

Scripture Reading: James 3:13~4:10 (NASB - New American Standard Bible)

^{3:13}Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

^{4:1}What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. ⁴You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?

⁶But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

⁷Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again this morning. Last week, I presented a message here on chapter 3 of the Epistle of James. The main topic of that chapter is the problem we often have with the ways we use our tongue. Our speech can get us into a lot of trouble. The tongue is such a small part of our body, and yet what comes out in our speech influences people greatly, so if we say things that are really negative, that can have seriously negative effects on the lives of the people we speak to. We need to watch our tongue and be careful with what we say – that was the main point of last week’s message. And what comes out in our speech often reveals what it is we have in our heart, so we actually need to be filling our hearts with good, godly thoughts rather than negative and malicious thoughts. I quoted for you Philippians 4:8, a favorite verse of mine, which tells us that our minds should dwell on whatever things are true, honorable, right, and pure. I also pointed to James 3:17 which tells us that the wisdom which comes from God is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, and full of mercy.

In today’s Scripture Reading, we started with James 3:13-18. That latter portion of chapter 3 follows on from the discussion earlier in the chapter on the misuses of our tongue and it exhorts us to follow the way of good behavior and godly wisdom, as I mentioned a moment ago when I quoted James 3:17. That paragraph also exhorts us to throw off the negativity in our hearts ... and it is an introduction to the problems that are discussed in James chapter 4, the main focus of today’s sermon. Both this latter portion of chapter 3 and the first half of chapter 4 describe certain problems that we have and these verses provide some solutions to those problems.

Let’s look at James 3:14-16 – “¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in the heart. What fills the heart comes out in our speech, as Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-37, which I read for you last week. Our jealousy and selfish ambition are not from God. James 3:15 says that this is ungodly wisdom that is “earthly, natural, demonic.” Perhaps it is from this verse that we get the popular phrase that our three chief enemies in our life is “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” The world, the flesh, and the devil. The corrupt values of this fallen world can still lead us astray with worldly reasoning and self-centered ambitions. And the various temptations of the flesh can lead us into sins of over-indulgence, sex, alcohol abuse, etc. And the devil is a foe that seeks to attack and discourage us and destroy us – read 1st Peter 5:8-9,

Ephesians 6:1-17, and Matthew 4:1-11 for more on that topic. The world, the flesh, and the devil – the three enemies that we must be careful about and refuse to follow.

I told you a moment ago that James tells us our problem and he tells us the solution. In James 3:17-18, he tells us the solution – “¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” We must be sure to fill our minds and hearts with the wisdom that comes from above – that which is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, and without hypocrisy. We must sow peace in our hearts and our lifestyles, for then we can live lives marked by righteousness and peace. That is the solution that James gives us at the end of chapter 3.

I ended last week’s message with a piece of wisdom that comes from the ancient church. Here is an old slogan: *We are to lead a life of peace and repentance.* Lead a life of peace and repentance. Firstly, peace with God and peace with our fellow human beings. Secondly, repentance from anything that separates us from God and anything that separates us from our fellow human beings. *Let us live lives of peace and repentance.*

In chapter 4 of his epistle, James again describes a big problem and he gives us the solution. James begins the chapter with what sounds like the very opposite of peace and repentance.

James 4:1-4 – “¹What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. ⁴You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. This reminds me of what I said a moment ago about the world being one of the three enemies we Christians have. Following worldly wisdom and its often corrupt manners is being a friend of the world, which James likens to being an adulteress who is unfaithful to her husband. When we Christians follow the world’s ways instead of the ways of Christ, we are unfaithful to our husband, who is Jesus Christ. The church is sometimes described as the bride of Christ in the New Testament.

James 4:1 – “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?” James highlights for us the sad fact that oftentimes, there are quarrels and conflicts among church members. James mentioned this in chapter 3 as well, and he makes a comment in the last half of James 3:10 – “*...My brethren, these things ought not to be this way!*”

And what is the source of these quarrels and conflicts? It is *the pleasures that wage war inside your heart*. Again, we have here a heart problem. Do you remember what I said in my sermon on James 1 when we discussed the lust that is inside us? James 1:14-15 – “¹⁴But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” The lust inhabits our own hearts and if we let temptation carry us away, the lust in our heart gives birth to sin, and sin leads us to death.

In James 4:1, it is our pleasures, our lusts, which lead to disharmony in relationships at church. James continues in verses 2-3 – “²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” This is stark language here. Murder? Indeed, there have been instances in church history when Christian groups have fought against each other and killed one another. There have been some cases of individuals doing that as well. Less serious, but also destructive, are various kinds of

bickering and competition among Christians at church. *My brethren, these things ought not to be this way!*

When I read verse 2 here, I see that there is a suggestion that we could simply ask for what we need or desire. Why not talk calmly to one another to settle our differences? But too often we don't take that route, we don't ask, we don't start a calm line of communication, but instead just react in destructive ways. Verse 3 indicates that even if we do ask, even if we do try to communicate, oftentimes we have wrong motives ... selfish motives. In the long run, that kind of communication doesn't work either. Conflicts continue to arise, because our motives and methods are not right.

