

**SURRENDER UNCONDITIONALLY****JAMES 1:5-8; 4:4-10**

Many of our country's most recent wars or military conflicts have ended with a negotiated settlement rather than an unconditional surrender. For example, both the Korean and Vietnam Wars came to an end through negotiations. Probably the most recent unconditional surrender was the Gulf War back in 1991, although I don't know if what was left of the Iraqi military ever signed formal surrender documents. Maybe the best example of an unconditional surrender goes back to World War 2: Nazi Germany in 1945 and Japan in 1946. What's an unconditional surrender? It's the formal end to a military conflict with no guarantees or conditions extended to the defeated army. There's no negotiation, because the defeated army is in no position to make any demands. The only way to end the war is for them to lay down their weapons, put their hands in the air, and allow the victorious army to do whatever it wants to do.

The Bible says human beings are at war with God. Because sin is an act of spiritual hostility against the God of the Universe and because every human being is a sinner, all of us begin life at war with God spiritually. Yes, He has made peace through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, but we have to enter into that peace. We have different names for that encounter - being saved, getting converted, being born again, trusting in Jesus for salvation, becoming a Christian - just to name a few. But it's also something else. It's a personal, spiritual surrender to the God of the Universe. It's an unconditional surrender. We're not in any position to negotiate with God. Either we surrender to God on His terms or there is no peace.

We're working our way through the New Testament book of James. He was the half-brother of Jesus and the first pastor of the very first church located in the city of Jerusalem. His style of communication was blunt, brusque, and "in your face." There may be no better example of James' "in your face" style of communication than one of the passages we look at today. Let's read it and you'll see what I mean: James 4:4-10. James uses words that evoke battles, wars, conflicts, and hostilities. Words like "enemy," "submit," and "resist." There are some 50 commands in the little book of James and ten of them are right there in 7-10: 1) submit, 2) resist, 3) come near, 4) wash 5) purify, 6) grieve, 7) mourn, 8) wail, 9) change your laughter to mourning, and 10) humble yourself! If you don't like to be told what to do, James will likely irritate you.

That first command - "submit" - was a military word. It meant to understand the role and responsibilities of your military rank and act accordingly. James implied surrender to God unconditionally was the only right and rational choice. But because he was writing to fellow Christians, he implied unconditional surrender to God is something we pretty much need to keep on doing every day of our lives. It's continual, perpetual, and ongoing surrender. If there's any area of our lives that's withheld from God, we will find ourselves in new battles with God. I see in the two passages we consider today God's terms for my unconditional surrender and for yours.

**WILL I CHOOSE GOD TODAY?**

What does that mean? How do I choose God today? How do I choose God again? I make a deliberate decision to be God's friend and the world's enemy. James said, "Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God." (Jam. 4:4 NLT) When you are God's friend, you can't also be a friend of the world. One cancels out the other. One choice excludes the other. If you are a friend of the world, you are an enemy of God. If you are a friend of God, you are an enemy of the world.

What does it mean to be the world's friend? The world here is not the physical planet we live on. It's not even human beings or human cultures in general. After all, the Bible says God so loved the world that He sent His Son to be our Savior. There the word means spiritually lost people. In fact, because God loves lost people, we're going to ask you to list and pray for lost people you know at the end of today's service. The world, as James used it here, is simply that part of human society that has no use for God, hates whatever God loves, and loves whatever God hates. It's full of pride. It's self-centered. It's full of greed. It's evil, although it can look benign enough. Yes, you can see it demonstrated in sinful acts or behaviors like lying, stealing, or murder, but it really goes back to godless values and a rejection of God's authority. The world can also become an evil mindset that then infiltrates structures in society and makes them evil. Maybe the best example is racism. When a human culture is racist, that's one demonstration of what James meant by the world. When an evil mindset like racism becomes embedded in the structures of a society - its government, its education, its business, its politics - that also is a demonstration of this godless sense of the world.

