

Submit yourself to God!

James 4:1-12

Beloved, according to the dictionary the word submit ... or submission ... is "the action of accepting or yielding to a superior force or to the will or authority of another person." It is a word that causes many in society to react with mixed emotions ... and this is because we live in a world, that in many senses, rejects authority ... In an article taken from 'Table Talk' magazine the author had the following to say, "Children disobey parents with impunity, and people reject the admonitions of leaders in the church, the government, and other social institutions. In some cases, various authorities have brought on this rejection themselves by offering poor leadership or by abusing those whom they supervise. Yet, this is not true in every case, and even many good and faithful authorities are rejected. We live in a culture that hates authority, and we have all been affected by this disdain for authority in one way or another." And so, when the word submission is used ... it is usually met with an element of disdain ... especially when Christians use it in terms of the relationship between a husband and wife ... and even more so when it is used with regards to our lives and God ... I have heard countless people say that being a Christian is so boring ... or so limiting ... "why would you want to submit yourself to a God that makes all the "fun" things bad" ... And yet as Christians ... our submission to God ... to His authority ... is vital in our walk of faith because He is a loving Father ... He knows what is best for us... and the blessings and peace that we gain from humbly surrendering and submitting ourselves to Him daily **are** a gift of grace that nothing in this world can compare to. And this is not because God is a tyrant ... or power hungry ... But rather our submission means to arrange ourselves under the command of a divine viewpoint rather than to live according to your old way of life based on a human viewpoint ... It is the process of surrendering your own will to that of our Father in heaven's.

And this is what James is exhorting believers of all ages to consider ... and yes ... the letter of James is addressed to the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations" as Gordon explained to last week ... but ... this beautiful letter does force all who submit their lives to Christ to really consider how consistent the way we live is with our confession faith ... something that should cause all of us to examine our lives more closely ... And so, this morning we will be looking at James chapter 4 verses 1 to 12 in three parts ... Firstly we will be looking at verses 1 to 3, God is sovereign ... Second in versus 4 to 10, God is gracious ... and third in versus 11 and 12, God is just.

James chapter 4 verses 1 to 3 says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

God is sovereign. Beloved ... a very sad reality in church circles around the world is the constant bickering and fighting that happens ... and not only between churches of different denominations ... but between members of the same denomination and often between members of the same church ... those who share pews ... and those who worship together ... I remember reading a story of a young farmer in America who learnt this lesson the hard way ... hearing a commotion in his backyard, he

looked outside and saw his daughter and several playmates in a heated argument ... When he intervened, his daughter called back ... "Dad, we are just playing church" ... Unfortunately ... this is not a new problem ... In verse 1 we read of James posing quite a challenging question to the troubled churches in his address ... "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" You see, if we look at the context to which James was writing ... Rival "would-be" teachers grasped at the imagined good life of being Christian Rabbi's ... literally referring to themselves as 'great ones'. They were fueled by "bitter envy" and "selfish ambition" ... they fell to "disorder and every evil practice". They praised God in the church ... crying out "Blessed be He! Blessed be He!" ... at every mention of God's Name ... and then verbally cursed their brothers and sisters in Christ ... and why ... because their focus ... their desire ... was not to surrender to the Sovereign God of the universe ... but rather it was self-promotion they were after ... At Bible study on Wednesday we discussed very briefly a trend known as little god syndrome ... where people believe that they are in fact little gods ... after all we were created in the image of the Triune God ... beloved ... self-promotion is one of the greatest down falls of society ... and people will go to horrible lengths to ensure that they reach the top ... that they leave a legacy ... that their name will be known and remembered for centuries ... there is no desire to leave a legacy that points to God ... where your name is forgotten ... but your faith ... your submission to God is remembered ... and this will be seen in your prayer life ... for those whose hearts have been turned to Christ ... will not pray as those of the world ... those praying for personal gain as if God were a vending machine ... but rather ... the true believer ... submits themselves fully to God's good and sovereign will ... their prayer life reflects their faith life ... for rather than asking for things ... they thank God for everything! When God is glorified in what you do ... you will be satisfied in all you achieve ...

James chapter 4 verses 4 to 10 say, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." 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."

