

# Drawing Nigh to God

*“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:7-10).*

James asks the church, which includes its young people, why there are wars and fightings among themselves. For young people this certainly would include harassment and bullying. James informs us that it is because we lust after the world which is spiritual adultery. Hence, friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore, he calls them to be friends with God.

In order to do this we must humble ourselves, for it is only to them that God gives grace. We are not equals with God for he is the Creator and we are the creatures; he the redeemer and we the redeemed. Beginning with vs. 7 James shows us what true humility is. He does this with ten different admonitions. The central and positive admonition is in vs. 8. “Draw nigh to God.”

This is an essential idea seen throughout history. God dwelt in the temple in the midst of his people. Enoch walked with God. Abraham was the friend of God. Moses spoke with God face to face. That essential idea remains in the New Dispensation although the types are gone. God’s temple is the body of Christ. It becomes so through the cross and the resurrection: through the state of humiliation and resulting glory.

God dwells in Christ, for through the Spirit of Christ we are attached to that body and become that body. In this way we come nearer to God and to the brethren. We see, then, that drawing nigh to God is not a mere physical act, but a spiritual-ethical act of faith. We emphasize this, for God in the spiritual-ethical sense can be far away. We are sinners and sin is departure from God, called spiritual fornication. The sinner banishes God from his thoughts, walks in his own way, afar from God. In addition, God resists the proud. He is angry over the sinner and gives him over to his sin. His curse rests upon his house and he says, “Depart from me, I know thee not”.

To be spiritually-ethically near to God we do not have to go physically to Mt. Zion. To be near God is the conscious awareness of his presence in his favor. It is to walk step by step in the consciousness of his guidance and dependence. It is to experience in life all the blessings of salvation through Christ. That includes all his love, mercy, and favor. It means to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. It is to be God-conscious in all that we do. As the Psalmist says in Psalm

16:8, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." One must commit his way to him in constant prayer. We walk, as it were, hand in hand, serving and confessing him, experiencing his guidance, approval, and fellowship.

We do this, first of all, by resisting the devil, that slanderer who slanders us before God as he did with Job and as he slanders God to us as he did with Eve in paradise. As an adversary he is formidable for he has thousands of demons to assist him in his wicked work who are in absolute subjection to him. He has vast and great powers himself for he was an high angel and did not lose his powers. He has the whole world on his side, direct access to our thoughts, desires, and inward life. He has vast experience in the work of destroying the church and purpose of God. As our foe he is utterly ruthless, never vacations, never ceases fire, and is always busy. Our sinful flesh is fertile ground and a good ally for him.

James admonishes us to resist the devil. That is an essential impossibility because the ally is in our own flesh. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness set a pattern for resistance. One weapon which the devil can not stand against is the Word of God. One must always quote the Word of God to him; it is the sword of the Spirit, the whole armor of God. We can not resist him in our own strength. Christ has principally defeated him on the cross. The devil can do nothing without the will of Christ for Christ rules sovereignly. Therefore, we can resist and stand only by faith. If you so resist him and do so properly he shall flee from you. The devil is by us until death, but after each confrontation he will flee away defeated. Each time we resist him will give us added strength to meet the next attack. If we do not resist, then we are weaker until finally there is no resistance at all. Resisting the devil is the antithetical side of submitting to God.

Thus we turn to the positive admonition to submit yourselves to God. Here the whole concept of humility is implied. God gives grace to the humble, therefore, submit. This is not natural at all for a young person, but this is the commandment of God. To submit is to arrange and group yourselves under the commander. A subordinate must obey. To do this under God means that you arrange yourself under His law, recognize His superiority and do this with your whole life.

Next we have "cleansing your hands, ye sinners." This is a reference to the Old Dispensation priests who had to wash their hands before they might come before the Lord. Hands are expressive of outward conduct. It does not mean that we are authors of our own salvation and can come only after being perfect. It does mean that we must wash our hands in the blood of Christ. He only can ascend the holy hill of Mt. Zion. The only way to God is through Christ. Sinners miss the mark, for they shoot in the opposite direction of the target.

“Purify your hearts, ye double-minded” refers to our inner life. To be double-minded is to halt between two opinions. We want God and the world. We want to be saints and sinners. We seek forgiveness but cherish secret sins. Thus, purify your hearts in the blood of Christ. Forsake your two-mindedness at the foot of the cross for you can not serve God and mammon.

Next is a trio of closely related admonitions. James says be afflicted, that is, labor heavily, endure hardships, therefore, feel wretched and miserable. Secondly, we are to mourn, which is an inward sorrow not manifested outwardly. Thirdly, we are to weep, a visible and external weeping, sobs. As mentioned these are closely related. To be afflicted results in mourning and in weeping. This comes from the heavy labor of carrying the burden of sin and guilt. It is to know sin in a personal and experiential way. We realize how horrible sin is, that it is committed against the most high God. The man who knows this mourns, which is soon manifested in outward expression. This is the only way to draw nigh to God for it leads to the cross. We must come with a broken and contrite heart which leads to confession and repentance, which is not once in a life time, but daily.

Then, let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness, both of which are brought on by the former three admonitions. By laughter is meant the laughter of the world, the silly laughter which tries to cover up deep and profound misery. It is a laughter which mocks holy things, obscenities, and life’s tragedies. It is often cold and ruthless meant to cut, hurt, and destroy. For the child of God it comes from down in the heart. It is rooted in peace with God and spiritual well-being. True happiness arises by first mourning, for in mourning we go to the cross where we find forgiveness and salvation. By joy is meant the joy of the world; the joking of sin we turn to sadness.

The final admonition is humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord. It is to make very low, which refers to our spiritual attitude of ourselves. As creatures we are very low in relation to God who is almighty and sovereign Lord over all. This is a spiritual knowledge through faith.

Heeding these admonitions there is blessedness. He will draw nigh to you. He draws nigh to us in Christ through the cross, the resurrection, and the pouring out of the Spirit. The future tense indicates that we will not have this conscious experience of his favor unless we turn to him. This is not on the basis of our turning, but the way. This is a promise. We need this promise in the consciousness of our sins. We need not be afraid for he will draw nigh. His covenant life engulfs us so that our life is filled with joy and peace.

The second part of this blessedness is that He shall lift you up. This is exaltation from one's lowliness. He raises us from a prone position before him to our feet and onto a throne beside him. In so doing he takes us into his fellowship. He forgives and pardons, making us taste of his blessedness. The final exaltation will be when we are brought to glory. This is the promise of God himself which can not fail and which shall surely be fulfilled.