

“Spiritual Maturity: Cleansing from Priding”

Intro: After 2 lessons and 5 verses in chapter 4 of spiritual daggers of deserved condemnation, we now get practical answers to how we can be other than spiritual adulteresses and not bring about the hostility and jealousy of God. I call it “cleansing from priding” – another of James’ keys to SPIRITUAL MATURITY.

OUR TEXT: JAMES 4: 6 -10

- 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." [Proverbs 3:34]
- 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.

A GREATER GRACE

Oh how we need a greater grace. When the burdens get piled high God gives a greater grace.

When the sin of our faithlessness breaks our relationship with Him, He gives a greater grace. There are no mountains of circumstance that cannot be met by the greater grace of God. Nor are there any valleys of sinfulness that cannot be crossed by His greater grace.

It is this passage of Scripture that caused Annie Johnson Flint to pen these words that are the lyrics of the hymn loved by many of us: “He Giveth More Grace.”

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase.
To added affliction, He addeth His mercy;
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*His love has no limit; His grace has no measure;
His power has no boundary known unto men.
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

God’s grace is available for the asking. One of our recent “Biblical Biggies” was:

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Now think with me on this one – we really don't want to have to ask for more grace. ("Lord, bring on the grace!") Grace is given to help us through difficult circumstances and through sin. And none of us want more struggles or sin in our life, just so we can receive grace. But, PRAISE GOD that God's grace is always available to match and exceed our great need.

GRACE = SLACK

In our vernacular, GRACE might be described as SLACK granted us by God. God's law is justly strict, for God is a holy and perfect God. And yet God is also loving and merciful, wanting to extend to us the help we need in our sinfulness – so He gives us "slack" or grace.

James quotes from Proverbs 3:34 to teach us that GRACE is not just given to anyone. It is given to the HUMBLE – not to the proud and arrogant.

The analogy of a leash on a dog might be helpful. When the dog strains at the leash and won't walk obediently at the owner's side, the leash is kept tight as a strict enforcement to "heel." No slack is given or allowed. But when the dog heels willingly and obediently with the leash hardly needed, the owner will likely slacken the leash and give a greater degree of freedom and mercy to the dog to be freer of restraint.

So, it is that when we are HUMBLE, not struggling at the leash of the law, we will receive the GRACE, or slack, that we need and desire from God.

Jesus taught the same principle with a similar analogy of an oxen's YOKE:

Matthew 11: 29-30 Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light.

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS YOKE OF LOVE AND SLACK LEASH OF GRACE TO THE HUMBLE HEART AND YIELDED WILL. God's "greater grace" is the answer to our infightings and materialism

"HOW TO" OBTAIN SLACK (GRACE)

In verses 7-10 James uses no less than 10 verbs of command – clear instruction and direction for how to obtain the SPIRITUAL MATURITY of "cleansing from priding" that we might receive the GREATER GRACE that we need.

- 7 Submit to God, Resist the devil
- 8 Draw near to God, cleanse your hands (external), purify your hearts (internal)
- 9 Be miserable, mourn, weep, turn your laughter to mourning
- 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord

This list of 10 can best be simplified and outlined with 3 key principles – each referring in the passage directly to what we do for God – the others being explanatory to these 3 keys.

1. **SUBMIT TO GOD (v. 7)**
2. **DRAW NEAR TO GOD (v. 8)**
3. **HUMBLE YOURSELVES BEFORE GOD (v. 10)**

1. SUBMIT - all about CONTROL

Gk.- a military term: “fall in line” “Thy will be done” - “it’s about You, not me”

An issue of “who’s in CONTROL - YIELDING CONTROL

Psalm 100:3 Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture

Psalm 46:10 Cease striving (be still) and know I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. (implying our humility)

Sub – mission = “below the mission”

I don’t make it happen – He does as I humbly “fall in line” and do His bidding

Earthly examples: - wives to husbands, - citizens to government
- children to parents. - employees to employers

To RESIST the devil is to submit to God. Learn to say “NO”

Like Jesus being tempted in the wilderness

Or Jesus to Peter (speaking to the devil controlling him at that moment) “get behind me, Satan”

The promise in James: the devil WILL DEPART

Our battle gear is described in Ephesians 6: the armor of God

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and having done everything, to stand firm. Claim your salvation and righteousness in Jesus!

