

James 4:7-10

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[0:00] This is a continuation of our exposition of the book of James, and today's text is James chapter 4 verses 7 through 10. I'll begin by reading it, but before I do, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us.

It was written for his glory and our good. So we would all do well to listen to it, to believe its promises and obey its commands. James 4 beginning in verse 7.

James' original audience for this letter were Jews who had been dispersed throughout the Roman world, who were professing followers of his half-brother, the Lord Jesus Christ.

His concern is that they understand that a saving faith in Jesus, while not earned by works, will be accompanied by works.

We have a faith that works. He says in James chapter 2 verse 17 and 18, Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

[1:42] But someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

So it is the faith that saves us, but it is the works of faith that evidence that salvation. And it is in this context that we need to understand today's text.

James wants to be sure that his hearers understand what must be done to be restored to God. He is pastorally concerned for anyone who might claim the name of Christ and not actually be saved. This is a great problem of our day. Just about anybody you'd speak to would say they're a Christian. Living in the southeast, the trouble of ministry often is that you have to convince people that they're not in Christ so that they can place their faith in Christ.

James here is seeking our highest good, and he does so in some really striking ways. He says some things that just make you go, whoa.

[3:00] His original audience must have known how much he loved them to receive these kinds of words. Just previously in chapter 4, he said, you adulterous people.

He's drawing their minds back to all of the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people throughout the Old Testament. He goes on in verse 4, 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. It's a very dichotomous thing that he sets up here.

I just would ask you, would you avail yourself of such strong language this morning? Charles Spurgeon delivered a sermon on April 7, 1878, entitled, The Reason Why Many Cannot Find Peace.

It was on this text, in which he said, he's talking about people who can't find peace. He said, now I fear that comfort is misplaced in these cases.

[4:06] When we have endeavored to cheer such people, I fear we may have been filming over a wound which needs a sharp knife rather than a soft bandage, a keen lancet rather than a healing liniment.

We shall try at this time to show certain uneasy souls why they do not obtain peace and what they must be brought to by the Holy Spirit before they can rightly claim that they are saved.

Though our words may be somewhat caustic, they will be uttered in loving faithfulness. And may the Lord our God make them effectual to the ending of the inner strife and the establishment of settled peace." Now that is the great labor of the preacher, to open up God's word to people and to

grab a hold of this ancient text, all of its cultural complication and language challenges, with one hand, and to grab a hold of a people with the other and pull them together.

How does this mean something for us today and on into this next week and on for forever? But we don't all come to our gatherings in the same state of soul.

This is broad discipling that's happening right now. Where exactly each and every person is in this room or across the hall or perhaps listening to the recording of this sometime later, it's very difficult to know.

[5:45] I'm a fan of smaller congregations and meeting in person because there's a greater likelihood that I might know, right? As I pray for our members and think about you, I may have some sense of the state of your soul, but I'm not God.

It's hard to really know what's going on. There are guests here. I'm looking at faces I've never seen before. So it's a challenge. It's a labor of a preacher to try to do this.

So the preacher must have many kinds of people in mind when he prepares to preach and while he's preaching. And so to do this, I try to think with varied success.

I don't know that I do this very well, but I try to think in five different categories. Try to think of categories of people who may come and hear God's word opened.

Number one, the weary. Those who have suffered much this past week or have attempted to work to earn God's favor and are just tired.

[6:49] Just come here feeling beat down, feeling their failure, and need to be reminded of the gospel. You need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' finished work, made real for you. I also try to have in mind the wayward. Those who have imperceptibly drifted from their first love and the holiness that accompanies a pursuit of him.

They've just forgotten, just grown a bit cold. The anchor was taken up and they're getting drawn out to sea. And they need to be reminded of the gospel.

I try to have in mind the proud. Those who believe that they have done enough this past week. Who come and say, I'm alright. I pulled it off this past week.

Enough to earn his favor, thinking they're better than others. And they need to be reminded of the gospel. They need to be reminded there's nothing we could do.

[7:58] We were utterly wretched apart from Christ. I try to keep in mind the lazy. Those who have grown apathetic in their zeal for the Lord and his ways.

