

Commands To The Enemies Of God

My beloved as we began to understand two weeks ago these 4 short verses contain 10 commandments given as imperative verbs. These commands give one of the clearest calls to salvation found in the Bible. We studied the first five; Jesus' divine call for unbelievers to submit to him, resist sin, draw near to God, cleanse and purify themselves. This morning we will examine the last five - to be wretched, mourn, weep, laughter turned to mourning and to humble oneself.

The main theme of James' letter is the testing of a professed Christian's faith and by the testing, knowing if one's faith is genuine or false. James desires no one to be deceived but to know without doubt if they are saved or not. Just like our Lord Jesus taught in Matthew chapter 13, verses 24 to 30 the need to expose the tares among the wheat. Jesus said, **“Let both (*tares and wheat*) grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘Gather the weeds (*or tares*) first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’ ”** (v. 30) In the Jerusalem church and the church today there are both believers (wheat that will reproduce **“hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”** Matthew 13:8) and unbelievers who belong to the world and will be burned.

Let us pray for the Lord to reveal the truth of his words to our hearts.

Turn in your Bible to James chapter 4 beginning in verse 7, **“Submit yourselves 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 wretched and mourn and weep. Let your**

laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” Now we will work to understand the last five imperative commands beginning in verse 9.

Be Wretched

James wrote in verse 9, “Be wretched and mourn and weep.” This command to “be wretched” appears only here in the Bible. It conveys the idea of one being broken and of experiencing wretchedness because of one’s sin. Here one is to feel wretched because of their sin and feeling lost like a ship without a rudder and the gnawing feel of being separated from God. Remember Luke’s recording of Jesus speaking of the Pharisee and tax collector who both went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood where everyone could see him and prayed loudly how thankful he was that he was not like other men who were sinners. However, “the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ” (Luke 18:13) It was like this for me when I was first saved. I came to the realization of what a wicked sinner I had been and a sinner I remain, but now redeemed. It was gut wrenching and I knew that I deserved death not salvation. Oh, how thankful I was for the Lord saving me and oh, how wretched I was in my sin. I struggled with forgiving myself to the point it affected my fully receiving the gift of salvation from Christ. In the beginning I did not understand grace, let alone God’s grace upon grace. I felt I had to somehow pay for my past sins – I had to inflict some punishment – to atone – not fully understanding Jesus’ atonement. I clearly remember having coffee with a brother in Christ who was to become a mentor to me. He asked me, “Bill, has God forgiven you your past?” “Yes” was my answer. “Bill, has Joyce forgiven you and your past?” Again, my answer was “Yes.” Then he said, “But you have not forgiven yourself. You have placed yourself above God. You are

the most arrogant man to consider your judgment above God's grace and forgiveness!" I felt like I had been hit between the eyes with a hammer. It was the watershed I needed to begin my journey to humble myself before God. This is when I understood God through Christ had created me anew and claimed for myself 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." I began to understand God had saved me to bring him glory and to help others, as Paul continued in verse 18, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." One's wretchedness is over our brokenness as one comes to realize that there is right and wrong, that one is to live as God has called verses the sin of living for oneself in the world. One comes to the realization when one lives in the world - it brings pain and judgment. We are to mourn instead of laughing because of the momentary pleasures of the world.

There exists the problem of where one can find truth as they seek to know if there is a God. Man's natural tendency to gravitate toward those answers or religions that a person can understand more easily and have some control over their own destiny. Paul wrote to the church in Colossi a warning about false teachings and religions, "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and *self-denial* and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." (Colossians 2:23) For truth to be eternally true and not the world's propositional truth it must be true without exception. I have found this truth in the Bible and not in any of the other religions holy books. The Bible was true when it was written and it is true today and it will be true forever. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and **truth**." (John 1:14) For believers this is the bedrock of our faith and hope. To the unbeliever it is the source of their wretchedness.

Mourn

James continues saying we are not only to be wretched but are also to mourn, a repentant sinner is to mourn over their sin. This mourning should lead one to both a deeper repentance and strong desire for more of Christ and less of ourselves. Just as a person mourns and grieves over the death of a loved one they should mourn their sin. As Jesus instructed in Matthew's gospel account, **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”** (Matthew 5:4) Christ's payment for our sins comforts us and God the Father views us through Christ's perfection.

We have heard and sang the hymn “It is well with my soul.” This hymn was written after traumatic events in Horatio Spafford's life. The first tragedy was the death of his son at the age of 2 followed closely by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which ruined him financially. Short afterward he had planned to travel to Europe with his family by ship. He was delayed on business so he sent his family ahead. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship sank quickly after a collision with another ship and all four of Spafford's daughters died. His wife Anna survived and sent him a telegram that began, “Saved alone ...” Shortly afterwards, as Horatio traveled to meet his grieving wife, he was inspired to write these words as his ship passed near where his daughters had died.

The Spaffords later had three more children. All three died of scarlet fever. Their Presbyterian church regarded their tragedies as divine punishment and shunned them. However, through the mourning and tragedy Horatio and Anna kept saying, “It is well with my soul” for they were comforted by the grace of God and their Lord Jesus and knowing their children were in heaven. The Spaffords joined a small group of pilgrims who traveled to Israel to establish a Christian settlement with the desire to share the gospel of Christ.

