

Submit yourselves to God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Turn back with me this morning to the passage we read in James chapter 4. The last time we looked, we looked at verses 1 to 7, which gave some kind of ideas of what it was like when we fall away, in a sense, from our first love and go back to the principles of the world, backslide as Christians.

And from verses 7 to 10, we find God's answer, how we keep ourselves from backsliding, how we stop going back, because it's very easy to, after the first little while or when certain things happen, to go away from God and to give up his way.

But he gives us his pattern, which helps us to remain Christ-like. And he says, submit yourselves, in verse 7, therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep, and let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy be heaviness.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. If we follow these patterns or these commands that God gives, Jesus Christ gives through James, then we'll find that as Christians we will be outcasts in society.

[1 : 24] We'll not be the trendy, popular people that we might like to be, but we'll be outcast, because these principles go absolutely straight in the face of the way the world lives and the way the world thinks.

It will make us be going up a one-way street, the wrong way, as far as the world is concerned. And we'll be fighting against the tide of opinion and of people's ideas and of society's ideas if we stand by what Christ wants us to do.

So don't imagine that coming to Christ and coming to church is the easy option, the soft option, because we'll find that if we stand by Jesus Christ, that we will be very much going in the opposite direction to everybody else.

And James here gives us really, I think, six essentials for Christian living. Six things that are absolutely basic to living a life where Jesus Christ looks down and smiles and thinks that we are obedient and thinks we are living by his standards.

He gives us six things here. He says the first thing is submitting ourselves to God. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. That is the first thing that absolutely flies in the face of everything that we're brought up to believe and brought up to think, because everyone today says assert yourselves, make yourselves important, get noticed, demand your rights.

[2 : 57] The world says that there must be the complete freedom for the individual. There must be the right to choose, and that right must be more important than any kind of rules, any kind of morality, any kind of thing that matters.

Christ shatters that whole ethos of thinking, and we can't bring that way of thinking into the Christian life. It's unpopular to speak of submission.

Now, sometimes when we were small, when I was small anyway, used to fight, and on the rare occasion that I managed to be on top of someone having thrashed the living daylight out of them in a fight, you would twist their arm up their back, and you would have their face in the mud, and they would be crying for mercy.

And you would say, well, I'll only let you go if you submit. And they would need to admit, they would need to say, I submit, before you let them go. And there was this feeling of mastery and power over someone that you'd got to submit to your superior strength.

This isn't the same kind of submitting that Jesus speaks about. When Jesus says here that we're to submit, it doesn't mean that we're to give in, that we're to kind of just give in to everything Jesus

says, but rather it's more a kind of enlistment word.

[4 : 22] It's an allegiance word. It means that we fall in behind Jesus Christ. We certainly submit to his authority, but it means that we've examined Christ, we've come in faith to Christ, and we see that he's good, so we've fallen behind him.

We've become part of his army. We enlist on his side. And when we submit, we admit our own need. We've come to the conclusion that we can't live in our own strength, and we can't have hope for eternal life without Christ.

It's a call for help. It opens the door to worship. It's the recognition that there's someone that's much bigger, and someone that's much more important than we are. It's the avenue into a whole new world.

It's changing our whole emphasis on life and on living. It's accepting Christ without always understanding everything about what he says. It's faith.

Submission to God. Submission to his authority. It's falling in with Jesus Christ. Now that's tough. That is hard, and that is an unacceptable teaching, and something that the world will throw into the bucket, because Christ is a great servant.

[5 : 41] It's great to have him as a servant. It's great to have Christ at our beck and call, like a pet dog, so that we can still be popular and trendy, and just like everybody else, but we have this kind of addition to our lives.

He's a great servant, but a master, someone that we submit to, someone that we must fall in behind. That is not so popular.

When Jesus taught his hard truths, we're told in the Bible that many of his disciples stopped following him. Many left. He said, I had enough of that.

That teaching's far too hard, and they left, and they followed somebody that was maybe more easy to understand, or pandered more to our own human natures. Will you leave Jesus Christ when his teaching gets hard?

Will I? Will we give in when we don't understand his commands? When we find that his ways go against what we want to do? Will you move away and follow somebody else?