Being a friend of the world excludes you from being a friend of God. The Bible says if you decide to be the world's friend, you will start loving what the world loves. "Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world." (1 Jo. 2:15-16). When you start loving the world, you'll start being conformed to the world. "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Rom. 12:2 NIV) The end result isn't pretty: God's condemnation. "But if we would examine ourselves... we will not be condemned along with the world." (1 Cor. 11:31-32 NLT)

A frantic 911 call brought police to a home. The caller, a woman, had only been able to communicate that she needed help and was being killed. When police arrived, they found a bloody knife beside her lifeless body on the kitchen floor. Blood was splattered across the room, but the police didn't find a single cut or puncture wound on the woman's body. But they did notice a trail of blood leading into the next room and followed it. There they found a large dying boa constrictor. Apparently the snake had been raised as a pet, but on this day the snake had wrapped itself around the woman as she was cooking in the kitchen. For whatever reason, she had allowed the snake to entwine her body in its coils. Only after it began to constrict its muscular body around her, did she sense the danger she'd put herself into. She grabbed a knife and began to slash away at the snake. While she managed to mortally wound it, the snake killed her.

You can't make a friend or a pet out of the world. When you invite the world into your life – through a value, an attitude, an action - you put yourself at great risk spiritually.

James refers to Christians who try to be God's friend and the world's friend as adulterers. "You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God?" (Jam. 4:4 NLT) What's that about? James compared worldliness to committing adultery against God. He borrowed a familiar Old Testament concept that considered the people of Israel to be like a bride and God the husband. When Israel worshiped and served other gods, the prophets depicted it as spiritual unfaithfulness to God. James adopted the same image. The church - or each individual believer - is, in a sense, married to Jesus when we are born again. But when we start desiring what this sinful world has to offer more than what God offers, it's like being a spiritual whore.

If you don't like the analogy because it's too harsh, please remember it's the Bible's not mine. But as repulsive as it may be, it gives us a glimpse into how our sin impacts God. It's not like when a slave disobeys his or her master. It's not even like when a child disobeys his or her parent. Instead, it's like finding out your spouse has been unfaithful to you. When we sin - when we choose to live life the world's way instead of God's way; when we try to be the world's friend and God's friend at the same time - it breaks God's heart. We're being unfaithful to Him. Choosing daily to be God's friend and the world's enemy is part of what it means to surrender to God unconditionally.

Here's another aspect of choosing God daily. I resist the devil. James said, "So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (Jam. 4:7 NLT) Do you hear the warfare language? You resist someone who is attacking you. You go on defense. We know, of course, that the devil is all about tempting us to sin in a wide variety of ways. He wants us to make friends with the world. He's all about enticing us to accept worldly values, worldly desires, and engage in acts of sin that dishonor God, destroy personal relationships, and damage ourselves. He wants us to become proud, self-centered, greedy, and dominate other people in sinful ways.

What does resisting the devil look like? Notice how James puts resisting the devil and humbling yourself or surrendering to God unconditionally in the same sentence. When we refuse to let pride get a foothold in our lives, the devil has far less influence. When temptation to commit some sin gets strong and we make up our minds to obey God regardless, the devil has nowhere to go but away from us. He's beaten. Yes, he will whisper into your mind that you can't resist him forever. Yes, he'll remind you how often you've failed in the past. Yes, he'll say, "Why not just give in and save all the bother?" But when you resist him with daily prayerful obedience to God, the devil will run away. Brothers and sisters, we all deal with sin areas in our lives. We're all tempted - yes, in different ways - but we all get tempted. Do you know where you're vulnerable? We need to look the devil in the face, so to speak, and say to him, "By God's grace and in His power, I am going to resist you today. In Jesus' Name, go away." That's part of what it means to surrender to God unconditionally every day of our lives. Here's another one of God's terms for my unconditional surrender.

## WILL I PURSUE GOD TODAY?

Our relationship with God is truly a relationship with another Person. It's not a one way street. It's not just God doing stuff for us. A relationship means we do stuff for or toward God, too. There are times when I need to take the initiative and approach God. So, the challenge might be framed this way: Will I pursue God today and every day? The next question is obvious. What does pursuing God look like? How do I pursue God daily? Part of James' answer to that question is I pursue humility before God and abandon pride. He quotes Proverbs 3:34, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Jam. 4:6 NLT) Pride is present whenever we have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves coupled with disdain for others and scorn for even God Himself. God is irrelevant to proud people. Prideful people cut themselves off from God because they doesn't realize how much help they need. They doesn't acknowledge sinful attitudes or actions, or - if they do - they excuse or rationalize them away.

