**HUMBLE YOURSELVES BEFORE GOD**

December 2, 2012

James 4:1-17

Key Verse 4:10 “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

After speaking about the importance of taming the tongue in the previous chapter, James now speaks out against fights and quarrels, friendship with the world, and slander. His reasoning behind the fighting, quarreling, love of the world, and slandering has its root in our pride, desires and passions of the heart and mind. In verses 7-10, James gives three practical ways to overcome quarreling, love of the world, and slandering: They are submission to God, resisting the devil, and coming near to God. May God guide us to learn victory in these three ways.

I. How to overcome the desires that battle within us. (1-10)

Look at verse 1. “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” We have strong desires within us which are constantly struggling to be satisfied. There is the lust to accumulate material possessions. There is the drive for prestige. There is the craving for pleasure. We are never satisfied. We always want more. It seems that we are constantly frustrated in our desire to get what we want. When we lose our battle against our desires, we end up fighting and quarreling with our brothers and sisters. John and Jane have just been married for some time. John has a good job with a moderate salary. Jane wants a house as good as the other young couples at church. John wants a fancy car. Jane wants fine furnishings and appliances. Some of these things had to be purchased on the installment plan. John’s salary is hardly sufficient to bear the strain. Then a baby is born. This means added expenses and a badly unbalanced budget. As Jane’s demands mount, John becomes frustrated. Soon the home becomes a battle ground. Materialism is destroying the home. On the other hand, it may be that Jane is jealous. She feels that Bob and Sarah have a more prominent place in the church than she and John. Soon she says mean things to Sarah. Soon John and Bob become involved in the fighting. The other Christians take sides and the congregation is divided—because of one person’s lust for prominence.

Prayer is the right approach to the problem. Look at verse 2b-3, “…You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” Instead of taking these matters to God in prayer, we try to get what we want by our own efforts. If we want something which we do not have, we should ask God for it. If we do ask, and the prayer is unanswered, what then? It simply means that our motives are not pure. We did not want these possessions for the glory of God or for others’ sake. We wanted them to satisfy our desires. God does not promise to answer such prayers. 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

Look at verse 4. “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?” James condemns the love of material things as spiritual adultery. Covetousness is a form of adultery. It means that we strongly desire what God does not want us to have. It means that we have set up idols in our hearts. We value material things above the will of God. So covetousness is idolatry, and idolatry is spiritual unfaithfulness to God.

How can men and women overcome fighting, quarreling and love of the world? James gives us the answer in verses 7-10. He says we can overcome our desires, motives, and love of the world through submission to God, resisting the devil, and coming near to God. Let’s look more closely at how to be victorious.

**First**, James calls believers to submit to the Lord. Look at verse 7a, “Submit yourselves, then, to God…” Submission is not an easy word to accept. Submission has a negative connotation. For the Romans, they thought submission is a sign of weakness. Today is the same. Submission is defined as being compliant and humble. In this context, it refers to a military term that means “get into your proper rank” or “to render obedience.” By practically applying this to our Lord, we have a place in God’s creation order. God is first, then man, followed by nature. To keep this creation order, man needs to submit to God. Not only should we submit because God is our Creator, but we should fully surrender to God because He is our conquering King. As our conquering King, Jesus defeated Satan, sin, and death because he submitted himself fully to God. As our conquering King, Jesus set the example for us how to defeat sin and Satan through submission to God. Therefore, we can fully entrust ourselves to his providence. That’s why unconditional surrender leads us to complete victory over ourselves and the world. Without submission to God, there is only slavery and bondage to sin. God wants to give us victory. He wants us to have freedom from our sinful desires and passions. May we learn to submit to Christ and have victory over our sinful passions.

**Second**, James calls believers to resist the devil. Look at verse 7b, “…Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James now commands Christians to resist the devil. We know that the devil is prowling around us like a roaring lion waiting to devour us (1Pe 5:8). Satan’s goal is to bind us and make us slaves to him and our sinful desires. To overcome Satan, we need to resist the devil. The word “resist” means to “take a stand against.” How can we resist the devil? One way is to fight against our sin with spiritual struggle. We must take an offensive approach to deal with sin. We do this by fighting to crucify our desires. The Bible says it requires great struggle. Hebrews 12:4 says, “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” Another way is to completely submit yourself to God. Finally, we must stand firm in the faith (1Pe 5:9). We must have faith that Jesus gave us victory on the cross over our sins. We must have faith that when we do stand firm in our faith, the devil will flee from us. This is God’s promise.