[6 : 45] Will you go in another direction? Will you give up Jesus Christ because his word rebukes, or corrects, or disciplines? Where is it you'll go to for your faith?

Who else will promise you salvation if you leave Jesus Christ? What did you expect when you came to Jesus Christ? Was it a party?

Was it becoming a member in a club? Was it to be entertained? Was it to give you a safety valve for heaven so that if you come every so often you know you'll be safe? Was it for a smulchy, warm feeling inside that you came to Jesus Christ?

Or was it to be a follower, to fall in behind him, to be submissive? He demands our loyalty. He demands our devotion.

And he demands our submission. Because he's much bigger than we are. So the first step to keep us from backsliding is to be submissive to God.

[7 : 50] And then secondly he says that we are to resist the devil and he will flee from us. And the world laughs when we speak about the devil. The world sniggers when we mention a personal foe, somebody who is inherently evil and who is a personal being.

They work out in their imaginations the red man with the forked tail and the horns of the Kit Kat advert. And they laugh and think that what Christians believe is nonsensical.

Do we laugh with them? Do we are finding our belief in these truths that Jesus Christ gives is waning and that we are becoming more like the world in the way we think?

Christ reminds us the devil is a fallen angel. The fallen angel. The devil is the author of sin. The devil has brought this world to its knees, to this place of tragedy where it is now.

The devil is too powerful for us. We need to be defended. We need to overcome the devil. We can't beat his greatest weapon which is death.

[9 : 06] We can only overcome by Christ's strength. There are many people who will mock at the idea of the devil but they will cease to laugh in the face of death which is the last reminder of the devil's work.

Christ alone can protect us because the devil runs from Jesus. And if we defend ourselves by the way Jesus tells us, by putting on Christ's armour, that's the only way to defend ourselves, to resist the temptations, the sin, the failures.

We can only defend ourselves with Christ's strength. Do you believe in the devil or do you disbelieve? Do you care less when we mention the devil or do you laugh nervously? He is happy if that is the case because you're on his side. We resist the devil. Thirdly, we draw near to God.

We're told that we resist the devil and that we draw near to God in verse 8 and he draws near to us. That is the third step we take in the six steps that were given here.

[10:28] Drawing near to God and he will draw near to us. The responsibility for our closeness to Jesus Christ belongs to us.

It's not God's work. It's our work. It starts with us. We are to go to God. We are to draw near. We are to come close. We don't wait for that loving feeling.

We don't wait for Christ to always come near to us. We often think it's the other way around. When God is near to us, when I feel like praying, when I can feel his presence, when there's this spiritual warmth, then I'll come close.

Then I'll draw near. But Christ says it's the other way around. He says you're to go and you're to seek out Christ's fellowship. You're to cultivate fellowship.

You're to use all the means he gives you. You're to use the Bible. You're to use prayer. You're to use worship. You're to use church as often as it meets. You're to use other Christians.

[11:32] You're to use the things he's given us to draw near. Very often you'll start cold. You'll come to church and you'll be dead spiritually. And you'll be fed up and you'll be looking for the end of the service to hurry up.

And you'll not be wanting the word and you'll be bored during the singings. But as you draw near, as the word is explained, as you feel Christ's presence, as you work out your salvation, he draws near to us.

He expects us to use our spiritual muscles, our spiritual energy, our will, and our effort. Christian living doesn't just happen.

That spiritual feeling doesn't just come into our souls without effort. We can't sit back and wait and expect God to bless us for nothing.

We draw near to him and leave the good feelings to Christ because he promises to come near to us. He promises to condescend, the God of the universe, to condescend, to draw near, to come beside you when you're sad, when you're lonely, when you're exhilarant, when you're backslidden.

[12:46] You come near and he returns the favor. Then we're told in the next verse, the fourth qualification for godly living, purify your hearts.

We're told that we are to cleanse our hands, you sinners, and purify our hearts, you double-minded. Purity is another step that brings us closer to God.

But Jesus Christ, unfortunately, is unattractive to most people in this area. He's unattractive to the much bigger group of people outside that aren't coming to God's house.

