

James 4:7-10 - Curing Envy

TSK, GreekLexicon, Rienecker, Gaebelein, Stott, Doriani, Trapp, Robertson, Vincent, Geneva, PNT, Henry, Gray, Poole, Clarke, Family, Calvin, Barnes Beloved in the Lord: Some in the church were **controlled by pride**. That **pride gave birth to envy**. **Envy brought his friends** – all bad friends. So envy and his friends had to be cured from the lives of Christians before they destroyed God's people.

But as with every spiritual disease, curing envy took work, hard work. And they needed help, much help. So Apostle James gave them the help they needed! He told them how to cure envy – and envy's friends. This is what you will hear about today.

Our headings are:

Come to God

Cleanse your hands

Cleanse your hearts

Our goals are: **That you will let God cleanse you of envy so you can freely serve the body of Christ, and bring glory to the head of the church, the Lord Jesus.**

Come to God

7 Therefore **submit to God**. **Resist the devil** and he will flee from you.

1. To kill envy, Christians needed humility; they needed to go down on their knees in prayer and supplication.

Pride (envy's mother) **lifts up**. **Humility** (the character of Jesus) **brings low**.

Notice Apostle James did not argue like my relative did recently: "Everyone has a right to equal things." No! He said pride, leading to envy, needed to be destroyed. **Pride had to be destroyed because pride was at the root of the problem!**

And to be humble they needed to start **with a sense of their low position before God**. They needed to bend their wills to God's.

2. Coming to God on their knees implied they had to resist bowing down to their former father, the Devil.

Humility does not mean passivity! Humility means to submit to God's will. Part of God's will is you resist evil. This is why it is attached to "resist." "Resist" literally means "to oppose."

They had to oppose all the Devil stood for...envy, lust, compromise...

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary **the devil walks about like a roaring lion**, seeking whom he may devour.

They could **resist the Devil by the Word of God with the help Holy Spirit** in them! God's Holy Spirit's power was in them! **And when they stood up to Satan, he had to flee.** He could not fight against the Spirit of God.

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

3. With their old father chased away, they were called to draw near to their new Father - God, with the assurance, that as they drew to him, he would draw near to them.

Drawing near to God meant he would favor them with his many graces.

Those that didn't return to God lost their graces! Look at an example of the exiles that had returned after Babylonian captivity.

Zechariah 1: 3 "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "**Return to Me**," says the LORD of hosts, "and **I will return to you**," says the LORD of hosts. 4 "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "**Turn now from your evil ways** and your evil deeds.'" But they did not hear nor heed Me," says the LORD.

They lost everything. So Apostle James was really saying those who returned and **stayed close to God would receive even more blessings than they already had.**

4. To draw near they had to stop pushing away the Holy Spirit who was drawing them back to God, who wanted to bless them.

5. Lessons:

a. If you submit to God and receive his blessings, you wouldn't want to go contrary to his constant warnings in the Scripture. For example:

Proverbs 3: 34 Surely He scorns the scornful, But **gives grace to the humble**.

So if someone, or a boss, or a civil authority demands you go contrary to God's law, refuse to bow to him. If a **company wants you to lie** to sell their products, don't. If a **politician tells a policeman to arrest someone for teaching the truth**, he shouldn't. If a **soldier is told to kill civilians**, he must resist. If a **doctor is told to murder a patient**, he must refuse.

Acts 5:27...And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "**We ought to obey God rather than men.**"

People who tell you to do things contrary to God's law are agents of the Devil. Submit to God, not to them.

b. If you don't resist the Devil and his agents, which means you are under their influence, you are resisting God. These two are existential enemies. You can't have two gods.

c. You resist the Devil by refusing to follow his commands...and running away from temptations.

Romans 13: 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision for the flesh**, to fulfill its lusts.

1Corinthians 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry.**

2Timothy 2: 22 **Flee also youthful lusts;** but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

d. You have to condition yourself to resist the Devil. You have to **be trained in learning and living God's Word.** You need to have strong assurance of your eternal destiny to fight the Devil. **No baseball, basketball, or football player stays idle during the off-season. He works on conditioning his body for the grind of the season.** So you must condition your spiritual body for this cosmic fight. Yes, conditioning might be slow...but don't give up! Any kind of muscle, physical or spiritual, takes time to develop!

e. God is always near you! It is you who stray from him. Don't ever feel like God has left you! He never does.

Cleanse your Hands

8...,Cleanse your hands, you sinners...

1. Apostle James then called on Christians who wanted to overcome envy to cleanse their hands.

Sin makes the hands dirty!

2. What exactly does "cleanse your hands" mean?

It meant they had to stop doing their outward acts of wickedness. "Cleanse" comes from a word that we get the word "cathartic."

