

A Study in James

The Tests of a Living Faith

James 4:6–12

March 13, 2013

Introduction

In our study of chapters 3 and 4, James has piled problem upon problem and laid charge after charge against his readers. They were failing when it came to unwise speech, unwise conduct, and worldly affections. They may have even felt, by this point, that they were beyond all hope. But James did not hang his readers out to dry. James 4:6–12 provides the answer to all these problems.

Test #6: A Living Faith and Godly Affections (4:1–12)

You will recall that chapter 4 began with an indictment against the readers regarding worldliness. They had set their affections on things below rather than on things above. This same problem is just as real for the church today. There are many ways in which the world seeks to pull us away from God. But as believers, we are foreigners here in this world. We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Eph 2:19), members of God's household, and heirs of eternal life (Titus 3:7). Since these things are true, our affections should be set upon God and the things that pertain to godliness.

The Solution to the Problem of Worldliness (vv. 6–12)

These verses provide the long-awaited answer to the problem of worldliness. But they also serve as the corrective for the issues discussed in chapter 3: wise speech and wise conduct. God, in His infinite wisdom, has provided one easy solution to three seemingly impossible problems.

The Grace of God (v. 6)

The answer can be summed up in one simple word: *grace* — specifically, *God's grace*. Romans 5:20–21 teaches us that God's grace is greater than all of our sins. Just as our sins abound in this life, so also God's grace abounds all the more. This is what James means by "greater grace." This grace comes through the Holy Spirit using the

Word of God to convict us of sin and bring about correction with respect to that sin.

But God's grace is not something that can be demanded by anyone. James qualifies this idea by citing Proverbs 3:34. Looking at the broader context of Proverbs 3:31–35, we see that evil people are repugnant in the Lord's sight. The proud person has no access to the grace of God because he lacks humility. In a way, salvation itself can be cast in terms of pride and humility. The unbeliever proudly boasts in his own self-righteousness and will ultimately be judged according to that standard and found wanting. But the believer humbly submits to the righteousness of Christ and relies on God's grace to save him. In this way, believers must *continue* to humble themselves before God so that they may be recipients of His grace.

Our Part in Receiving God's Grace (vv. 7–12)

For the Ten Commandments, there were two tablets given to Moses: one concerning their relations with God, and one concerning their relations with one another (Exod 20:1–17). In a similar way, Jesus summed up the Mosaic Law by giving two great commandments: love the Lord, and love your neighbor (Matt 22:36–40). The same is true here. James outlines various ways in which believers are to resolve conflicts by showing humility toward God and humility toward one another.

Responsibilities to Resolve Conflicts with God (vv. 7–10)

What follows below is the “how to” for receiving God's grace. These are practical steps every believer should be taking to overcome ungodly speech, ungodly conduct, and ungodly affections.

1) Submit to God and Resist Satan (v. 7)

The first step to overcoming sin is submitting to God. Every true believer has done this at least once, when they first got saved. Submitting to God simply means to obey God rather than the worldly pleasures that can capture the affections. In this way, submission and humility are roughly synonymous ideas in this passage. The counterpart to this is resisting the devil. This means refusing to obey him or the world system that he rules over. By resisting our own sinful desires and sin, we are resisting the devil. As a result, Satan will (at least temporarily — Luke 4:13) cease troubling the believer.

- 2) Draw Near to God through Repentance and Confession of Sin (v. 8a)
When James says “draw near to God,” the implication is that there is some distance there. Since God is omnipresent, this is not a physical distance. (The notion that ‘God is watching us from a distance’ is thoroughly unbiblical, Ps 139:7–10.) The distance in verse 8 is on the spiritual level, in terms of the relationship. Sin causes a separation between God and the believer that strains their fellowship. This can result in losing the joy of salvation (Ps 51:8, 12) or even divine chastisement (Heb 12). We can draw near by repenting of our sins and confessing them to God (1 John 1:9).
- 3) Demonstrate True Repentance through Sorrow over Sin (vv. 8b–9)
Some Christians will teach that repentance is not necessary for the believer (i.e. it only happens once at the moment of conversion). However, repentance is not simply a one-time change of mind with regard to Christ. It is a lifestyle involving a change of direction with regard to sin. In other words, repentance should be a continual pattern throughout a believer’s life (Rev 3:19). This is not simply deciding that something is bad. Repentance means recognizing sin as an offense against God and taking practical steps to avoid it in the future. But repentance also engages our emotions. We should have a certain level of godly sorrow over our sins — a sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Cor 7:8–10). This does not mean we need to live our entire lives in a state of mourning, but we should express grief over our sins, confess them to the Lord, and move forward in the knowledge that we have been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Cleansing the hands and purifying the heart are metaphors for changing your behavior and changing your thinking to be in sync with God’s ways. And when we do this, God graciously forgives and restores the blessing of our salvation relationship (Ps 34:18).