He's unattractive because people don't need him. They don't see that they need Christ. They don't see the need for being clean inside. So when Christ is mentioned, they run a mile.

It's something they want to avoid at all costs. Church for them is a farce, so they don't come near. But we came to Christ because we saw that our hearts were filthy.

[13:52] We saw that we were sinners. We saw that we needed somebody supernatural to clean them. We saw that we needed to be made new. We were fed up with the way we were and we wanted a change.

We knew we had no hope to live properly in this life. And more importantly, no hope of living forever with Christ. But the world laughs. The world laughs when we talk about being clean.

We talk about purity. But Christ demands not just that we come once and ask for cleansing and purity, but that we keep coming back.

That we keep seeing our need. That we keep wanting the soap of Jesus Christ to wash us clean inside our souls. And we're not to be double-minded in this desire.

That is, we're not to have two standards. We're not to come into the church once a week and with our lips only pray for forgiveness.

[14:57] Pray for being clean the once, the odd time that we come to God's house. and then go from God's house and wallow in a mud bath of sin all week like some exuberant pig swimming in its own mud bath.

That is not how we are to live our Christian lives. Happy in the mud of sin all week and then hypocritically coming on God's day to ask for forgiveness.

That is double-minded Christ says here. It's inconsistent. It's hypocritical. God more than anything else hates two standards where we look at him with one face on a Sunday and turn our backs the rest of the week.

He wants us to ongoingly purify our hearts every day seeing our need hating our sin wanting to be cleansed from that sin.

This is an unpopular teaching. This walks directly in the face of what you'll find outside what we are to be those who follow what Christ says purifying your heart.

[16:16] Fifthly we're given these directions as to staying close to Christ and we're told a very strange thing in verse 9 a very odd step to take as Christians and one that we almost instantly shy away from.

Be afflicted and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness. Who am I trying to kid?

You must be joking bringing this into the message into the steps of living close to God. Good church this one it encourages us to be sad.

What a great advert for Christianity that we want people to go about with their laughter turned to sadness and their joy to heaviness. Well that's really the church showing its through colours that they're really bleak that they're really sad that they're really mournful people and we want nothing to do with that but Christ tells us here that closeness to him involves this step of being sad not all the time but in its proper place and that is an idea that revolts the world outside and it keeps many people away from Jesus because this is pleasure city the gods of today are entertainment are sport are holidays good time living is the order of today people work so that they can earn so that they can have pleasure pleasure is no longer a byproduct it has become the aim in this whole society and our music drowns out the cries of starving children and we don't look at the scenes of brutality and of poverty and of misery and we avoid the truth by diving headlong into this pool of pleasure and the idea of tears instead of laughter the idea of grieving instead of pleasing is an idea that is rejected by society outside and that

I fear has come into my religion and has come into our Christianity today this hedonism which is the worship and pursuit of pleasure we find this command unpopular and morbid we are more interested in slapstick religion in a frothy faith in a pin a false smile on our face purity which is easy and which is superficial but Christ demands times of sadness sadness for our sins because if we've never seen Christ or if we've never seen the price that was paid for our sins then we'll never truly be sad for the things we do wrong when we only see the debt we owe only then will we understand the command and we wouldn't need a command because it will happen naturally there'll be this sadness in us for the things we've done wrong

[19:50] I wonder if you've ever offended a close friend if you've done something and the minute you've done it you've realised that it was an awful thing to say or to do close friend and you know they're hurt what do you do what is your reaction you don't run around skipping and laughing you're sad it's a natural human reaction we're sad when we've offended our best friends and we want to make up and that is all that Christ says that is all he's asking for this friendship where we're sensitive to doing wrong where we're sensitive to offending him where we want to obey him and where we want to please him do we cry when we offend our God by our sinfulness do we care does it matter are we repentant

