



Lesson 9 April 29, 2010

Pray or Prey

Having identified that strife and envy produce only confusion and every evil work which characterize those who seek the wisdom of man, the essence of worldliness according to James, he now expands that theme by acknowledging the logical progression, or degeneration, of the worldly minded into fighting and wars. Pay particular attention from chapters one and three that James is addressing fellow believers who are at war with each other, within themselves, and with God. James will then give three specific, imperative instructions which, if applied as a doer of the word, will overcome our rebellion to God, restoring harmony with Him and with each other and will further restore peace within ourselves.

1. In verse 1, James questions the cause of fighting among the brethren. What are some possible reasons according to these verses?

Proverbs 14:30b; 27:4

Galatians 5:17

1 Peter 2:11

2. In verses 1c-3, James then identifies that lust (v 1), which in the original Greek is the origin of the word hedonism meaning that pleasure is the chief pursuit of life is the reason behind such fighting. Selfishness is the root of lust and its companion vices of covetousness, envy, and strife, none of which will ever satisfy and will ultimately lead to either a complete lack of prayer (v 2) or wrong prayer (v 3). How do these passages underscore James' thoughts?

Psalms 66:18



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Proverbs 29:27

Ephesians 5:5

3. In verses 4-10, James admonishes that we must choose God or the world. There are no other options, for in not choosing God, we by default choose to be friends with the world as an enemy of God (v4). Fortunately, His Spirit within us jealously guards against the fleshly desires of our old nature (v5) and it is He Who gives us the power by His grace to be humble (v6,10), to submit to Him while simultaneously resisting the devil (v7), and to draw near to Him in purity (v8). James emphatically underscores that sin is deadly serious by reemphasizing his exhortation from Chapter one and that we should be in a state of mourning and shame over our flaws and failures (v8-9). What similar themes do you note in these scriptures?

Proverbs 3:34

Isaiah 1:16-17

Matthew 5:4

Romans 8:6-7

Ephesians 2:2-3; 4:27; 6:11



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Personal Application

James' overarching mandate throughout his letter is the call and the need for Christian maturity which will manifest itself in good works providing evidence of a dynamic, living faith in God. In essence, James is therefore a book on faith -- a diligent and active faith that works -- "without faith it is impossible to please Him for he who comes to God must believe that He is and is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). It is that type of godly, working faith that enables and empowers us to maturely and confidently trust in the Lord throughout the circumstances of life, both good and bad, for "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith" 1 John 5:5).

Not only do we contend with the world, friendship with which, or worldliness, James unapologetically rebukes as direct rebellion to God, but James acknowledges that we also must deal with the fleshly desires and pride of our old nature and with the devil who "as a roaring lion walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Paul identified the same enemies of the world, the devil, and the flesh which stand in direct opposition to our faith -- "wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:2-3) and commanded us "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11), engaging in spiritual warfare since "we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds: casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

James sounds the same battle cry as he implores us to diligently nurture and to vigorously defend our faith through the warfare of prayer. In condemning those who do not pray at all and those who do so selfishly, James rebukes the worldly and fleshly minded who unwittingly (being void of the pure, peaceable wisdom from above) follow "the god of this world who has blinded their mind" (2 Corinthians 4:4). He then contrasts such ungodly behavior by addressing the righteous necessity of individual humility in submitting to God and drawing near to Him in purity; however, James' subtle undertone through such comparison is that any submission would be impossible without prayer. Remember that James, in extolling the value of wisdom in chapters one and three, clearly stated this wisdom can only be attained through our consistent, believing, devotional communion with our heavenly Father in prayer. Unfortunately, prayerlessness can only lead us to prey upon one another and fall prey to the evil one.