

## **“The Road to Honor”**

James 4:7-12

When I travel to a place I’ve never been before, I often go to a mapping website to get directions. I request directions by entering my starting point and destination and the software figures out the best route for me to take. It also gives me the actual distance and an estimate of how much time it will take to drive that distance.

Along with the directions I can choose several options: the shortest route, the fastest route, (they’re not always the same), overview maps, step by step maps, and more. Why am I telling you this? Just to remind you that wherever we travel, there are multiple ways to get there.

We like choices, multiple options. But there is the danger, in becoming accustomed to those options, that we transfer that kind of thinking over to spiritual matters. There’s a common perception in our world, and even in organized religion, that there are a variety of ways one can take to find acceptance with God. **We, who accept the Bible as the Word of God, know there is only ONE way to God and that is through His Son, Jesus Christ.**

In today’s study we’ll look at another subject that’s often misunderstood; honor. Our culture has a different definition for this word than we Christians do. At least, they have a different perspective on how we attain honor. That perspective has an influence on us.

Our text today is James 4:7-12. In keeping with our opening illustration and in harmony with the text, I’ve titled the message, “The Road to Honor.” These verses give us the directions.

### **Read James 4:7-12**

As we travel the highways of our country, signs by the side of the road or overhead give us direction for our travel. Reflecting on this text, we observe several SIGNPOSTS that direct us along “The Road To Honor.”

The First SIGNPOST on the road to honor is,

### **Yield**

The triangular red and white sign with the word, YIELD, is a very familiar sight to anyone who's ever traveled on a major highway. Yielding is not a popular concept in our contemporary society. I'm old enough to notice how changes in our culture have caused changes in our driving habits. A yield sign on the entrance ramp once meant you would adjust your speed to ease in with the flow of traffic already on the highway. Today, many drivers expect those already in the flow of traffic to adjust to them. I've gotten more than one "dirty look" for maintaining my speed and lane position while passing by an entrance ramp.

James gets us started on the road to honor with this concept; yield. Actually, he uses the word, submit, a word even more disliked than the word, yield. "*Submit yourselves therefore to God.*" Notice the word, therefore. It takes us to the previous verse which states, "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" Resisting Him is a losing proposition. Submitting to God means we yield to His control. We obey His commands. We make our desires subordinate to His. We find success in learning His wishes and doing our best to fulfill them.

Now that certainly is not the formula our world would approve to travel the road of honor. No, their way is found in the verses we discussed last week; push, shove, step on people, fight your way to the top! And unfortunately, it's the way of too many professing Christians. Again I remind you that James is writing this letter to Christians.

Why is it that we find it difficult to submit to God and easy to follow the worldly practice of putting ourselves forward? First of all, it's our nature; our carnal, fleshly nature, that is. Just because we've received the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, our fleshly habits and thought patterns don't just fall away like the autumn leaves. Learning how to yield to God, accepting the Lordship of Christ, is a process.

That's why we need the second part of this verse, "*...resist the devil and he will flee from you.*" Satan knows how to appeal to our fleshly desires. Submit and resist are both verbs. They are words of action. Neither of them is easy or natural unless we reverse them. In our sinfulness we find it easy to resist God's commands and yield to Satan's temptations. But James tells us it must be the other way around. In my experience that takes work. And that work is an expression of the genuineness of my faith and yours.

Our difficulty is further complicated because we don't have a proper understanding of what honor really is. Our dictionary defines honor as a good name or reputation; one whose worth brings respect or fame; a person of superior standing. All of these play into the idea that if we just push our way to the top of the economic, corporate, or social ladder, we'll have honor.

But do you know the path to honor the Bible lays out for followers of Christ? Proverbs 18:12 tells us *"Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility."* Jesus' disciples got into a discussion one time about who would receive the position of honor. Do you remember what He said to them? *"...whoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,"* Matthew 20:26 - 28.

A servant doesn't have his own agenda. His desire is to find out what his master wants and then use all his energies to accomplish it. If we're going to make any progress on the road to honor, the first signpost will need to obey is the command to yield; yield to God.

The Second SIGNPOST on the road to honor is,

### **Merge**

This signpost is closely related to the first one. You'll see both of them especially in the area of entrance ramps. Road construction on four-lane highways is often announced by large, electronic signs flashing a warning. When there are lane closings the sign will flash a message like, "use both lanes to merge point." When you get closer to the lane closing another sign is posted; "merge here, take your turn." In order to merge, or join in the flow of traffic, you have to know how to yield.

James states it this way; *"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."* This is where we get the signpost of merging. To merge means to join one thing to another. Merging means you're no longer outside the mainstream. You are now part of the larger group. When there is a merging of companies in the corporate world, generally, one of the companies "yields" or gives up its identity. The two entities become one and are known by a single name.

