

James 4:4-6

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[0:00] So in today's text, James continues to rebuke these professing Christians for their devotion to their sinful desires. So we'll begin reading in verse 4, but before we do, let me remind you, beloved, this is God's word to us.

It was written for his glory and our good, and so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. James writes, Therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

We'll consider today's text in a four-point outline. This is not the typical three-pointer. Number one, the enmity of God. Two, the word of God.

Three, the jealousy of God. And four, the grace of God. So number one, the enmity of God we see in verse 4.

He starts out, and this is such strong language. Adulterous people. Unfaithful people. This is imagery picked up again and again in the Old Testament, and I believe that James intends for his readers' minds to be drawn to some of those instances.

[1:44] Remember, as I said already, this letter's original audience were Jews who had professed faith in Jesus Christ and had been scattered due to persecution. See chapter 1 and verse 1.

So being called adulterous would have been striking to them, as it should be for anybody, but perhaps especially for them. They would have known their Old Testament scriptures and how often God had called the nation of Israel adulterous.

Him as their husband, they as the bride, and them not being faithful to him. I picked a text that I thought was just tidy enough for a room full of adults and children to make the point.

There's a lot of texts that use words that I'd prefer not to use on a Sunday morning in front of kids. Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 23 and following. How can you say, I am not unclean?

I have not gone after the bales, the foreign gods. Look at your way in the valley. Know what you have done. A restless young camel running here and there.

[2:54] A wild donkey used to the wilderness in her heat, sniffing the wind. Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves.

In her month, they will find her. Keep your feet from going unshod and your throat from thirst. But you said, it is hopeless, for I have loved foreigners, and after them I will go.

You see the adulterous activity that's being metaphorized in this text. And James says, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

This going after the idols of the nations. And we are not tempted to worship the bales. No one is setting up a big figure out on the square in Dhalonega and asking us to bow down to it.

But we are asked to bow at the feet of consumerism, the American dream, popularity, position.

There's a lot that this culture would have us worship that is not our God.

[4:06] James says, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

And this is a frightful thing. I pick up in Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 26. As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed.

They, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, you are my father. And to a stone, you gave me birth.

The idolatry is found in that. For they have turned their back to me and not their face. But in the time of their trouble, they say, arise and save us.

But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in your time of trouble. For as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah.

[5:08] Why do you contend with me? You have all transgressed against me, declares the Lord. And remember that James is writing this to professing Christians.

I think the assumption is that they are, in fact, in the faith. And yet their fickle hearts are leading them astray. They're wanting all the things that the world has to offer and not the riches that are found in Christ.

And we are tempted to do this very same thing. We are guilty of this very same thing. Those tangible things, the things that we can see and touch and feel, so often distract us from the immeasurable riches found in Christ.

Those things that we receive by faith now and forevermore. It's a challenge to live in the world in which we live.

I think especially in a world that is so generally comfortable and so generally plentiful. If you desire to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

[6:19] Now, in verse 5, we encounter some translative challenges. So I'm taking a little aside here before we move on to our next two points.

You likely have an ESV laid before you if you've been around the church for some time. You don't have to. It's not the most holy of translations. But it's a good one and it's what most of us use. And if you do, you will see the way that its translators have chosen to punctuate this verse.

So there's no punctuation in the Greek. So it's a really difficult work in front of translators to figure out. Where do we put the periods and the commas and the exclamation marks? A difficult thing to do. So hear me.

As I say, I don't think the ESV translators got this right. Say that with humility. Because what a difficult work it is to do this. So we see verse 5. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture says, and then a citation.

He yearns jealously over the spirit that he's made to dwell in us. The trouble is that there is no Old Testament reference that says this.

[7:26] Scholars have tried to find it. I tried to find it on my own. A little while. Foolishly. There's not a direct Old Testament reference that says this.

The ideas are there. So some scholars have suggested that it's an amalgamation of a number of Old Testament texts. But they're also not very quick to provide the references.