SUBMIT = letting God be God

2. DRAW NEAR - all about RELATIONSHIP

- a. By reading the Bible - LISTEN TO HIM
- b. By praying – TALK TO HIM
- c. By practicing His presence – THINK ABOUT HIM
- d. By cleansing/purifying through confession – CRY WITH HIM about sin

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me

God is the initiator through Jesus. Our response is to DRAW NEAR, and we will sense His presence.

If you feel that God is distant, WHO MOVED? DRAW NEAR!

Our invitation: Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace . . .

3. HUMBLE YOURSELF - all about ATTITUDE

Job 5:11 He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.

Philippians 2:3, 5ff . . . but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus . . .

Humility is not putting yourself down – it is lifting others and God UP

The cure for “priding”: 1. Submit to God, 2. Draw near to God, 3. Humble yourself

This is a key to SPIRITUAL MATURITY!

JAMES, Chapter 1 (My Paraphrase)

1. To my Jewish brothers of all twelve tribes, wherever you might be after having been forced out of your homeland – this letter is from James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling and by choice. Dear brothers:

Confidence in Trials

2-4. Take a different perspective at the many trials you face, seeing the positive in them, rather than the negative. One, your faith is being proven and strengthened.

And two, you are

But is not an academic lesson, but is profoundly PRACTICAL – teaching us the “how to” in making Godly DECISIONS.

WISDOM is not the ability to understand circumstances - God may or may not reveal the “why” of why developing endurance for the long haul of life. Don’t balk at being tested, but hang in there, letting the tests accomplish their Godly purpose: your maturity, that you may be spiritually “buff” without flabbiness or weakness of character.

5. Remember, if you need wisdom (and who doesn’t?), just ask God, who gives it abundantly and without making you feel bad for asking. Just ask, and Godly wisdom will indeed be given to you.

6-8. But you have to ask really believing the answer will come. No doubting allowed! Because if you doubt, you are acting just like the waves of the sea blown around by the wind – up one minute with your belief and down the next with your doubts. This kind of supposed “faith” won’t get you anything from God. He doesn’t accept on-again, off-again faith, which by the way, indicates instability in other areas of life.

Confidence in Status

9-10. Hey, believing brother - how about this for God’s “upside down” perspective on wisdom? If your earthly status is on the “humble” side, be proud that you are standing rich and tall in God’s spiritual kingdom. And if your earthly status is on the “well off” side, be proud that in God’s kingdom you are just a spiritual beggar. After all, your earthly status is about as secure as flowering grass in the heat of the sun.

11. See the picture? Just like the sun rises, so does your status. Then comes the “Santa Annas” of life – and just like the grass withers and the flower falls, so does your status wither and fall. What once appeared beautiful is no more. Our status, and the futile pursuits of achieving it, will soon fade away.

12. So what’s worth achieving? - persevering through the trials of life and proving your Godly character through it all. This is how you will receive the true “crown of life” – God’s heavenly reward – which He promises to each one of His lovers.

Confidence in Temptation

13-16. I don’t ever want to hear you saying, “I am being tempted by God.” One, evil can never tempt a perfect God. And two, a perfect God could never lower Himself to tempt any one. Rather, it’s really you that brings on temptation by your own luring lustfulness. Sin comes when you give in to temptation by acting on your lust. And when that sin gets full sway in your life it kills your relationship with God. My dear, believing friends whom I love - don’t be sucked in by temptation!

17. Everything that is good is a perfect gift, especially given to you from God. “Good” is never by accident. The Giver is always our Heavenly Father, and like a bright light he never wavers or compromises in His delivery of good.

18. God exercised His Divine prerogative when He chose to pull us into truth by the power of His Word. This was so that we Jewish believers could be considered as the first ones to receive His special blessing of spiritual victory.

Confidence in Reactions

19-20. Now I’m going to tell you something you already know, but you must apply it to your reactions. One, be quick to listen to others and especially to God. Two, be slow to voice your opinion. And three, put any tendency to anger on a slow fuse. Pleasing God and getting angry never go well together. The short version: open your ears, close your mouth and chill your anger.

21. You know all that leftover filth of the old life that’s still seeps out? Dump it in the spiritual trash can. You know God’s Word that He has planted deep inside of you? Humbly receive its wisdom and let it save you from drowning in your own foolish reactions.

Confidence in Religion

22. It is delusional to think that you are religious by merely hearing the Word, believing it, and participating in a few religious activities. Rather, you prove and demonstrate your true religion by living out the Word actively in every area of your life.

