

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Grace Travels Downhill James 4:7-10 Part One

We have been away from **James** for a long time. Hopefully you remember James was primarily written to help professing believers know whether or not they in fact possessed saving or living faith. The epistle of James gives us a series of different tests to help us make that determination.

The second test that we examined was the “Response to the Word test” in James 1:19-27.

The third test that we examined was the “Impartiality test” in James 2:1-13.

The fourth test that we examined was the “Works test” in James 2:14-26.

The fifth test that we examined was the “Speech test” in James 3:1-12.

The sixth test that we examined was the “Wisdom test” in James 3:13-18.

And the seventh test that we examined was the “Friendship with the World test” in James 4:1-6.

We have taken a brief break from James 4 but this morning we will be moving back to this chapter in order to examine **verses 7-10**. Let us read these four verses, **“Submit 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 miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. (10) Humble ourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”** What do we immediately notice? We notice that what we have just read in **VV. 7-10** is connected to what we have recently studied in **VV. 1-6**. How do we know this? We know this because of the word **“Therefore.”** **Verses 7-10** is based on **verses 1-6**.

Let us for a moment consider how they are connected. James has a problem: certain of his readers who were professing believers appear to have begun a friendship with the world. Their lives were becoming characterized by turmoil with others, with themselves and with the Lord. And because of this, he makes this beautiful statement at the beginning of **V. 6** **“But He gives a greater grace.”**

The world certainly can exercise a tremendous pull on professing believers. The world’s thinking and attitudes can very easily permeate the church, and certainly at any given time within the church there will be professing Christians who give the appearance of having become a friend of the world. This of course is a very serious thing because we lose the assurance of our salvation when this happens. But the situation is not hopeless. Why? God gives greater grace. We do not have to continue to act or think like the world. All we have to do is humble ourselves before the Lord and He will pour out upon us greater grace to walk in a manner consistent with the teaching of God’s word. But in order to enjoy this **“greater grace”** we have to do something.

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We have to humble ourselves. Listen to the last part of **V. 6**, “**Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'**” This is the truth. This is what needs to be done by those who need grace. This is what needs to be done by professing believers who have begun to be influenced by the world. Having stated this truth, there is still one more thing that needs to be done. And what is that? Those professing believers who have begun to become friends of the world need to actually humble themselves before the Lord, and this is exactly what we see James calling his readers to do in **VV.7-10**.

We cannot simply know what is right; we must act on what we know. Hopefully this morning as we approach this passage of Scripture, there will not be a single individual who will simply give lip service to the importance of humility. Hopefully there will not be a single individual here that will profess the importance of humility in a person's life without themselves seeking to be humble. Let us now take a look at this wonderful passage of Scripture.

The Introduction of the Call to Humility (V. 7)

Grace, in a sense, travels downhill very much like water. If you want to bask in the abundance of God's grace then you must make sure that you have not exalted yourself to such a high and lofty place that the Lord's grace cannot flow to you. If we want to fully enjoy the greater grace that the Lord wants to pour out upon us then we need to bow ourselves low before Him.

This is the spiritual law behind **Prov. 3:34** which was quoted in **V. 6**, “**God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.**” The unbowed soul standing proudly before God receives no benefit from God's falling grace. It may descend upon Him, but it does not penetrate, and drips away like rain from a statue. But the soul lying humbly before God is immersed -- and even swims -- in a sea of grace. So while there is always “greater grace,” it is reserved for the lowly -- the humble-- who are willing to do what? Submit themselves.

Look at **V. 7**, “**Submit therefore to God ...**” This phrase introduces the theme of **VV. 7-10** which is a “call to humility.” The mood and tense of this verb (HUPOTAGETE) translated “submit” conveys a sense of urgency, demanding immediate compliance, and could be literally translated “to place under.” James is calling those professing believers who have begun to flirt with the world to immediately place themselves under the rule of God.

I am sure this weekend that there are people here that know that something is wrong between themselves and the Lord. I am sure that there are people here whose appetite for the Word and prayer has vanished. If you are one of those people, you might wonder why is it that you are not interested in reading the Bible? Why is it that you don't think about prayer? Why is it that you are not interested in doing those things which are absolutely necessary for deepening your relationship with God? The reason is simple, there is sin in your life. Sin is the problem. The world has infected you and your lack of appetite for spiritual things is simply a symptom of the problem.

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When we sin, we have chosen to leave God's presence. We have chosen to place ourselves in a position where communication with the Lord will be virtually impossible. It might be, while in this state of rebellion, that we may somehow be exposed to the teachings of God's Word, but we will have no particular interest in feeding on it. It also might be, while in this state of rebellion, that we might even attempt to lift our voice to the Lord in prayer, but we will intuitively know that our prayers are lacking power. We will intuitively know that our prayers are falling on deaf ears. We will intuitively know that we have removed ourselves far from God.

It could be that you are harboring resentment toward your spouse for some unkind remark or careless action. It could be that you are angry toward your parent because they are opposing what you want to do. It could be that you are tolerating sexual thoughts or practices which you down deep in your heart know are wrong. It could be that you are allowing your job to rule your life. I don't know what your particular sin problem might be but I know the reason why you do not have an appetite for spiritual things and that is sin.

If you are going to once again enjoy the Word and prayer, if you are going to enjoy all of the personal blessings of a relationship with God and swim in the sea of His grace, you must turn from your sin. You must submit yourself to the Lord. Now how is this going to happen?