They kind of just make that like the general broad. Well, it's, you know, it's some summary stuff from the Old Testament. Some have suggested that James' original hearers would have known exactly what he was talking about.

Right? That this was some summary teaching from the scripture. But he seems to say that the scripture itself says it. So it's a challenge.

Certainly the idea of the jealousy of God is taught in the Old Testament, but not quite in these words. So let me suggest to you an alternative.

[8:23] I believe, along with many smarter people than me, so I'm not the only one that's doing this, that it would actually be proper to divide verse 5 into two sentences. Again, Greek doesn't have punctuation.

And the phrase in the ESV translated, the scripture says, could also mean has spoken. So, I think we ought to see this as two separate sentences.

And I'll give you an alternative reading to it in just a moment. But to be clear, this doesn't significantly change the meaning of the text. Right? So I want to be very clear about that. We're not going a totally different direction because this is two sentences rather than one.

But I do think it minimizes what James is doing at the beginning of verse 5. I think we miss the force of what he's saying at the beginning of verse 5 after verse 4 if we lump it together.

Because all he's saying at the beginning of verse 5 then is, hey, listen, I'm about to quote the scripture to you. Right? The scripture has said, and you quote the scripture. I think he's saying something much more emphatic than that.

[9:30] So, an alternative translation, keeping really close to the ESV, would be this. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture

has spoken?

That's the question. And then a statement. He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us. So this is the approach I'm going to take to verse 5.

So our second point is the word of God found in the first half of verse 5. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture has spoken?

If we read the text this way, then I believe that James is piling on what he was previously accomplishing. Drawing his readers' minds back to the unfaithfulness of the Israelites in the Old Testament.

And to God's response to their unfaithfulness. That he has drawn their minds. You adulterous people. Right? Do you not know? You're making yourselves enemies of God.

[10:36] And their minds are meant to go back to all of these Old Testament references. And he goes, is it to no purpose that the scripture has spoken? That's like his punctuation on the point that he has been making.

Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture has spoken? Of course not. Right?

It's rhetorical. It is to a purpose that the scripture has spoken. This lesson has been taught again and again and again and again. All throughout Israel's history.

All throughout the New Testament. All in our age. Right? Those who claim to worship God are meant to be faithful to God. Right? God requires fidelity on the part of his people.

Not double-mindedness. But singular-mindedness. Right? We devote ourselves to the Lord. Now to illustrate this, I'm going to read to you a bit from Pilgrim's Progress.

[11:35] If you've been around a while, there's chuckles happening. I'll joke. If you stick around long enough, I'll read the entirety of this book to you. This is not an inspired text. I want to be very clear.

But John Bunyan, a Puritan writer, knew his Bible. And he makes some very careful points to us in this allegory. So it's highly allegorical. If you hate allegory, don't read this.

But I would really encourage you to read the Pilgrim's Progress. Crossway put out a great modern English version of it, which is what I'm going to read from for you. There's a pilgrim going on this journey.

His name is Christian. And at this point in the story, he's picked up a friend called Hopeful. And they have encountered a guy named Mr. By-ins. Now, we don't use the term By-ins.

That just means ulterior motive. And Mr. By-ins is all about religion, provided that it serves him. Right? He loves religion, he says, when he goes out in his golden slippers.

[12:31] Right? So he takes up religion when religion is convenient for him, when it serves his temporal good. But he's quick to set it aside otherwise. And they get in a little bit of a conflict over this.

He ends up calling them narrow-minded. How could they possibly think in these ways? And Mr. By-ins, so Christian Hopeful go off. And Mr. By-ins picks up some travel companions called Mr. Hold the World, Mr. Money Love, and Mr. Save All.

And Bunyan means a universalist. In that sense. So, convenient, easy grace Christianity is what these guys all represent.

