others (Prov 16:7). In 4:1, he asks, **What is the source of quarrels & conflicts among you?** He then goes on to show the source is our selfishness. I believe that 2 life-events make our selfishness much clearer to us. What are they? 1st, getting married. All of a sudden you have to think of someone else & your selfish pride often rises to the surface. The 2nd event? Having a child, for much the same reasons. Agree? We all battle our selfish desires. To resolve conflicts, we must repent of our selfishness & humble ourselves before God. We have to judge our selfish motives (1-3) & turn from spiritual adultery & humbly come to God for His grace (4-6). To be able to do any of this we must submit ourselves to God, which summarizes vss 7-10. **4:1-12 PRAY**

Being humbled isn't fun but vs 6 tells us it's the way of grace. How do we humbly receive God's grace? What does this look like? James tells us here. Our text (6-10) is sandwiched between the quote, **God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble** (vs 6, quoting Prov 3:34) & the concluding command, **Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, & He will exalt you** (10). Here James zeroes in on God's way of conflict resolution, which deals with our hearts before Him. Conflict with God is often behind conflicts with others. 1st & foremost in any conflict, we must get right with God. **6-7a**

Submitting to God requires the humble mind of vs 6. The Greek word for **humble** here is a rare word that was used to describe the Nile River at its low stage, meaning, *it runs low*. So should we. God always has more grace & it flows to the humble. Those who elevate themselves will never experience God's grace upon grace. We can sum up all of James' staccato commands in these vss under this one command: **Submit to God. Therefore**, vs 7 says, in light of the truth of vs 6, **submit to God. Submit** is a soldier's word for placing yourself under the commander to fight for him, which is far better than having him fight against you. A soldier in training can't be arguing about his desires & rights with his drill sergeant. His life depends on him following the chain of command, assuming his position, & obeying his orders. **Submit** is also in the emphatic position in the grammar & is followed by 9 commands. All 10 of the rapid-fire commands can be seen as different expressions of the same truth of what the humble person of vs 6 looks like & how he receives the **greater grace** promised. This whole section begins & ends with being able to humbly submit (7a, 10). If you want to be lifted up, if you want to receive more grace, **greater grace**, don't just focus on God's promise of grace. Instead focus on the process of grace that James gives us.

The world has all kinds of seminars on how to be more assertive, but I've yet to see a seminar on how to **submit**. All kinds of books are written on being a good leader. Not so many about how to follow. This isn't a popular concept, but it is a biblical one. We must put ourselves in rank under Someone, implying an order of authority. The word is used of our obligation to submit to government authorities (Rom 13:1, 5; 1 Pt 2:13), to elders in the church (1 Pt 5:5), & of mutual submission of husbands & wives to one another in marriage (Eph 5:21-22; 1 Pt 3:1, 5). Of course, God is the ultimate & only sovereign authority in the universe & it should be obvious to everyone that it's not right to rebel against His authority. Since He's **opposed to the proud** (6), vs 7 says that submitting to God is the only sensible thing to do. But because of the fall, as Paul explains, the mind set on the flesh **is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so** (Rom 8:7). **Subject** is the same Greek word as **submit** in James. Unbelievers are unable to submit to God because they're unwilling & unable to do so. Using the same word in Rom 10:3, Paul states, **For not knowing about God's righteousness & seeking to establish their own,**

they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. In pride, fallen man wants to set up his own righteousness as good enough, but it falls far short of God's perfect righteousness. The essence of human rebellion against God is we don't **submit** to His holy law or His perfect righteousness. You can't separate submitting to God from trusting Him for salvation. Humble repentance is necessary to receive God's grace, but God's grace is also necessary for our humble repentance to even take place. Salvation & sanctification are all of grace & all a gift, though human responsibility & repentance is involved. Grace empowers submission to God. & repentance isn't even a work of man, it's a gift God grants to us. Acts 11:18 says, **God has granted repentance to the Gentiles...** Paul writes in 2 Tim 2:24, **God may grant them repentance...** & we've seen in Js 1:17-18 that **every good thing given & every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father ... In the exercise of His will He brought us forth...** Repentance is a gift from God above. Humility starts knowing our salvation is all of grace. This isn't to say that God's grace excludes our effort. No, but it empowers it. Grace isn't a license to do as we please but the power to do as we should. We don't just believe in saving grace, the grace that regenerates a spiritually dead sinner & makes him alive together with Christ (Eph 2:5). We also believe in sustaining, sanctifying grace, the kind we need continually. It's more grace, future grace, greater grace. So when James says **submit** yourselves, you must do this yourself but you can't do this by yourself. You can't do any of these 10 commands apart from His grace. You can't **resist the devil** by yourself (7b). But as Paul says in Eph 6, you can do so in the Lord's armor & in the strength of His might. You must **draw near to God** (8), but we know from other passages that no one can do this without God drawing them 1st by His grace. When James commands us to **cleanse our hands & purify our hearts**, which is part of repentance, we know that only God can purify our hearts & cleanse us because, **we have received ... grace upon grace** (Jn 1:16). We need to do what James says to receive grace & we need that grace to do what vs 7-10 say. It's all by grace, not of works, so that no one may boast (& so God gets all the glory)! But recognizing **by the grace of God I am what I am** (1 Cor 15:10) doesn't negate our work, it should motivate us to work, just as Paul said it caused him to labor more. It's in Christ we live, with Christ, by Christ, from Christ, through Christ, & to Christ. Paul says in Gal 2:20-21, **I have been crucified**

