

## Bondservant of Christ = Humility and Submission

### Key Verses:

*"James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings." James 1:1*

*"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." James 4:6-10*

*"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city; and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." James 4:13-17*

### Teaching Outlines:

- A. James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1a)
  - 1. To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings (1:1b)
- B. God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (4:6b)
  - 1. But He gives a greater grace (4:6a)
  - 2. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you (4:10)
    - 1) Submit therefore to God (4:7a)
    - 2) Resist the devil and he will flee from you (4:7b)
  - 3. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (4:8a)
    - 1) Cleanse your hands you sinners (4:8b)
    - 2) And purify your hearts you double-minded (4:8c)
  - 4. Be miserable and mourn and weep (4:9a)
    - a) Let your laughter be turned into mourning (4:9b)
    - b) And your joy to gloom (4:9c)
- C. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (4:14b)
  - 1. Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit" (4:13)
    - a) Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow (4:14a)
    - b) Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." (4:15)
  - 2. But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil (4:16)
    - a) Therefore, to the one who knows that right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (4:17)

## Introduction

The first chapter of James is an outline of main ideas he addresses throughout the remainder of the epistle. The significance of the first verse of chapter one is in how James chooses to identify himself. There were other ways he could have done this, being the half-brother of Jesus Christ or the leader of the Jerusalem church, but he goes with “bondservant of God and of Jesus Christ.” Because he chooses this description over others, it is significant. James was influenced by the wisdom literature demonstrating that he was an educated man. He valued the teaching in those texts and would have wanted to be wise in how he introduced himself. James wrote his epistle to Hebrews who had converted to following Christ but had been dispersed among other nations due to persecution of Christ-followers in Jerusalem. He needed to address those dispersed believers because they were struggling among the pagan nations and beginning to live like their new neighbors. Therefore, he could have started his epistle with a statement such as, “James, leader of the church in Jerusalem and your authority in matters of proper living, commands you to begin doing these things.” But he chose not to take that route. He chose to write, “James, a bondservant (slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

You can read the paper on James 1:1 in the Basics dropdown on the home page for further teaching on being a bondservant of Christ. The main idea is that when it comes to identifying yourself, actions speak louder than words. You can say all you want about who and what you are, using words of all kinds, but sooner or later there need to be actions that back up those words. Are you a follower of Christ simply because you say that you are or are you a follower of Christ because you ARE a follower of Christ? Throughout this study in James, I will use the terms “follower of Christ” or “believer in Christ” instead of “Christian” because of the wide, and at times meaningless, application that the term “Christian” receives in our culture. One of the central ideas in the epistle of James, when it comes to being a follower of Christ, of being authentically Christian, is that actions speak louder than words. “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?” (2:14) “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” (2:17) James does not teach that salvation is based on works, that you can somehow earn it. James’ focus is on whether someone’s self-proclaimed faith is authentic or not. Is there anything to your faith? Is it simply an idle boast or empty words? Or is there substance to your faith?

This is a subtle change in perspective that is vital to the follower of Christ. If you are a follower of Christ, then you have been saved by grace through faith, as Paul explains. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”* (Eph. 2:8) Salvation for the sinner was attained by Jesus Christ through His death on the cross. Salvation is God’s gift and cannot be earned by the sinner. Faith is also a gift from God. Faith is not self-generated but comes only from God. It comes to you complete and “as is.” You do not get to pick and choose or take what you want and leave the rest. Faith is as God delivers it and you receive it completely. An important aspect of faith as delivered is that the recipient now belongs to Christ. If you have been saved by grace through faith, you have been bought with a price. Your sin debt has been paid in full and you have been redeemed. *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.”* (1 Cor. 6:19-20) This is not works-based salvation. This is salvation! Being saved from sin and death also means you are a redeemed follower of Christ. You have been bought. You belong to Christ. You do not get to pick and choose what you like and do not like. If you have accepted

God's gift of faith, you are His bondservant. James understood this and identified himself as "*a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*." And what he goes on to explain through his epistle is what a follower of Christ looks like, behaves like, thinks like, speaks like, etc. There was a lot of distorted teaching and confusion within the believing community, and James wanted to sift through that and get to what it meant to be an authentic follower of Christ.

## **Humility and Submission**

Two basic characteristics to being a bondservant of Christ are humility and submission. This is where we begin as followers of Christ. Are you truly humble and submissive before Christ? Or are you arrogant and defiant? Our American culture is anything but humble and submissive. If you are anything in today's world, you are not humble. You are assertive, self-confident, domineering, proud, self-centered, self-promoting, self-satisfied, extroverted and uninhibited. You do not take no for an answer, nor do you allow anyone to control your destiny. You are the captain of your ship and the master of your soul. And if you are a "Christian" the motto is "God helps those who help themselves." And submissive? Not a chance! You are rebellious, contrary, headstrong, unyielding, defiant, nonconformist and, when necessary, disrespectful, rude and insubordinate. Be honest! These are the traits that are most admired, respected and promoted in our modern culture. It is all about getting what you can and as much as you can while you can. Humility? No way! Submissiveness? Forget it!

