

Submitting to God

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[0 : 0 0] And I'm going to start by reading out from James. So if you have your Bible and I hope you do, turn to James chapter three. We're going to read from verse 13 all the way through chapter four, verse 10.

James 3, 13. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, don't boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

[1 : 1 6] Is it not this that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. 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.

Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture says he yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us? But he gives more grace.

Therefore it says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you, draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

[2 : 2 0] Curse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. This is the word of the Lord. Ending on a serious note, isn't it?

So we'll get to that. It's a big chunk of text and so we're gonna work through it a little bit like we did a couple of weeks ago and just go kind of verse by verse phrase by phrase.

But here's where we're going. This is what I want to show you from the text that for those of us who are exhausted by our own inner constant low-grade fever of selfishness, bitterness, that kind of critical spirit toward others, for people like that, there's hope.

And for those of us who don't feel affection for God like we should, who sometimes we just don't want God, maybe we want to want God, but that's the best we can do, for those of us, there's hope.

[3 : 34] That's where I hope to get to today and uncover what that hope is. So as we walk through the passage, I'm gonna kind of contain it in three main points. Excuse me. Number one is the nastiness of war.

Number two is hope for rebels. And number three is the path to peace. So let me share my screen. No, I'm not gonna do that just yet, sorry.

So number one, we're gonna start on talking about the nastiness of war. So this passage, this whole chunk that we read is actually full of words that come under the umbrella of war language.

Let me give you a smattering of what I mean. There's, I don't know, 10, 11, 12 or so words. So in verse 14 of chapter three, he says that we boast.

He says, don't boast. Now that word for boast is the same word used in ancient texts of a gladiator gloating over his fallen, you know, battle partner.

[4 : 36] Standing over him with raised swords saying, look what I've done, I've won. That's boasting. It's a war. It's a war, it's a battle word. In verse 16 of chapter three, he talks about how the worldly wisdom breeds disorder.

Now that's basically the word for anarchy. It's mob rule. It's battle language. For one, what causes quarrels?

The word quarrels is the word for military skirmishes. What causes quarrels and fights or battles among you? He says our passions are at war within us.

Chapter four, verse two, he says that we murder, we fight, we quarrel or skirmish amongst ourselves. And in verse four, he uses the language of enmity and says that we make ourselves an enemy of God.

So I guess if I were, I didn't title it, but if I were titling the sermon, I might call it war and peace because there's a lot of war language. Now what's the point of all of that war terminology?

[5 : 44] James is trying to get us to see that our worldly way of living is nasty. He's trying to get us to see it for what it really is, which is deadly and demonic.

Now to get at this point, James begins, excuse me, I've got a frog in my throat. James begins in verse 13 by contrasting godly wisdom with worldly wisdom.

So we're gonna look at that now. Can you all see my screen? Can I get a thumbs up? Yes, excellent. All right, so we're gonna look at verses 13 and 14 first. Who is wise and understanding by his good conduct?

Let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. So we see from that that godly wisdom is made obvious by humility and good works.

Godly wisdom is made obvious by humility and good works. Now this isn't a new idea. It's the same concept we saw a couple of weeks ago about the tongue, namely that when life squeezes us, what's inside comes out, right?

[6 : 57] If we're filled with wisdom from God, what comes out when we're squeezed is good works, humility, right, meekness, good conduct. But then he goes into the contrast and says, but if you have bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, don't boast and be false.

This isn't the wisdom that comes down from above, right? So godly wisdom, so that's that word disorder that we see at the end of 16.

It says we're jealousy and selfish ambition exists. There will be disorder and every vile practice. There will be mob rule and chaos.

Now James is continuing his contrast of godly and worldly wisdom, but now he's making it really clear, verse 17, but the wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, merciful, fruitful, et cetera.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. So godly wisdom breeds peace. It's not only known and made obvious by our works, it actually creates, it's like a source of peace in our communities.

[8 : 30] Remember James is writing, not just to an individual person, he's writing to Christian communities. And his goal isn't just individual wisdom, it's communities that of peacemakers.

That's what James is going for here, godly wisdom breeds peace. But then we see at the beginning of chapter four, he asks what causes all these fights among these communities.

Isn't it that we want the wrong things, that our passions are at war, our desires? We want things and we don't get them, so we take what we want.

We go to war. So godly wisdom breeds peace, but worldly wisdom breeds war. Verse four, he says, 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. Think about the Second World War.