Who just have stopped really caring about living for the life to come. Are consumed with the life that is now. And they need to be reminded of the gospel.

And finally, try to have in mind the lost. Those who have never heard the gospel or have heard the gospel and have never placed saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls.

And I think there's application for all of these categories today. But maybe most particularly for the last. You came to church this morning not just interested but thinking that you're in Christ.

Actually thinking, I am a Christian. And I would just like for you to perhaps, not that I want to cast doubt into your souls, but maybe just get you to stop and think, but what if I'm not?

[9:10] So there may be more categories. But generally, I think this framework serves a congregation well. However, it would take too much time and it's not ever my attempt to sort and label you into these categories so neatly.

Because I don't have the power to view and assess your souls. I'm encouraged that James also doesn't seem to try to do so. He is concerned for the state of his original audience's souls, right? He's hearing about things that are happening in these churches. He's hearing about unacceptable things that are happening. The way they speak, the way they're showing preferential treatment to one another, the way they're friends with the world.

Perhaps, we just see in the beginning of chapter 4, perhaps, somebody professing to know Christ killed somebody. It's quite possible. You do not have and so you murder. But in James 1.16, he simply states, do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

And in James 3.10, he says, my brothers, these things ought not be so. He assumes their professions are genuine, but he is careful to instruct them to test the genuineness of said

professions.

[10:38] So that's the context. That's where our text lies. It's in the midst of that. This is his mind. It's his concern and it's my concern for us this morning.

So with that context in mind, I want to read the text one more time. Right? Maybe some of it will begin to already kind of be enlightened for you as you go, oh, I see what James is doing here with them and with us.

He says, 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. Cleanse 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.

We see in this passage, number one, a comprehensive command, an all-inclusive, a wide, overarching command, the first part of verse seven, submit yourselves, therefore, to God.

[11:51] And at the end of the passage, we see a summary command, which is that accompanied by wonderful promise. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

And then I would submit to you that in between those two, a comprehensive command, this is our two-point summary today, a comprehensive command and a summary command, there are five explanatory commands.

Last half of verse seven and through verse nine. So if we're being comprehensively commanded to submit ourselves to God, how, what must we do to be in submission to our God?

And I think those commands, those five, help us to understand what that looks like. So let's look first at a comprehensive command. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God.

And he says, therefore, so we must back up a little bit and to chapter four and verse six, where James, right, but he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, and he's quoting Proverbs 3, 34, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

[13:08] Those who are willing to recognize that they are created and then rightly submit themselves to their creator, right?

And God gives grace to those who will submit themselves to God. And this is why he says, submit yourselves, therefore, to God.

Submission is not a thing that the unregenerate person naturally gravitates toward. In fact, naturally, the unconverted person gravitates away from submission.

Submitting is not a thing that a regenerate person does without an ongoing intervention of the Holy Spirit in our lives, right? Given to our flesh, we will tend to not want to submit to authority.

We are very inclined to go our own way. We are very inclined to think that we know best and can govern our lives best, right?

[14:08] I am me, therefore, I know what I need better than anyone else. And this is just not true. Just think, our entire national identity is founded in the idea of casting off a despot that we might govern ourselves.

But even our founders intended for our experiment in liberty to be one of ordered liberty. And they knew that our people would have to have an even higher authority for the experiment to find any success.

It's unraveling in our day because so many of our nation do not have a higher authority that they submit to. We as a culture find ourselves applauding the trailblazer, the rule breaker, the rogue, right?

We love this fierce, wild individualism, right? Cast off anything that might tell you you must look like this or do such and such.

And I think that permeates our very nature and it extends to other things as well. People have a difficult time submitting themselves. themselves.

[15:24] But every created thing belongs to its creator. Nothing created has any right to declare what it wants to do. This cup, when I want to pick it up and drink water out of it, will be picked up and I will drink water out of it.

