

James 4:4-10 A Plea for Repentance

Before we begin, I must point out that v. 5 is one of the most difficult verses in the NT to know FOR SURE James' meaning. There is difficulty in the grammar. And we are not certain to which "Scripture" James is referring when he says, "*He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.*" And honestly, there are differing opinions and disagreements with all sides claiming their interpretation is best. With this in mind, I believe the best interpretation comes with context. So, I will say up front I may be wrong on the exact meaning in v. 5. However, the truths that I believe the text teaches are %100 correct as found in the Bible. This MAY mean that I miss the exact meaning, but I still am able to preach the truth. In our text today, we really find the application of 3:13-4:3. James is concerned with wisdom, wisdom that leads to peace. There was apparently a lot of quarreling and fighting. And in our text today, he blames the quarreling to worldliness. And the solution is repentance and faith as we consider the greatness of God. And the outcome is great blessing! Look at 4:10: "**Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**" In this text James gives the problem: worldliness. We must repent from worldliness (v. 4). Then, to help us in our repentance, he appeals to the character of God (vv. 5-6). And finally, he shows us what repentance looks like (vv. 7-10). So, let's begin with the problem.

1. Worldliness is spiritual adultery. Look at v. 4. "**You adulterous people! 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.**" I think we know what worldliness is. To be worldly is not referring to our love for nature or for our love toward sinful mankind. "World," in this context "refers to a system of human existence that draws a person's attention away from God." One theologian says it is "the ethos of life in opposition to, or disregard of, God and his kingdom" (McCartney). Really it is anything that goes against God. To be is worldly to put the things of this world in the place of God. In 1 John 2:15 the Apostle John writes: "**Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**"

Here we see two pictures. One is the picture of a friend. I have some deep friendships here at Grace. And I love my friends. And I enjoy friendship. And I get together with my friends. And through the years I have gotten to know my friends very well. There is an intimacy and a bond and a love between friends. I think we all know what that is like. In the same kind of way, James says that to be a friend with the world is to be an enemy of God.

The 2nd picture is the picture of adultery. And I think this captures the meaning more clearly. He implies that worldliness is like an unfaithful spouse. In the OT God says to his people Israel, "**I am the One who made you; I am your husband**" (Is. 54:5). God entered into a covenant, a covenant of faithfulness with his people. And what did they do? Jer. 3:20 says, "**Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD.**" In Ezek. 16:30-33 we read: "**How sick is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square. Yet you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment. Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave**

your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings.”

Here, we see James is saying the same thing to Christians, to the Church. He is saying, “When you show partiality or discriminate (2:1-13), or speak evil of a brother or sister with whom you disagree (3:1-12), when you pursue your own destructive pleasures (4:1-3), you are worldly.” And I don’t know if you’ve notice something from James or not. But, growing up I always thought that being worldly had to do more with the saying, “*Don’t drink. Don’t smoke. Don’t go with girls who do.*” Those things can be worldly. But the focus here is more on acting like the world, those who shouldn’t think as we do. For they do not have the Holy Spirit. They don’t value the Word. They don’t love to pray. They don’t love to fellowship with Christians, etc. And when we act in these ways, we commit spiritual adultery. Let me call this particular sin another name. It is idolatry. When believers act like the world at any point, their allegiance is to someone or something besides God. This is why the Apostle John ends his 1st letter with these words: “***My children, keep yourselves from idols***” (1 John 5:21).

2. God is jealous for his people. After telling us the problem and why we need to repent, James moves to the character of God (our next two truths). It is so helpful to know what God is like. And here we see that God is a jealous God. If we think about our previous picture of marriage, what happens when a wife is unfaithful to her husband. How does the husband think? What does he do? He is jealous for undivided affection and love from his wife. She must not give her attention to another! Look at v. 5: “**Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us’?**” Now, I am not going to go into all the different possibilities for this translation and exactly where in the Scriptures James gets this quote. But the meaning seems to be clear because of the context and the picture of adultery. Worldliness is adultery. And when God’s people love the world and date the world and in unfaithfulness become a friend of the world, God is jealous.

