

West Kirby URC 26 October 2014 – James Chapter 4 – Submit Yourself to God Not to Your Own Selfish Desires

Alpha Joke re weaknesses of 4 ministers (theft, drink, lust).

The overriding theme of the book of James is self-control and in chapter 4 he is focussing on our tendency to be self-centred rather than God-centred and encouraging us to submit to God rather than pursue our own agenda.

In verse 1 he asks what causes fights and quarrels amongst believers and then answers the question himself. **Read verses 1-2.** It is the selfish desire to have what **we** want, to have our own way. James knows that conflict and disagreement are harmful within a body of believers and I think that this is very important for us all to remember as we are shortly to consider radical proposals for re-ordering our church buildings. We will not all agree. Some will want minimal change because they love the building as it is and some will want maximum change because they think this is necessary to attract new believers. Whatever your personal view, James is saying that we should be seeking God's will in prayer and doing it the right way.

He tells us the wrong way to approach prayer – **Read verse 3** - asking for the wrong things or asking for things with the wrong motives. Too often, he says, we ask for things from selfish motives, asking only for things that enhance our life or give us pleasure. Things which affect our well-being or the well-being of those we love. Why are we so often self-centred in prayer? James tells us that it is because we are an adulterous people – **Read verse 4** – A graphic way of saying we are unfaithful to God. He tells us that friendship with the world is incompatible with friendship with God – we cannot serve 2 masters. Trying to do so leads to what James calls a “double-minded” life (**verse 8**). We must be single-minded in our commitment to Jesus. Too often we chase what the world tells us is good – material things, things that allow us to spoil ourselves.

Is James a killjoy? Does he want us to live dull, drab lives? No! There is nothing wrong with wanting the good things in life. God gives us good gifts and wants us to enjoy them. It is only when we put the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment **above** obedience to God that we get our priorities wrong. Jesus himself told us in **Matthew 6:33** “seek **first** the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...”

It is also wrong if we seek our pleasure or our advancement at the expense of others by putting them down, treating them badly or simply by acting selfishly.

James's cure for dealing with this sort of selfish behaviour is shown in **verse 6** (Read). Pride receives God's opposition whilst humility receives God's grace. Pride

makes us self-centred, humility makes us God (or other people) centred. James goes on to tell us (**verse 7**) that when we resist giving in to our own selfish desires the devil will flee but when we humble ourselves before God He will draw near. We are told “Come near to God and He will come near to you.” How do we come near to God? James tells us this in **verse 8** (Read). Figuratively “wash your hands”. When we acknowledge our failings and weaknesses we receive forgiveness (our heart is purified). **Verses 9-10** tell us that our repentance must be sincere and meaningful and **verse 11** tells us that having been forgiven we should not judge anyone else. That is not our job! Our own personal relationship with God is **our** business – everybody else’s relationship with God is between them and Him (although we are allowed to encourage and love people, just not to judge them!) Only God can judge (**verse 12**).

We each need to ask ourselves whether we are too quick to judge others. Do we build people up or tear people down? Remember what was said last week about the power of the tongue!

As we embark on the task of re-ordering our church buildings and put forward our own views whilst listening to the differing views of others let us all remember that we are meant to be seeking God’s way forward together not simply pushing our own individual agenda.

TELL STORY OF BASQUE CHURCH

Finally, **verses 13-17** warn us about over-confidence in our own plans and ideas (READ). Nobody knows what tomorrow will bring. Whilst it might be prudent to plan ahead wisely we need to acknowledge that whatever our plans might be God’s plans might be rather different.

Remember – **Matthew 6:33**, Seek first the kingdom of God.... Let us pray.