James gives practical advice for the bondservant of Christ in the matters of humility and submissiveness. The two sections we will be looking at are James 4:6-10 and 4:13-17. As stated before, James did not construct his epistle in the manner of other epistles in the New Testament. Being influenced by wisdom literature, he constructed his epistle in a similar format. James summarized his thoughts on wise living using short speeches and one-liners, so the teaching could be remembered. Also, he was not addressing a church in a specific location but scattered believers in various locations. What sticks out in the short speech in 4:6-10 is the quotation, "*God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble*." He was probably paraphrasing from Proverbs 3:34, "*Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted*." This statement can also be found using the exact wording in 1 Peter 5:5. This statement is the tidbit of wisdom that James wants to impart in this short speech, that God opposes pride but is gracious toward humility. But James didn't simply give them a one-liner and leave it at that. He explains the thought a bit further.

## **Benefits of Humility**

James begins by explaining, "*But He gives a greater grace*." This essentially means that God has a much better offer.

James had just been reprimanding followers of Christ for not living in a proper manner. They were quarreling, fighting, coveting and basically living in a manner that we find to be so common today. He was addressing how people make themselves into enemies of God and then states there is another way, a better way. What is that better way? "*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you*." (4:10) Rather than being self-promoting, self-serving and self-centered, try humility. Why? Because God opposes pride. God actually takes a stand against those who have overinflated opinions of themselves, but He extends grace to those who are humble. James provides two practical ways to be humble.

- 1) Submit to God or be subordinate to God.

## 2) Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

If you are not submitting to God, then you are resisting Him. Being submissive means being ready to conform to the authority of another. You cannot both resist and be submissive at the same time to a single authority. You must choose which authority you will submit to and which you will resist. If you are resisting God, you are submitting to the devil. Thus, the quarreling, fighting, lusting, coveting and all else. By resisting, you've made an enemy of God and, at the same time, become friendly with the devil. But the better offer is this. Reverse course and change allegiances. Choose humility before God. Submit to God and resist the devil. When you go in this direction better things begin to happen. First, the devil will begin to avoid you. He will flee. Second, *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."* James then provides two ways that we can draw near to God.

- 1) Cleanse your hands you sinners
- 2) Purify your hearts you double minded

These are two ways to draw close to God, one external and one internal. First, avoid error by keeping your hands clean from worldliness.

James is referring to the external things that create a barrier between you and God and keep you at a distance from Him. This could be things like gossiping, lying, cursing, stealing, cheating, immorality, pornography, overworking so you can make more money, hoarding wealth as opposed to using it to help others, physical abuse, child abuse, alcoholism, drunkenness, addiction to drugs, losing your temper, arguing and being combative, inappropriate jokes, hate speech, laziness, etc. There are so many things that dirty our hands and keep us at a distance from God. James' advice? Clean it off!

Second, purify your heart. James moves from the external to the internal explaining that we need to purify, or consecrate, our hearts.

We need to dedicate ourselves to God so that we can properly serve Him. Then James uses a term that only he uses throughout the New Testament, *"double-minded."* The Greek term he constructs literally means *"double breathing."* James used the term in 1:8 and offered further understanding of this term in that context. In 1:8 he referred to a person who asked for wisdom from God but did not receive their request. *"But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."* (1:6-8) While studying this word I had an image of a person pulling into the parking lot of a grocery store asking God to give them a great parking spot. As they pull into the lot, they are not sure which aisle to choose because they are fretting over that perfect spot. As they drive down their chosen aisle, they question whether God will grant them the parking spot they long for as they frantically search. This illustrates the type of silly and self-serving request that James referred to. (Just to clarify, I am not referring to someone who needs a spot close to a store due to accessibility issues.) The request serves no real purpose other than to satisfy some craving or to support one's own comfort or curiosity. And if this person does get a good parking spot, right up front, does that mean that the God of the Universe took time to hold traffic in one parking lot so the requestor could park up front? Really??? Of course not! And that is what James is expressing. God is not going to answer these kinds of requests. They are silly, non-sensical, self-serving and useless. It is also indicative of a person with an overinflated opinion of themselves, who does not have a heart purified or consecrated to God,

because it is filled with themselves. James' advice? Purify your heart. He means to consecrate it to God. Stop being filled with yourself and your silly comfort-driven requests. Stop being pushed around like a directionless wave on the sea and dedicate your heart to God. Direct your faith to serve Christ rather than yourself.