How does this concept of merging work out as we follow the road to honor. The second part of verse eight provides practical applications that begin with cleansing. Since James is writing to Christians, I don't believe the cleansing of salvation is in view here. That has already taken place. This is the kind of cleansing Jesus spoke of when he told Peter, *"The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is clean in every way..."* It is the ongoing cleansing of the blood of Christ that permits us to have continual fellowship with God. I John 1:9, *"If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

And this cleansing specifically mentions the hands. *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners."* What are the hands for? If you look up this word, "hands," in a Greek Dictionary it mentions the idea of hollowness, for grasping. We use our hands for grasping. But our hands don't control themselves; they're controlled by our mind, our will. I see in this command a reference to our motives. If we are truly going to become one with our Lord, to merge with Him onto the road to honor, we need to bring our motives into line with His.

The Psalmist states this so well in Psalm 24:3 - 5, *"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that has clean hands, and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."* That's the kind of honor I want!

The final part of verse eight is, *"Purify your hearts you double-minded."* If we want to merge with Christ on the road to honor we need to get rid of those things that cause us to have a divided allegiance. When Elijah confronted the children of Israel and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he said, "How long do you halt, or vacillate, between two opinions?" They were trying to have it both ways; to serve God and to serve Baal.

That's where many professing Christians are today. They're double-minded, trying to serve Christ and follow the world. It will not work. James says if we're going to merge with our Lord and Savior we need to get off the fence and allow His Spirit to clean out the worldly junk in our lives. We've got to lay down our plans and fit ourselves into His plans for us. If we don't, we'll find ourselves right back in the first four verses of this chapter!

The Next SIGNPOST on the road to honor is,

## **U-Turn**

You've probably noticed in driving that you see more signs that read, "No U Turns" than ones that read "U-Turns Permitted"; but they are out there. Maybe you're wondering where I see U-turns in this text. Look at verses nine and ten. What do the actions listed in verse nine call to mind? What do you call it when you humble yourself in the presence of the Lord with mourning and tears and sorrow? The first word that comes to my mind is, repent. What does it mean to repent? It means to make a U-turn. You were going the wrong way, now you turn and go the opposite way.

Oh how we need the spirit of repentance in the Church today! So much of modern worship is loud music and shouting and emotional highs, and that's not all wrong. But where is the mourning for the blatant ("in your face") disregard for God's commands by those who claim His name? Where is the weeping over opportunities lost and resources squandered on making ourselves feel good and look good in the eyes of the world? Where is the sadness that comes from the realization that our lifestyle choices have crucified the Lord Jesus afresh and put him to shame before unbelievers?

I know that message isn't popular today. But brothers and sisters, it is the Word of God, isn't it? Did you notice verse ten. The road to honor leads through humility, through repentance! Why is that true? Because it is only when we see ourselves as God sees us that we can truly be honored by Him. I know, this is totally opposite from what we think is logical, but it is biblical.

Those in the world pursue the logical way; to their own destruction. Their honor is only temporary. Once they're dead and gone, most are soon forgotten. But what about the righteous ones who choose God's road to honor? Daniel 12:3 says, "*And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.*" That's the kind of honor I want. How about you?

The Final SIGNPOST on the road to honor is,

## **Caution**

This is a warning. Go slow, be careful. Verses eleven and twelve contain a warning for us as we continue traveling the road to honor. In our humanity we're tempted to think we can gain

honor at the expense of someone else. We have the mistaken notion that bringing someone down will lift us up. In these final verses of our text, James destroys that notion.

He cautions us not to fall for this error because of the serious implications that arise. Isn't it interesting how we often want to pass judgment on someone for the very thing we struggle with? If we pronounce judgment on our brother, we are putting ourselves in a place of authority that is not ours. We are taking the place of God.

And James asks, "Who are you to put yourself in the position of judge?" God alone is able to fully know the thoughts and motives of our brother's heart. Does that mean we cannot confront a brother or sister when we see sin in their lives? Of course not. But it is the spirit in which we approach them that makes the difference.

If we want to restore them, that's the Biblical goal, we do not speak in judgment. We speak in love and sincerity. We are not trying to gain position for ourselves by putting them in a negative light. We are attempting to restore them to their position in Christ. I have observed that being a peacemaker will not win you many friends. People on either side of the issue will accuse you of taking sides. You may be vilified instead of honored. But when we humbly do what we can to promote reconciliation in the right spirit, God will honor that. And that is really what matters.

Now that we've looked at these signposts on the road to honor, each of us has a choice to make. We can continue to seek honor the way the world does, by ignoring these signposts and putting ourselves forward. Or, we can seek honor God's way by following these signposts, humbling ourselves before Him and allowing Him to bring honor to us in His time. Which road to honor will you choose?