

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

JAMES 4:1-17, FAITH TEST 5: SUBMISSIONS TO GOD (HOLINESS)

- A. The spiritual life demands submission to the authority of God (1 - 10)
1. Conflicts arise from self-centeredness (1-5)
 - a. Conflicts are sourced in internal strife (1), *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*
 - 1) There is a struggle between pursuing personal desires or the will of God.
 - a) *passions*, the word comes from the same word for hedonist, a pursuer of pleasure.
 - b) A. T. Robertson, *the desire to get what one wants despite the cost of suffering to others.*
 - 2) It is an internal battle, Galatians 5:17, *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*
 - 3) Thomas Manton, *Indeed, worldly desires stir and rage more in a godly heart than in a wicked one.*
 - b. Conflicts become evident in interpersonal conflict (2a), *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*
 - 1) *among you* (a look back to 1a)
 - a) James is addressing Christians.
 - b) Annie Dillard notes the concerns of a young father, *hearing a commotion in his backyard, he looked outside and saw his daughter and several playmates in a heated quarrel. When he intervened, his daughter called back, "Dad, we're just playing church!"*
 - 2) Specific illustrations of conflict
 - a) Unchecked desire can lead to murder.
 - 1] King David's desire for Bathsheba led to the death of Uriah.
 - 2] There is danger for the covetous, as well, Proverbs 1:19, *Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.*
 - b) Covetousness causes unrest.
 - 1] *covet*, wanting what another person has can lead all the way to murder.
 - 2] Note the connection of jealousy and strife, 1 Corinthians 3:3, *...For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*
 - c. Conflicts impact one's fellowship with God (2b-5)
 - 1) Concerning prayer (2b-3), *You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*
 - a) No requests made to God.
 - 1) One who doesn't depend on God sees no need to pray.
 - 2) One doesn't consider God as a provider when struggling to take from others.
 - 3) Martin Luther, *As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.*
 - b) Wrong requests made to God.
 - 1) *wrongly*, with evil intent.
 - 2) The purpose of such prayers is to satisfy personal pleasures not to seek God's will.
 - 3) Thomas Manton, *Your desires in asking are only right when they suit God's purposes in giving.*
 - 4) John Ward, a member of the British Parliament, died and one of his prayers was found among his papers: *O Lord, thou knowest that I have mine estates in the City of London, and likewise that I have lately purchased an estate in the county of Essex. I beseech thee to preserve the two counties of Middlesex and Essex from fire and earthquake; and as I have a mortgage in Hertfordshire, I beg of thee likewise to have an eye of compassion on that county. As for the rest of the counties, thou mayest deal with them as thou are pleased.*
 - 5) 1 John 5:14, *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.*

- 2) Concerning relationships (4-5)
 - a) Friendship with the world makes one an adulterer (4), ***You adulterous people! 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.***
 - 1) Isaiah 54:5, *For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.*
 - 2) Christians who are self-centered (worldly) are idolaters and the false god is *the world*.
 - 3) Oswald Chambers, *Whenever we take what God has done and put it in the place of himself, we become idolaters.*
 - 4) Friendship with the world is a choice.
 - a) *wishes to be*, a desire for the world rather than a desire for God.
 - b) Such desires make one an enemy of God.
 - b) God considers our friendship with Him the priority (5), ***Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?***
 - 1) *the Scripture says*, there is no specific Scripture reference unless it is looking to verse 6 which is a quotation from Proverbs 3:34, *Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.*
 - 2) *spirit*
 - a) Two basic interpretations: the Holy Spirit or the spirit of man
 - b) I believe the best interpretation is the spirit of man.
 - 1] God is emphasizing His passion for the spirit of man which comes from Him.
 - 2] He is tying this statement to the previous section when He speaks of those whose spirits are drawn to the world, as adulterers and idolaters.
2. God's strength overcomes man's weakness (6-10)
 - a. He gives grace (6), ***But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."***
 - 1) To the humble
 - a) God's resources alone can overcome the tendency of man toward self-centeredness.
 - b) Augustine, *God gives us what He demands.*
 - c) 2 Corinthians 12:9, *But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
 - 2) To the proud God is opposed
 - a) Pride is idolatry, the worship of myself instead of God.
 - b) Thomas Manton, *Pride not only withdraws the heart from God but lifts it up against God.*
 - b. He demands personal response to His authority (7-10)
 - 1) Submit to God (7a), ***Submit yourselves therefore to God.***
 - a) *therefore,*" looks back to verse 6, do these things and God's grace will be abundantly supplied.
 - b) John Calvin relates this submission to the pattern of Christ, Philippians 2:5-8, *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*
 - 2) Resist the devil (7b), ***Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.***
 - a) He is powerful but not all-powerful, 1 Peter 5:8-9, *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, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the*
 - b) Adrian Rogers, *There are three essential words for overcoming temptation--flight, faith and fight." The key to overcoming the flesh is flight-flee from evil; to overcoming the world, faith, a God-centered faith not a self-centered faith; and to overcoming the devil, fight-resist Him.*

- 3) Draw near to God (8a), ***Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.***
 - a) He draws near those who seek Him through submission to His authority.
 - b) God is the loving Father looking for His prodigal sons, Luke 15:20, *And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*
 - c) Bernard of Clairvaux, *God loves both more than you love, and before you love at all.*

- 4) Be holy (8b-c)
 - a) In actions (8b), ***Cleanse your hands, you sinners,***
 - 1] Stop committing sins.
 - 2] Isaiah 1:16, *Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,*
 - b) In attitudes (8c), ***purify your hearts, you double-minded.***
 - 1] *double-minded*, be God-centered not self-centered.
 - 2] An idolater places trust in anything but God.