And the cup cannot say no. And you might go, well, that seems very obvious. We are like the cup. We have a creator who has a right to demand how it is we're meant to act. Our creator has absolute authority. He created all things and he does not relinquish that authority. Charles Spurgeon, same sermon. I don't remember how many times I quote Spurgeon in this. If I do though, it's all from that same sermon. Spurgeon said, common sense teaches that rebellion against omnipotence, which is absolute power, rebellion against omnipotence is both insanity and blasphemy.

The great trouble with mankind, the great trouble with us is that we have disregarded this common sense and it's not a new trouble.

[16:44] It was the trouble that caused all the trouble. in the garden, Adam and Eve disregarding the good commands of God and seeking to govern themselves. It was the trouble of Israel before and after the Exodus, setting aside the good commands of God for the idols of the nations and it remains and it remains our trouble.

Submission to God, James tells us, is comprehensive. He says, submit yourselves. This is all-inclusive.

James says, our very being must be placed under the rule of God. every bit of you, body and soul, your mind and your affections, your desires, your will, must be given to him in allegiance.

Every day of your week, every ounce of you must be given to God. Now, at this point, if this feels burdensome to you, if this feels in any way oppressive to you, please hear me.

Submission to God is not a displeasurable thing. God is the creator and God knows best.

[18:06] Those of you who know me know that I'm a fairly controlling person. I like things in my life to be just so-so. And a lot of you joke about some of those things that actually don't really matter to me that much.

I straighten the chairs almost every Sunday. And when you all leave, I go, I can't believe how crooked these chairs are. I straighten them again. And it's fine. I'm at peace with that. It's okay. If I didn't know the creator, right, God Almighty, the one who is powerful to control all things and knows what's best, I would be a mess.

I was sharing with a brother just this past week. I don't know that I would still be alive. I don't know that I could handle how much in my life is actually out of control. the older I get and the more I realize how little I can affect the things in my world if I didn't know the one who is in control.

I control so little. And that's good when we realize how desperately we need a creator who is in control. It's not displeasurable to submit yourself to God.

[19:17] God is so full of goodness and loving kindness to those who will submit themselves to him that he will not command us to do anything harmful or forbid us to do anything beneficial and he gets to define those terms.

What is good for us? Romans 8, 28, and 29. You know this, right? It's in the zeitgeist and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose.

Those who love God all things every circumstance whatever it is we're walking through they're for good. Right? And we don't have to wonder what is that good? What's the mystery? Someday maybe I'll know because verse 29 says for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

This is the great good that God is working in all things our holiness. Right? That we might look more like Christ and gain more of Christ in our lives.

It is a wonderful thing to submit yourself to God. It's a wonderful thing to give up control to get off the throne and let God reign in your life.

[20:39] And if God does not reign in your life in an ever-growing measure none of us or doing this with perfection then you may not be saved.

It is possible that you've made some mental assent to the gospel of Jesus Christ but you still love your control. You still want to be a friend with the world and this is to be an enemy of God.

So, what does it look like to submit ourselves to God? How might we submit ourselves to God?

James gives us five explanatory commands.

Number one, resist the devil. By which I believe that James means resist all sin. I think there's a spiritual battle reality to what he's saying here but I don't think he just means that.

Again, contextually, I think he means resist all sin. Whatever its source might be, whether it's the temptation that the devil brings or our own flesh, we do battle in the spiritual realm and we must be awakened to this reality.

[21:52] If we are submitted to God, we must resist the ways of the devil. We cannot have two masters. We must resist.

It takes work. And here we find a promise. This is a great promise. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Beloved, sin has no power over you. If you are in Christ, you have been set free from sin. Romans chapter 6.

It does not have power and you should stop living as if it does. Some of you are in Christ and you just grant power back to sin.

It has no power over you. This will take activity on your part. You will have to hold on to Christ. You will have to love the ways of God to resist the devil.

[22:56] It takes activity, but it is accompanied by the grace of God. God will give you the power. If you're in Christ, God has given to you his spirit and he will give you the power to resist and have the devil flee from you.

Think practically. Paul says well in 1 Corinthians 10, 13, no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

And I think what Paul means to be communicating there is don't think that there are some others, there are some new temptation that no one else has experienced in life and yet you have now experienced it and it is too powerful for you to resist.