We too, may mourn our past; the hurts and tragedies both received and some inflicted. But unlike those who are not saved we can be comforted and know it is well with our souls for Christ has redeemed us and given us a relationship with God the Father.

Weep

The first sentence of verse 9 ends with one's need to weep. Weeping is the outward manifestation of knowing our wretchedness and of mourning the sin that separates us from God. This is exactly what Peter did after he realized, just as Jesus had predicted, he had denied his Lord and "...immediately the rooster crowed..." Peter was struck with such deep mourning and sorrow over his denying Jesus "...he broke down and wept." (Mark 14:72)

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in regard to the brokenness that one comes to when they surrender to Christ. Paul's first letter had resulted in people within the church grieving over their sin Paul had addressed. Now in his second letter he writes, "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹ For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you..." (2 Corinthians 7:9-11) To be broken by the Lord is to experience the death of the world's hold on one. At first this may produce weeping of the pain of knowing how wretched one is – this is what I experienced at first, but then these tears of pain and sorrow were replaced with tears of joy. I still shed tears over my weakness and sins but I also weep the tears of joy for the Lord's grace and that he saved me.

Some people desire that everyday be filled with pure joy and constant sunshine; they think sunshine will bring gladness and joy. John Denver wrote the opening

to a song, “Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy...” but he did not want sunshine every minute of every day. He continued, “Sunshine almost always makes me high.” People might listen to this song thinking it would be nice if the sun always shined for they desire to avoid the heartaches of life that brings tears to our eyes and causes us to weep. However, if there is only sunshine the result is a hot arid land for without the clouds of life and even the occasional downpour there would be nothing to nurture the roots of life and life would be unproductive and lack challenges that make us grow. King David wrote, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” (Psalm 30:5) You see weeping washes the soul and gives room for the Lord’s grace and joy to take root.

Turn Laughter To Mourning

The second half of verse 9 is interesting, “Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.” This is a Jewish form of writing, a couplet, using two examples to illustrate the same point and each with a contrasting word within the same sentence – laughter to mourning and joy to gloom. James is not condemning the use of laughter or joy for he knew God wants his children to have joy in life. Jesus said, “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” Jesus is saying those who pay a price or suffer, as his followers here on earth will laugh for their eternal future is secure. James in verse 9 is condemning crude, flippant, sensual laughter and laughter at the expense of others. Jesus continued in Luke chapter 6 a few verses later saying, “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” (Luke 6:21 & 25) Those who are living in the pleasures of this world will hunger spiritually, mourn and weep forever when they depart from this earthly life. Jeremiah the prophet of God saw the Jewish people; God’s chosen people, turn their backs on God and

live in sinful ways. Jeremiah cried out to God saying, “The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning. ¹⁶ The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned!” (Lamentations 5:15-16) Jeremiah called the Hebrews back to God, back to the life God outlined in the scriptures. In the New Testament, James was calling unbelievers to mourn and feel the gloom of their sinful behavior and come to God and he was calling those who called themselves Christian, but lived worldly lives to return to living for the glory of God. Today it is the same; as Christ’s ambassadors we are to call the lost to come to God through Christ and call those who have strayed to return to Christ.

Humble Yourselves

The final command of the ten is found in verse 10, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” It is the last of the ten but it is also where it all begins. God calls people but they must humble themselves. In the first Beatitude Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit (*meaning to be spiritually humble*), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3) James wrote earlier in chapter 4 quoting Proverbs, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6, Proverbs 3:34) James clearly understood that salvation required a genuine humbleness that knows ones complete unworthiness and total lostness because of their sin. Understanding when one gives up our self and submits to God, he will draw us near. As an unbeliever sees God as he really is and sees themselves are they really are that cannot help but fall before God and cry out for mercy, just as the tax collector in the temple. And as the prophet Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5) Praise for God’s grace – salvation through Christ!

God has always honored those who humble themselves before him, those who empty themselves of their pride and desire for the fleeting things of the world and those who know he is the Creator of all. After Solomon faithfully finished building God's temple the Lord appeared to Solomon saying, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14) Is this not the same promise we have today? If we want the Lord to change America, to change the world, should we not be the first to call his name, pray and seek his face – meaning should we not be living with the primary purpose of bring God glory? If we humble ourselves before God, he will bring people to us to hear of him. Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12) Jesus lived these words – he exalted God the Father and humbled himself to the point of death and God the Father then exalted Jesus. It should be our desire to exalt Jesus, not for what we selfishly gain, but for what we have lost – we have lost the world and its sin and will live in the very presences of God forever, beginning here and now.

Remember James is the earliest or first book written in the New Testament. There is a very good chance that the other writers read James' letter and may have been influenced by it straightforward message. Paul echoed James point that we have studied this morning, giving the Ephesians an overview of God's grace. I close by reading from Ephesians chapter 1 beginning in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with

which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” My beloved, live in such a manner that all those you meet in life will want to know more about your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!