And as they're traveling together, these four, Mr. By-ins asks a question. He says, my friends, we are all in the same pilgrimage. To help pass the time, I would like to propose a question to you.

Suppose a man, a minister or tradesman or such, should have an opportunity to get a blessing and improve his station in life by becoming extremely zealous in some point of religion.

[13:34] Let's suppose that this religious point is something about which he has no particular interest. But by appearing to be interested, he can gain an advantage, either financial or otherwise.

The question I put to you is this. Can he pretend to be interested and remain an upstanding, honest man? Now, if you're in this room, I hope you go, no, of course not.

But these three companions take a couple of pages to explain why, yes, of course, he can do this. He can pick up religion and use it for his temporal gain.

So they decide to catch up to Christian and hopeful and ask them the very same question. And to be sure that the question isn't loaded, they decide that Mr. Hold the World is going to propose the

question to Christian and hopeful.

So they catch up and they do. And this is Christian's response. Now, what I want you to hear is that it's full of scripture. I'll give you some citations as we do. Then Christian said, even a babe in religion could answer 10,000 such questions.

[14:45] For if it is unlawful to follow Christ for loaves, as it says in John 6, how much more abominable is it to make him and religion into a self-serving device for getting and enjoying the world?

Only heathens, hypocrites, devils and witches are of your opinion. The heathens Hamor and Shechem coveted the daughters and cattle of Jacob. And when they saw that there was no way to get them but by becoming circumcised, they said to their companions, if every male of us be circumcised as they are circumcised, will not their cattle and their property and every beast of theirs be ours?

Jacob's daughters and cattle were what the heathen wanted. And they used Jacob's religion as a guise to try to get it. And then Bunyan actually says, read the whole story and you can read that in Genesis chapter 34.

The hypocritical Pharisees were also of this religion. Long prayers were their pretense, but their intent was to gain the houses and property of widows. And their judgment was greater damnation from God.

Judas the devil was also of this religion. And he would rather have had the possession of the money bag than Christ. He was lost, cast away, and the very son of perdition.

[15:59] Simon the witch was of this religion also. He wanted the Holy Ghost for the purpose of his own personal financial gain. And you can read in Acts the response of the Apostle Peter to his religion.

It also occurs to me that the man who takes up religion for the world would just as easily throw away religion for the world. For just as Judas is out of the world and becoming religious, so did he also sell religion and his master for the same.

To answer the question as you have done and to accept your answer as authentic, as heathenish, hypocritical, and devilish. You will be rewarded according to your works. Then they stood staring at one another, unable to answer Christian.

Hopeful also approved the soundness of Christian's answer. So there was a great silence among them. So Christian and Hopeful continued their journey. But Mr. Byens and his company stayed behind, stunned by Christian's rebuke.

Then Christian said to Hopeful, If these men cannot stand before the sentence of men, what will they do before the sentence of God? And if they are mute when dealt with by vessels of clay, what will they do when they shall be rebuked by the flames of a devouring fire?

[17:10] Scripture has spoken about this. And these Christians would have been aware of all of these references, all of these examples of unfaithfulness.

They would have been familiar with every bit of it. And James means, I think, to prick their conscience. Right? The Bible has spoken.

Is it to no purpose that it said all of these things? He intends for us to take it up and to heed the warning. The one who wants to become friends of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Let me give you one more New Testament example. Likely, James' hearers would not have been familiar with Philippians 3, verse 18 and 19. Paul writes, This shouldn't be so with us.

It's worshipers of God. We ought not desire to be friends with the world. We live in it. We are not of it. We're meant to be proclaimers of a kingdom that is coming.

[18:36] Third, let's look at the jealousy of God. The last part of verse 5. He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us. Now, if I'm correct about the translator change, this doesn't change the meaning of the second part of verse 5.

Right? He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us. James, having told us that those who love the world will be God's enemy, now tells us of God's jealousy.

This is also developed thematically in the Old Testament. We'll just briefly look at two places. And it's often connected to God's anger toward an adulterous people.