with Christ; & it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; & the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me & gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God... All that you have & all that you are must be surrendered to all that God is in Jesus. We must submit to the Commander & never surrender to the enemy.

1. Resist the Devil 7b

Resist is another military term from which we get the word *antihistamine*, which means *to stand against*. Having a healthy relationship with God, submitting to Him, comes 1st, then resisting the enemy. James intentionally says, **submit to God** before telling us to **resist the devil**. Before we can *stand against* Satan, we must bow before God. You must 1st have your allegiance surrendered to the Lord to fight for His army before you can fight against the enemy. The Greek word for **devil** is *diabolos*, which means to throw against. It's the word for *slanderer*. It translates the Hebrew word for **Satan**, which means *adversary*. The devil is an evil fallen angel who stands against God & His people, always ready to accuse or slander us (Zech 3:1, 2; Rev 12:10). While we're no match for him in our own strength, in the name of the Lord, & protected by the armor He provides, we may simply stand against Satan & he will flee.

We must not forget about Satan but we must not focus on him either. He isn't our where we fix our eyes nor is he the one we submit to. We must focus on & submit to God (7a, 8a). The devil must be resisted by our being humble & submissive. Again, the order is significant. When we're not as humble as we should be (which we don't think is such a big sin & often don't even recognize as sin) we're easy prey for the prowling lion. Don't just think of Satan in the occult, witchcraft, Ouija boards, & the paranormal. Eph 4:26-27 says we give the devil a foothold in more normal things like not dealing with anger in our heart, letting the sun set before we've repented of & removed our bitter grudges & have forgiven others. Pride is somewhere in the mix in all sin from the 1st sin of Lucifer to the 1st sin of Adam & Eve. In both cases self was desiring too highly. Pride is devilish. We must kill it by submitting humbly to God. James & Peter were kind of co-pastors in the Jerusalem church in its early years (Gal 2:9) & this is one area their writings are so similar you wonder if they co-taught this subject at some point. 1 Pt 5:1-4 instructs the elders how to lead &

shepherd the flock in the church, exercising oversight but not in a harsh way or lording their rule over others but with loving authority under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus. **All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.** Same quotation that James uses in 4:6. Peter continues, **Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you** (also same phrases as Js 4:10) **at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him...** One of the ways we're to humble ourselves is through humble, submissive prayer for all our needs & cares (Js 4:2b, 13-16). We must **be of sober spirit, be on the alert**, watching out for a lack of humility in our hearts at all times. **Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.** Notice that the warning of the devil comes after the warning of pride. **But resist him** (same command as Js 4:7), **firm in your faith.** In both cases, along with Eph 6:13, we're told to stand firm in spiritual warfare. It doesn't say run or retreat or give in. It doesn't say *rebuke* the devil, it says **resist the devil.** Turn forward a few books to Jude. I've heard many Christians pray things like, *Satan, I rebuke you & bind you.* Jude 9 tells us, **Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil & argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"** If the highest angels don't rebuke Satan directly, why should we? We can pray to the Lord to deal with the devil, but no mere human saying things like, *Satan, I bind you,* does anything. In Rev 20 we see the one occasion in the Bible where Satan is bound & it's by God's doing after the return of Jesus as King in Rev 19. When His kingdom comes in its fullness, Satan will be bound. We need to know of the devil's reality & activity & we need to **resist** him as the one who has the power to deceive but we can access greater power, God's **greater grace.** The encouragement in fighting the good fight of faith is that our Captain is fighting with us! We aren't in this fight alone & greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). & **greater grace** is available & the promise is that no temptation from our enemy is greater than we can bear. God's grace always gives us a way through any battle (1 Cor 10:31). Besides that, we aren't ignorant of our enemy's schemes if we use God's Word, our all-sufficient & only weapon. Js 4:7 has good news for us: if you resist the devil, **he will flee.** AW Pink says when you read this in the context of vs 6,

