

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – October 4, 2015

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

**James 4:7-12** (NIV)

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8) Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9) Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. 11) Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another.** Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12) There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Eggo Waffles have become a well-known brand at least in part because of their well-known advertising phrase; “Leggo of my Eggo.” One of the first commercials to use that phrase featured a father and a son both reaching to take a waffle out of the toaster. The dad says let go of my eggo and his little boy responds by saying let go of my eggo!

In our text for today James encourages us to let go of something – it’s our egos not our eggos!

**Theme:** Let Go of Your Ego

1. By submitting to the almighty God
2. By dealing with your neighbor in love

The main theme of James’ letter is repent. Eleven times in our text, James calls upon us to let go of the evil which is part of our sinful nature as a response of faith. 1) Submit yourselves to God. 2) Resist the Devil. 3) Come near to God. 4) Wash your hands, you sinners. 5) Purify your hearts, you double minded. 6-8) Grieve, mourn and wail. 9) Change your laughter to mourning. 10) Humble yourselves before the Lord. 11) Do not slander one another.

It’s humbling to hear James addressing us as double minded sinners. It maybe hurts our ego a bit to hear him talk that way. After all our sinful nature tries to convince us that we’re pretty good. Our ego takes another hit when we hear James urge us to humble ourselves before the Lord. Once again, our sinful nature likes to take pride in itself and in our own abilities and strength. It’s humbling to our ego to have to put others in front of ourselves and acknowledge that we’re not “Number One.”

This section of God’s word does more than wound our ego – it requires us to “Leggo of ego” with the opening word – submit. That word sets the tone for today’s lesson. Submit yourselves – voluntarily place yourself underneath someone else. Voluntarily put others first.

Let go of your ego by submitting to the almighty God. Place yourself under his leadership and direction. Follow his word and his will – setting aside your own selfish interests completely. Such submission involves self-denial and taking one’s will, desires, one’s words and actions, our talents and abilities, our entire self and placing them all at the disposal of the Almighty God to be used for his purposes.

**Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** Submission to God means resisting the Devil and his sinful ways and ideas. The Devil's aim and goal is to separate us from Christ and to oppose God's will and ways. From the beginning the Devil has been in rebellion against God and he wants us to join him in his proud and haughty ways. He tempts us to follow his example, to do whatever we please. He wants us to question God's power and authority as well as his grace and love. It gives him great delight when God's people turn away from the Lord and ignore the truths of his Word.

The Devil is a cunning, wily foe with many servants. But Jesus has defeated him for us. When we stand up to the Devil armed with the Word of God to empower us to resist him he will have to flee from us. That is why James encourages Christians to come near to God. The Holy Spirit uses this command to draw us to God. Once again this is a call to repentance.

Setting aside our egos let's heed the call to wash our hands of sinful actions, to purify our hearts of sinful thoughts. To grieve, mourn and wail over our sins. The evil that we once enjoyed will lead us to mourning as we despair of our wicked double-minded ways.

The devil tries to convince us that we can serve both self and God. But that simple is not the case. The Lord Jesus said it clearly – no one can serve two masters. (cf. Luke 16:4) Although we may claim to be the Lord's, we have turned away from him time and time again as we try to follow our path through this world. Our sins have invited God's wrath and eternal punishment.

But in his grace God draws us to himself with his Word. Pardon, peace, righteousness and glory are not too great for the God of grace to bestow on those who come to him with repentant hearts. That is why James promises: **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

Let go of your ego – put away your sinful pride, your self-righteous thoughts along with all of your empty excuses for your sins. Present yourself to the Almighty with a broken and contrite heart that longs for the Lord's mercy and forgiveness and healing. The Lord will lift you up – he will assure you of your forgiveness in Jesus' name. He will credit you with the righteousness of Christ. He will accept the payment that Christ made for your sins on the cross. That payment involved suffering the eternal punishment you deserved for your sins.

The Lord will lift you up. He will take you into his own family and make you an heir of eternal glory. When the Lord Jesus comes on the last day you will be exalted to live with him forever. Dear friends, Let go of your ego, submit yourselves to the almighty God and you will enjoy his unending love and blessings.

Submitting to the almighty God, as we have seen, means living in agreement with his will. Therefore James urges us to let go of our ego as we deal with our neighbor in love. A lack of love for each other is really a lack of humility and an attack on God's law. Previous in this Epistle James had spoken of sins we commit with our tongues. He picks up on that thought again when he writes: Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it.

James now provides us with a practical example of what it means to live humbly before the Lord. Our humility will show itself in the way that we deal with others. Jesus explained that it is God's will for us to love God and our neighbor. (Matthew 22:37-39 NIV) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38) This is the first and greatest commandment. 39) And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

When someone speaks evil against someone or spreads gossip about them, they are guilty of slander – hurting the reputation of someone else. Many times this kind of judging is based on our own standards and expectations. We set up expectations for them to meet and when they fall short we're quick to judge. In a sense then we've set up some "laws" for others to follow. We've become guilty of putting ourselves in God's place. That shows a sinful arrogance and a lack of humility before God and others. It is a setting aside of God's law – judging it to be inadequate.

When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12) There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?

Who are we to sit on judgement against God's laws? Who are we to judge our neighbor? Jesus once reprimanded the Pharisees of his day for those kinds of sins by saying to them: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. (2) For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (3) "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (4) How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? (5) You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5 NIV)

Jesus words remind us to take a good hard look at ourselves. When we do that, we will see just how far short of God's expectations we fall. That will humble us in a hurry. In love we will be willing to deal with others as God deals with them. He has forgiven us for our sins. That in turn will lead us to forgive the sins of others rather than condemn others for their sins when they have repented of them.

As we consider the command not to judge it's important for us to understand it in the context of the rest of Scripture. Today it's common for individuals who are clearly sinning against God's law and setting it aside (refusing to repent of their sins) to refer to these verses. "Who are you to judge," they ask us. They might even quote Jesus: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." (Matthew 7:1 NIV)

As Christians, we will lovingly point out the sins of others, not to Lord it over them but to call them to repent. We do so using God's Law and standards not ours. We do so not to condemn them but to express our concern for their spiritual welfare. When we use God's Law to point out the sins of others to call them to repentance we're not judging them – God is. Love for our neighbor compels us to share what God says about their actions in an effort to save them from his condemnation.

Love for our neighbor also means that we will forgive those whom God forgives. (cf.1 John 1:9) God's forgiveness isn't a matter of simply ignoring sin. God didn't ignore sin – he punished it. Jesus was punished in the sinners place – therefore God forgives those who confess their sins and turn away from them to him.

Jesus said, "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them." (Luke 17:3 NIV) Such actions flow from a heart of humility and love not pride. So let go of your ego – deal with your neighbor in love. Speak well of him. Take his words and actions in the kindest possible way. Speak up for them and defend them when others slander them. Lovingly use God's word to call them repentance if needed and to assure them of the Lord's forgiveness when they repent by speaking to them of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross for their sins.

Dear friends, Lego of your ego!

1. By submitting to the almighty God
2. By dealing with your neighbor in love

Amen.