It's common. Same stuff. We're all dealing with the same temptation. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. And I feel the Greek doesn't have it, but I almost feel like there should be a but in here.

But God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it, to resist the devil.

[24:06] So there should be in us that kind of compulsion, a hatred of sin. If you are in Christ, you will not love your sin. You will still sin. We are not yet entirely free from our flesh.

You will still sin, but you've been set free from the power of it and you shouldn't enjoy it. When you sin, you should, here I go again. The same thing, Lord deliver me from this body of death.

Second, we are to draw near to God. Another command with a wonderful promise, and this is a most excellent promise.

Did you see that cup of bay? God's God's word. I think that James means for us to understand this drawing near in practical ways.

I don't think this is meant to be super emotional. I just want to draw. We write a song about it that would sound like a love song. I think he means very practically study God's word and respond in prayer.

[25:22] I think this is what he means. God has written for us a book. God has descended to become an author. God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

We can't even kind of fathom his immensity, his power. We are forever. Get this, if you're in Christ, you're going to be with God for eternity realizing his immensity and his power.

That's an astounding thing to think about. We are going to again and again and again and again receive new revelation about the greatness of our God. He wrote a book and we neglect it.

It is a precious book. Every single word. If you're going to resist, if you're going to submit yourself to God, you're going to do it on his terms.

Be careful that you don't have a God of your own making. It is incredible to me the number of people that profess faith in Jesus Christ and then in the same breath will say something about God that is flatly untrue and not unclear in the Bible.

[26:32] God has spoken to us. We're going to draw near to God himself. We're going to do it in the study of his word and then in response to that

word.

Prayer does not seek to control God, but to find us in submission to him. You ever had a conversation with somebody and you can pretty quickly get that they are not listening to you? You do not desire to be in any kind of relationship with you at all. An argument especially where they're just not hearing the clear things that you're saying to them and their responses make no sense whatsoever.

A lot of us speak to God that way. God's like, why would you pray that? I've already told you. I've taught you how to pray. You should know the things to ask for.

You should be directed as you come near to me. God speaks to us by his word and we respond according to his word in prayer.

[27:35] Here is another one, Spurgeon. Prayer is feeling that God is present and the desire of the soul to come near to him so as to know his influence, to know his love, to feel his power and to be conformed to his will.

If you are in Christ, not with perfection, but you should desire to meet with God in his word and to respond to him in prayer. And I don't want to pretend for a moment that I don't also struggle with the habits of grace.

There are days that it's the very thing I ought to do and it's the thing that I don't do. But in ever-growing ways, I find myself loving God's word more and more and more as its complexity is open to me, as he comes to alive to me in the text.

And more and more I recognize that I need to submit myself to him in prayer. I need him for every single moment of every day. It should be a growing reality in your life if you are in Christ.

We'll take the next two together because they really are intricately connected. Number three, cleanse your hands. And number four, purify your hearts.

[28:53] James tells us that the ones submitted to God will desire to give up sin. Both sins external, cleanse your hands, and sins internal purify your hearts.

We should want to give up sin. A refusal to do so is inconsistent with submission to God. You can't be a friend of the world and a friend of God.

If you are to have God, then you'll have him on his terms. James has made this point in James chapter four in verse four. Here's a people he's writing to.

Perhaps this morning, somebody he's writing to were trying to commit themselves in two places. He says, you adulterous people.

My wife's name is Sam, and I've committed to her as my wife. And I'm not to be committed to any other woman. It's my wife, just Sam. Otherwise, I would be an adulterer.

[29:56] This is what he's calling a person who tries to live in the world, have the things of the world, and also have God. And here James calls this type of behavior double-minded.

Double-mindedness. As if you have two brains in your head, which should be an impossibility. It's not the first time he's used this phrase. In chapter one, verse eight, he says that the double-minded person is unstable in all his ways.

Your devotion to God and his ways should be clear, growing in its clarity. And I think here that James likely has Psalm 119, verse 113 in mind.