Ah, that is encouraging, that stimulates faith & hope. The One unto whom I am to "submit" myself is no harsh Tyrant ... but the "God of all grace." He has already given me saving grace, & "He giveth more grace" to the humble, & "more grace" is exactly what I need, if I am to successfully "resist the Devil." ... I cannot prevail over the great Enemy in my own strength, & God will not give me of His "grace" while I am resisting Him! Thus, I must cease resisting God before I can hope to resist the Devil... The prayerless soul is a proud one, for his refusal to receive strength from God is tantamount to saying that he can get along through the day without Him.¹

Part of submitting to God is resisting the devil.

2. Draw Near to God James again gives us a command & a promise in vs 8: **Draw near to God & He will draw near to you.** Before I comment on what this means, let me say what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean God is waiting for sinners to make the 1st move toward Him & then He'll respond. Not only does that run counter to all of Scripture, it also runs counter to this vs, which is God commanding us to draw near to Him! Jesus said, **No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him** (Jn 6:44). In case we missed it, He repeated, **For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father** (6:65). God always makes the 1st move toward us. If He didn't, we all would perish in our sins (Jn 8:34, 43-44; Rom 3:10-12). As Jesus said, **All that the Father gives Me will come to Me** (Jn 6:37). But these words in James are written primarily to believers. It's easy even for believers, to drift away from the Lord. James' point is that we move away from God. He's not moving away from us. If you're engaging in continuing quarrels & conflicts, you aren't close to God. You've drifted. He's calling you to draw near to Him with the promise that He's ready & waiting to draw near to you. You can't be close to God at the same time you're pridefully angry or bitter or bickering with someone else. That's why immediately after teaching how serious the sin of anger is, Jesus said, **Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, & there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar & go; first be reconciled to your brother, & then come & present your offering** (Mt 5:23-24). You can't draw near to God until you 1st clear up, as much as it's in your power, any relational difficulties. If you think you're close to God, but you're selfishly angry & bitter, you're deceiving yourself. Submit to God by drawing near to Him. How? I can draw knowledge from a passage of God's Word but that's not the same as drawing near to God necessarily. Without

¹ *Studies in the Scriptures*, 1932-33, Vol 6, p 236

confession of sin, prayer, & true fellowship with God, any of us can be in danger of what Jesus warned about. People that **honor Him with their lips while their heart is far from Him** (Mt 15:8). In context here, the sin of worldliness (Js 4:4) had put many of the original readers at a distance from God because friendship with the world's values is spiritual adultery which hurts the relationship with God who loves His bride with a jealous love. But no matter how serious our sin is against our Lord, if we draw near to Him, repentantly, humbly pleading for His grace to change our heart from its selfish desires, **He will draw near to you!** This is an incredible picture when considering that in ancient times kings were totally unapproachable by the common people. Even in OT worship only the Jewish high priest could enter the Holy of holies where God's presence was & then only once a year. But Heb 4:16 says any believer can draw near confidently to the throne of grace to find grace & mercy to help in time of need.

3. Cleanse & 4. Purify 8b

Drawing near to God clearly has connection with cleansed living (hands represent action) as well as a pure heart (attitudes & motives). The language of clean hands & pure heart comes from Ps 24:3 which says, **Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? & who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands & a pure heart ...** How do we as sinners get cleansed hands & a purified hearts? David, who wrote Ps 24, also prayed like this in Ps 51. **Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity & cleanse me from my sin... Purify me... & I shall be clean; Wash me, & I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a clean heart, O God ... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken & a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise (2,7, 10, 17).** A truly humble, broken, repentant prayer like that God won't reject. Js 4:8 calls for repentance as our responsibility. We must repent. James' Jewish readers knew this OT pattern of cleansing, not just by human effort but ultimately by seeking God's cleansing. We can't pray with sinful hands & hearts still holding on to our sins. In Is 1:15-16 God says to unrepentant worshipers & pray-ers, **even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil ...** A good mark & measure of true repentance is the pursuit, not just of forgiveness from sin, but the pursuit of forsaking sin. Those who are truly & humbly

repentant doesn't just want to get rid of the consequences of sin, they want to get rid of the causes of sin. They aren't content to clean up their outward life in the eyes of others. They aren't satisfied until God has also cleansed their inward hearts as well.