Practically, Christians were to **stop showing favoritism** to the wicked rich who could give them personal advantage.

And Christians were to **welcome the widows, orphans, foreigners, and poor!** In their hands they should have no stolen property! This was the call of the Psalmist!

Psalms 24:3 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has **clean hands** and a pure heart, who has **not lifted up his soul to an idol**, nor sworn deceitfully.

3. Could Christians cleanse their hands themselves?

No. None of them could do that. So they had to rely on the Holy Spirit to do so. And he removed their sins because they were washed in the blood of the Lamb of God.

So Apostle James was calling on them to **exercise their faith...and repent and reform their lives.**

4. Lessons:

a. If you have been envious of others, stop it! Don't do it, it's wrong! Reflect on your riches. On the contrary, remember your duty to help others. In short: Stop stealing. Work hard to share with the needy. This is not communism. It is Christianity.

b. What can wash away yours sins...what can make your hands clean of pride, envy, cheating, oppressing? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! **Alcohol, drugs, therapy can only block sins for a time,** but they can't remove sins.

c. You have to have clean hands everywhere as the Devil will tempt you in many places! Remember how Jesus stood up to the Devil when he was tempted with 3 things in 3 places? He couldn't escape. So if you are alone in your hotel room and tempted to watch pornographic movies, or if you are tempted to gossip about someone, or if you opportunity to steal even a cookie (boys and girls) you have to learn to resist in all areas– with God's help. Maybe you have to call a friend for encouragement. **Maybe you need to make a quick prayer for help!** It is not just about coming to church on Sundays!

Cleanse your hearts

8...and **purify your hearts**, you double-minded.

1. Christians were not only to stop their wicked outward acts but they were also to clean their inward lusts.

The root of all sins is the heart, so it was appropriate for Apostle James to focus there.

1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him **purifies himself**, just as He is pure.

Christians needed to cleanse their hearts because they were double-minded. Double-minded?

Christians were thinking they could love money (which made them compromise and follow the Devil) **and love God at the same time** – a God who warned against the love of money. That were two-faced.

9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

2. In order to purify their hearts, Christians were to lament, mourn, and weep!

Lament. The word literally means to “feel miserable.” (It doesn’t mean “singing a sad song.”)

Mourn – Inward sorrow and shame for sins. **Inward sorrow leads to repentance.** (2Corinthians 7:10)

Weep – **Outward evidence of suffering.** In this case it was suffering for sins.

Joel 2:12 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "**Turn to Me** with all your heart, With **fasting,**
with weeping, and with mourning."

3. In order to lament, mourn, and weep, Christians had to stop their laughter and set aside their worldly celebrations for wealth.

It was no time to laugh when they had guilt and shame. There was certainly no time for joy when envy was destroying their lives.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

4. Apostle James then summarized what he was saying: If Christians humbled themselves, instead of being controlled by envy and all her evil twins, God would lift them up!

What does God “lifting them up” mean? It **does not mean God would make them healthy or wealthy.**

It may be that God would do so, but that was no guarantee! **God would lift them up in spiritual blessings**...with graces...with thankfulness in their hearts...with peace...with contentment! Who would need shiny things when there was unspeakable peace and joy in his heart?

5. Lessons:

a. Apostle James’ 10 imperatives are for you too: Submit, resist, draw near, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, humble yourselves, lament, mourn weep, and humble yourselves.

b. God doesn’t want to humble you to show tyrannical powers. That’s how pagans work. God wants you to be humble so he could be near to you, so he could bless a you, and so he can lift you up to heavenly places.

c. St Augustine said you are like a tree that must have roots that go downward – in humility – to be strong outwardly! You can say “Amen” to that.

d. Humility is something you learn! It is unnatural to be humble. But when you learn to be humble inwardly, pride – the sin of the heart - is destroyed. **When pride is destroyed, envy must flee...with all his friends.**

Conclusion:

Instead of living with envy and his friends, Christians were to come to God, change their way of life, and cleanse their hearts of sin. This way they would be able to truly serve the church of Jesus Christ (and not exclude the poor and destitute) and they would cause praise to go up to God by the poor.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Of course you want praise to go up to your Savior. So don’t live a life of envy. Run from envy and his friends. Stay close to God. **Wash away the lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life** – those external and internal sins.

2. Practically, reflect on the salvation and safety you have in Jesus. Think of the **peace you have on earth** now and the **possessions you will have in heaven.**

3. Watch envy flee. Smile. Greater is he who is in you then he who is in the world.

Finally: **Trying to fight God and live your own life will achieve only hell for you!** God is the one and only true God. Submit to him and plead Jesus’ life and death as yours, or spend eternity in hell!