

James 4:7-10 - The Ten Commandments of James

Sign Title: The Ten Commandments of James

September 11, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! Welcome to kickoff Sunday. Last week, we learned that God is holy and cannot tolerate sin, but there is good news! He is also gracious! He always has more grace than we have sin. God having an inexhaustible supply of grace and a love to extend that grace is one thing; our reception of it is another. Last week we saw that James qualified the reception of God's grace in our lives by quoting Proverbs 3:34 from the Septuagint. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Pride shuts off the endless flow of grace into our lives. Humility releases it.

We can remind ourselves of this every time we are in front of a faucet. Shut off the water and say "Pride". Turn the water on and say "Humility". Humility is what it takes to receive grace; pride turns off God's grace.

While we like to think of ourselves as humble, if we are honest, most of us do not have as much humility as we think. Most of us don't wake up in a humble mood. We don't eat breakfast in humility. When we drive to work weaving through traffic, we are not humble. If we are downright honest, except for rare occasions, we live with more pride than we do humility. If you are offended by what I just said, it is because your pride was just insulted and my point is proven.

Let's not be too quick to assume we are on the grace-receiving side of this verse. I'd suggest that most of us, including me, have more pride than we realize. James knows the congregations he is writing to have the same problem, so in James 4:7-10, he tells us how to cultivate humility in our lives. He does it

by giving us ten succinct imperatives. They hit fast and hard, like a jackhammer breaking the concrete in our heart. Many Bible scholars call them the Ten Commandments of James, so that is what I titled our message. We need to use them to cultivate humility in our life if we are to be recipients of the one thing we desperately need... God's grace.

Ten Steps to Humility

Submit to God.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. James 4:7 (ESV)

The first step to humility is submission of the heart. The Greek word for submit is used to describe a Christian's responsibility to submit to those in government (Romans 13:1), a wife's responsibility to submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22) and the church's responsibility to submit to Christ. It is a military word. It means to fall in rank behind. Think of an army marching forward. There is no confusion who the soldiers fall in rank behind. My favorite mental picture of this are the news clips of the Russian army marching through Red Square. The soldiers are in perfect step together. They are in submission to their superior officer who leads the march. They are not meandering through the streets buying hot dogs from street vendors.

We are to submit to God, to fall in step behind him. The first step to humility is relinquishing my right to rule myself and acknowledging it belongs to God. Life is not about me and my happiness; it is about God and his glory. I fall in line behind him. He doesn't fall in line behind me. This is the first, and often

the hardest, step of humility because everything in our culture tells us life is about us and the most important part of life is to be happy.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” — yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. James 4:13–14 (ESV)

We live under the delusion that we are in control. According to this verse, we are nothing more than a vapor. How much control of life does a vapor have?

Let me prove my point. How many of you in high school planned to be doing what you are doing today? I had no idea I would be a pastor. I don’t even think I could find Iowa on the map during my geography test. I had no idea I would be living here. We are not in control of anything. We live with delusion that we are in control, but God is in control of our life.

We are like children at the amusement park on a kiddie car ride. We turn the steering wheel back and forth but we are not determining anything. James says we need to be like a kid on an amusement park ride that says, “OK God, I’ll let you drive.” We need to get in line behind God and realize he is the one that is steering. I like the way the old Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, put it:



Lord, what thou wilt, where thou wilt, and when thou wilt. Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

Now most of us are happy to nod our heads in affirmation and verbally acknowledge God is the one steering our lives. We will admit God is in control and tell others we are comfortable with his driving abilities until God steers us in

a direction we don't want to go - when someone we love comes down with cancer or the market drops and we face financial ruin. We say, "God, there must be some mistake. This isn't the direction I want you to steer my life."

The test of submission is how I react when God steers me in a direction I don't want to go. Job's response showed the humility of his submission when God steered him down a path where he lost his property and his children.

And he said, "...The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21 (ESV)

That is the first step of humility. It is acknowledging God is in charge of the steering wheel in our lives and we aren't. It is trusting God knows what he is doing when he steers us down paths we would never take if we were in control. It is responding in trust, like Job, when God steers us down difficult lanes. That is humility in action.

Resist the devil

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7b (ESV)

If you are new around Faith Church, you may have misconceptions about the devil. He doesn't wear red pajamas. He doesn't have horns and a tail. He definitely doesn't wear Prada. The devil's name is Lucifer. He was one of the greatest, most powerful and most beautiful angels Jesus created. His pride led to his downfall. He tried to take worship that was to be given to God and keep it for himself. As a result, he was banished from Heaven and cast to Earth. He now wages war against God, creation and us. He is not alone in his



war, because a third of the angels rebelled and were banished with him. We call them demons.