- 4) Show Humility before God and God will Deliver (v. 10)
When we demonstrate humility in our lives by living in obedience to God’s word, God will lift us up and restore the joy and blessings of living in fellowship with Him. One thing we should note here is that if we humble *ourselves*, we will not have to endure being humbled (punished) by God.

Responsibilities to Resolve Conflicts with One Another (vv. 11–12)

Just as verses 7–10 dealt with our relationship with God, verses 11–12 deal with our relationship with others. These verses draw upon the imagery of wars and fights from verse 1. We are to deal with our brother or sister in the same way that God has dealt with us: with grace and compassion.

1) Don't Unjustly Criticize or Judge a Brother (v. 11a)

One of the problems with James's audience was an inner conflict within individuals that spilled over into external conflicts with fellow believers. We saw in verses 1–5 that this was due to a love for the world and the things of this world. One of the ways this manifested itself was in a hyper-critical or judgmental spirit. There are many ways in which someone can speak evil against another: slander, gossip, etc. These believers were leveling false accusations against one another. James's solution is simple: stop it! But more than that, they needed to recognize *why* they should stop.

2) Only the Lord is Qualified to Judge (vv. 11b–12)

Those who speak evil of a brother judge their brother and judge the law. The law in view here is the law of Christ (see James 1:25; 2:8–12). This includes everything Jesus and the apostles taught, both in word and deed. But when someone is judgmental toward another, he is effectively saying that he is above the law and the One who has given the law: Jesus Christ (Matt 7:1). Only Christ is qualified to judge fallen humanity — both believers and unbelievers. We need to treat our fellow believer according to the same standard by which we have been treated: grace!

Does this mean we are never to judge? No! The law of Christ instructs believers to recognize and remove “believers” who persist in immorality (1 Cor 5). It also instructs Christians on numerous occasions to call out false teachers and not associate with them. But what James has in view here is a hyper-judgmental spirit that only seeks to condemn, rather than covering it with love (1 Pet 4:8).

Conclusion

James has given us many practical ways in which we can draw near to God. Our status as sinners is not beyond hope! If we humbly repent of our sins and rely on His grace, we can enjoy the wondrous fellowship and joy that God alone can give!

~AWB

Salvation

A person is saved by faith alone. The Scriptures also say we must repent in order to be saved. The two terms are really two sides of the same coin. A person must have a repentant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Salvation can be viewed in light of both of these categories. Each has three aspects.

Faith

In terms of faith, salvation must include the following aspects:

Knowledge: Apprehension of Truth

Heb 11:3; Rom 10:17

There must be an intellectual content to faith. This includes a knowledge of God, Christ, sin, and faith and repentance as found in the Bible.

Assent: Affirmation of Truth

Heb 11:1; Matt 13:23; cf. Jas 2:19

The truth apprehended above must be accepted as true. This includes a conviction that the truth applies to oneself personally.

Trust: Appropriation of Truth

Prov 3:5; John 3:16; Acts 16:31

This involves surrender and reliance on Christ alone to save. True faith must include this final aspect in order to be genuine. The demons have a kind of belief that fits the first two categories above, but that kind of belief does not save. To fall short of exercising trust is to fail to have true saving faith.

Repentance

In terms of repentance, salvation must include the following aspects:

Intellectual: Knowledge of Sin

Ps 51:3; Rev 9:21

This involves a change of view. It is a recognition of what sin really is (evil) and what it means (physical & spiritual death).

Emotional: Sorrow Over Sin

2 Cor 7:8–10; cf. Luke 18:23

This involves a change of feeling. It is more than just feeling bad for getting “caught in the act.” It is regret over sin for offending a holy God.

Volitional: Desire to Seek Pardon

Ps 51:10; Acts 2:38; cf. Matt 3:8

This involves a change of purpose. It pertains to the will and is an inward turning from sin and a disposition to seek pardon and cleansing. This does not mean some outward act of repentance (which would mean salvation by works). But genuine repentance will go on to produce good works in a believer's life.

Again, genuine salvation involves both repentance and faith. Faith is a believer's response to the truth of the gospel. Repentance is a believer's response to sin. Once saved, believers can never lose their salvation. All true believers will persevere in the faith and be glorified (Romans 8:29–30).