So two quick examples. Exodus chapter 20 and verse 5. You shall not bow down to foreign gods or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me. Then Exodus 34 and verse 14.

[19:37] For you shall worship no other God for the Lord whose name is jealous. Is a jealous God. God desires our worship.

There's debate about whether the spirit that he has made to dwell in us is the spirit of man or the holy. Spirit. You will know which way the translators of your copy of the Bible went by noting whether or not spirit is capitalized.

Here I think the ESV translators got it right. James uses the same word to refer to the human spirit in James chapter 2 and verse 26. 26 where he says for as the body apart from the spirit is dead. So also faith apart from works is dead. So it's most likely that he's using the word in the exact same way in this letter. So what James is communicating is that God desires for our very being, our existence, all that we are to worship him.

He desires whole person fidelity. Right. And this is not misplaced jealousy. This is not that God sets aside some of his characteristics in doing this because God is our greatest good.

[20:52] He wouldn't be loving toward us if he didn't desire this type of worship. Right. This is what we need. And he knows best what we need. He created us to be worshipers.

We will worship something. Inevitably, you will be a worshiper. Either the creation, which will fail to ever satisfy you, or the all satisfying God who gives amply, who provides for us all that we need. Not all that we want, for he knows best. Beloved, if we are found worshiping our God, then our desires will not be at war within us. We will not be friends with the world, and there will not be quarrels and fights among us.

So when there are, when we find that our desires are misplaced, we need to recognize it as a worship issue. It's an issue of the heart.

If we're in Christ, we have forgotten who we are. And we need to be reminded of God's loving kindness towards us. Which brings me to my final point.

[22:04] Number four, the grace of God. It's my final, but it is the best point. This is the best part of today's text.

But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. James tells us that God is gracious.

He started out verse four saying, you adulterous people. He begins verse six by saying, God is gracious and he gives more grace.

James here is not referring to saving grace. Remember, these are professing Christians. James, I think, writes to them and to us, assuming we've placed believing faith in Jesus Christ.

If we have believed this astounding, life changing, eternally consequential truth. It is because God has been gracious to us.

[23:05] If you're in Christ, you didn't stumble upon this and believe it on your own. You were guided by a gracious God to believe in him.

This is the saving grace. Here, James tells us, God continues to give grace. He continues to act kindly toward us and to provide amply for us.

He keeps it on the life of the believer. We sing a lot of songs about this. I want you to start paying attention to those songs to point out just to come.

Thou fount of every blessing. Oh, to grace, how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be. Let thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart.

To thee. We need God's grace day by day by day. Amazing grace. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come.

[24:04] 'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far. And grace will lead me home. God grants grace to his people. Saving grace and sustaining grace.

He keeps us going by his kindness toward us. However, there is a condition for receiving this abounding grace.

Here, James does in fact cite an Old Testament text. I won't try to explain that away. He says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

And this is Proverbs 3, 34. God grants ample grace for the one who recognizes their need of grace.

God supplies for those who turn to him. So as we wrestle to live in a world that is enticing to our souls, that distracts us at every turn.

[25:08] James would have us here. Don't desire the riches of this world because you risk becoming an enemy of God. He has spoken clearly about this and desires you to worship him with your all.

And if you will humble yourselves before him, he will graciously provide for all that he commands.

Well, that is a wonderful thing that we can go humbly to our God and that he will provide.

He will give us abounding grace to be obedient to all of the things that he's asked of us. All of the things that are for our highest good. Beloved, may we be mindful today and into this week of enmity of God.

The possibility of being God's enemy. Of his word that has spoken so clearly. That has helped us.

That has put signposts in the way to warn us of becoming friends with the world.

Of the jealousy of God. He desires, he yearns for us to be worshipers of him for our great good and his glory. And for the grace of God that he supplies.

[26:20] And may we do all of this this week to the glory of God. Let's pray together.