

**Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

**Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

**Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you-- who are you to judge your neighbor?**

### Unconditional Surrender of Ego Is the Way to Peace

1. There can be no mutual co-existence between your ego and God.
2. There can be no cooperation between your ego and love.

Dear fellow saints,

A stately gentleman dressed in a grey uniform with gold braids and gold stripes on the side of his trousers and wearing the insignia of a General in the Army of the Confederate State of America stands before a man similarly dressed. Only the uniform of this man is a dark blue. General Robert E. Lee surrenders his sword to General Ulysses S. Grant. This took place before the courthouse at Appomattox. This was the formal ceremony of surrender. It was a symbol of the unconditional surrender of the confederate Army. The war was over. The Union was preserved. Peace was reestablished between the states.

General Lee did not have one hand behind his back with his fingers crossed when he surrendered his sword. Many years before Charlemagne marched the vanquished army of pagans into the river to baptize them all, but those beaten soldiers held their sword arm up above their heads so that their fighting arm would not be baptized. They were submitting to the order of the conquering commander but they were preserving in their minds the right to take up the sword again at a future, convenient time.

In our text the Apostle James is referring to a different kind of warfare. He is talking about the battle that goes on between our old sinful man and God. He begins this chapter by asking, **What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.** The answer to is this struggle is unconditional surrender of our ego to God. Then God restores peace through forgiveness for the sake of Jesus.

In verse 4 preceding our text James refers to his readers as **adulterous people**. I am sure that got their attention. He could be referring to sexual sins, of course; but more than likely he is referring to sins against the First Commandment. He calls this sin friendship with the world. He says that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. This doesn't mean that Christians can't have friends or things of the world in their lives. However, it does mean that loving evil things, or even loving good things more than God, infuriates God.

Why is there quarreling in Christian homes? Because people are letting selfishness or their ego rule their wants and their words. Why do husbands and wives fight? It is because their hearts are not right with God. It is because they like being proud more than being humble. It is because self-pity is a powerful narcotic. It is because loving themselves seems more satisfying than loving their

partner. They feel more powerful criticizing their partner's faults than confessing their own. They grow to like the adrenaline rush of anger.

Let's assume that the warning against falling in love with the world has had their effects in the hearts of the readers. This causes questions to rise up in the hearts and minds of those who hear. Remember when the soldiers and tax collectors who heard the call to repentance in the stern preaching of John the Baptist came to him with the question, **what should we do then?** In the same way at the conclusion of Peter's sermon on Pentecost the audience convicted of their sins, asked **Brothers, what shall we do?** The answer is **Submit yourselves to God.** Take the sword of your ego, unhook it from your belt, scabbard and all, and place it at the feet of your God. By doing this you are admitting that you are accountable to Him. You are confessing Him as first in your heart. You are saying that you are ready to subordinate your will to His, to open your eyes and ears to His Word, to let Him steer your choices and decisions, to let him set your limits of right and wrong.

You see there is no mutual co-existence between your ego and God. When this is realized and understood, then the next directive of James makes sense. **Resist the devil.** Every military strategist knows that warfare is waged both with weapons and with psychology. Breaking the enemies confidence and will to resist can be just as effective as defeating him with a frontal assault. The devil is very good at psychological warfare. He floods us with propaganda that his evil ways are really good in the end. He assures us that going along with him is harmless, and fulfilling.

Right here the Bible says, **Resist him!** Fight! Armed with the Word of God, you are stronger than he is. Your pride and ego have been surrendered to God unconditionally. In their place God has given you His Holy Spirit who emboldens you to resist. Dr. Luther reminded his hearers that they could not keep birds from flying over their heads but they could keep them from building nests in their hair. So too, we living in a sinful and adulterous world can keep the world out of our hearts and subjected to defeat. We cannot keep the devil from roaming about looking for someone to devour, but we are empowered by the Spirit to resist him.

James encourages us to **Come near to God.** How do we do this? You might even think that you have been away too long or you have gone too far. You can't come near to God again. This is not true. Through the blood of Jesus, it is never too late. Through the blood of Jesus the door to God's chamber is always open. Through the miracle of God's grace which you have received through faith in Jesus, you will never be turned away. And when God draws near to you, good things always happen. Your life gets better every day.

James says, **Wash your hands!** This is picture language for repenting of your sins, for all the evil things your hands have done. Soap and water cannot remove the spots of spiritual dirt. Electric shock cannot remove from our minds or hearts the guilt of our sins. But the cleansing blood of Jesus can. It can eradicate every spot and stain of sin and present us pure before our Father in heaven.

James refers to his hearers as "double minded." One of the tricks in the bag of Satan's temptations is to see our religious life as separate from our day to day living. We could say it is like being Christians on Sundays and live like pagans the rest of the week. James is encouraging us to break down the walls that isolate our faith life, our spiritual conduct, from the rest of our life and instead to be single minded, singly devoted to God. There is no mutual co-existence between our selfishness and God.

If and when you find joy in sinning, it is necessary for you to approach God with the conviction that you have been offending Him with your attitudes and actions. **Grieve, mourn and wail** are encouragements to the penitent heart. Jesus has taught us that it is better to weep now than to have to do so in hell.

Ego, selfishness, and pride stand in the way of person coming clean with God in repentance. James says, **Humble yourselves before the Lord.** There can be no spiritual health and soundness in a person until he acknowledges his sinful failures and asks God for mercy instead of demanding wages. Notice that such a person is not left there before God to live his life in the dust of contrition and repentance. The text says, **God will lift him up!** Wow! We are not outcasts after all. We are privileged members of the kingdom of God. This is a place of peace with our almighty God. We have been exalted to the position of God's own children and heirs of the eternal treasures of heaven.

As there is no co-existence between ego and God, so there is no cooperation between ego and love. James instructs us who bear the name of Christ, **Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?** What God is saying here is that there is no place for sinful judging when it comes to our neighbor. To judge another person is to claim to be able to read that person's mind and heart. For example, the person says to you, "I am sorry" and you respond by saying, "No, you're not!" Sinful judging is to think that you are morally superior to the other person. Sinful judging goes beyond criticizing the other person's sin. Sinful judging makes that person feel worthless in the process. Sinful judging is criticizing another person without love for that person. It is an attempt to make you feel bigger and better.

To do this is dangerous. It is to insult the very Law of God by appearing to be above the law. There is only one judge and those who sinfully judge others are insulting God by putting themselves in His place.

Unconditional surrender of our ego, our selfishness and our pride is the path to peace with God. This comes with faith in Jesus, our only Savior. As members of God's eternal kingdom by His grace, we rejoice in the freedom and the peace such unconditional surrender brings. We also live at peace with our neighbor. Amen.