James then inserts an interesting bit of instruction. *"Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom."* (4:9) What is he saying?

This goes back to being a humble and submissive bondservant. It is a change in perspective, a paradigm shift, that is needed by anyone who intends to be a follower of Christ, a bondservant. You must go from being a self-inflated, self-serving person who God opposes to being a contrite and repentant person who God exalts. You must take on the perspective of one who is under conviction of sin and understands their true need for God's grace. A person with this perspective endures misery and expresses grief over their sin. People under conviction do not laugh but mourn.

People under conviction are not joyful but heartbroken. This is not the approach to life that the world recommends. The world says you are to be confident, proud, proactive, and happy with yourself. There is such a fine line here and it is important to see it. In and of themselves, there is nothing bad about confidence, happiness and being proactive. But it is a problem for the follower of Christ when self gets promoted over God, when the self becomes the focus and priority rather than being a bondservant, being humble, being submissive, and being a follower of Christ. It is so subtle, but in our culture, even in our "Christian" culture, the tipping point has been reached and most "Christians" do not serve Christ. They serve themselves and try to sugarcoat their self-absorbed approach to life with going to church and reading the Bible and being a "good person." But all the while it is nothing more than the empty, useless faith that James is addressing head on in his epistle. He is very clearly telling us that this type of self-serving "Christianity" is opposed by God and is not the way a bondservant of Christ lives. Why? Because it is meaningless! It is useless! And if you are going to follow Jesus Christ, you must come to grips with this. And when you do, there will be mourning, weeping and contrition.

### **Assumptive Arrogance**

James addresses humility and submissiveness further with a short speech in 4:13-17. He uses the realm of business as an example of how we become arrogantly opposed to God. This is appropriate for us today because our society is driven by success, profit, wealth, and business corporations influence our lives in so many ways. Within this short speech he gives us a one-liner that is meant to help us remember the main point, *"you are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."* (4:14b) This seems to echo Proverbs 21:5-6, *"The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty. The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death."* There is arrogance in not taking an honest and humble assessment of your life in a proper context. When life is all about you and getting everything you can out of it, you miss the point. And James makes the point with an analogy from the world of business. *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow."* (4:13-14a) There is nothing wrong with planning in and of itself, but it is a problem when you arrogantly assume that you control what you will do tomorrow, next week or next year. According to the dictionary, being arrogant is simply having an exaggerated sense of your own

importance. It is the assumption that just because you want it, you will get it, and nothing is going to get in your way. This is what James is driving at and what needs to be removed from your heart.

James was influenced in his thought by wisdom literature, but he also seems to have been influenced by the Sermon on the Mount. There is a section from the Sermon that could have been influential to what James is getting at in 4:13-17 and can inform our understanding a bit further on the fine line between planning and arrogance. Jesus stated it this way. *"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* (Matthew 6:25-34)

When planning is motivated by worrying over worldly things and how you are going to get them, then you have crossed the line into arrogance. Recall what James said about the double-minded person who frets and worries over supercilious matters. You are making requests out of some deep-seated need for control or from a lust for convenience. You are attempting to control something that you really have no control over instead of being submissive to God and trusting Him.

James then adds, *"Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'" (4:15)* That is the attitude of a follower of Christ. There is an understanding and an acceptance that needs are real but there is no reason to be focused on them when you can trust in God to provide what is needed. And when you self-confidently proclaim how you are going to meet, not only your needs, but to go out and *"engage in business and make a profit,"* then you have crossed into arrogance. You have allowed your worry about things to drive your lust to go out and attain more. And even though you attempt to explain it as "I'm just providing for my family," what really drives you is the attainment of more. That is what drives and motivates the planning of the arrogant. God has promised to meet your needs. What you want is more! And that attainment of more is arrogance personified because you have put self in place of God. How? Because you are making plans for how you will go out and get more based on your own abilities. *"But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil."* (4:16) And this goes back to where we began this section. *"God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble."* God opposes anyone who has put self in the position where they should put Him.

*"Therefore, to the one who knows who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."* (4:17) James referred to this concept earlier in the epistle when he talked about one who looks into a mirror and then walks away forgetting what they saw. In 4:6-10 and 4:13-17, he is explaining very clearly how one who is a follower of Christ is to conduct themselves with humility and submissiveness. It is as if he adds this on to say, "you see what you are supposed to do,

now go do it, but if you don't then you will continue to live in error." It is not enough to simply listen to the instructions, to look into the mirror. You must apply what you learn and live it.

*As a bondservant of Christ, you are to demonstrate humility and submissiveness by submitting to God and resisting the devil and drawing close to God by removing all internal and external barriers that keep you at a distance while not allowing worry over needs to drive you to make plans for how you will attain more for yourself.*