**Third**, James calls believers to come near to God. Look at verse 8a. “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” We must come near to God. We must stay close to God. We can must seek, approach and appear to God. We can seek God through Bible reading, studying God’s word, and praying. Also through our prayer we can approach and appear to Him. We can also approach God through writing personal reflections (testimonies) each week. We can approach and appear to God by worshipping and praising God. Finally, we can also draw near to God when we serve His will and purpose in our lives. What is the promise for us when we come to God? God will come near to us. To come near to God, we should cut off our love of the world and our sinful desires through repentance and restoring our first love for God. When we do this God will come near to us and give us more grace and blessings. But what should our attitude be when we approach God?

Firstly, we must approach God with godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Look at verses 8b-9, “…Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.” Washing and purifying are Old Testament terms that refers to ceremonial cleansing. God is holy. To stand before God, we should wash our hands from the sins we have committed. And we should purify our hearts from the double-mindedness that comes from our adulterous hearts. We grieve, mourn and wail over our wasted days, our wanderings from God, our love of the world and our sins. But this grieving, mourning, and wailing are proper responses to our sinfulness and God’s impending judgment for our sins. This does not mean we live every day in grieving, mourning, and wailing. Instead, it means that we have godly sorrow that leads to repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:10a says, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret…” Through godly sorrow that leads to repentance we please God, and we will bear the fruit of repentance.

Secondly, we must approach God in humility. As James said in verse 6, “God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.” A proud man or woman never feels or acknowledges the need for God. A proud person is self-reliant and self-preserving. A proud person never acknowledges his or her need for grace. A proud person thinks he or she can achieve anything on their own merit, strength, intellect, and hard work. On the other hand, God lifts up the humble because of their humility. This is God’s promise to the humble. A humble person lowers himself or herself before God. He or she acknowledges their weaknesses and short-comings. A humble person acknowledges their need for God’s grace in their lives. Also, those who are humble know their helplessness and seek God in their time of need. A humble person prays to God for His guidance and leading over one’s life. This is why humility is key to victory. Without humility, we cannot submit to the Lord, resist the devil, come near to God, and repent.

II. Do not boast about tomorrow. (11-17)

In verse 11 and 12, James admonishes Christians for judging others. Instead of judging others, we should love them. In verses 13-17, James warns against boasting about tomorrow. We are all guilty of this kind of boasting, aren’t we! I have done it numerous times, even in the last few days. But James does not consider this a quality that a mature Christian should have. Why? He says, “…you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” (14) People talk about their plans—travels, tours, projects and money. Many speak about their business deals, family vacations, and what career they will pursue. Life is full of activities and exciting adventures. These same people speak with certainty what their lives would be like. The problem with this boasting is that people plan their lives independently and apart from God. In effect, they are saying that they don’t need God to manage their life. But we need God in our life, because our life, time, job, money, etc… are His. He gave us this life. He gave us our time and possessions, don’t you think we need to include Him in our daily plans?

Another reason why we should not boast about tomorrow is because of the passing nature of our life. Life is short and it vanishes quickly. This reminds me of the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-20. “A certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you...’” This man was a fool because he boasted about tomorrow. He is also a fool because he took for granted his short life. Our life is like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Does this mean we stop planning for tomorrow? Of course not! Actually, we still need to plan ahead. Then what shall we do? James says, “…You ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that…’”Our overall life plan should be based on eternity and God’s kingdom. We should store up for treasures in heaven (Mt 6:20) In our plan of life, we need to make room for God. Each day is God’s gift for us. We should thank God for this life, as well as, seeking God and eternal things. While seeking His kingdom, we need to trust in God’s providence in this earthly life. In the end, we should plan and work hard but with humble dependence on God.

Look at verse 17, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” Instead of wasting time bragging about our plans for the future, we should manage our time in doing good. Since this world is short and temporary and even futile, we must submit in humility to our all-powerful Father in heaven. We must submit our lives to Him and put our hope in the Kingdom of God. We must live to fulfill His will for our lives.