As we continue our verse-by-verse study through this God-inspired life-changing, and grace-giving book, we come to a section I’m calling “the 10 commandments of humble repentance.” You could just as easily call “commandments of grace” because James 4:6 sets up these 10 commands with grace to the humble, these 10 imperatives, 10 illustrations of the humble repentant person who receives God’s grace. Commandments from God’s law you may not think of as grace, but even the original 10 commandments can be seen through the lens of words of grace to those who know they fall short and humbly repentantly seek grace.

James 4 (NASB95) 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

1. Submit to God (v. 7a)

As we saw last time, the “therefore” in the first phrase in v. 7 is a connecting word back in context to the verses before. Certainly the closing word of v. 6 (“humble”) is connected to the word “submit” in v. 7 as well as the last command in v. 10 (“humble yourselves”). From start-to-finish, this whole section is bookended and bracketed by God’s grace to the humble, in v. 10 God’s uplifting grace. If you want to be lifted up today, if you want to receive more grace, the greater grace of v. 6, don’t just focus on the promise of grace in this passage; focus on the process of grace before v. 10b.

Humble repentance is necessary to receive God’s grace, but God’s grace is also necessary for our humble repentance to even take place! Salvation and sanctification is all of grace and all a gift, though human responsibility and repentance is involved. It’s not mere free will or effort in the flesh. Grace empowers submission to God. Phil. 3:21 says God’s power is what submits all to Himself. And repentance is not a work of man, it’s a gift God grants to man:

Acts 11:18 …God has granted repentance to the Gentiles…
2 Tim. 2:24 … God may grant them repentance …

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father … 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth … [Amplified Bible says it was of God’s “own free will that He gave us birth,” i.e., the new birth/salvation]

Humility starts knowing salvation is all of grace, and that’s not just true of salvation, but all that we are and all we have is all of grace.
Paul said: *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me* (1 Cor. 15:10)

God’s grace doesn’t exclude our effort, it empowers it. Grace is not license to do as we please, but the power to do as we should. We don’t just believe in saving grace, the grace that regenerates a spiritually dead sinner and makes him alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5), we also believe in sustaining grace, sanctifying grace (James 4:6) that we need continually, more grace, future grace.

So when v. 7 says “submit yourselves,” you must do this yourself but you can’t do this *by yourself*, or any of these 10 commands apart from grace. You can’t “resist the devil” by yourself (v. 7b), but as Paul says in Eph. 6, you can do so in the Lord’s armor and in the strength of His might. You must “draw near to God” (v. 8), but we know from other passages that no man can do this without God drawing them first by His grace. When v. 8 commands us to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts, that is part of repentance, but we know that only God can purify our hearts and cleanse us (remember repentance is God’s gift not our independent effort).

As John 1:16 says “we have received … grace for grace” (NKJV). We need to do what James 4:7-10 says to receive grace, and we even need grace to do what v. 7-10 says, so that it’s all by grace, not of works, so that no one may boast (and so God gets all glory)!

But recognizing “*by the grace of God I am what I am*” does not negate our labor, it should motivate our labor, as Paul said in that same verse it caused him to labor more than all by God’s grace. It is in Christ we live, with Christ, by Christ, from Christ, through Christ, to Christ. Paul says in Galatians 2 (KJV) 20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God …* 21 *I do not frustrate the grace of God …*

One writer has pointed out that when Paul says “Not I, but Christ,” the capital letter “C” that Christ starts with is the capital letter “I” that has been bent (fitting because “I” must be bent over in submissive humility and reshaped to follow Christ who calls us to die to self, and do it daily -- end of self, all about Christ now).

Submit, v. 7 commands. Don’t keep your head up as a stiff-necked defender of your desires (v. 1-2), bow your neck to the King’s foot, so you can truly submissively sing to God these words:

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.
Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.
Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.
All that you have and all that you are, surrender to all that He is in Christ. Submit to the Commander but don’t surrender to the enemy

2. Resist the Devil (v. 7b)

This is a Greek military term that we get a medical term from today: anthistemi (anti + histemi = to cause to stand, together “to stand against” – medical term anti-histamine comes from this Grk word, an agent that resists histamine and fights against allergic reactions).

Having a healthy relationship with God comes first, then fighting the enemy. Verse 7 says “submit to God” intentionally before the 2nd half of v. 7 “resist the devil.” Before we can stand before Satan, we must bow before God. You must first have your allegiance surrendered to the Lord to fight for His army then you can fight against the enemy without surrendering or losing. Don’t forget Satan, but don’t focus on him either, focus on God (v.7a, 8a).

In context, the devil’s work is more subtle than we usually think. Ex: in v. 1-2, our desires for good things that have become imbalanced, our selfishness we don’t realize and instead rationalize because we can think of good reasons why we deserve what we desire (even proof-texting like Satan). But truth is, the only thing we deserve biblically is eternal punishment with the devil!