Some professing believers it seems are waiting for someone or something to somehow magically change them. It is as if they would like to one morning wake up and find themselves submitted to the Lord. This is about as likely to happen as you waking up one morning and discovering that during the night you have become the president of the United States. Submitting ourselves to God and turning from our sin is something that must begin in our own heart. It must be something that we ourselves want and that we are willing to pursue as we would pursue anything else that we might want.

But someone might say, "But would God, if we are truly His child, be actively seeking to humble us if we are choosing the path of sin?" And the answer of course is yes. It is true that God is a jealous God and He will not allow us to flirt with the world without a response. It is true that He will in fact lovingly discipline us for our wandering ways but He will not circumvent our will. Certainly Jonah discovered this to be true. God took Jonah from one bad situation to the next bad situation waiting for what to happen? He was waiting for Jonah to submit. He was waiting for Jonah to do what He had commanded him to do and that was to preach to the Ninevites the message that God had given him to preach and to do so willingly. We must ourselves choose to submit to the Lord, and this is why James is calling these certain readers to "submit" themselves.

This subordination, so hard for the proud and self-reliant, is essential to cure their worldliness. Submission to God is the beginning, middle, and end of the prodigal son's return from a disastrous familiarity with the world to the security of his Father's home. And it is the beginning, middle, and end of the return for any wayward professing believer.

James 4:6 states very clearly, "**God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.**" If you believe this and you have recently begun to flirt with the pleasures of the world, the thinking of the world and the values of the world, will you now as James instructs us in **V. 7** "**Submit yourself therefore to God?**"

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If you are here this morning and you are tired of living your life very much as the world might live their lives and you are weary and want to bask in the sea of God's grace, don't think that your submission will be unopposed. We do have an enemy, and his name is the devil. Therefore James is not only calling those who had begun to become flirtatious with the world to submission but also to resistance. Let us again look at **James 4:7** but this time let us read the next phrase, **“Submit therefore to God, resist the devil ...”**

The word “devil” (DIABOLO) means “slanderer.” The other primary name given to the devil in the NT is “Satan” which means “adversary, opponent, or enemy.” Certainly he is the enemy of God but he is also our enemy. 1 Pet. 5:8 tells us “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert, your adversary the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” We may choose to turn our back on the world, but the God of this world will not voluntarily turn his back on us. In fact, he is pictured in the Scriptures as a pursuer of God's children.

Why is it when we want to turn our back on the world and to be submissive to the Lord that we often times find it so difficult? It is because Satan is opposing us. We should not be so naive as to think that if we, at this very moment, purpose ourselves to submit to the Lord, that Satan will not oppose us. He will oppose us.

You might be sitting here this weekend and you know that you have been struggling with wanting to stay married. You know that the Lord hates divorce but you have been entertaining that very thought. Perhaps as you have been listening to this teaching in James, you have come to the point in your life that you have now decided that you will submit yourself to the Lord and you will no longer entertain the thought of divorce. What do you think the devil's response will be to that? Do you think he is going to say, “Fine, if that is what you want to do, who am I to stand in your way? I am just so glad that you have come to this decision” Is this how Satan is going to respond? Not according to the Scriptures. What is most likely to happen is that he will oppose us by saying “Why would you want to stay in a difficult marriage? Why should you continue to suffer? Why should your spouse continue to suffer? Why should your children have to live in a home with parents who are struggling in their marriage? This is what we should expect from Satan.

Therefore, when we choose to submit ourselves to the Lord, humbling ourselves before Him that we might enjoy the blessings of his grace, be prepared for the assault. Because the devil is our enemy we need to prepare ourselves to resist him. The word “resist” (ANTIESTE) means to “stand against.”

Now I know that a lot of people are very fearful of the devil and the thought of resisting or standing against him in our strength is comical. But certainly **James 4:7** gives us every reason to be very confident. Look again at **James 4:7** but this time let us finish the verse, **“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”** Why would he flee from us? It really has very little to do with us, but has everything to do with the Lord. We see the same thing in **Jude 9** when we read these words, **“But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.”** If we, in the name of Christ, will resist the devil, he will in fact flee from us.

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Practically speaking we resist the devil when we prayerfully, in the power of the Spirit, hold forth the Word of God as our shield and as our sword. We see this being done by Christ when He is spiritually attacked by Satan in the wilderness in **Matt. 4:1-11**, “**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (2) And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. (3) And the tempter came and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” (4) But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’” (5) Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, (6) and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will give His angels charge concerning you’ and ‘on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” (7) Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (8) Again the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; (9) and he said to Him, “All these things will I give you, if you fall down and worship me.” (10) Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”” (11) Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.” Jesus resisted Satan by holding forth the Word of God as his shield and as His sword. And what does it say happened? Satan left Him.**

This is the point that James is making in **James 4:7** “**Submit therefore to God, resist the Devil and he will flee from you.**” This is a promise.

CONCLUSION

God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Hopefully every one of us here this morning would agree with this statement. But knowing this is not enough; we must act on it. This is why James goes on in **James 4:7** to say, “**Submit therefore to God.**” Please, for the Lord’s sake, for your family’s sake, for your sake, act on this command this morning and plunge into the sea of God’s grace.

Know that this will not be without opposition. The devil, the god of this world, will in fact pursue you. But resist him firm in your faith and he will flee from you. Hold forth God’s Word as your shield and as your sword and you will enjoy the victory and all the blessings of that victory.