Let's be humble. Let's seek peaceful solutions. I am reminded of some key scriptures about how we are to relate to our fellow believers.

Ephesians 4:31-32 – “³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Throw away all those awful things that can bring tension to relationships: *bitterness, wrath, anger, slander, and malice.*

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other.

Remember: *God in Christ also has forgiven you.* You are a sinner, too, just like your brother or sister. Be humble. Forgive one another – the sooner the better.

Ephesians 4:29 – “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

Ephesians 4:27 – “And do not give the devil an opportunity.” We give the devil an opportunity to mess up our relationships when we fail to live by the principles of love and forgiveness and when we continue to harbor those negative emotions of bitterness and wrath against one another.

Throw off the negativity! Forgive your brother or sister. Love each other. Never forget that you have your own faults but God has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12-15 – “¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.” *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.* Remember: you need to deal with your heart issues if you are going to have success in realizing harmony in relationships with your fellow human beings.

Let's continue our reading in James chapter 4. After his severe rebuke for allowing worldly ways and inner pleasures to wreak havoc in our relationships, James says this in verse 5 – “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’?” God is a jealous God, jealous for his people – Old Testament scriptures describing this include Exodus 20:5 and 34:14, as well as Zechariah 8:2. The New Testament church is the bride of Christ, and so He is certainly jealous to keep His bride and He is grieved when we are unfaithful and act like adulteresses, as James 4:4 describes.

James continues in verse 6 – “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble’.” James is quoting Proverbs 3:34 and may also be referencing Psalm 138:6. God has given us a grace that is greater than any temptation we face or any worldly wisdom we might try to follow. But we must be humble to receive it. If you harbor a prideful attitude, do not think that you will receive anything from the Lord. Matthew 5:5 – “Blessed are the humble [the meek], for they shall inherit the earth.”

1st Peter 5:5b – “... All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble’.” It is not only before God that we are to humble ourselves, but we should be humble toward one another, toward our brothers and sisters. This would certainly dramatically reduce the quarrels and conflicts among us.

I told you at the beginning of today’s message that in chapter 3, James describes a big problem and provides the solution. In chapter 4, he again describes a big problem – quarrels and conflicts arising from the selfish pleasures we have in our heart – and now we come to the solution in verses 7-10. In these verses, we read a series of crucially important exhortations.

Let’s read James 4:7-10 – “⁷Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

Let me repeat those exhortations and list them one at a time:

Submit therefore to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners.

Purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Be miserable and mourn and weep.

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Submit ... Resist the devil ... **Draw near** to God ... **Cleanse** your hands ... **Purify** your hearts ... **Be miserable** and mourn and weep ... **Humble yourselves**.

This is a passage of Scripture that I have often stopped to ponder and meditate on. There are a few passages of Scripture that, whenever I come across them in my Bible reading, I linger a while and meditate on the passage and ask myself “How am doing in living out these principles?” This is what I do when I read Romans 5:4-6, 2nd Peter 1:5-8, and this passage James 4:7-10. Let’s take a look at these exhortations and I would like you all to ask yourself how are you doing in living out these principles?

① The first exhortation here is “Submit therefore to God.” This is the most fundamental principle of all: submission to the God who created us. Theologian Douglas Moo says, “To submit to God means to place ourselves under his lordship, and therefore to commit ourselves to obey him in all things.”¹ The following exhortations all flow out from this first one.

② “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” This sounds quite straightforward: just resist Satan ... and then he will flee from you. Satan is our great enemy, but our God is all-powerful and we have the Holy Spirit living inside us to empower us for overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil. Let us not forget that. All it takes is a bit of discipline to say No to temptations of all sorts, and we can overcome them with God’s help.

One of my favorite verses is 1st Corinthians 10:13 – “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” Temptation may seem strong, but God is stronger and He always provides the way of escape. Take advantage of that. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, The Letter of James, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 192.

Let's move on to the next point:

③ “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” How important it is to stay close to God! Approach Him every day ... many times a day. When we are tempted to sin, we tend to want to avoid God – that's what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. But if you make the effort to keep close to God, the temptations will lose their attraction and their power. Draw near to God, and He promises to draw near to you.

