

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

Sermon # 8

“Living in Uncommon Grace!”

James 4:4-10

Most Christians understand “grace” as it applies to salvation that is that Jesus did something for them that they could never do for themselves. By his death on the cross in our place, He paid our sin debt. He gives us a new standing before God the Father. He made us spiritually alive so that we could enjoy an intimate relationship with the Father.

We tend to get a little fuzzy when it comes to grace as it applies in the Christian life. According to James what we need is “more grace” (v.6). God stands willing to give us all the grace that we need to meet the challenges of our lives. In fact he stands ready at any moment to assume control of our lives, meet our needs – to become everything that we need for life. The problem lies in that we look in all the wrong places for the answer we need.

In verse four God accuses us of being “Adulterers and adulteresses!” He goes on in verse four to say, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (5) Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

The accusation of adultery sounds pretty stern in our modern ears. It is not as if we consciously betray God. We don’t intend any unfaithfulness to God. Adultery occurs in a marriage when one of the partners looks outside of the exclusive relationship of marriage to get their needs met. A third party is added to the relationship that does not belong. In much the same way spiritual adultery occurs when Christians look outside their relationship to God to get their needs met. A third party, the world, is invited into the relationship. In the New Testament, the Greek term for “world” is *kosmos* and is ordinarily used to mean “*the world apart from God!*”

We do this in many subtle ways. When we believe what daytime television gurus tells us over what the Bible says, we demonstrate our unfaithfulness. When our leisure interest greatly exceed our time given to the Lord, we need to ask the question, “Who really has our allegiance?”

In verse six, James gives the answer, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

God gives grace to the humble - to those who admit their helplessness and begin to look to God to meet their needs. Instead of continuing in a course of independence, arrogantly refusing to admit the impossibility of a satisfying life apart from God, they begin to walk in dependence upon Him for everything.

God hates arrogance, and independent living. That is why he “resists the proud.” Independent living is what sin is all about, and God will not support His children in such a lifestyle. He forces us to choose between the world and Himself.

Beginning in verses seven through ten, James gives a series of ten commands (aorist imperatives) which constitute an urgent call to return to God. These commands like curt military commands, demand decisive action. They reflect the seriousness with which James views the problems that he sees within the church. It is first and foremost a call to repentance. In verse seven James sets forth the basic requirements and subsequent verses lay out what is involved in a whole-hearted return to God.

The reader is first of all told in verse seven, “Therefore submit to God. (v. 7a).” It is unfortunate but true that Christ can be in our lives but not in control of our lives. Just as it took an act of our will to choose to accept Christ as our Savior it takes an act of our will to yield our lives to Him.

Make no mistake about it, you cannot follow Jesus without doing what he says. And if you as a Christian are still trying to call all the shots, still trying to run your life your way – you will end up a miserable, unhappy, unfulfilled and angry person.

Are you willing to let God be God? Are you willing to do whatever he pleases? Can you submit to his program for your life and his way of working things out in it? Does God have that right in your life? Doesn't the Creator have the right to determine your circumstances, your health, your job situation? Is He the potter? And aren't we the clay?

Although I have never thought of it in this fashion the remainder of verse seven gives us the flip side of the equation. In the second half of verse seven we are also told to, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (v. 7b) C. S. Lewis in his classic work, “*The Screwtape Letters*” maintains that there are two equally dangerous trends when dealing with Satan; that of either displaying either too much or too little interest in the subject. If we are over zealous we end up assigning to the operations of Satan, matters that can adequately be explained by the common sinfulness of man. The label of Satanic possession is attached to the actions of Christian’s which in are nothing more than their own sinful behavior.

Yet the opposite of this is the modern scornful approach that reads even the accounts in the Bible of Satan as nothing more than God speaking in terms that uneducated and superstitious people could understand. According to George Barna in a survey conducted in 2005 only 46% of the people who consider themselves born-again believers believe in the existence of Satan. [Barna Online. www.barna.org. Beliefs: Trinity, Satan]

But according to Scripture Satan is real and his still alive, and according to 1 Peter 5:8 we are to, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*” Yet Peter goes on in the next verse to say, “*Resist him.*”

Whether we realize it our not “*resisting the devil*” begins with rejecting the lie and accepting the fact that we can’t have real life apart from God.

