

James

God's Grace – Our Response

April 1, 2012

I. Introduction

A. **James 4:1-10** . . . What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? [2] You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. [4] You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? [6] But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [7] 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 yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

B. Prayer

II. God's Grace – Given Freely But Not Indiscriminately

A. **James 4:6** . . . But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'

1. I want to remind you that God's grace is greater than our unfaithfulness to Him, and greater than His jealousy over our unfaithfulness. And though we understand that God's grace is given to us freely, we see here in **James 4:6** that His grace is not given indiscriminately.
2. We say God's grace is given to us freely because it goes far beyond what we deserve and it does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.
 - a. As the Bible teaches, all sin incurs a debt (**Romans 6:23**). The only way a sinner can pay his sin debt is to spend eternity in hell. If we sinners are to gain forgiveness and eternal life with God, someone else must pay our sin debt on our behalf – which is what God did through His son, Jesus Christ. Now I do not question the motivating factor of God's love in paying our sin debt, but I also

realize His act of love is equally an act of grace – for He has done for us what we do not deserve and given us what we cannot obtain buy ourselves.

- b. Now it is important for us to see that God's grace is freely given in relation to salvation and our daily forgiveness of sin. You see, just as we cannot save ourselves, we cannot remove the label "adulteress" or escape its required death penalty (**Galatians 6:7-8**) apart from God's great grace.
 3. However, even though God gives His grace freely, He does not give it indiscriminately. God attaches conditions to His grace – which means that in order to receive God's gracious forgiveness for having acted sinfully, we must comply with God's conditions.
 - a. Here in **James 4:6**, we see that God's condition for receiving His grace is humility, which means God discriminates between those who are proud and those who are humble.
 - b. In other words, God will not give His grace to the proud. In fact, He does just the opposite. He sets Himself against the proud and works against them in order to bring them to their senses.
 4. The point being made here is that for us to receive God's grace in relation to our sinful rebellion against Him, we must meet God's conditions. And His condition is humility.
- B. Now I know that some will say that what I am talking about is works based salvation, or works based forgiveness, or something else that implies we are foolishly trying to do for ourselves what only God can do for us.
 1. My reply to that is that there is no such thing as works based anything between God and us in relation to our sin. The penalty for sin is eternal damnation. The only way you can work off your debt is to pass from this life through the door of physical death and spend eternity in hell, forever separated from God.
 2. As for forgiveness of sin, because sin is inseparably attached to the debt of eternal death, the debt must be paid before any sin can be forgiven. This means you can never gain God's forgiveness of your sin if you are paying your debt of sin yourself. To be forgiven by God, you must confess your sin, repent of your sin, and depend on His gracious payment for your sin.
 3. In summary, we cannot earn or gain for ourselves the salvation and forgiveness we so desperately need to walk and live with God for eternity. This means that to receive God's grace, it must come as a gift from Him. God's conditions on who receives His grace does not change the fact that it must be freely given for us to gain it.

- C. If you are thinking that **James 4:6** is the only scripture that speaks of God placing the condition of humility on receiving His grace and favor, then you are wrong. There are other scriptures that affirm this truth, and I want us to look at just four of them.
1. **Psalms 138:6** . . . For though the LORD is exalted, yet **He regards the lowly**, but the haughty He knows from afar.
 2. **Micah 6:6-8** . . . With what shall I come to the LORD and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? [7] Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? [8] He has told you, O man, what is good; and **what does the LORD require** of you but **to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly** with your God?
 3. **Luke 18:9-14** . . . And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: [10] "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' [13] But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' [14] I tell you, this man **went to his house justified** rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."
 4. **I Peter 5:5b-10** . . . All of you, **clothe yourselves with humility** toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. [6] Therefore **humble yourselves** under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, [7] **casting all** your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. [8] Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [9] But **resist him**, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. [10] **After you have suffered** for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.
- D. Not only does God place conditions on His grace, He actively supports those conditions. He is active in forgiving and supporting and blessing

the humble, the repentant, and the obedient. And He is active in opposing the proud, the rebellious, and those who continue doing what they know is wrong. This fact ought to catch our attention, for we cannot escape God's active intervention in the affairs of life in dealing out grace or opposition.

1. We have only to read the OT to see how active God is in pouring out blessings on those who humbly submit to His Lordship and obey His word, and in pouring out discipline, judgment, and ultimately punishment on those who arrogantly rebel and go their own way.
 2. And one of the clear statements concerning this truth in the NT comes from **Galatians 6:7-8** . . . Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
 3. God does not stand idly on the sidelines watching our lives pass before Him. He is active and involved – giving His gracious help and comfort and blessing to the humble, while opposing and disciplining and eventually punishing the proud. This is true in your life, my life, and the life of our church.
- E. Now it is possible that you have an area or two of pride in your life; an area or two where you have gone your own way, and used earthly wisdom do gratify your pleasures, and dealt with conflict in a selfish way. And if this is the case, you are experiencing God's opposition and discipline. You may even be experiencing His judgment for having stubbornly gone your own way for too long.
1. If this is true of you, I urge you to stop shooting yourself in the foot. Put an end to making your life harder than it needs to be. Humble yourself before God, repent of your sin, seek God's forgiveness, and begin doing what you know is right.
 2. Thankfully, here in **James 4:7-10**, God tells us how to reverse our direction of rebellion, adultery, hostility, and enmity, and get back on the path of humbly submitting to His will and ways.