In v. 6-7, the devil must be resisted by us first being humble and submissive (order significant). When we’re not as humble as we should be (which we don’t think is such a big sin and often don’t even realize as sin) we’re easy prey for the prowling lion. Don’t just think of Satan in occult wickedness, witchcraft, Ouija boards, the paranormal. Eph. 4:26-27 says we give the devil a foothold in more “normal things” like not dealing with anger in our heart on a daily basis, letting the sun go down before we have repented of and removed all bitter grudges and have forgiven at least in the heart attitude of Mark 11:25. Pride is somewhere in the mix in all sin from the first sin of Lucifer to the first sin of our first parents (in both cases “self” desiring too highly like v. 1-2, wanting to be in charge and like God in a way God had not allowed, to elevate self). Pride/self is devilish if not submitted humbly to God in charge.

James and Peter were co-pastors in the Jerusalem church in its early years (Gal. 2:9), and this is one area their writings are so similar you wonder if they co-taught this subject in Sunday school. 1 Peter 5:1-4 instructs the elders how to lead and shepherd the flock in the church, exercising oversight but not in a harsh rule or lording authority but with loving authority under the authority of the chief shepherd, who is Jesus. Then v. 5 instructs the younger (same term as in Titus 2) in particular to submit to the elders, and then it says all should submit regardless of age or position:

“... all of you, clothe yourselves with humility [daily putting on] toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. [word-for-word same as James 4] 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you [also same phrases as James 4] at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him... [one of the ways to humble self is through humble submissive prayer for all our needs and cares, as James 4:2b and 13-16 demonstrate]. 8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. [in context, be watching out for lack of humility in your heart at all times] Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour [note the warning of the devil after warning of pride] 9 But resist him [same command as James 4:7a]. firm in your faith
In both cases, and also in Eph. 6:13, we are told to stand firm in spiritual warfare. It doesn’t say run or retreat or give in, it says resist the spiritual enemy. It doesn’t say rebuke the devil, it says resist the devil. Turn forward a few books to Jude (before Rev.). I’ve had friends who when they pray, say things like “devil, I rebuke you; devil, I bind you,” etc. One friend would go on to rail against the devil, and rebuke and speak as if he personally had authority in himself over Satan (and as if Satan actually was there and listening, not elsewhere on earth). But look at Jude, v. 8:

8 Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”

But these men revile the things which they do not understand

If the highest angels don’t rebuke Satan directly, why should we? We can pray to the Lord to deal with the devil, but no mere human being saying formulas like “Satan, I bind you” does anything. Turn forward to Revelation 20 and you will see the one occasion in the Bible where Satan is bound and it’s by God’s doing after the return of Jesus as King in Revelation 19, when His kingdom comes, then God will have His angel bind the great fallen angel to incarcerate

Revelation 20

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time ... 7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations ...

My understanding of the book of Revelation is futurist (events of Rev. 6-20 mostly future) and pre-millennial, which just means that I believe the return of Jesus in Revelation 19 comes pre (before) the millennium (“thousand years”) in the future in Rev 20 (other views say ch. 20 describes events prior to 2nd coming in ch. 19). I believe this binding of Satan described here is a future event, in contrast to a-millennial brethren who would argue that vs. 1-3 describe Satan’s current condition since Jesus died and rose. It’s precisely texts like James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5 that make it hard for me to accept a-mil arguments that say that since the cross (30 A.D.) Satan’s already been bound (in the sense of “restricted”? ) and thrown in the abyss of Rev. 20:3, which has been shut, and even further sealed over him, as v. 1-2 say, locked with a key Satan doesn’t have access to, and bound with a great chain, so he’s no longer able to deceive the nations.

[in fairness to my a-mil friends, some of whom talked with me after this message, they felt this was not a fair presentation of their view, and would recommend for a good book for laypeople interested in various views and why many orthodox godly men hold to the a-mil view (including a high number of my theological heroes): Sam Waldron’s, The End Times Made Simple. My a-mil brethren do take James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:8 as seriously as I do, but I am not convinced that they have taken some of the details of Revelation 20 seriously enough, and a good book I would recommend to a reader wanting to see the basic arguments for the pre-mil view while giving responses from other views in their own words, see Matt Waymeyer, Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate. I love and can fellowship with those holding other views, and pray God will grow me in grace and truth]
Of course Revelation uses figurative language, but it conveys a reality. When James writes to Jews in all nations and Peter and other NT writers address Christians in the nations long after 30 A.D. (45-95 A.D.), they describe the devil as being as active as ever and rather than the devil’s power being restricted, the devil’s power is what needs to be resisted. He still is going to and fro seeking people to destroy in 1 Peter 5:8, which doesn’t sound like his activity has changed at all since Job 1-2 (4,000 years ago). If Rev. 20:1-3 happened to the devil in 30 A.D., how does that language fit with later NT descriptions of Satan as “the ruler of this age,” “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience [the whole world of sinners],” “the god of this age who blinds the mind of unbelievers”, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one,” etc. (2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 2:2-3, 1 John 5:19)?