23-24. Hearing the Word and not doing it is like looking at yourself in a mirror and not fixing what needs fixing. Why even look if you just go away unchanged and oblivious to the need?

25. God's Word is the perfect rulebook for life, with rules to set you free, not tie you down, and therefore worthy of a long and hard look. If you let them sink in, and turn your thinking into meaningful action and change, your life will surely be blessed for it.

26. Do you think that your religion is healthy? Then put it to the test by whether you can control your tongue. If you can't, not only is your religion worthless but you're deceiving yourself into thinking your religion is OK. It's not.

27. I'll tell you what real religion is about. It's about practicing love and care for those with special needs – like children without parents or women who have lost their husbands. Bottom line, true religion is keeping yourself pure from the wickedness of the world!

JAMES, Chapter 2 (My Paraphrase)

Conviction in Equality

1. Don't you dare call yourself a believer in our amazing Lord and Chosen One, Jesus, if you treat people differently based on their appearance or background.

2-4. Here's a test. If one person walks into to your church service looking like "a million" and another comes in looking like a "bum," will you treat them the same? Or will you give special attention or seating to the one looking great and ignore the other, even making him or her sit in a place where they might not so easily draw attention. If you'd honestly treat them differently, you fail the test. You would be making an ungodly judgment based on unfair distinctions.

5-7. As my brothers in the Lord, I really do love you. So, listen up. Don't we read that God so often has chosen the poor in wealth to be rich in faith and receive His kingdom inheritance? This is exactly what God promises to all who love Him. It doesn't make sense to dishonor the poor person. More often than not, it's the rich one who will give you a hard time, even pulling you into court or using your precious Lord's name in vain.

8-9. The highest law of God's kingdom is this: "Love others as you would want to be loved." If you do this, you're right on. But if you love people differently based on externals, you're practicing sin and guilty of breaking God's #1 law.

10-11. Here's the hard fact. Even if you were to keep all of God's law perfectly, one sin (like favoritism) makes you guilty of all in God's eyes. God forbids adultery, just

like he forbids murder. But if you are clean regarding adultery, yet commit murder – you’re guilty of adultery, and all the other laws as well. Ouch!

12-13. Now don’t be frozen with fear in your words and actions toward others – God’s royal law of love is meant to motivate and free you, not condemn you. If you show no mercy, then mercy won’t come your way. But if you learn to show mercy in your assessment of others, that demonstration of mercy will trump any judgment that is due you.

Conviction in Works

14. Tell me, fellow Christians, what is “saving faith?” If someone claims to be a Christian by their faith, and yet there is little visible sign of that faith in their actions, it seems to me that kind of faith is useless faith – not “saving faith.”

15-16. For example, if a believing brother lacks some basic necessity such as clothing or food and you essentially tell him “blessings on you, I hope you’ll be okay!” and don’t make an effort to meet his need, I say your supposed faith is a sham.

17. The principle is this: Faith, if it isn’t backed up by action, is dead faith.

18. Now, I can just hear someone say, “Some Christians are more private, and some are more outgoing in expressing their faith.” Well, if you’re one of those “private in your faith” types, I dare you to prove your faith without any action, while I prove my faith to others by living it out in action.

19-20. You believe that God is one? That’s good, but think of this: the demons, as they shudder, believe the same (and they’re not believers!). Can’t you admit that believing alone without actions to back it up means nothing?

21-23 After all, haven’t we heard Father Abraham was “justified by faith” when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? His faith and works “teamed up” so that his behavior proved his belief to be authentic. This was the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Remember, this faith matched with action resulted in Abraham being called the friend of God.

24. So here’s the principle said another way: A man is made right with God by action that demonstrates inward faith, and not by action less faith.

25. Another example would be Rahab, who was once a harlot. But she too was justified, (that is, made right with God) by her works. Remember, she received and hid the spies (Joshua and Caleb) and then let them exit by a safe way.

26. To say the principle a final way: Just like a body without a spirit is lifeless, so also faith without demonstrative action is lifeless.

JAMES, Chapter 3 (My Paraphrase)

Control of Giftedness

1-2. Think long and hard about whether God has called you to be a teacher of His Holy Word. Why? First, God will give teachers a stricter judgment when it comes to

handling His Word. Secondly, we are all sinners. (And this implies that a teacher will be rightly held to a higher standard by his students, as well.) And thirdly, since teaching uses a lot of words and many words lead to certain stumbling, a teacher will never be perfect in his teaching.

Control of Tongue