Humble Yourselves Before the Lord

James 4:1-17

Key Verse 4:10

1. **Review the previous passage (James 3:1-18) and summarize the two types of wisdom James identified.**
   * “Earthly Wisdom”
     1. James 3:15 – “Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”
     2. This wisdom cultivates self-focused desires like “envy” and “selfish ambition”
     3. This wisdom encourages people to be: self-serving, conceited, individualistic, shallow, narcissistic, elitist, arrogant, judgemental and boastful.
     4. This wisdom leads away from God and oneness with our neighbors
     5. This wisdom is the official wisdom of the World, the flesh and demons
   * “Wisdom from Heaven”
     1. James 3:17 – “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”
     2. This wisdom cultivates a total focus on “God” and “others”
     3. This wisdom leads away from the World and all worldliness
     4. This wisdom is the wisdom of the Kingdom of Heaven

**How does this passage (that focuses on repentance) correlate with the previous passage?**

* In the previous passage, James established that believers are operating with both types of wisdom at the same time (demonic wisdom and heavenly wisdom).
* This passage guides us into the urgent process of flushing out demonic wisdom and replacing it with heavenly wisdom.

1. **Look at v.1-5. What is the root cause of all fights and quarrels?**

* Sinful desires are battling within and are expelled through harsh words, arrogant words and other actions that lead to arguments and fights. Ill-will towards neighbors is manifested due to the sinful desires within the heart.

**How do sinful desires impact a believer’s prayer life? (3)**

* Sinful desires disqualify a believer from receiving from God because their asking is with the wrong motive. Even though Jesus promised that “anything” we ask for in prayer will be given to us, sinful desires disqualify us from this promise.
* James 1:6,7 stated a similar principle:
  + “But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”
* The prayer life of the righteous is very different though: “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” —James 5:16b, t

**What allegiance do believers end up showing by their sinful desires? (4)**

* Harboring “worldly wisdom” and its resulting sinful desires makes a believer into a “Friend of the world” and “enemy of God”.

**What does God think about this allegiance? (5)**

* The Lord God is “jealous” like a husband who knows his wife has two lovers in her heart. God doesn’t want to see us living as “adulterous people” ; he jealously longs for us to have an undivided spirit of wholehearted devotion.
* Believers with both wisdoms act as “double-agents” who ignorantly sabotage the Kingdom of Heaven while also confessing their faith in Jesus.
  + Example 1: Peter who at one moment confessed, “You are the Christ” but soon thereafter was called “Satan” by Jesus for having in mind the things of man instead of the things of God.
  + Example 2: Balaam who was a prophet with immense knowledge of God, His plan and purpose for Israel and who enjoyed a rich prayer life.
  + Example 3: Judas Iscariot, who in regard to money, chose the wisdom of this world (that worships money) over the wisdom from heaven (that disregards it).
  + Example 4: Jonah (to a lesser degree) who held his bias against Assyrians higher than God’s loving concern for them and their animals.

1. **Look at v.6-10. What “grace” has God provided for us to escape our enmity towards Him? (6)**

* Even though God “opposes the proud,” he also “shows favor to the humble” and therefore has provided an escape for believers entangled in worldly wisdom. We can call this “repentance” but James’ description is a self-imposed humbling that slows down the momentum of sinful desires so time can be spent to realize self-deception.  By this, worldly wisdom can be exposed and replaced by the truth of the “wisdom from heaven.”
* A good example of this is the Ninivites from the book of Jonah—they did exactly what James prescribes here. This is an amazing affordance provided by the Lord.

**Describe the process to “humble yourself before the Lord”? (7-9)**

* There are at least 9 directions here:
  + Submit myself to God
  + Resist the devil
  + Come near to God
  + Wash my hands
  + Purify my hearts
  + Grieve, mourn and wail
  + Change my laughter to mourning
  + Change my joy to gloom
  + Humble myself before the Lord
* To flush out Worldly Wisdom and the resulting sinful desires and actions, James prescribes a serious effort of solemnly seeking God without distraction until God, who sees everything, lifts us up.

Why does this process work and lead to “favor” with God?

* Such a serious effort matches the seriousness of the situation and is an act of faith and goodwill towards our Heavenly Father that we sincerely care about being his child and removing anything that causes us to desire and act as His enemy.

**What similar process were the Israelites commanded to undergo every year?**

* This process reminds us of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and especially the effort to remove every hint of yeast from one’s home prior to the festival.

1. **Look at v.11-16. What similarities do “slander/judging” (11) have in common with “boasting” (16)?**

* Both are tremendously rooted in pride and arrogance

**How is slander/judging evidence of a proud heart? (12)**

* James asks the question, “But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?” This shows that those who judge climb into the seat of the only “Judge” and act like God himself by forming a conclusion about someone and declaring that opinion through slander.
* Those who judge others never use the “Royal Law” but apply a corrupted version that either adds or removes  law.
* Even by their own standards, believers who judge others are often hypocritical to their own self-authored law.

**How can this pride be cut off?**

* Through a deep consideration of God’s truth in His word.

**How can talking about future plans be an expression of arrogance? (13-16)**

* We are a “mist” that “vanishes” and nothing can be done unless God allows it to happen. Boasting about tomorrow is not aligned with this truth.

**How can this arrogance be cut off?**

1. Look at v.17. From chapter 4, what is the “good they ought to do”? Considering the previous three chapters, how is v.17 an important summary statement?

* Open Answer