Is it any wonder God resists, opposes, and stands against proud people? Pride is what made the devil the devil. He wanted to be like God. And getting us to approach life full of pride is his default temptation. Do you remember when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden? He said to her, "You will be like God." It was an appeal to pride. The devil is about trying to inflate our egos and encouraging us to do life our own way with little or no regard for a relationship with God or caring about what God wants.

How did James understand or define humility here? James said, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor." (Jam. 4:6-8, 10 NLT) When all is said and done, James suggests humility is a daily willingness to submit to God plain and simple. Biblical humility is not thinking you're worthless or unimportant. Biblical humility means we welcome God's sovereignty and authority over our lives. We welcome it gladly every day. We rejoice in it every day. We want to experience it more deeply and completely every day. That's also part of what it means to surrender to God unconditionally every day of our lives.

Let's consider another aspect of what it means to pursue God daily. I pursue God's wisdom and refuse to doubt Him. We see that in another passage: James 1:5-8. What is wisdom, again? It's knowledge, but more than just knowing lots of facts. It's the right use of knowledge; knowledge turned into godly action. I believe wisdom for James was the ability to look at all of life through God's eyes and then go out and live a godly life every day as a result. Back in 1969, in a science lab in New Jersey, Canadian physicist Willard Boyle and his colleagues invented the concept of an electronic eye. They provided the science behind digital cameras – something known as a charged-coupled device or CCD. I don't understand it, but CCD technology revolutionized photography. CCD technology is used on the Hubble telescope and the Mars Lunar probe. It was Boyle's invention that allowed us to see the surface of Mars for the first time. In 2009 Willard Boyle was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics. A few years after the original invention of CCD technology, Boyle walked into a store to purchase a

new digital camera based on his invention. During the visit, the salesman tried to explain the intricacies of the digital camera. Boyle finally said, "No need to explain. I invented it." When the salesman didn't believe him, Boyle told the salesman to type "Willard S. Boyle" into his computer and see for himself. At times we almost act like that salesman in our relationship with God. We tell God how life works or how we think it should work. But God simply and confidently responds, "No need to explain. I invented life." And wisdom is seeing all of life through His eyes.

These verses about seeking wisdom follow the opening verses exhorting us to see life's trials as God's method of growing us up spiritually. When we're going through very difficult times, we begin to wonder if God is still out there. Does He really love us? What are God's purposes in allowing painful circumstances to come into our lives? That's certainly a time to take the initiative, pursue God in prayer, and ask Him, "Lord, could you help me see what You're doing here and why?" We need God's wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving to us to mature.

When we pursue God for His wisdom, it's important to ask in the right way. We should ask God knowing He's a good God who loves to give us only good things including wisdom. James reminds us here that it's God's nature to give generously and with full integrity. We human beings may give grudgingly, either wishing we hadn't given or because we felt obliged to do so, but God's giving and His gifts have no second guessing about them. After all, God doesn't want us going through life blindly or foolishly. Now, God doesn't promise to provide wisdom at the exact moment we ask for it. Haven't you found that to be true? For example, sometimes we begin to get God's perspective and see God's hand in something painful or difficult that happened to us only years later. In the meantime, we put our faith in God daily and continue to believe in His goodness daily. That's part of pursuing God's wisdom the right way.

The other part is refusing to doubt God. Doubt can be a real temptation. We want answers now. We want understanding now. We want to know what God is up to now. We've all had moments when we've been tempted to doubt God. Perhaps we've even given into those doubts for a season. James had persistent, chronic doubt in mind here. It's wanting God to answer our prayers but doubting He has the desire or the ability to do so all at the same time. All that does is reveal our own instability. We're like a wave in the ocean moving back and forth, getting pushed here and there. James says, "Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do." (Jam. 1:8 NIV).