[9 : 43] If you were an adult in 1945, you couldn't both love the Jews and love the Nazis. You can't have it both ways.

Those are mutually exclusive allegiances, as it were. You can't be allies with the two parties that are at war to shift the metaphor a little bit, right?

If two countries are at war, you can't be supportive allies with both of those countries. In God's economy, there's no Switzerland. There is no neutral party here.

We will either be friends with the world and enemies with God, or friends with God and at war against the world. Now remember, we're not talking about going to war against people, right?

This isn't actually inspiring us to kind of take up arms and be combative Christians. This is talking at a higher plane of reality, in a sense. It's a metaphor to show that it's talking about our allegiance, who's gonna be our Lord?

[10 : 57] Are we going to let God be our allegiance Lord? Are we gonna follow him where he goes? Are we gonna live his way in his kingdom? Or are we gonna follow the world? And remember just a couple of verses ago, he says, actually, let me back up and look at that.

I think it's important. Where is it? I should have written this down. There it is, verse 15, the wisdom that comes down from above.

It's not that, but it's earthly, unspiritual and demonic. Now, one of the great tricks of the devil is to get us to think that this worldly wisdom way of living is just natural.

But you see how he juxtaposes the phrases earthly and demonic. This sort of combative fight for your own rights, selfish, bitter way of living is actually sub-natural.

And it comes from hell. It's not natural to the human race. It's not what God intended. So the point here from verses four and five of chapter four is we can't be friends with the world and friends with God.

[12 : 16] These are mutually exclusive relationships. So what James has just done is he's indicted us as war criminals, rebels against our rightful king.

And if we've allied ourselves with the world's way of living and thinking, we've made ourselves an enemy to God. Now, sometimes we do that outwardly and obviously, maybe more often it's deep inside.

It's at the heart level and we can be simmering with bitterness. We can be critical toward others in our spirit. We can be deeply selfish. We boast or harsh.

We can either pick ideological fights with people that we disagree with or at least we secretly want to. And that's the world's wisdom though. And it's got an icy grip on our hearts sometimes, doesn't it?

Now, maybe you read the newspaper or you're on Twitter or some other social media platform and you keep encountering people who disagree with you and they do it vehemently and it's irritating and it just gets under your skin.

[13 : 25] People who don't live like you do, who critique your lifestyle, who critique your faith, who critique all of your beliefs, your ideologies and you begin to harbor bitterness in your heart.

You begin to just grumble in your spirit about these other people, about that political party or this sexual revolution or whatever it is.

And we begin to get kind of nasty inside and we can begin to grumble to others about it as well. And Jesus says, that's demonic. James, sorry, James says that's earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

That's the world's way, it's not God's way. But we all do that. So we've all been indicted as war criminals. Now, it gets better from here, but we have to understand that in some sense, we are rebels against God if we live like that.

We're rebels against this good rule and his wisdom. So that's point number one, the nastiness of war. Let's go to point number two. Point number two is hope for rebels.

[14 : 41] Verse six, I love verse six, and he gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Just a few days ago at the Gospel Coalition Conference in the States, somebody said something like this, that God wants the church to be an island of Shalom in a sea of rage and hostility.

Isn't that beautiful? An island of Shalom, peace in a sea of rage and hostility. But for rebels and war criminals like us, is that even possible?

After all the damage we've caused, after all the forest fires we started with our tongue, after we've shown time and time again that we'd rather have the world's way than God's way, is there really hope for us to become people of peace?

James 4-6 says, absolutely, absolutely there's hope. He gives more grace. We have to write that on our hearts.

[15 : 58] God's grace is the key. God, here's what this teaches us. This is so important. God's not eager to punish us for our sins.

God's eager to give us more grace. That's what he really wants. So at the beginning of verse seven, James can say, submit yourselves therefore to God.

Note the therefore, right? What is the therefore, therefore? That's a word of logic. And he's telling us to do something. He's saying, here's what you must do is submit yourselves to God.

And he's basing that command on, the grounds of that command is that God gives grace. God gives grace to the humble.

So why wouldn't you submit yourself to someone like that? That goes all the way back to James one. I keep referencing it, but we never move beyond this. That if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach.

[17 : 04] That's giving grace to the humble. So James says, therefore we submit ourselves to God. So we can humble ourselves and submit ourselves to God because God is fuller of grace than we are full of anything.