Now the problem with human jealousy is sin. But God’s jealousy, which we may call “divine jealousy,” his yearning and pursuit of the undivided allegiance of his people, is completely holy and right. And when James mentions the spirit, it seems to me to be the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. At the least, it means that God has a special relationship with us and will not tolerate spiritual adultery, which is called worldliness. God will not give his glory to another. In this way He is a jealous God.

In Exod. 20: 5, speaking of idolatry, God says, “**You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God . . .**” In Exod. 34:14 we read: “**for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God . . .**” Now, as I continued to look up other verses that mentioned divine jealousy, I found a common theme . . . anger, judgment, and wrath. Let me read more verses. Deut. 6:15: “**for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.**” Deut. 32:21: “**They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.**” Here, and in other places, because He is jealous, we see God showing a particular kind of judgment upon his people, even bringing ungodly nations upon them. And

later, we will see the same principle as God judges the same ungodly nations he previously used to judge Israel. And at the same time, we see his people turn back again in repentance and faith.

With this same kind of language, I believe James is saying the same thing about the church. V. 4: **“You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”** This is a call to repentance for their worldliness. With this in mind, what is it that we need to repent of? Is there jealousy? Is there selfish ambition? (3:16). Are we peaceable toward our brothers and sisters? Are we gentle, open to reason, impartial and sincere? Are we fighting and quarreling? Are there divisions among us? Do we act like the world in our pride? We must ask ourselves these questions? I’ll come back to this later in application. But, let’s move on with another truth about God and his character.

3. God’s grace is abundant. Look at v. 6: **“But he gives more grace.”** From one perspective, we owe our salvation to the jealousy of God and we praise Him for it. Why? Because his jealousy leads to an unending pursuit of our undivided loyalty and love. Maybe the best picture in the Bible is Hosea. God tells this man to go and marry a prostitute, and even after she has children with him, she continues to be unfaithful. But Hosea is jealous for his wife and for his wife’s love and attention. So, he continues to pursue her as a gracious husband. This is what God does. God will not give his glory to another. This word “jealousy” can often be translated as zeal. God is zealous for his own glory . . . FIRST. And then he is zealous for us NOT to be idolaters, not to be worldly. And this is for our good! And what flows from God’s jealousy for his own glory is manifested in grace. God knows what we are like. He knows that He must accomplish his purpose in us. HE must do it. This is grace!

Speaking of Israel’s idolatry, God says through Isaiah, **“Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?”** (Is. 63:2). This is a picture of sin. And as God looks down at them as a husband, in his envy for devotion and holiness, he gives grace. In the same passage he says, **“I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me”** (Is. 63:5). Is. 59:16-17: **“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.”**

Brothers and sisters, where would you be without the zealous pursuit of the grace of God? I know where I would be! I would not be here today . . . with all you! I would be going right along with the world, with the world’s wisdom, trying to make my own righteousness. Think about your own salvation! Where would you be without an Eternal Husband coming after you with jealousy with a desire to have a relationship with you in faithfulness? This is the Gospel! The arm of the Lord’s grace is the Lord Jesus Christ! Grace abounding to the chief of sinners! God’s zealous pursuit of grace for you is displayed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It was the only way! And our Lord gladly came here. He took on flesh. He was completely obedient. And he laid down his life on the cross, taking the wrath of God upon himself, doing what we could never do in our sins. Our sins are many, but his mercy is more! Therefore, look unto Christ!

Application: God gives what he commands. Though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. And when it comes to repentance from worldliness, God will give more grace. When He gives a plea for repentance, we can find the grace to carry it out!

4. A plea to humble repentance. We know what the problem is. We know the character of God in his jealous desire for love and devotion. We know that his grace and mercy are more abundant than our sins. So, what is our response? Our response must be one of humble repentance. So, how do you know if you are repentant? To put it another way as we consider the context of James: How do you know you are wise? Or even another way, how do you know what humility looks like in action? Look at vv. 7-10.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

What a beautiful plea for repentance. We see the problem: worldliness. We have help. The jealous of God for his glory and our good as he pursues us and gives us grace. And finally, we know what repentance looks like.