- 5) Be repentant (9), ***Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.***
 - a) *be wretched and mourn and weep*
 - 1] Repetition of words for emphasis on one's desperate need for repentance.
 - 2] Thomas Manton, *The exercises of repentance are the best ways to mortify worldly desires.*
 - 3] Matthew 5:4, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
 - b) *let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom*
 - 1] Repetition of repentance is an emphasis on its importance.
 - 2] James Adamson, *James is not bidding these frivolous people never to laugh again, but instead of pursuing joy all the time let them be abashed and give some serious thought to God.*
 - 3] Is purpose of Christianity to make me happy or conform me to the image of Christ?
 - c) A brief explanation of repentance
 - 1] A change of mind concerning oneself: there is separation from our holy God.
 - 2] A change of feeling: sorrow for sins which separate one from God.
 - 3] A change of will: a conscious choice to not sin.

- 6) Be humble (10), ***Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.***
 - a) Stay in submission to God and He will exalt you.
 - b) That is the paradox of humility - the way to rise is to fall, Philippians 2:9-10, *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

B. Illustrations of behavior not submissive to the authority of God (11-17)

1. A judgmental spirit (11-12)
 - a. Don't slander or judge others (11a), ***Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.***
 - 1) This is a sin of the devil, Rev. 12:10, *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*
 - 2) Bernard of Clairvaux observed that the tongue kills three things at once, *the person who is slandered (his reputation), the person to whom it is told (believes a lie), and himself (sin of defamation).*
 - 3) Hillel, *Judge not your neighbor before you find yourself in the same situation.*
 - 4) Mother Teresa, *If you judge people, you have no time to love them.*

- b. Don't presume to judge the law (11b), *The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.*
- 1) We judge the law when we judge others.
 - 2) We elevate ourselves above the law when we:
 - a) Expand the law by requiring more from others than the law demands.
 - b) Restrict the law by not allowing what the law allows.
 - 3) Guidelines concerning judging others
 - a) When Scripture is silent, we should be silent.
 - b) Don't accuse others of sins for which you are guilty. (Rom. 2:1).
 - c) Don't look for problems in areas that are not your responsibility.
 - d) Don't look for shortcomings in others because it gives pleasure of satisfaction.
 - e) Don't pass judgment based on mistaken assumptions or inconclusive evidence.
- c. God alone has authority to judge others (12), *There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*
- 1) God is the only lawgiver and judge.
 - a) He is able to save, Isaiah 33:22, *For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us.*
 - b) He is able to destroy, Deuteronomy 32:39, *See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.*
 - 2) No one else has authority to judge.
 - a) Romans 14:4, *Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*
 - b) In response to the question, *Who are you to judge your neighbor*, John Wesley replied, *A poor, weak, dying worm.*
2. A boastful spirit (13-16)
- a. Man has no authority over the future (13-14), *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"— 14 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.*
- 1) Planning without prayer is foolish since we don't have a handle on tomorrow, nevertheless, next year.
 - 2) Our physical lives are uncertain and as temporary as vapor.
 - a) Psalm 78:39, *He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.*
 - b) Job 14:1-2, *Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not.*
 - 3) A look into the future from the World Exposition in Chicago, 1893
 - a) *...it will be as common for the citizen to call for his dirigible balloon as it now is for his buggy.*
 - b) *...A life span of 150 years.*
 - c) *Mail will be delivered nationwide by a system of pneumatic tubes.*
 - d) *Trains will never travel faster than 40 miles per hour because higher speeds would be unsafe.*
 - e) *Within the next century law will be simplified and brought within the range of the common people. As a result, the occupation of two-thirds of the lawyers will be destroyed.*
- b. The future is controlled by God (15-16)
- 1) Christians must depend upon God (15), *Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."*
 - a) *If the Lord wills*, is a declaration of submission to God.
 - b) The apostle Paul was submissive, 1 Corinthians 16:7, *For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.*
 - 2) Lack of dependence upon God is evil (16), *As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*
 - a) It is arrogant to presume the future.
 - b) Catherine of Genoa, *The one sole thing in myself in which I glory is that I see in myself nothing in which I can glory.*

3. A disobedient spirit (17), *So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*
 - a. Christians are to submit to God
 - 1) *So*, the context of the previous instruction.
 - 2) We are to be God-centered not self-centered.
 - 3) Author unknown, *You can never go wrong when you chose to obey Christ.*
 - 4) Augustine, *When your commands are obeyed, it is from You that we receive the power to obey them.*
 - b. Lack of submission is sin.
 - 1) Disobedience is doing what I know I shouldn't do.
 - 2) Disobedience is not doing what I know I should do.

CONCLUSION

- A. Am I a troublemaker? External conflicts are based in self-centeredness.
- B. Is my faith marked by adultery? Friendship with the world is hatred toward God.
- C. Have I submitted this day to God? His strength overcomes my weaknesses.
- D. Am I offended more by others' sins than by my own? When I judge others I am judging the law.
- E. Do I include God in planning my day? The future is in His hands not mine.
- F. Has obedience become the pattern of my life? Obedience is the distinctive of a submissive spirit. A. E. Brooke, *The test of progress is obedience.*