He has more grace than we have any other characteristic or thing he's filthy rich with grace. And he's full of grace, chock full of it.

And gentle and lowly, Dan Ortlund has a great, he writes this, he says, this is deeper than saying Jesus is loving or merciful or gracious.

The cumulative testimony of the four gospels is that when Jesus Christ sees the fallenness of Him, His deepest impulse, His most natural instinct is to move toward that sin and suffering, not away from it.

Do you catch that? James is getting at the point that when we humble ourselves and come and bring all of our rebellion and our sin to God and say, look what this mess that I've made, look what I've done, God moves toward us, not away from us.

[18 : 30] His impulse is not, how can I punish Him? How can I punish her? It's how can I give them more grace? I wonder what our church, our hearts, our lives would be like if we really deeply believed that.

There is hope for us rebels to get out of this warmongering downward spiral that we can get into in our hearts sometimes. And there's hope for finding peace because the heart of God is brimming with grace.

It's just overflowing with it. So there's hope for us who are selfish, who are harboring bitterness. There's hope for us who don't desire God, whose passions are broken and we want all the wrong things.

And that hope is not rooted in how wise you are. That hope is not rooted in how nice you are. That hope is not rooted in how much you even dislike the war and the sin.

That hope is only rooted in the free, undeserved grace of God. That's where our hope comes from, that He gives more grace because that's who He is.

[19 : 42] That grace, which just means gift, that gift is Jesus, Jesus who died for our war crimes.

So there's hope for rebels. Point three, the path to peace. Remember, one of the themes that runs through James' letter is that we should be doers of the word, not hearers only.

So when we hear, we hear that God is full of grace and that Jesus died for our sins, great. Now what? Now what? How does that truth that we hear compel us to live differently?

We can't just hear it say that's nice and go back to our old ways. God forbid. So how do we become doers of the word and not hearers only? And that's what I mean by the path to peace.

Now what path do we have to walk as pardoned war criminals? So I said that we can humble ourselves and submit to God because he's full of grace and we are of anything.

[20 : 56] Now here's how James begins to unpack what that looks like. This is the path to peace. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, be wretched, mourn, weep, let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

So first, we humble and submit ourselves to God by realigning our friendships, our allegiances to use the war language again.

We stop looking for friendship with the world. We stop trying to live the world's way and we start looking for friendship with God.

So we resist the devil and his way and we pursue, we draw near to God and his way. And there's this sweet promise, friends, that if you draw near to God, it doesn't say he'll consider drawing near to you.

[22 : 03] He will draw near to you. He'll do it. You can put your feet down on that one. So that leads us to ask then, all right, what does it look like technically to draw near to God?

Okay, I get resisting the devil. You resist temptations, you endure through it, you try to find Jesus more beautiful than the sin.

That we do understand resisting the devil, but how do we draw near to God? Now, we could say a lot of things, that would be true, right? The means of grace comes to mind.

We sit under the preaching of the word, we pray, we read the Bible, we enter into fellowship together, we confess our sins to God and to each other. All of these things are true and good.

We're gonna have communion coming up soon, in person, at church. And that's a way that we draw near to God, that's all true. But James has something specific in mind.

[23 : 10] It's a little broader actually, it's not specific to the wrong word, but he takes a little bit of a broader approach and lets us fill in the gaps. So what does it look like to draw near to God?

Well, we draw near to God, we humble and submit ourselves to God by repentance unto life. Repentance unto life.

Now, this is where he says to cleanse your hands, youth sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded, be wretched, more. What is he doing here? James is not trying to turn us into a gloomy, dejected bunch of legalists who try to earn favor from God.

That is not what he's doing. In fact, all of this comes after his declaration of God's favor for you in verse six, when he says, but he gives more grace.

So he's saying, purify and cleanse yourself because you already have God's favor, not do it in order to gain God's favor. I hope that's clear.

[24 : 15] And he's ultimately, you could sum all this up with this phrase, repentance unto life. Now, that phrase was used, I think it's in Acts 16, perhaps it's somewhere in Acts, but the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 87, is one of my favorites, and I'm gonna read it to you, of course.

So the question is, what is repentance unto life? Answer, repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

All right, there's a lot, that's why I color coded it to help make it make a little bit more sense. So the Westminster Shorter Catechism here is actually following the shape of this text in James.

And that's not because they were particularly reflecting James, it's because it's the shape of repentance in the whole of scripture. Here's what I mean, you know, our three points, the nastiness of sin, hope for rebels and the path to peace, right?