I respectfully disagree with the view that Satan’s deceiving power has been radically restrained in this age -- if anything, it seems ramped up and rampant and roaring like a freely prowling lion. We need to reckon with the devil’s reality and activity and we need to resist the devil who still does have power to deceive but we can access greater power: greater grace in James 4!

The encouragement in fighting the good fight of faith is that our Captain is fighting with us! We are not in this fight alone, and greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. And greater grace is available and the promise is that no temptation from our enemy is greater than what we can bear, but God’s grace always gives us a way through any battle (1 Cor. 10:31). And we are not ignorant of our enemy’s schemes if we use God’s Word, our all-sufficient warfare manual and only weapon, the sword of the Lord. James 4:7 has good news for us: if you resist the devil, he will flee.

A. W. Pink says when you read this in the context of v. 6, ‘Ah, that is encouraging, that stimulates faith and hope. The One unto whom I am to "submit" myself [a loving God in v. 7a] is no harsh Tyrant, no merciless Despot, but the "God of all grace." He has already given me saving grace, and "He giveth more grace" to the humble, and "more grace" is exactly what I need, if I am to successfully "resist the Devil." … I cannot prevail over the great Enemy in my own strength, and God will not give me of His "grace" while I am resisting Him! Thus, I must cease resisting God before I can hope to resist the Devil - chiefly to make me proud, self-sufficient, independent. The prayerless soul is a proud one [v. 2b], for his refusal to receive strength from God is tantamount to saying that he can get along through the day without Him.”¹

3. Draw near to God (v. 8a)

The word prayer isn’t used in these verses, but it seems implied in each one of these commands, as well as in the context (v. 2b). We can make sure we aren’t attempting any of these commands in our own strength, by praying more, which admits we can’t on our own.

I was convicted at this point in my study … I can draw knowledge from a passage of God’s Word (I love to study) but that’s not the same as drawing near to God necessarily. Without prayer and true spiritual communion and fellowship with God, I can be and any of you can be in danger of what Jesus warned about, people that “honor Him with their lips while their heart is far from Him.”
In context (v. 4) the sin of worldliness had put many of the original readers at distance with God, intimate friendship with the world’s values and loves = spiritual adultery hurting deeply the relationship with the Lord who loves His bride, His people with a jealous love.

But no matter how serious our sin is against our beloved Lord, if we draw near to Him, repentantly humbly pleading for grace, not just forgiveness for past unfaithfulness but grace to change our heart from its craving fulfillment outside of His covenant love … the gracious promise in this verse is: and He will draw near to you!

This is an incredible picture when considering that in ancient times kings were totally unapproachable by the common people and in OT worship only the Jewish high priest could actually enter the Holy of holies where God’s presence was and then only once a year! But Heb. 4:16 says any believer can draw near confidently to the throne of grace to find grace and mercy to help in time of need!

4. Forsake sin inside and out (v. 8b)
   ... Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [we’ll command these 2 commands in 1 point]

Drawing near to God in worship clearly has connection with cleansed living (hands represent action) as well as a pure heart. The language of clean hands and pure heart comes from Psalm 24:

3 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart ...

How do we as sinners get cleansed hands and a purified heart? The same David who wrote Psalm 24 also prayed like this in Psalm 51:

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin ... 7 Purify me ... and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow ... 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God ... 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

A truly humble broken repentant prayer like that God won’t reject. James 4:8 calls for repentance by human responsibility (you must repent) but his Jewish readers knew this OT pattern of cleansing, not by mere human effort but ultimately seeking God’s cleansing. And we can’t pray with sinful hands still deep in un-forsaken sin.

In Isaiah 1:15, God says to unrepentant worship / prayer: “even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. 16 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil ...”

A good mark and measure of true repentance is the pursuit not just of forgiveness from sin, but the pursuit of forsaking sin. One who is repentant truly and humbly doesn’t just want to get rid of the consequences of sin, but wants to get rid of the causes of sin in him or her, not content to clean up the outward life in the eyes of others but is not content until God has also cleansed his inward heart also.
Let the water and the blood From Thy wounded side which flowed, 
Be of sin the double cure; Save from wrath and make me pure …
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.

It’s in this fountain of grace where those who recognize themselves as “sinners” (v. 8) can plunge for cleansing in repentance, and lose all their guilty stains. This image continues till the end of the Bible.

Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome, God’s free bounty glorify; 
True belief and true repentance, Every grace that brings you nigh.
Come, ye weary, heavy laden, Lost and ruined by the fall; 
If you [wait until] you’re better, You will never come at all.
View Him prostrate in the garden; On the ground your Maker lies.
On the bloody tree behold Him; Sinner, will this not suffice?

5. Mourn over your sin (v. 9)

Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

This could be an entire sermon by itself, and the idea will come up again in 5:1, but for now just notice in James 4:9 that feeling bad is not always bad, in fact there are times when it would be very bad not to feel very bad. This verse doesn’t make sense to most modern American churchgoers who think Christianity’s all about happiness and sermons should be full of laughter and you should never walk out of church feeling down or like a sinner or too convicted. I’ve had more than one complaint along those lines of my preaching, but when I read James say things like this I don’t know if our danger is being too serious about sin or not being serious enough. Jesus said Blessed are they who mourn, they shall be comforted.

Paul speaks of a godly sorrow that is God’s will, beginning with salvation which begins with repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). Paul told the Corinthians they should mourn over their sin (1 Cor. 5:2).

Many laugh at sin, but not many lament their sin as they should. It should alarm us if our sin doesn’t alarm us, and it should trouble us when our sin doesn’t trouble us as it should. If you want to know if your repentance is deep enough, measure it against what this verse says. Do you ever feel this way about your sin, broken, contrite?

Puritan Thomas Brooks asks: ‘Oh, who can look upon sin . . . as an offence against a holy God, as the beach of a holy law, as the wounding and crucifying of a holy Savior, as the grieving and saddening of a holy Sanctifier, and not mourn over it?
Oh, who can cast a serious eye . . . upon the heinous nature of sin, upon the exceeding sinfulness of sin, upon the aggravations of sin—and not have . . .
... his heart humbled, his soul grieved, his spirit melted, his mouth full of penitential confessions, his eyes full of penitential tears, and his heart full of penitential sorrow?

The Christian mourns that he has sinned against . . .

a God so great, a God so gracious,
a God so bountiful, a God so merciful.

Oh, how should a sinner fall a-weeping when he looks upon the greatness of his wickedness, and his lack of holiness! As ever you would be holy, mourn over your own unholiness. Those who weep not for sin here—shall weep out their eyes in hell hereafter!

It is better to weep bitterly for your sins on earth, than to weep eternally . . .

Joel 2:12 “... Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning: And rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness...

When we sense our brokenness we appreciate God’s graciousness.

6. Humble yourself (v. 10)

Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift thee up

The biblical pattern is that you must go down before you can truly be brought up (which v. 10 will say). If you’re not broken over your sin (which v. 9 commands 4x in 4 different ways) you won’t experience the truly uplifting grace of God that follows repentance.

Before of a Christian message that seeks to uplift you without any pride-crushing sin-convicting thrust … it’s different than this Word

In Luke 6:21, Jesus explained: “Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh [in other words, those who weep over their sins now and repent have future joy ahead of them] ... Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Luke 14:11 “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” [or “lifted up”] The picture of God lifting up the humble in His presence has been pictured in the historical context as ‘that of someone prostrate before an oriental monarch, begging mercy. The monarch leans down from the throne and lifts the petitioner’s face from the dust. The person rises with grateful joy, knowing he or she is forgiven.’

In Luke 15, Jesus illustrated true humble repentance in the prodigal son who said: “I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’”
Note the attitude of genuine repentance and submission (Jas 4:7), drawing near (Jas 4:8), with mourning over his sin that has turned laughter to sorrow (v. 9), humbling self in the sight of the father (v. 10)

20 “So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him [as he drew near to the father, the father drew near to him, just like Jas 4:8 says, and as the son humbled himself in his father’s sight, the father lifts him up in the following verses]

18:9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people … 12 “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ 13 “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” [or “lifted up”]

This law applies to everything in the universe. The highest archangel in the original heaven that wanted to exalt himself is humiliated and will be cast into the lowest abyss and deepest hell. Even the great exalted stars in this universe will be put out by God and in the new heavens and new earth God alone will be the light. And even now he lifts up his humble followers to shine like stars as they hold forth the word of life. A Puritan prayer says it this way:

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,
You have brought me to the valley of vision,
where I live in the depths but see you in the heights;
hemmed in my mountains of sin I behold your glory.
Let me learn by paradox:
that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing soul,
that to have nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision.

… Let me find
your light in my darkness,
your life in my death,
your joy in my sorrow,
your grace in my sin,
your riches in my poverty,
your glory in my valley.
1 http://www.mountzion.org/fgb/Summer97/FgbS5-97.html

2 Thomas Brooks, *The Crown and Glory of Christianity or, HOLINESS, the Only Way to Happiness* Hiebert, 240.