We submit to God by resisting the devil, drawing near to God, cleansing & purifying ourselves through the sacrifice of Jesus. Now we're told to ... 9

5. Be Miserable 6. Mourn 7. Weep & 8. Laughter to Mourning & Joy to Gloom Did you know the Bible commanded you to **be miserable**? Some of you manage that one just fine. What's James getting at here? Clearly this could be an entire sermon by itself. James brings up this thought again in 5:1. But for now notice that feeling bad isn't always bad. In fact there are times when it would be very bad not to feel very bad. This vs doesn't make sense to most American churchgoers who think Christianity's all about prosperity & contentment. Jesus said, **Blessed are they who mourn, they shall be comforted** (Mt 5:4). Paul speaks of a godly sorrow that is God's will, beginning with salvation which starts with repentance (2 Cor 7:10). He told the Corinthians they should mourn over their sin (1 Cor 5:2). Many today laugh at sin & few lament their sin as they should. It should alarm us if our sin doesn't alarm us. It should trouble us when our sin doesn't trouble us as it should. If you want to know if your repentance is deep enough, measure it against what this vs says. Do you ever feel this way about your sin? Are you miserable, broken, & repentant?

There are people in churches today who are outwardly happy with their material possessions & their self-centered lifestyles. Yet at the same time they hate others within the church, ignore the needy, & never get involved in serving their fellow Christians. It's to these types that James shouts, **Be miserable & mourn & weep!** James' words show there's an emotional element to genuine repentance. It isn't just a glib, *I'm sorry I offended you. Or, I'm sorry you're upset*, implying it's your fault. When you're truly repentant, you accept full responsibility for your sin. You don't excuse it as a shortcoming or oversight. You mourn over how you've offended God, disgraced His name, & hurt your brother or sister in Christ (2 Cor 2:1-7; 7:7-11). Puritan Thomas Brooks asks:

*Oh, who can look upon sin ...
as an offence against a holy God,
as the breach of a holy law,
as the wounding & crucifying of a holy Savior,*

*as the grieving & saddening of a holy Sanctifier,
and not mourn over it?*

*Oh, who can cast a serious eye ...
upon the heinous nature of sin,
upon the exceeding sinfulness of sin,
upon the aggravations of sin—*

*& not have ...
his heart humbled,
his soul grieved,
his spirit melted,
his mouth full of penitential confessions,
his eyes full of penitential tears,
and his heart full of penitential sorrow?*

*The Christian mourns that he has sinned against...
a God so great,
a God so gracious,
a God so bountiful,
a God so merciful.*

Oh, how should a sinner fall a-weeping when he looks upon the greatness of his wickedness, & his lack of holiness! As ever you would be holy, mourn over your own unholiness. Those who weep not for sin here—shall weep out their eyes in hell hereafter! It is better to weep bitterly for your sins on earth, than to weep eternally for your folly in hell...²

God says in Joel 2:12-13, **“Return to Me with all your heart, & with fasting, weeping & mourning; & rend your heart & not your garments.”** Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious & compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness... When we sense our brokenness we appreciate God’s graciousness. Finally, & again, **10**.

9. Humble Yourself (10) Pride is at the heart of all disobedience to God & of most relational conflicts.

If God opposes the proud, **but gives grace to the humble** (4:6), you better make sure you’re not making yourself God’s opponent! The theme of God humbling the proud but exalting the humble runs throughout Scripture (1 Sam 2:4-8; Job 42:6, 10-17; Ps 34:18; 51:17; Prov 3:34; 29:25; Is 57:15; 66:2; Ezek 17:24; Mt 23:12; Lk 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pt 5:6). In the context of dealing with bickering & quarreling, Paul tells us to imitate the Lord Jesus, the supreme example of one who humbled Himself & was exalted by God (Phil 2:8-9). The key to developing biblical humility is in the phrase, **in the presence of the Lord** (10). Only those with hardened hearts could be proud **in the**