Now, if you look at the orange text, a true sense of sin, that's that first point I'm talking about, that's the first chunk of this passage in James. James is driving home the nastiness of our sin, the nastiness of this war that we've started with each other and really with God.

[25 : 48] And we need to see it for what it is, is demonic, un-spiritual. Then the green text, apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, verse six, he gives more grace.

The blue and the purple is the path to peace, grief and hatred of sin, turning from sin to God. Christian repentance, repentance until life, right?

Repentance until life includes and must include action and emotion, you see that? We have to actively turn from something to something, from sin to God, we have to stop doing this and start doing something else.

So James uses that language of cleansing our hands, the hands like this is what you do things with, your hands and he says to purify our hearts and the heart is what we, it's what we intend from.

It's the source of our will, it's our want, our desire and he says, we have to cleanse and purify those things, we have to change our actions and our intentions.

[27 : 05] And then, we have to have grief and hatred of this sin. So we must feel sorrow and a profound distaste of sin. James uses the language of mourning and gloom, not mourning and evening, but mourning, you know, the sadness and gloom.

He's not saying we have to be moeey people, he's saying we have to hate and be sorrowful about our sin. And that's our path to peace as we begin to see the nastiness of our own sin, the nastiness of world's wisdom.

Then we preach the hope of Christ and the grace of God to our weary hearts and then we start to live like it's actually true. We turn actively from our sin to God, from the world's way to God's way.

And that is perhaps one of the most humbling things we could do, isn't it? So verse 10, this is our last verse, humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Now, I hope we can get a sense for why he's ending this passage with this phrase, because this process of repentance, this process of turning to God from our sin is humbling.

[28 : 31] It's deeply humbling. It makes us feel small and that's good because we are small.

It's about time that we get a true sense of our smallness. Now, I don't mean the world's warp on that, the world's distortion on that proper perspective, right?

Because that's false humility. False humility turns a proper perspective of smallness into self-pity. And self-pity is ultimately self-exalting.

It's just the reverse side of the coin of pride. When we are self-pitying, we feel sorry for ourselves because we want to be made much of because we want the glory and we're not getting it.

So we pity ourselves. So when I say smallness is good for us, that's not what I mean. I don't mean self-pity. True humility, a true sense of our smallness doesn't degrade into self-pity because it's more concerned with God's glory than with our glory.

[29 : 49] And when we humble ourselves through repentance like that, God exalts us. So you can either be self-exalted or you can be God exalted, but you can't be both.

God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. So the last question I suppose is, how do we become more concerned than with God's glory than with my own?

I have to confess this to the Lord all the time. To be honest with you, sometimes I realize, Lord, I'm walking down this path and I'm more concerned about me than I am about you. And then what do you do with that?

It's kind of a helpless realization to have, isn't it? It feels like, well, how can I change what I'm concerned about? How can I change my emotions? How can I change my own heart?

Let's look at one last verse again or go back to verse five. 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?

[30 : 57] Or do you suppose that it's to no purpose that the scripture says he yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?

Quickly, let me know that's a lower case S. He's not talking about the Holy Spirit. He's talking about the breath that we breathe in our lungs. He's talking about the thing that makes us alive.

Earlier in James, he says that faith without works is like a body without breath. That's the breath, the spirit. It's the same word that he's talking about here.

In other words, God does not need you, but he longs for you. To put it in human terms, God's heart beats for you because he delights in you.

That's how Jesus could face the cross. Hebrews 12 says the joy set before him. That's why the father sent Jesus to die. John says, for God so loved the world that he's in his only son.

[32 : 06] He's in the world that he's in. He's in the world that he's in. And he says, God longs for you. God desires you.

And when we finally start to apprehend, to get our minds around God's desire for us, then the Holy Spirit begins to fan the flames of our desire for him.

That's what the gospel does in our hearts. That's renewal. That's transformation. That's God's work. So we preach the gospel to our hearts, we preach the gospel to each other, we pray and we ask the Lord to make Him and His glory more important in our hearts than our own.

So that's the end of my thing and that's what we're going to pray for together. Just now in the large group for a few minutes is we're just going to ask the Lord together to make much of Himself in our hearts, in our church, in our denomination, in our countries, in our communities, in our city.

So let's do that and let's just think about and thank God for His grace for us in Christ. Thank you.