God demands that we are repentant and sad about our sin but also that we're sad for the world outside without Jesus Christ we're very wealthy here comparatively compared with everywhere else in the world or many places in the world maybe we've seen some of them in the telly and we've wanted to share with them the wealth we have we've started the youth fellowship so we sponsor grace in Kenya because we've got and we want to share with her and she can have what she wouldn't have had otherwise we want to share our wealth with others and we're sad when we see them so poor so naked and so miserable that is all Christ wants us to do spiritually that we have this great wealth that's been given to us we have peace we have joy we have everlasting life we have the friendship of the creator we are truly wealthy we are members of his royal family and so he wants us to be sad when we look outside and see all these people in Roskine that don't have this that don't have the gift we've been given that have never heard that don't know we'd be less than human we'd be less than having a real faith if we didn't feel sorry if we weren't sad for these people

we must have sadness we must sometimes put aside the laughter and be sad because of all the people who don't know but also sad because of just the world in which we live have you ever seen a beautiful an absolutely beautiful garden or something like that maybe gardens don't attract you but something that attracts you that's absolutely beautiful and you see it vandalised one day all the plants ripped out the garden dug up the grass ripped from where it was you've seen a beautiful building and people have come along and they've sprayed on it they've vandalised it and that makes you sad because you see something of beauty and it's been corrupted or it's been deformed it's been defaced well that is what God is wanting us to do with his world as we look outside he wants us to look from his point of view this beautiful world that he made this perfect world world that was made for you and for me to enjoy a world that gives us pleasure a world that gives us enjoyment a world that was made almost as a marriage between humanity and between the cosmos and what has happened

God looks down and he sees it's raped and it's abused and he sees his offers to repair the damage laughed at by the world salvation is mocked he sees inequality he sees the oozing fat wealthy people living side by side with those in grinding poverty the world over he sees disease he sees the destruction of all his resources he sees man's greed at work he sees the perversion of politics the immorality the murder the rape the abuse the children that are left on the dunghill of life he sees these things as the pursuit of our pleasure and our happiness as it really so important and so great that we can never obey our command here to be sad to see as God sees sometimes and to see that it is part of our closeness to

Jesus when we grieve and when our hearts are heavy that's the fifth and the last thing he tells us in his pattern for a life of Christianity which keeps us close to Jesus Christ is humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he shall lift you up there is that great promise that Jesus Christ will lift Christians up that he will lift us up through the sadness through the hardship through the discipline through the obedience through the submission that he lifts us up if we're humble if we're humble to him in the world pride rules the roost but Christ wants us to be humble and if we're humble he will lift us up lift us up to be useful Christians lift us up to be

Christians who will persevere Christians who will see the truth who will spread the truth who will alleviate the pain who will bring light into darkness who will share the good news who will reach out to the lost he will lift us up so that we'll be seen we'll not be insignificant puny people passing through life unnoticed by anyone bringing nobody to Christ changing nothing in this community making no difference no headway into the pursuit of the evil one and into his victory over this area we follow him closely we are humble to him wholeheartedly and he lifts us up to be wholesome people satisfied blessed joyful with the great gift of eternal life there's no place for pride in our worship and the minister and the elders and the members and the adherents there's no place for pride pride in God's house is rejected by God himself for there's pride and we find that there's backsliding knocking at the back door because pride wants ease pride wants popularity pride wants self as number one pride loves to quarrel pride loves to pick out small things and make them very important pride is the devil's gift it is his work we will be noticed only when we are humble and when Christ lifts us up amen let us pray gracious God we ask that we would take the challenging and awesome words of scripture the powerful words the words that leave us without an excuse the words that give us the absolute clear direction that we need the words that demand effort demand submission and above all point us to

[28 : 02] Jesus Christ because we can't do these things in our own strength we must come to him by faith and ask him to be Christians living by his pattern may we be a people who live by the pattern God gives us submissive Christians Christians resisting the evil one help us to draw near to God and make use of every opportunity that is provided in Roskeen congregation to draw near to God help us to purify our hearts help us oh Lord God to be sad at the right times to be sad with those who mourn and to be sad when we see our own sin and the persecution we face and the laughter of the world and Lord also to be humble we know that the demands are great we know that we are being asked to do a tremendous amount but Lord let us tap into the power and the love of Jesus Christ who can help us and who can strengthen us and who can make us extraordinary people we ask this in Jesus name Amen