

• *Instructions to respectable backslidden friends*

1. They must humble themselves

• *We must acknowledge sin and submit*

2. They must resist the devil

• *We refuse to give in to Satan's pressure*

3. They must draw near to God

• *Something that we must do*

4. They must cleanse themselves

• *Hands – what we do*

• *Hearts – our attitudes*

James now comes to tell his respectable but backslidden friends what they must do to return to God. He says to them, '*So humble yourselves submissively to God. Resist the devil, and he will run from you*¹. *Come near to God and God will come near to you*²'.

1 4:7

2 4:8a

1. **They must humble themselves.** We notice how this comes at the beginning and the end of what James says. This is the main point. The other things he says are telling them how to do it and what is involved. They have already experienced the opposition of God. If they will humble themselves they will experience His 'greater grace'. It means that we acknowledge our sin and we submit to whatever God is asking from us. It might involve a great struggle. None of us submits to the call of godliness easily! We may be temperamentally 'nice' in one way or another, but when God actually demands that we submit to something He has shown us, it rouses our resistance. But we must submit!

2. **They must resist the devil.** The quarrelling and discrimination among James' friends actually comes from the devil! When we truly start living for God, Satan has ways of attacking and discouraging. He will appear as an angel of light wanting to lead us astray. He might terrorize us with fearful happenings in our lives, but we resist him. It means we refuse to give in to his pressure and we insist in going the way God is leading us. When Satan sees we are obeying God regardless of the consequences it defeats him. There is nothing He can do about it, if we walk in the pathway of obedience.

3. **They must draw near to God.** This is something we have to do! It does not say 'God will draw near to you, and then you will draw near to God'. God has already drawn near to us in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now if we want God to be closer still we must draw near to God! It involves having fellowship with God, and all that will happen as we seek to do so. As we get closer to God we shall find God speaking to us. Then, if we wish to keep getting closer to God, we have to take note of what He says. There is a wonderful promise attached to the command. God will indeed come close to us.

4. **They must cleanse their behaviour and their attitudes.** James says, '*Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded people*¹'.

1 4:8

He speaks of 'your hands' and 'your hearts'. The first speaks of what we do. The hands are what we use to do things. The heart is the inner personality. We have to deal both with our actions and our attitudes, our hands and our heart. They must deal with their behaviour first! They must stop discriminating against the poor, stop their quarrelling. They are Christian people. They already have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are able to take action and cleanse their hands of all that is wrong in their lives. They can do it and they must do it.

• *Dealing with our hearts means examining ourselves in the presence of God*

Then they must deal with their hearts. When we are turning away from sin we must not be in too much of a hurry. Often we want to stop doing something and then hurriedly press on. We must indeed press on with serving God but we do have to deal with our hearts! In James' friends, what was it that led to this discrimination? What was it that led to this sin or that sin? It was our pride, our refusal to consult God, our impatience to get something for ourselves. Our inner life was wrong and it led to a mistake in our behaviour. So we have to cleanse our hands, but then we must cleanse our hearts. It will involve examining ourselves in the presence of God. We have been 'double-minded', pulling sometimes in the direction of God's will, but pulling sometimes in the direction of our own sins and weaknesses.

5. They must take time to consider what they have done

5. They must take time to consider what they have done. *'Grieve and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into heaviness¹. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you².* We must notice here that the mourning for sin comes after the turning to God. A lot of people want to put it the other way around. But this mourning for sin does not prepare us to come to God. We come to God as we are! And of course there is no special value in weeping! It is not that we work ourselves up emotionally until we weep!

1 4:9
2 4:10

• *For a time we must leave aside our laughter and see what we are and what we have done*

What James has in mind is simply that we face ourselves and what we have done! These people to whom James is writing have been treating poor people badly. They have rejected people that God wants! God has chosen the poor, but they have rejected the poor. Let them be sorry for what they have done! Let them consider what God feels about the way they have behaved! We all have to stop and think about ourselves from time to time. If we truly are honest it will lead to much sorrow, for we shall discover things about ourselves that we do not like to see. But we must admit what we see and take it to God with true sorrow. For a time we must leave aside our laughter and see what we are and what we have done. We do not have to feel rejected by God, but we do need to see the truth about ourselves. Then God will reassure us and our joy will return.

• *Then... our joy will return*

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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