④ “Cleanse your hands, you sinners.” We all still sin. We all need to daily cleanse our hands of our misdeeds and sins. One passage of Scripture that has impacted me is Romans chapter 6, which contains admonitions to forsake sin. Let's read Romans 6:12-13 – “¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Our hands and our feet should be instruments of righteousness, not instruments of sin. Whenever we sin, we must quickly confess it and turn from it and ask the Lord for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

⑤ “Purify your hearts, you double-minded.” In James 1:6-8, James tells us that when we make a request of the Lord, we must do so in complete faith – if we do not do so in faith, we are being double-minded and we cannot expect to receive anything from the Lord. Here in chapter 4, James tells us to purify our hearts. How many times in last week's message and today's message have I pointed out to you the importance of having clean hearts that dwell on godly thoughts rather than negative thoughts? Purify your hearts. Matthew 5:8 – “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

⑥ “Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.” This sounds a bit depressing. But we must remember that we have to take God seriously and walk the Christian life with seriousness and not be flippant or careless with how we live our lives. This call to be miserable and mourn is reflective of what many of the Old Testament prophets declared. For example, Joel 2:12 says – “‘Yet even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning.’” Weep, mourn, and return to your God.

⑦ “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.” Here is the concluding exhortation and the concluding promise. We must be humble. In the presence of almighty God, we, His creatures, must be humble. We rely on His power as we live the Christian life, not on our own power or wisdom. If we follow this path, He will exalt us. Let Him exalt you – don't try to exalt yourself, because you will only have a temporary and earth-bound position. Humble yourself and let the Lord lift you up. In Matthew 23:11-12, Jesus says this – ¹¹“But the greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹²Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Let me read James 4:7-10 one more time – “⁷Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

Conclusion

I would like to spend the last few minutes of this message on a totally different topic. On numerous occasions, you have heard me mention the name of a well-known and influential pastor named John MacArthur. I recently learned that he passed away last month at the age of 86. He had a tremendous influence on me and so I would like to spend a few minutes giving a personal tribute to this significant man of God.

John MacArthur was the pastor of Grace Community Church in Los Angeles. My twin brother and I were introduced to the church during our first year of college, in 1977. MacArthur was still in his first decade of ministry at that church, but he was already becoming a well-known and influential Bible teacher. On my first visit to the church, I was amazed to learn that he was preaching verse by verse through the entire book of 1st Corinthians and even though he had been in that book for two years, he still was only two-thirds of the way through the book. Such in-depth Bible teaching in the Sunday sermon was impressive and deeply informative. MacArthur was not the first preacher to preach through whole books of the Bible, but that place was the first time I had ever heard of such a method of preaching.

Somebody gave my brother a box of cassette tapes of John MacArthur sermons – about 200 tapes. During the summer vacation of 1978, my brother and I were given a task by our father to paint the entire family home. My brother and I set up a cassette tape player and listened to all of those tapes while painting the house. We listened to them all at least two times each. We received that summer an unparalleled theological education. And I developed a life-long habit of listening to Christian messages while doing various kinds of household chores, as well as my morning exercise. My wife knows this habit very well – I am still listening to Christian messages and she is often nearby hearing them too. I haven't been listening to John MacArthur since the mid-1980s when I moved away from Los Angeles, but instead I have been listening to some other fine teachers.

MacArthur taught me some crucial lessons that have been a bedrock in my study of Scripture. He taught me to take the Bible seriously and to live by it. He taught me that you must always be aware of the historical and cultural context that any particular Bible book was written in. Understanding the context is so important to get the correct meaning out of the text. Also, he taught me that every doctrine Christians teach and every practice Christians engage in in their church life must be grounded in Scripture – you must be able to point to specific chapters and verses in the Bible to defend every doctrine and every practice.

There is something else I learned that has been quite significant for me. MacArthur described a wonderful method of ingesting Scripture into yourself. He recommends reading the same block of Scripture every day for thirty days – material that would take about 20 or 30 minutes to read – for example, reading all of 1st John every day for thirty days. I used this method often, and when I read through Romans, I divided that book into three parts that were each about 20 minutes of reading. With this method, you can really get to know the Scripture deeply! I did this repeatedly throughout my 20s and 30s. I read through the New Testament books this way and a few of the Old Testament books. I highly recommend it to you. This has been another really special and life-changing practice for me, something I learned from John MacArthur.

Next Sunday morning, a week from now, there will be a memorial service for John MacArthur which will be broadcast by livestream. I plan on watching it. It is going to be held on Saturday afternoon California time, which is 2:30 am Sunday morning Japan time. If you are interested in viewing the memorial service, I am going to put the livestream address in the sermon script and you can find it there (<https://www.gracechurch.org/live>). Well, that is the end of my personal tribute today.

I'm going to close my sermon today with a thought that hearkens back to some of the principles of today's message, which is also a thought that I have shared with you before. Whenever I finish teaching a Bible study or delivering a sermon, I recall what the goal of our teaching should be. While it is crucially important to be standing on right doctrine, the goal is not to fill your mind with Bible knowledge. I am often reminded of 1st Timothy 1:5 – “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” The goal is love from a pure heart. Have a pure heart – that has been a crucial theme in my messages today and last week. The goal of Christian instruction is the transformation of our heart and soul, which should then find expression in godly behavior. Speech and actions that come from a pure heart, a sincere faith, and a clean conscience.