Man has come up with some pretty strange ideas of what it means to “resist Satan”! Resisting does not mean yelling and screaming at the devil, it means drawing close to God. Have you ever wondered why the Devil would “flee’ from you when you “resist” him? The Devil flees because our resisting means God is drawing near to us and the Devil cannot stand in the presence of God. “*James tells us that the way to resist the Devil is to draw near to God. The Devil will flee from you, because he*

doesn't like God as company. The Devil will not get to you unless you get too far away from God. A wolf never attacks a sheep as long as it is with the rest of the sheep and with the shepherd. And the closer the sheep is to the shepherd, the safer it is. Our problem is that we get too far from God." [J. Vernon McGee. Thru The Bible Commentary. (electronic ed. - 2001). Thomas Nelson: Nashville]

In verse eight we are told exactly what we must do to enjoy the uncommon grace promised in verse six.

The first ingredient is there must be a whole-hearted return to God. The reader is told in verse eight, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." (v. 8a) When James tells us to "*draw near to God*" he is reminding them that however close they have been drawn to the world, they have been drawn equally as far from God. They and we, must return in order to have an intimate relationship with God. It is we and not God who has distanced ourselves. The call to "draw near" conveys the idea that this is done by drawing into communion with God as worshipers.

If the problem has been that we have gone to the world to have our needs met then the answer is that drawing near to God allows Him to supply us with whatever we require.

The second ingredient of personal cleansing is found in the second part of verse eight where we are told, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (v. 8b). Their contact with the world has left them polluted, thus personal cleansing is needed. James speaks first of their need to "*cleanse their hands*" which symbolizes their sinful deeds. James clearly indicates that a return to a close communion with God demands a change in their conduct. And his reference to "*purify their hearts*" means reversing one disposition. James does not want us to be a bunch of depressed, miserable Christians, but he does want us to be so moved by our own sins that we will not continue to wallow in them.

In Psalm 51 we have a powerful confession on the part of King David after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. He begins this psalm in verse one and two with a plea for cleansing, "*Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.*"

We need both clean hands and clean hearts if we are to enjoy close communion with the Father.

The third ingredient of open repentance is given in verse nine where we read, "Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." Three verbs are united to form an urgent demand for open and thorough repentance. The intensity of the demand is intentionally startling, to literally shake the believer with the seriousness of this call to repentance.

Repentance is fundamentally a change of mind concerning sin. We will never turn away from sin until we see it for what it is – an offense against God – something that breaks His heart. King David came to this realization in his life after his sin with Bathsheba, for in Psalm 51:3-4 he says, "*For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. (4) Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight.*" What David says literally in this passage is "God I realize that my sin is against you and you in particular." It was not that David had not sinned against Bathsheba, against his family, against the people that looked to him for leadership, against Uriah who had killed, for he had sinned against all of them, but sin in essence is first a sin against a holy God.

The story is told of a famous rabbi who was walking with some of his disciples when one of them asked, "Rabbi, when should a man repent?" The rabbi calmly replied, "You should be sure you repent on the last day of your life!" "But," protested several of his disciples, "we can never be sure which day will be the last day of our life." The famous rabbi smiled and said, "The answer to that problem is very simple. Repent now!"

The fourth and final ingredient of humility is found in verse ten where James says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." It is only through our willingness to humble ourselves before God that we find the ability to admit that any kind of truly satisfying life is impossible apart from God.

Conclusion

We began this message by noting that God extends the offer of "more grace" that God actually intends for us to have "uncommon grace." Annie Johnson Flint captures the thought in the old hymn that says,

"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!

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,

When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,

When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,

Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,

His power has no boundary known unto to men;

For out of his infinite riches in Jesus

He giveth, and giveth and giveth again!"