It is a little freaky realizing we have incredibly powerful spiritual beings waging war against us. They are intent on destroying us. Growing up, I was afraid of the sixth-grade bullies who would dump my books in the hall and chase me home from school. If I was afraid of sixth-grade boys who wanted to annoy me, I should be terrified of the devil who wants to destroy me. But the Bible tells us we can fight the devil... and win.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith,... 1 Peter 5:8–9 (ESV)

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:11–12 (ESV)

What business do we have resisting the devil and fighting against him? I know I don't have the strength to win that battle on my own.

As Christians, we are not in the battle with Satan alone.

...for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 1 John 4:4 (ESV)

The Holy Spirit is much more powerful than the devil. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and enables us to resist the attacks of the devil in our lives. Christians do not fight sin and temptation alone. The Holy Spirit is the secret weapon that will send the devil fleeing.

Now, I want to get practical. Lets talk about how the battle unfolds. When I was younger, I was assaulted by particular temptations on an almost daily

basis. My first thought on how to win the battle was to picture myself like a knight in shining armor with a sword in my hand from Ephesians 6 saying, "Get thee behind me Satan!" I hoped he would run like a whipped puppy dog. While, at times, that was appropriate, most of the time, it didn't work.

I wasn't, and am not, a knight in shining armor who is such a stud I can rebuke Satan. While trying to rebuke Satan, I kept thinking about the temptation in my mind. It wasn't long until I talked myself into it. Why doesn't that bold frontal assault against the devil's temptations work? It is often based on pride rather than humility. Humility is admitting we are so vulnerable to sin that to fight it in hand to hand combat is more than we can handle. Fighting temptation in humility is admitting the only thing I have the strength to do is turn and walk away. In my experience, the Holy Spirit has always given me enough strength to do that.

For example, when you are changing television channels and you get a juicy glimpse of an HBO show as you surf by it with your channel clicker, part of you wants to change back to the channel to see more. You begin the battle of resisting the temptation to sin in one part of your mind while you are looking for a decent television program to watch with the other part of your mind. Many times, the temptation to sin grows stronger the more we think about it. It is not long until we give in.

Battle Satan with humility. Just walk away. When you feel the temptation to that sin begin, don't keep surfing the television channels, turn off the television

and walk away. Do something else. The Holy Spirit will always give you enough strength to do that.

The same applies to movies. Living in a small town, there are not many options at the movie theatre. As teenagers, you show up with your friends to watch a Friday night movie and the options are limited. Many times, none of them are great. You buy a ticket for the least inappropriate movie and begin watching it. While watching it, you realize it will be more ungodly than you realized. How do you battle it? Do you try to keep blocking out the inappropriate thoughts in one part of your mind while you are trying to enjoy the storyline in another part of your mind? The answer is to battle Satan in humility. Have the courage to get up and walk out of the theatre. Be willing to not finish the movie even after you paid \$5 to see it.

Draw near to God.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. James 4:8 (ESV)

This is a well-known verse, but it is not well understood. We tend to think of drawing near in terms of physical proximity. In a church I served, people would come to the sanctuary during the week to pray. Of course, there is nothing wrong with doing that. This is the sanctuary, which literally means “sacred place”. If a church sanctuary helps you pray, that is fine. The problem is sometimes people feel they need a church sanctuary to pray. They think that by coming to a church they are inching closer to God. The truth is we are no closer to God in the church sanctuary than we are at The Barefoot Bar. The *drawing near* in this verse is not spacial but spiritual.

What does it look like to draw near to spiritually God? One of the best ways to draw near to God is to cultivate a lifestyle of healthy spiritual habits. Let me give you some examples. Christian friends are very important. Our friends either build us up or tear us down. Getting under good Bible teaching is very important. Getting in a small group to experience people who love you in a way that only brothers and sisters in Christ can is something you don't want to miss. Reading the Bible, memorizing Scripture and talking to God in prayer. These are all habits of a healthy spiritual life.

This verse doesn't just command us to draw near to God, but it also has a promise. When we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. The more we seek him, the more he will reveal of himself to us. The more we cultivate our relationship with God, the more he will give of himself to us.

The Lord is near to all who call on him,.. Psalm 145:18 (ESV)

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV)

This is one reason the parable of the prodigal son is so meaningful. The adult son wastes his inheritance on foolish living and decides to return home in shame. His father sees him from a distance and runs to embrace him.

This is our God. He doesn't sit in heaven like a heartless father angry when we return. He is filled with love and compassion for us. He runs to us when we return to him.

