

A MESSAGE ON CARNALITY (CONTINUED)

James 4:8-12

Verse eight emphasizes the importance of prayer. It tells us of the right condition of life in order to have effective prayer. It says we must have clean hands and a pure heart in order to enjoy God's presence and nearness.

It is a great privilege to be able to draw nigh to God. When we think of His greatness, His majesty and His holiness, we are made to wonder that He has any time for us. Because of the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross, the vilest sinner can now draw nigh to God. Of course, there must be repentance toward God and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. The Spirit of God convicts a sinner of his sins and then urges him to come to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness.

There is nothing the Father delights in more than constant fellowship with His child. He constantly holds open the door of communion. He loves to hear your voice. Communion with God is one of the most effective weapons against the wiles of Satan. The effects of constant communion with the Lord are unlimited. Communion with Him will show itself in our talk and our walk. We will have peace in our souls and gladness in our lives. We will be effective in our service for the Lord, and be of help to the Lord's people.

To keep near to God one has suggested these three rules: Let the Lord speak to you by reading His Word for fifteen minutes every day, speak to the Lord in prayer fifteen minutes every day, then speak to someone about the Lord for fifteen minutes each day. If you do this, there is not much danger of your backsliding. When we draw nigh to God we must be willing to forsake our sins. He will welcome the vilest sinner for salvation, but He must have a clean saint for communion.

Besides cleansing the hands, James says purifying the heart is necessary for communion with the Lord. The hands speak of external cleansing while purifying the heart speaks of internal cleansing. The thoughts and desires of a man must be clean as well as his actions. It is like purifying a stream at its source. If the spring is impure, so also will be the stream. An unclean heart will produce unclean actions. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Psalm 66:18. This verse puts the responsibility of purifying our hearts upon ourselves.

In verse nine the three words, "afflicted," "mourn" and "weep" are closely related. They all speak of true sorrow for sin. "Afflicted" would be better translated "wretched." It speaks of an internal feeling of misery. "Mourn" speaks more of a sad outward appearance. "Weep" speaks of the special outflow of tears signifying real sorrow.

Have you been filled with envy? Well might you be wretched about it. Have you been striving for honor, or position or preeminence? If so, it would be good to mourn. Have you sought the fellowship of the world? Perhaps you should do some weeping before the Lord. God is looking for tears in the eyes of those who have dishonored Him and wandered from Him. Only through self-judgment and confession will there be forgiveness and cleansing.

Many have sinned against God grievously, and are far from the Lord, and yet are laughing in their sinful condition. Their laughter should be turned to mourning. Let them beware lest the Father with His chastening hand change their laughter to mourning.

James again turns to the subject of humility. He sets forth the only proper attitude in the words, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." How similar His language is to that recorded by Simon Peter, "Humble yourself therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." I Peter 5:6. His language is also like that of the Lord Jesus: "He that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Matthew 23:12. The way down is the way up. A tree must send roots downward before it can grow upward. So we must go down in humility before the Lord will lift us up. These early Jewish Christians were trying to lift themselves up instead of humbling themselves before the Lord and waiting for Him to lift them up.

To humble self means to take the low place. This place is to be taken voluntarily as the word "yourselves" implies. There is no reason to be proud. We were corrupt sinners and deserved nothing but the wrath of God. Even now that we are saved we have nothing of ourselves in which to boast. It is in the sight of the Lord that we are to humble ourselves; not in the sight of men. Some talk very humbly and try to act very humbly when some of their fellow Christians are around. However, this does not count with the Lord. To realize that we are ever in the presence of the Lord is sure to make us know our own insignificance and sinfulness. If we are to be lifted, the Lord must do it. We cannot lift ourselves. Our verse says, "He shall lift you up." If we really do humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift us. If we are humble, He will lift us out of sin. If we get into trouble, He will lift us out of that too. He will lift us out of the snares of this world. He will lift us out of danger into safety, out of degradation into honor. If our spirits are downcast, he will lift us into joy and gladness. At last He will lift us out of this scene into glory.

Verse eleven returns us to the main sin condemned by James, namely, the sin of the tongue. He says to speak evil of a brother is to be his judge, and that is the same as speaking evil of the law and judging the law. This is putting oneself above the Lord Himself who is the one lawgiver and judge. No doubt there was a great deal of harsh speaking about and to one another. Their speech was overly critical and faultfinding. This uncharitable spirit is prevalent today, too.

Some seem to think that by speaking evil of others they raise themselves in the opinion of those who listen to them. This is never so. No one likes a hypercritical, fault-finding person, and it is sure to turn back on one's own head in time. To speak evil injures three people--the speaker, the one spoken to and the one spoken about. One man lamented the fact that his children were not saved. His friend said to him, "I do not wonder that none of your children are saved. They have heard you criticize the messenger, so they will not believe the message." It is lofty opinions of self that cause one to embark on the path of faultfinding. If one refrains from evil speaking, he has won a great victory. It is far easier to play the part of critic of the law than to be a doer of the law.

There are some things about the Law of God upon which we may dwell with profit. His laws are righteous. They are right and just to the last degree. His laws manifest His character. God never demands of another that which exceeds what He Himself is and does. His laws are beneficent. They are given because His will is for our good. His laws are two-fold in their demands. First, they convey our duties toward God, and second, they convey our duties toward our fellowmen. His laws drive the breakers of them to Christ for pardon. The effect of the law was first, the sense of sin, and second the seeking of pardon. The Bible speaks of the Law as a schoolmaster which brings us to Christ.

We are not competent to judge properly as our knowledge is limited. We cannot see as God sees for our knowledge is limited too. We can neither see nor destroy. We have no right to pardon, nor the power to inflict the penalty. He alone pronounces accurate judgment, and He alone has the power to enforce the penalty.