III. How To Humble Ourselves To Meet God's Condition Of Grace – Or Turning From Pride To Godliness

- A. **James 4:7-10** . . . 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 yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

B. **Submit therefore to God.**

1. Before saying anything about submission, I want to remind you that this portion in James is specifically about the ways we deal with conflict, the value we place on relationships, and how much we care about how our choices and behavior affect God. Now to submission.
2. To submit to God is to place yourself under God's authority. It means making yourself accountable or answerable to God. It includes serving God. And in its essence, it is making God's will your will.
3. To give someone this kind of authority over you requires some serious humility, because it requires giving up selfishness and self-rule to the point of becoming vulnerable to the will of the one in authority.
4. Do you trust God enough to make yourself vulnerable to His will?
 - a. Yet this kind of vulnerability is where Christian faith takes us. In practice, it is humbly submitting to the will of God to the point of no longer guarding yourself against His will.
 - b. And this is also an important part of the path to conflict resolution – trusting that God's ways of dealing with conflict are so right and good that you no longer guard yourself against His ways and their potential outcome when resolving differences.
5. It is pride that says: "I know what is best for me and that is what I am going to do." It is humility which says: "God knows what is best for me and that is what I am going to do."
6. Therefore, willing submission to God's rule over our lives is the first step in getting back on the path of humility and receiving God's grace. If we will not humble ourselves in this way, in time, God will humble us, and when He does, you will wish you had humbled yourself as the scriptures recommend.

C. **Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**

1. Jesus showed us the way to do this in the way He dealt with His temptations in the wilderness (**Luke 4:1-13**).
2. God adds these words to Jesus' example: "Do not give the devil an opportunity" (**Ephesians 4:27**). "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (**Ephesians 6:11**).
 - a. God gives us these exhortations because we see from Jesus' example that godliness is not a deterrent to being tempted by the devil. Though the godly will be free from most of the temptations we bring on ourselves from within ourselves (**James 1:14**), they will receive the devil's direct attention in regard to temptation. And so we must be vigilant and prepared.

- b. These two exhortations also affirm that resisting the devil is not something to be left until the time of temptation. Successfully resisting the devil requires the work of daily preparation, day-long vigilance, memorizing scripture, lots of prayer, and a growing awareness of the devil's tricks and schemes.
- 3. In regard to pride and humility, the devil's way is the way of pride and selfishness. To resist the devil's temptations is to resist pride and selfishness and choose humility and love. I urge you to consider this truth in regard to conflict as well as other sinful ways.
- 4. The point here is that resisting the devil's lies and temptations is the second step on the return from pride and rebellion against God to humility and obedience. Remember God's involvement. If we do not resist the devil, we will continue in the way of sin, and that will bring God's discipline and judgment.

D. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

- 1. This third step of turning away from pride and disobedience is fully dependant on the first two steps – for three reasons.
 - a. **First**, we were the ones who turned our backs on God, committed adultery, acted hostile toward God, and made ourselves His enemy. Like the father of the Prodigal son, God is not the one who moved away. Therefore, because we are the ones who have rebelled, and in so doing pulled away from God, He will wait for us to return.
 - b. **Second**, according to such scriptures as **II Chronicles 15:2b**, **Zechariah 1:3**, **Malachi 3:7**, waiting for us to come to our senses, repent, and return with a humble heart has been God's way with His people.
 - c. **Third**, to draw nearer than we currently are, or to return to where we were before sinning, we must put away the sin or sins that separates us and put godliness in their place.
 - (1) The more of self and sin we allow in our lives, the further we move away from God and the shallower our relationship with God.
 - (2) The more godly we become, the closer we draw toward God and the deeper and more intimate our relationship with God.
 - (3) As the Psalmist said: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (**Psalms 24:3-4**).
- 2. Confessing our sin is vital, but it is just one step in dealing with the damage we have done to our relationship with God and others when we sin. Drawing near to God is also one of the steps, and it is a step

we should never neglect if we want to remove the distance our rebellion and sin brought about between God and us.

E. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

1. This statement may sound like two separate steps, but it isn't. It is a combined whole with the second part fully dependent on the first.
2. Cleansing your hands is another way of saying, repent of and put an end to the known sins of your flesh – especially those that are recurring. In **Galatians 5:19-21** . . . God says the deeds of the flesh are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, [21] envying, drunkenness, carousing, and whatever other fleshly gratifications you seek.
3. Purifying your heart begins with putting away the sins of the flesh, yet it continues long afterward. Why? Because in your heart there is selfishness and evil longings that linger long after the sins of the flesh have been severely dealt with. And if you leave impurity in your heart, it will eventually pull you back into sinful practices and away from nearness to God.

F. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

1. This is nothing more than a broken, grieving, and remorseful heart over having unnecessarily hurt someone we deeply love. In other words, mourning over our sin is the natural response of having sinned against the God we revere and worship and love with all our heart.
2. And just as a pure heart is only gained after purifying our flesh, so this depth of love is only attained as we willingly submit to God, resist the devil, daily and deliberately draw near to God, put away the sins of our flesh, purify our hearts, and care about how our sins affect God.
3. You cannot manufacture a broken heart over sinning against God, but you will gain a broken heart as you fulfill the conditions of humility required to receive God's grace.

G. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

1. Interestingly, the way up is down, and our focus is to be on going down while leaving our upward movement to God.
2. So focus on humbling yourself – not so God will raise you up, but so that you can gain more of God and God's ways. Then God will raise you up.

IV. Conclusion