God is gracious. And we should be ever grateful for His grace. Have you ever sat and considered how easy it is to be distracted by the things of world ... how desperately we want to fit in ... be popular ... be known ... and yet the reality is this ... if you are friends with the world ... if you entertain things that are not of God ... you are in fact any enemy of God ... on my left ankle I have a tattoo of a fence that surrounds a forest ... now I wont go into the details of the full tattoo ... but the fence is reminder to me that as Christians ... we cannot sit on the fence because the fence belongs to satan ... for as the Scriptures say, 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.' And this is because our God is a jealous God ... He wants all of you or nothing ... just look at the very first commandment ... "I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me." And beloved

... as John Calvin so rightly said ... our hearts are idol making factories ... when we do not submit ourselves to God fully ... we find things of this world to worship ... clothing ... sports teams ... celebrities ... and this may feel like a personal attack to some ... but even our cell phones ... beloved ... any thing we place before God we make our god ... and yet by the grace of God ... He sent His one and only Son into the world to die for you and for me ... Beloved ... Christ declared that it was finished on the cross ... and finished it is ... no longer would those who submit themselves to Christ alone ... who turn away from their wicked ways and repent be separated from God ... but rather by His grace and our submission we are set free from the grip of sin ... and though we will never be perfect ... God will not look at us and see our imperfections ... but rather He will look at us and see the complete work of Jesus' sacrifice! He showed us a grace like no other ... and this grace continues, as Annie Johnson Flint wrote, "He gives more grace when the burdens grow greater; He sends more grace when the labours increase; To added afflictions He adds His mercy, to multiplied trials His multiplied peace. When we have exhausted our store of endurance, when our strength has failed and the day is half done: when we reach the end of our hoarded resources, our Father's full giving is only begun. His love has no limits, His grace has no measure, His power has no boundary known unto men; for out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He gives, and gives, and gives again." And this is why we, like those receiving James's letter, need to draw nearer to God ... and in turn ... He will draw nearer to us ... for the more you know God ... the more inclined you will be to submit yourself to Him fully ... enjoying His grace which gives hope ... brings joy ... and ignites a heart of love for all God's people.

James chapter 4 verses 11 and 12 say, "Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them 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?"

God is just. I remember hearing a story of a old church in America ... and it was a rather charismatic church ... and as the pastor was preaching there was a group of elderly ladies sitting in the front ... and with every statement the pastor made ... the woman would respond with a loud amen ... you shall not steal ... amen ... you shall not murder ... amen ... you shall not covet ... amen ... and then the pastor said ... you not slander and gossip ... to which the one woman responded ... paster ... now you are just interfering ... Beloved ... we have been commanded to love our brothers and sisters in Christ ... we are commanded to love them as Christ loved us ... which means instead of talking down to them ... instead of speaking ill of them ... We should rather seek to encourage them ... to build them up in the fellowship of believers ... It is so sad to see churches divided because of rumors, because of animosity that leads to jealousy and judgment ... and this kind of judgement is not judgement with the desire to bring a fellow believer closer to Christ ... but rather judgment that seeks to put the other person down and elevate self ... is not sad how self-obsessed the world is ... to the point where so often the only reason people turn to God is if they have needs ... there is a saying that more earnest prayers are said in the hospital than in the church walls ... are we not called to be a lighthouse ... should the church not be the leading example of what it means to love and care for those created in the image God ... you see God is both just and justifier ... and where we judge by appearance ... God judges by

the heart ... for the heart reveals all ... as the writer of Proverbs says, "Above all else, guard your heart, For everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips." We have to submit ourselves to God's just judgment ... for He is the only One Who is just ... by His sovereign grace ... He judges us according to our submission to Christ ... and as it is written in Job chapter 40, "Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm: "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at all who are proud and bring them low, look at all who are proud and humble them, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you."

Beloved, realistically submission to God is not easy ... in a world filled with distractions and offers of comfort that distract us from our purpose in this life ... we can quite easily fall into the trap of being lukewarm fence sitters that though we say we follow Christ ... actually do not submit our lives to God ... we do not offer Him our all ... and yes we will fall short ... there will be days that are harder than others ... but beloved ... these days ... these trials ... should not distract us from our **GOAL** ... our **PURPOSE** to worship God and enjoy Him forever. And so beloved when the evil one tempts you to speak ill of a brother or sister ... when he tempts you to promote yourself above your Lord and Savior ... resist with all your strength and might ... and remember when you are weak He is strong ... and His grace is sufficient ... Submit yourself to God with the faith that He will carry you through every trial you ever face for His glory! And I conclude with the words of the beautiful and popular hymn written by Charlotte Elliott in 1835, 'Just as I am'.

"Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bids me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Just as I am, and waiting not To rid my soul of one dark blot, To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind, Yea, all I need in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Just as I am, Thy love unknown Hath broken every barrier down; Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

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