

SESSION TWO

Living with True Humility (*James 1:19-27*)

"The proud offend God by self-exaltation, against other people by self-preoccupation, and against the self by self-deception." ~ J. E. Sanderson, "Pride," in *ISBE* 3:960

I. Overview

James opens his epistle discussing how our responses to the circumstances of life can either produce spiritual growth and maturity or serve as our spiritual downfall. Instead of depending upon ourselves to navigate through life's storms, James calls us to submit to God by turning to Him for wisdom. Viewing trials as a source of humility is not foreign to the Scriptures (cf. Psalms 69 and 119). James further highlights the importance of humility in living life in this next portion of his epistle.

II. The Content

A. True humility requires one to guard his/her tongue (1:19-21).

Rather than arguing and debating with either the Lord or with others, Christians should be quick to listen.

Proverbs 13:3 - "Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives, those who open wide their lips come to ruin." (also, cf. Prov. 15:1; 29:20).

v. 20 - "Righteousness of God" - This phrase most likely references God's standard. Human anger fails to please God.

v. 21 - "humbly welcome" - One commentator aptly notes, "Meekness is indeed important in the passage, not so much because of its contrast to anger but because it is the attitude of those who are God's poor . . . who have come to the end of their resources and wait humbly trustingly upon God." (P. H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 94-95).

"message implanted" - While the term can mean "innate," the context is clearly indicating something received or "implanted". In particular, James is referring to the preaching of the Gospel (cf. 1 Thess 1:6; 2:13; 1 Cor 3:6). Note that a believer's openness and receptive spirit to the work of the word in his/her heart allows him/her to share in a future orientation—an ultimate deliverance from sin and death (cf. 1 Thess 5:9; Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 4:18; 1 Peter 4:18).

B. True humility submits to the Lord in obedience (1:22-25).

v. 22 - "deceives oneself" - The term refers to leading one astray from the faith (cf. Col 2:4). Anyone thinking he or she is a believer but fails to practice good works is not saved (cf. Matt 7:21-27; Lk 6:46-49; Rom 2:13). "To be 'deceived' is to be blinded to the reality of one's true religious state." (D. Moo, *The Letter of James*, 90).

w. 23-25 - Note what the two people observe in this passage:

“perfect law of liberty” - The “law” here is more than merely the Mosaic Law. Rather, James is speaking of the law of Moses as interpreted and supplemented by Christ. This “law” is now “implanted” or “written on the heart” (cf. Jer 31:31-34).

Galatians 5:13 - “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge your flesh, but through love serve one another.”

“to remember” - The phrase is used throughout Scripture to call for a lasting impression on both the heart and the mind (Exod 13:3; Deut 6:12; 2 Peter 1:12-13). For instance, one of the main reasons why the church at Ephesus had “lost their first love” was because they had forgotten how the Lord had saved them (cf. Rev 2:5).

C. True humility moves beyond hypocrisy (1:26-27).

1. It avoids outward religiosity (v. 26).

Pride and deceit go hand in hand (cf. Ps 31:18).

2. It cares for others (v. 27a).

Pride fails to observe the needs of others (cf. Ps 10:2; 73:3-9). God will no longer recognize the worship from those who disregard the oppressed (cf. Isa 1:10-17).

3. It resists temptation (v. 27b).

The initial steps of pride lead one to forsake the Lord (cf. 1 John 2:16) and to be enticed by the world (e.g., self-preservation, self-gratification).

True religion is a lifestyle of humble obedience to the Lord. Ultimately, pride disregards our role within the created order and causes us to live life as we desire (Ezek 28:2, 6, 17).

III. Intersect

Because of God's disdain for pride in conjunction with the severe consequences which can occur because of arrogance, it should not be surprising that Scripture offers these instructional guidelines on how to walk in humility:

- A. A Constant Dependence upon the Lord. The entire salvific experience is based upon humility. The act of repentance compels a person to recognize one's insufficiency before a holy God. But also the sanctification process calls for submission and the recognition of one's dependence upon the Lord (cf. Zeph 2.3).

- B. A Healthy View of Oneself—Willingness to Listen and Accept Criticism. One of the reasons the Lord punished the Israelites economically was because they failed to listen to the judges (cf. Jdgs 2.17). Pride creates stubborn hearts which refuse constructive criticism, a questioning of agenda, or disagreement. A healthy view of oneself also calls for a willingness to admit mistakes and ask for forgiveness.

- C. Attention Focused Outward Rather than Inward. Selfless living helps prevent arrogance from gaining a stronghold in one's life (cf. Phil 2.3).

- D. Quick to Give God and Others Credit. Self-idolization will eclipse a healthy view of self, discredit others, and steal God's glory (cf. Rom 12.9-10).

- E. Accountability. Transparency and openness can help reduce the danger of *hubris* taking a foothold (cf. James 5.16).

"It is better to be a humble member of Christ's flock than to be rich and famous but yet be excluded from hope."
~ 1 Clement 57.2