

James

I. Introduction

A. **James 4:1-10** . . . What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? [2] You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. [4] You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? [6] But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [7] Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

B. Prayer

II. Prayer and Conflict

A. **James 4:4** . . . You adulteresses, **do you not know** (*as if this were something we should know*) that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore **whoever** (*a Christian or non-Christian*) wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

1. This verse possibly sounds like a harsh word from God.
 - a. He begins by calling those who want to gratify the desires of their flesh with the pleasures of sin, adulteresses.
 - b. He identifies adultery as an inappropriate, or outside the boundaries of an unacceptable friendship/relationship with the world. He goes on to say that those who engage in an adulterous pursuit of the world's ways, pleasures, and possessions, are committing an act of hostility toward God.
 - c. And He concludes by saying that those who want to be friends of the world, make themselves enemies of God, by doing so.

2. Though we may be inclined to read over these words as if they do not apply to us, especially given their harshness, I am convinced that for our own spiritual health and well-being, we are wise to consider them carefully. With that in mind, we will look at these three strong statements about sinful behavior, one at a time.
3. **Christian / spiritual adultery** is unfaithfulness or disloyalty in a relationship where faithfulness and loyalty are the right and naturally expected norm.
 - a. So why is faithfulness and loyalty the naturally expected norm in the relationship between God and us?
 - (1) It is the naturally expected norm for the same reason faithfulness and loyalty are naturally expected between a husband and a wife – we are married to God. Or as the NT puts it, we are the bride of Christ. Therefore the nature of the Christian’s relationship to God is that of a wife to her husband, or a bride and to her groom.
 - (2) Picturing the relationship between God and His people as a marriage relationship begins in the OT. We read in **Isaiah 54:5 . . . For your husband is your Maker**, whose name is the LORD of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth.
 - (3) We find this same imagery of a marriage relationship between Christ and the church in **Ephesians 5:25-27, 31-32 . . .** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, [26] so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. [31] For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and **the two shall become one flesh**. [32] This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.
 - (4) And here is just one more scripture to affirm the two we just read, taken from Paul’s words to the Christians in Corinth: “**I betrothed you to one husband**, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. [3] But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (**II Corinthians 11:2-3**).

- b. Now I want to acknowledge that the scriptures speak of our relationship to God in terms of being His child. Such imagery points to our duty to submit to His authority and obey Him.
 - (1) But we also see that the scriptures speak of our relationship to God in terms of being His spouse, or Christ's bride – which speaks of our duty to remain faithful and loyal to Him.
 - (2) Therefore, when we entertain thoughts, nurture desires, and give in to actions that are categorically unfaithful to God, who is our spiritual husband, we are committing adultery.
 - c. To further clarify the nature of our relationship to God, I want to give you just two more truths about faithfulness and adultery:
 - (1) Faithfulness and adultery are black and white issues. For example, you cannot travel north and south at the same time any more than you can be faithful and unfaithful at the same time. Therefore, you are either being faithful or committing adultery at any given moment or in any situation, including conflicts, when it comes to your relationship with God.
 - (2) Faithfulness and adultery are also a matter of who or what we love, and who or what we cherish.
 - (a) For example, a husband is not loving or cherishing his wife when he is engaging, with another woman, in the kind of activities that are to be done only within the boundaries of marriage.
 - (b) In the same way, we are not loving God or cherishing Him when we are seeking pleasure or worldly gain or fame or fortune or security from sources outside the boundaries of a right and faithful relationship with God.
 - d. Without question, spiritual adultery is bad, but God goes on to say that adultery is not only unfaithfulness on our part, it is an act of hostility toward Him.
4. **Hostility toward God** means we have joined forces with or become part of that which opposes God, is harmful to God's purposes, and seriously damages or even breaks the relationship of trust and love we have with God.
- a. However, and this is an important point, hostility is not a stand-alone, unrelated to anything else, action on our part. And I want to give you three reasons why this is true.
 - b. First of all, under these circumstances of being married to God, hostility toward God exists only where there are two opposing sides

that can never be reconciled or exist in harmony with each other, and where we are forced to pick between them.