Inch toward God, and he will step toward you. Step toward God, and he will sprint toward you. Sprint toward God, and he will fly to you!¹

¹ Hughes, R. K. (1991). *James : Faith that works*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

How do we return to him? It begins with repentance. Sin breaks our fellowship with God and when we repent, we take a step toward God. In return, he takes a massive step toward us.

Cleanse your hands... purify your hearts

We will take these two together. Clean hands is an Old Testament image. It shouldn't surprise us James uses this, because he is writing to Jewish Christians. One of the temple furnishings was the bronze basin (Exodus 30:18-21), which was for the priests to wash their hands. Having clean hands was symbolic of a pure life. We use similar statements when we say things like "There is no blood on my hands," which means we are innocent.

Purifying your heart symbolizes thought life. Hand and heart; deeds and thoughts - both are to be pure. So how do we do this? Repent of sin, confess our sin and strive to make real changes when our heart and our actions are sinful.

One way to do this is practicing instant repentance. Instant repentance is confessing sin the moment we are aware of it. Let me give you an example. Guys, this summer, how many of us spent time on a boat or at the beach in Arnolds Park? As the temperature rose, more than just the bugs came out to play. Miss "I'm letting it all hang out in my skimpy two piece" conveniently placed herself in your field of vision. Since you have testosterone, you were instantly captivated by the scenery. What are we to do? A friend of mine calls it the eye bounce. Rather than looking, lingering and lusting; we bounce our eyes in another direction and seize the moment to confess and repent.

The eye bounce part is important. It is not continuing to stare while asking forgiveness but to bounce your eyes and ask forgiveness. Repent means retreat. It means head in the opposite direction. Repentance means looking in the opposite direction of sin you were watching. Simple confession is not asking God's forgiveness until we get the chance to do it over again. Confession with repentance is asking God's forgiveness plus turning away from the sin and taking steps to avoid doing it over again.

Repentance and confession leads to humility because my pride doesn't want to admit I am so prone to sin, especially when I confess it as soon as I begin thinking or acting upon it.

**Be wretched, mourn, and weep, change your laughter to mourning;
joy to gloom**

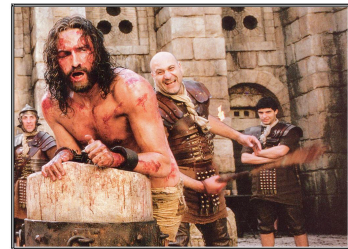
This is one of the more confusing verses you will come across. These are four commands that essentially say the same thing. Let me first say what this verse is NOT telling us. It is not teaching us that laughter and joy are wrong. Joy is a fruit of the spirit. Laughter is good. As Christians, we should be the most joyous people around because we look at our lives from the perspective of faith. We look at all we have through Jesus Christ in this life and for eternity in the next and we should be filled with joy. Christians who don't laugh and cannot crack a smile are not spiritual people; they are boring people. They need to get a life and learn to have a little joy.

While we should be filled with joy, is there something we should grieve? Of course there is. It is our sin. It was the guilt of my sin that Christ bore on the

cross. The precious blood of Jesus was shed for my sin. He died a tortuous death on the cross because of my sin. The central moment of redemptive history is not a laughing moment. It is deathly serious and eternally weighty. James tells us to never get over this. In one sense, we are to always be broken over sin and to sense the seriousness of it.

Too many churches do not take sin seriously. I call them the happy-clappy churches. Everything is fun and games and a pew jumping party. Nobody every talks about sin, judgment, and hell. The Old Testament, where God wiped out thousands of people at a time because of his wrath is off limits in those churches. James is going after this cavalier faith that ignores the seriousness of the sin Christ came to deal with. If we don't weep over sin something is wrong.

I remember when the movie *The Passion of the Christ* came out and people were walking out of theaters. Nobody was talking. For a few minutes people were gripped by the seriousness of their sin when they saw what Christ went through to cover it.



The more I understand that greatness of my sin, the more humble I will be. The more I understand I have a great savior, the more humble I will be.

Conclusion - Humble yourselves before the Lord.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. James 4:10 (ESV)

The other nine commands tell us how to become humble. This command comes with a promise. When we humble ourselves, God will lift us up.

One of the reasons we don't like humility is because when we are humble, people step on us. We get run over. Who will make anything of our lives if, in humility, we don't? God says... he will. God promises you this morning that when you choose to give yourself to humility, he will make more out of your life than you could have ever made of it yourself.

He did it with Christ. It was the humility of Christ that the Father used to free us from the power of sin. As a result of Christ's humility, he was given by the Father the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess him as Lord. This morning, humble yourself before God. Let him lift you up in the way and in the time he chooses, just like he did for Jesus. There is no better way.



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