If you're unfamiliar with Psalm 119, it is all about the beauty, the worth, the value of God's word. And here the psalmist says, I hate the double-minded, but I love your law.

He juxtaposes that, right? He's saying, I'm not double-minded because I love your law. I want to submit myself to your law.

[31:09] So, cleanse your hands and purify your hearts. Fifth, mourn your sin. He said, be wretched and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. James here is not contradicting all of the Bible's teaching about joy. You've got to place it in its context.

Those in Christ have great reason for great joy, abiding, unalterable joy. James is speaking to those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, and then they sin with frivolity.

They're licentious in their sinning. They treat lightly the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Cheap grace. They just think they can go off and do whatever they want to do, and they have a great time doing it.

They're like the Israelites in the days of the prophet Jeremiah. This is chapter 6, verse 13 and following. For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain, and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.

[32:25] They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, peace, peace, when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?

No, they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall. At the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord.

We should not sin lightly. All of this effort that James is talking about, all of these submitting explanatory commands, we will not do with perfection, but when we fail to do them, we should mourn our sin.

Jesus in Matthew chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, called the Beatitudes, he says, blessed, you could insert there, happy or joyful, are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

We're mourning, we're mourning over our fallen condition, even though we've been redeemed in Christ, longing for that day when he will make all things new.

[33:38] We'll put off these bodies of death, we'll be given resurrection bodies, when we can sin no more, that will be our glorified state. I think that as we await that, the Christian should be all at once the most sad and the most happy of people, all at the same time.

Sad because we know the weight of our own sin and that of the world, happy because we've been delivered from it, and know that one day it'll all be fixed.

Thomas Adams, this is the quotation on your bulletin, said, we spend our years with sighing, it is a valley of tears, but death is the funeral of all our sorrows.

So we have this comprehensive command, submit yourselves therefore to God, and the five explanatory commands that accompany it. Second point is a summary command accompanied by a promise, and this is brief, I promise, so here we go.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. If we are submitted to God, then the posture of our hearts will be humility. The emotional position of submission, right, is humility, recognizing that we are not God, and that he is, that we get our very being and we need everything from him.

[35:03] If we have not come to the end of ourselves, recognize that we are nothing, we have nothing, and we can do nothing apart from God, then we do not deserve his mercy and grace, which he freely grants to the humble in the personal work of Jesus Christ.

Psalms 51, verse 17, the psalmist writes, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

and the humble heart is given this glorious promise, and he will exalt you. So in closing, you can leave James, turn with me to Matthew chapter 20, as I command this cup to wet my whistle.

I think this little picture in the life of Jesus and the disciples is very helpful and instructive as Jesus teaches as well in it.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. I'll begin reading in verse 17. And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and on the way he said to them, see, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified and he will be raised on the third day.

[36:53] Now, they, as they hear this, they're hearing Son of Man from the book of Daniel, a forever king, a reigning forever king.

And they had recognized this is who he was, so then he says, but I'm going to be condemned to death and delivered to the Gentiles and I'm going to be crucified and of course the glorious promise of his resurrection.

But they're confused by this. What's that going to look like? Wait a second, that seems backwards and upside down. So verse 20 says, then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons and kneeling before him she asked him for something.

And he said to her, do you want? She said to him, say that these two sons of mine are to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom. Jesus answered, you do not know what you

are asking.

are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? They said to him, we are able. Now he's talking about the cup of the wrath, eternal wrath of God.

[38:04] And they arrogantly say we are able. He said to them, you will drink my cup. And here he's talking now about the suffering, filling up the afflictions of Christ.

Christ, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my father. And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.

But Jesus called them to him and said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them.

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Even as the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[39:08] And we know now and in a future coming reality, the name of Christ, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He has been and will be for eternity exalted. And we will join in that wonderful celebration and be glorified alongside if we will be humble.

So we see in this text a sobering, extremely important, of highest, greatest importance, comprehensive command.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. And a summary command which is accompanied by a glorious promise. Humble yourselves before the Lord.

He will exalt you. Let's pray together. as