Double-minded meant to be of two minds, to be divided in your approach to God, trying to pursue God and yet rejecting Him all at the same time. God has no use for our doubts about Him and He's not very patient about it. He knows who He is and He thinks He's worthy of our trust every day. If God is the supreme giver without reservation, we should trust in Him without reservation. Sure, you and I will be tempted to doubt God, to allow our faith in Him to cool off, and to start to care less about following Jesus wholeheartedly. Resist doubt. Refuse doubt. Reject doubt. Asking God for wisdom is an act of humility. You're admitting you don't know everything. And

pursuing God for His wisdom and insight is one way we move toward spiritual maturity. It's part of what it means to surrender to God unconditionally every day of our lives.

I see one more aspect of what it means to pursue God daily. It's found back in the James 4 passage we read earlier. I pursue repentance and draw near to God. "Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor." (Jam. 4:8-10 NLT) James never uses the word "repentance" here, but that's what he's talking about. Repentance is when we confess our sins to God, ask Him to forgive us, and, by God's grace and power, turn away from those sinful attitudes and actions. How often do you repent? Is it only when the Holy Spirit convicts you of something? James challenged us here to take the initiative to repent. Humble yourself. How do you do that? One way is not to wait for God to draw near to you, but for you to come close or draw near to God. I suggest we do that regularly – like daily. We have a way of picking up the dirt and crud of this world very easily. Most of us bathe every day physically. We would do well to bathe every day spiritually.

Communion is a wonderful opportunity to pursue repentance and draw near to God once again. Don't miss the opportunity provided in just a few minutes from now. Don't just go through the motions. Don't eat the bread and drink the cup and allow your mind to be on what's happening later today. Think about your life. Be honest about yourself before God. Confess attitudes and actions to Him that you know full well cannot please Him. Ask and receive His forgiveness and grace. We have a tendency to treat our own sin lightly. We might even laugh it off. My sin is a very serious thing to God.

Throughout the Bible we're encouraged to take the initiative and draw near to God by pursuing repentance. "Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD." (Mal. 3:7 NLT) "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." (Heb. 4:16 NLT) When we take the initiative, God honors our pursuit of Him. "Come close to God, and God will come close to you.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor." (Jam. 4:8, 10 NLT) Genuine repentance always leads to God's forgiveness and God's grace. God will come close to us when we deal with the sin that's keeping Him at a distance. Pursue repentance. Take the initiative. Make a personal effort to draw near to God. Surrender again unconditionally.

If this whole idea of surrendering to God sounds a little too weird or a little too militaristic for you, consider a different analogy that reveals the same truth. Is it hard to hand over the keys of your car to someone else? For example, it can be a scary and uncomfortable moment for parents when they hand over the keys to their car to their kid who just turned 16. He or she just moved from the passenger seat - or the ride along seat - into the driver's seat. Scary moment. It's a big moment in your life when you hand someone else the keys. Up until now, I've been driving. I choose the destination. I choose the route. I choose the speed. You're in the drive-along seat. But if you're

going to drive, I have to trust you. It's all about control. Whoever is in the driver's seat is the person who's in control. Most of us are uncomfortable not being in control.

It's handy to have Jesus in the car as long as He's in the ride-along seat, because something may come up where we require His services. "Jesus, I have a health problem, and I need some help. I want You in the car, but I'm not so sure I want You driving." If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my life anymore. If He's driving, I'm not in charge of my wallet anymore. If I put him in control, then it's no longer a matter of giving some money now and then when I'm feeling generous. Now, it's His wallet. Scary. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my ego anymore. I no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition. Scary. It's His agenda. It's His life. Now, I'm not in charge of my mouth anymore. I don't get to gossip, lie, get angry, intimidate, or exaggerate. Scary. I get out of the driver's seat and hand the keys over to Jesus. I'm still fully engaged. In fact, I'm more alive than I've ever been before, but it's not my life anymore. It's His life. That's unconditional surrender. And that's what you and I are called to do not just on the first day we got born again or started to follow Jesus. It's today. It's every day. It's all day. Unconditional surrender.