² *The Crown & Glory of Christianity or, HOLINESS, the Only Way to Happiness, www.gracegems.org/07/04/best.html*

presence of the Lord. The angels in His presence cover their faces (Is 6:2). When Isaiah had his vision of the Lord, he was undone, shattered, & immediately aware of his own sinfulness (Is 6:5). When God portrayed the wonders of creation before Job, Job had no further arguments against Him. Instead, he said, **I retract, & I repent in dust & ashes** (42:6). When John, who formerly had rested his head on Jesus' chest, saw Him in His glory, he fell at His feet as a dead man (Rev 1:17). The Puritan Thomas Manton paraphrases Calvin's opening line from *The Institutes* this way: *The soul becomes humble by the true knowledge of God & ourselves.* He continues, *The stars vanish when the sun arises; & our poor candle is slighted into a disappearance, when the glory of God arises in our thoughts.... & we see our vileness in God's majesty.... Get as large & comprehensive thoughts of Him as you can; see His glory, if you would know your own baseness.* The 1st step in resolving conflicts with others is to submit to God, which includes drawing near to Him & humbling yourself before Him. What's the promise in vs 10? **He will exalt you.** You must go down before you can truly be brought up. If you're not broken over your sin (which vs 9 commands 4x in 4 different ways) you won't experience the truly uplifting grace of God that follows repentance.

The mourning of biblical repentance isn't contradictory to the biblical joy that we're commanded to have at all times (Phil 4:4; 1 Thes 5:16). In fact, true joy comes only through true repentance. It's only then that we experience God's forgiveness & mercy. Don't sit passively & wait for resolution in a conflict to happen spontaneously. James gives 10 active commands in machine-gun fashion in these 4 vss: Submit to God! Resist the devil! Draw near to God! Cleanse your hands! Purify your heart! Be miserable! Mourn! Weep! Let your laughter be turned into mourning & your joy into gloom! Humble yourself! God's way to resolve conflicts is for you to submit to Him, resist the devil, & repent of all sin. I like how this prayer says it:

*Lord, high & holy, meek & lowly,
You have brought us to the valley of vision,
where we live in the depths but see You in the heights;
hemmed in our mountains of sin we behold Your glory.*

*Let us learn by paradox
that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing soul,*

*that to have nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision...*

*Let us find Your light in our darkness,
Your life in our death,
Your joy in our sorrow,
Your grace in our sin,
Your riches in our poverty,
Your glory in our valley.³*

PRAY Men Come for Communion

The Lord's Supper is an act of worship which reminds us of God's grace in Christ & because of His grace we belong to Him. Too often we have a view of the Lord's Supper that's merely self-reflective & guilt-driven. We think it's primarily about what we need to do to fix things. We need to remember & confess every sin we've committed. We need to feel guilty for how far short we all fall. We make the Lord's Supper about us & our sin instead of Jesus & His grace. Don't get me wrong. The Bible says this is a privilege only for His children walking with Him. If you're not a follower of Christ then let the elements pass. & if you're a believer but you know you're in a place of willful disobedience you need to deal with that before taking part of this. But for most of us, the reality is we come here each Sunday aware of how sinful & undeserving we are. We bring our burdens & pains & we need God to refresh us with His grace. We bring our doubt & fears & we need God to grant us assurance. We come aware of our sins & how desperately we need the gospel of God's grace to be applied to our hearts. & that's exactly why God gave us this ordinance.

This table isn't what we do once we've gotten things right on our end. We do it believing God makes us right through the death & resurrection of Jesus. Yes, this is a time to confess our sins, but instead of trying to clean ourselves up or staying in a place of guilt, come to Jesus in the Lord's Supper as an act of faith where you say He is the answer & He alone is what you need. The Lord's Supper is not about our worthiness but about His worthiness & how He, in amazing grace, makes us fit to sit at God's table. As you eat & drink the elements today, do so with an awareness that Jesus is still a sufficient Savior for all our sins & He offers to us grace upon grace to help in any

³ Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*, pp 24-25

situation we find ourselves in. As we take in these physical objects of bread & juice, representing Christ's death, may God give us a powerful taste of the forgiveness & fullness of Jesus for us. This Supper is an invitation, not for those who've got things under control or are good people. It's an invitation for sinful & weak Christian's in need of Christ's grace. Jesus invites us to come to Him. All who are thirsty, come! All who are weak & wounded, come! All who are aware of their sin & need God's grace, come! PRAY – PASS ELEMENTS

The Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; & when He had given thanks, He broke it & said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor 11:24). As we eat of the bread we remember & find hope in the fact that Christ's body was crushed under God's wrath so we might receive God's grace.

In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread & drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor 11:25-26). As we drink the cup we remember & rejoice that Jesus' blood, His death, paid the price for our sins & purchased our redemption, all by God's all-sufficient grace.