

James: Humble Faith

James 4:1-10 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.

ILLUS – Maybe you have heard of Muhammad Ali’s boast that in the boxing ring he could “float like a butterfly, and sting like a bee.” He certainly knew the value of bragging in an attempt to psyche out his opponents. But on one particular flight, he says in his book, *The Soul of a Butterfly*, that the flight attendant asked him to put his seat belt on. He said to her, “Superman don’t need no seat belt.” She smiled at him and said, “Superman don’t need no plane, either.”

Well, Muhammad Ali was not noted for his humility.

But in this message today, we’re going to see how God values humility, and that it’s an essential quality for Christian growth.

So let’s take a look at some of the things James says in this passage on this important subject as well as a few other things that are tied in to the quality of humility.

1. Strife comes from lust

James begins this section by asking the question, and I’m paraphrasing, “What is the source of all your strife and conflict?”

And his answer is that it comes from people’s desires.

In verse 2, it says “lusts” which is an unfortunate word, because today when we hear the word lust, we automatically think of sexual desire.

But in English, as well as in ancient Greek, the word lust means a strong desire.

The Scripture says that conflicts and fights and strife don’t originate from outside; they come from inside, from our own desires.

Anger comes from blocked desires.

ILLUS – For instance, think back to the story of Cain and Abel. They bring their offerings to God, and Abel’s offering is accepted, but Cain’s offering is rejected. There are different theories as to why one was accepted and the other rejected, but here’s what happened. It tells us that when Cain’s offering was not accepted by God, he was very angry. Why? His desire was blocked.

You’ll find that at the root of all anger is a blocked desire.

Cain’s anger resulted in the murder of his brother.

Jesus pointed out the association between anger and murder.

He said, (Mat 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.’ (22) But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Murder is just the outward expression of the inner emotion of anger.

You might have even heard people say, “I was so angry I could have killed him!”

Verse 2 also tells us something else that comes from strong desires: Covetousness.

The desire to have what someone else has got.

But there’s a correct way to handle our desires, and anger and coveting isn’t the way God wants us to go.

Instead, the right way to handle desire is prayer.

James says, “You do not have because you do not ask.”

But it’s not enough just to pray about something; we need to have the right motives.

Verse 3: You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Selfish motives guarantee unanswered prayer.

God wants us to be people who have the interests of the Kingdom at heart.

Just like Jesus.

ILLUS – When Jesus was facing the prospect of being scourged and crucified, He agonised over the fact that it was going to be a painful experience. But here’s what He prayed: “Not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42)

Jesus had the interests of the Kingdom at heart.

He was more interested in the will of the Father than what He Himself wanted.

2. A friend of this world is an enemy of God

There is no middle ground.

Luke 11:23 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

You can’t just sit on the fence; you’re either with Him or against Him.

ILLUS – During World War 2, there were two main antagonists. Britain, France, the US, and others; these were the Allies. Then there was Germany, Japan and Italy; they were known as the Axis. But certain countries declared themselves neutral; countries like Spain, Ireland, and Switzerland. They didn’t want to get involved. They didn’t want to be a part of the fight.

But here’s the news: There is no spiritual Switzerland.

You’re either on one side, or you’re on the other.

You’re friends with God, or you’re friends with the world; you can’t be both.

Rev 3:15-16 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. (16) So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

There’s an interesting concept in this verse: The person who is lukewarm for God, Jesus will vomit him out of His mouth.

Let me ask you this: Does that sound like a good thing?

It doesn’t sound good to me.

It sounds as if being lukewarm for the things of God is the same as playing for the other team.

God wants our friendship, so what is a friend?

A friend is loyal, has my best interests at heart.

So a friend of the world is loyal to the world, has the interests of the world at heart.

2 Tim 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

We can't please God if we're entangled in the affairs of this life.

That doesn't mean that we can't get involved in the affairs of this life; we still have to live and eat.

But as soon as the affairs of this life begin to interfere with our devotion to God, there's a problem.

That person is now a friend of the world, and a friend of the world is an enemy of God's.

This is why James refers to adultery.

Loyalty to the world is spiritual adultery.

So what's the sign of being a friend of God?

John 15:14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

Friendship with God means obedience to His will.

3. God resists the proud

Why does James bring this up?

He brings up the issue of pride, because the root of anger and strife is pride.

The person who is at war with others is a proud person.

Prov 13:10 By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Pride brings strife, and God resists the proud.

But the good news is that He gives grace to the humble.

ILLUS – God chose Saul when he was a humble man. When Samuel first spoke to Saul and prophetically talked about Saul's importance in Israel, Saul said, "How come you're talking to me like that? I'm insignificant. I'm part of the least important family in the least important tribe in Israel." He was humble, and God promoted him. Samuel later described Saul at that time of life and said "you were little in your own eyes."

But then he became proud and God opposed him.

Humility invites God's grace; pride invites God's opposition.

4. The remedy is repentance

Here in this passage of Scripture, James describes the process of repentance.

First, draw near to God.

That means to get close to Him, become His friend.

How do you do that?

Simple spiritual disciplines like prayer, worship, spending time meditating on God's Word, being involved in active service

Ultimately, we're talking about obedience; that's what it's all about.

Second, turn from sin.

He says, "Cleanse your hands. Purify your hearts."

Our hands represent the things that we do, so it's saying, "Stop doing things that displease the Lord. And start doing the right thing."

But it's not enough to just deal with the outward actions, we need also to deal with the heart attitude behind those actions.

We have to purify our hearts.

Third, there's godly sorrow.

2 Cor 7:10-11 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (11) For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

At the very heart of genuine repentance is godly sorrow.

This isn't just an intellectual nod to the fact that we're doing the wrong thing.

It has to affect us on a deeper level; it has to touch our heart.

This kind of response to sin produces change, transformation.

We're not talking about remorse.

ILLUS – Think about the difference between two of Jesus' disciples who let Him down badly. The first was Judas Iscariot. He's the guy who went to the Jewish authorities to betray Jesus. He's the guy who led them right to Him. Would Jesus have forgiven him? I believe so. But what was Judas' solution to the problem when he realised that what he'd done was wrong? Suicide. He hanged himself. He'd done the wrong thing, felt bad about it, but he only experienced remorse.

ILLUS – On the other hand, there's Simon Peter. He's the guy who said he'd stand with Jesus no matter what, even if it meant dying with Him. But then, when it came to the crunch, all he could do was deny that he'd ever even known Jesus. Scripture tells us that he "wept bitterly." (Matt 26:75)

And the thing with Peter is that he came back to Jesus.

Judas allowed his sin to drive a wedge between him and the Lord; Peter allowed his sin to drive him closer as he experienced godly sorrow and repentance.

5. Two promises

We're going to finish this message with two promises contained in this passage of Scripture.

The first is that the devil will be afraid of you.

How many of you would like the devil to be afraid of you?

Then you can – if you fulfil the conditions of the promise.

Here's the promise: Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (verse 7)

There are two conditions – submit to God, and resist the devil.

Fulfil those conditions, and the devil will be so afraid of you that he will run away from you.

The second promise is that God will advance you.

Verse 10: Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

A great promise, but it has a condition too.

The condition is humility; if you want go to promote you, advance you, lift you up, the key is not praying, believing, pursuing – although they're all good things.

But the key is humility.