- (1) For example, God and the world are two opposite masters who require contrary thinking, desiring, speaking, and behavior.
 - (2) Jesus confirmed this truth in relation to money when He said: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (**Matthew 6:24**).
 - (3) Now because there isn’t a third option – like being on our own separate from the world’s camp and God’s camp, and because we cannot live in both camps at the same time, any choice we make puts us in one camp or the other.
- c. Second, hostility toward God becomes obvious when we join with those who are opposed to God and His will – such as when we join ourselves to the world, or pursue the gratification of our flesh through unholy means, or serve the purposes of the devil. Therefore, when we choose the world’s wisdom or the world’s pleasures or the gratification of our flesh over God and His will, we are not choosing to simply turn away from God to do something wrong, we are choosing to turn **against** God in doing what is wrong.
- d. And third, though hostility is expressed outwardly, it begins inwardly, in our heart and thoughts. This means we become hostile toward God in our heart and mind, first, and then in our actions.
- e. Let sum up what I have just been saying about hostility.
- (1) Hostility is hatred, or at least a strong dislike for the demands or expectations of someone or something to whom we have a serious obligation based on our relationship to it.
 - (2) Based on the kind of relationship we have with God, our hostility toward God shows up when we have strong feelings of attraction or desire for someone or something we are not supposed to have such feelings for. And so we turn **against** God when we turn to the world and the devil to give us what we want – just as an unfaithful husband turns against his wife when turning to another woman to get what he wants.
 - (3) Finally, it is our turning against God and joining forces with His arch enemy that is our act of hostility toward God.

5. **Enemy of God** – An enemy is a foe or adversary. An enemy is someone who is determined to harm you or gain some advantage over you without any regard for your good or the good of those you are responsible for. In other words, I make myself an enemy of God when I join forces with and befriend His enemies.
 - a. Now it is important to remember that when you make yourself anyone's enemy, you put them in the place of having to defend themselves and those they love from you.
 - b. This means that when you make yourself God's enemy, He takes on a defensive posture in order to protect His kingdom and His will from whatever harm you may do in your pursuit of sin.
 - c. Therefore, just as pride sets God against us, so making ourselves God's enemy sets God against us. Do you really want to pay this heavy of a price just to get your own way?

- B. What we have been examining today is not unique to James. These truths appear in other places in God's word. Therefore, they ought to sober us, for they describe our pursuit of worldly and fleshly pleasures as being an offense to God, a hostile act against God, and adultery toward God.
 1. It is my experience that few Christians seriously ponder the effect their sin has on God and on their relationship to God.
 2. Yet what we have looked at today speaks directly and clearly to the reality that our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds do indeed break God's heart. They do indeed turn us against Him and make us His enemy. And our sin does, at the very least, some serious damage to our relationship with God.
 3. Therefore, I urge you to take this teaching today very seriously. Ponder it over and over for a month or two. Pray for God's gracious help to clearly see and even feel what your sin does to Him and to your relationship with Him.
 4. I find it extremely helpful to use the language of **James 4:4** when confessing my sin to God and when thinking about what my sin looks like to God. I encourage you to do the same.

- C. I want to finish today by looking at several other portions of scripture that reinforce what God says here in **James 4:4**. These scriptures have helped me move toward God and work harder at remaining faithful to God. I trust they will help you.
 1. **Proverbs 14:2** . . . He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him.

2. **Psalm 81:15** . . . Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him, and their time of punishment would be forever.
3. **I John 2:15-17** . . . Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. [17] The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.
4. **I John 3:4** . . . Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.
5. **I Samuel 15:22-23a** . . . Samuel said [to Saul], "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. [23] For **rebellion** is as the sin of **divination**, and **insubordination** is as **iniquity** and **idolatry**."
6. **II Samuel 12:9-10** . . . [Nathan said to David] 'Why have you **despised the word of the LORD** by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. [10] Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have **despised Me** and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'
 - a. **Psalm 51:4** . . . Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.
 - b. **Psalm 51:11** . . . Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

III. Conclusion

- A. How does all this fit into the subject of conflict? Conflict is one of life's strongest tests in relation to who and what we love? And when faced with conflict over some issue or situation that is dear to our heart, we will be strongly tempted to turn against God and go our own way.
- B. But when we do, we are committing adultery against God, we are acting hostile toward God, and we make ourselves God's enemy.
- C. Surely God ought to be worth more than that to us. Surely, He is worthy of our love – a love that rises above all other loves or longings or felt-needs.
- D. May we love Him so much that being unfaithful is as abhorrent to us as it is to Him – even in the face of our most trying conflicts.