

XVIII. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“True Religion and Faithfulness”
James 4:4–10
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April 6, 2014 – Morning Sermon

We are in our 18th study of the book of James. We are in James 4. In the last study we covered James 4:1-3 that dealt with the inconsistencies of our quarrels and fights and how the problem is a heart issue and not just speech therapy or a vocabulary issue. Speech reveals our heart. Now he goes to another issue starting in James 4:4. James 4:4-10 says [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.* [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”?* [6] *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* [7] *Submit yourselves 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 wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* [10] *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We are in a book that is designed to give us Gospel Wisdom so that those with a Gospel foundation, meaning they are saved by God’s grace, have a Gospel motivation, they are growing in grace which is the theme of this book and are able to live in a sin-cursed world. Remember we do not live in a Genesis 1 world. We live in a Genesis 3 but God’s grace is sufficient and in a sin-cursed world His grace has enabled us with Gospel wisdom above. You have to avoid wisdom from below because it brings disorder. It’s demonic and brings chaos but wisdom from above enables us to persistently grow in grace and minister by grace. It also enables us to joyfully mature in the Lord.

The issue he is telling us about is that we need a renewed mind to fill your heart but first you have to have a new heart. You have to be converted. Then you have to keep your heart. You keep your heart by God’s grace, full of His grace, so that our lives begin to reflect what He calls true religion. It is not man-made religion that arrogantly thinks we can work our way to God but a God-made religion that is based upon a God-given relationship in Christ by grace that leads to a way of life to honor the Lord. Then James has taken on issue after issue.

This God-given life, this grace-derived life, this blessed life ought to be one that says ‘no’ to partiality. He gives us three things on this life. It bridles the tongue. It engages in public ministry and it is a personal pursuit of holiness to be unstained by the world. So how can we be a people who discriminate for we see people made in the image of God who are in need of a saving relationship with Christ, for we are reaching all people. Secondly James says that our bridled tongue ought not to bring fights and quarrels. Thirdly, if there is true saving faith there will not just be a possession of faith

but a profession of faith. You can't have saving faith without professing faith but you can profess faith and not have possession of faith. Our works evidence the reality of saving faith in our life.

Now James comes to another issue. Very seldom do we come to a single word in the Bible that brings both a scathing indictment and hope in one word all at the same time. So in this study we are going to look at this matter of true religion and faithfulness as opposed to our bent toward unfaithfulness. The first thing we'll look at is the indictment and the hope in James 4:4a which says 'you adulterous people.' Gird up the loins of your mind just for a moment. I could only find one translation that I think does a good job of James 4:4a. The ESV translation that we are using says 'you adulterous people.' Some translations say 'you adulterous generation' or 'you adulterers and adulteresses.' I think I know why they translate it this way and even though I think they may be well meaning it does it a disserve because it robs us of the insight of James' careful choice of one word. The one word translation should be 'adulteresses' and the 'you' is understood. The only translation that translates it this way is the NAS (New American Standard). I think they got it right and we need to maintain that.

I know why they would say 'adulterers and adulteresses' rather than just adulteresses because one might think James is just bringing a charge against women in the church for that's the feminine term by a woman. I think we're missing something when we think that for he is making a clear statement by the use of this word. I want to give it to you because in it is the hope. The first thing James is telling you is that idolatry is spiritual adultery. The second thing he is saying is that we as believers, the elect of God, those who know the Lord, His church are all guilty of it. The indictment stands against us all. We all walk away from our marital fidelity to our great Husband, our Beloved, into disobedience, idolatry and unfaithfulness to Him.

That's why James uses the feminine because he is telling us something about our relationship. Our relationship with the Lord is likened unto the covenant marriage where the Lord is our Bridegroom and we are the bride. So that is why he uses the feminine for he is talking to the entire church which is the bride of Christ. All of us, the bride of Christ, have become unfaithful to Him who is always faithful to us.

God in order to teach us something about ourselves and something about Himself will use metaphors or word pictures about our relationships. Sometimes He calls us an army and He is the Captain therefore we're on a mission and He is the One who'll lead us into battle because He is the great victorious Warrior. Sometimes He'll call us a synagogue where we're a gathering of people being taught, emphasizing His role as the Prophet and we are the people who learn from Him. Sometimes He calls us a royal nation, meaning He is the King and we are the citizens of His Kingdom. Sometimes He calls us the flock where we are the sheep and He is the Shepherd that lays down His life. Every one of those metaphors has a purpose to teach us something about our Savior and something about ourselves.

In this one He is reminding us of something that runs in the whole Bible and that is our relationship with Him is a marriage relationship. It is a marital covenant relationship. Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea all say that we are His bride and it runs throughout the whole Bible. He is our Groom and He is our faithful Beloved and we are His unfaithful bride, positioned in purity because of Him but constantly wandering away from Him. There is our indictment.

There was one prophet where his whole life was devoted to teaching us about our Savior being our Bridegroom and we are His bride. That prophet was Hosea who purchased a harlot and brought her in. He cared for her and gave her children yet she kept wandering away back to her harlotry. Hosea is the faint but clear picture of our Savior. When we were saved we were saved from our harlotry. God made us for His glory and we went and slept with anything and everything thinking there was glory there. We were walking away from Him but notice he doesn't call the people of God fornicators for that's immorality outside of marriage. He calls us adulteresses, a bride that is unfaithful even though they're married. We were in the bondage of our harlotry and God by His grace rescued us even as Hosea brought forth Gomer from her harlotry. Then He took care of us, provided for us, redeemed us and allows us to serve Him and yet we continually walk away to play the harlot. The language is even much more graphic in Jeremiah 2 and 3 than I'm going to be willing to use here, but go read it.

Have you ever said to someone 'do you know what it's like to love someone and they don't love you back'? Jesus knows how this feels. He loves us but we don't love Him back. We may for a season but we easily walk away into unfaithfulness to Him. There is not only a scathing indictment against us but there is our hope because we have a Bridegroom who says 'even though you give Me grounds for divorce I won't.' Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ and that's why I want to be careful on this very first word for in it is the indictment and when we walk away from the Lord that's not just mere mistakes.

When we walk away from the Lord to embrace the things of this world and give our affections and allegiance to it, things that are in and of themselves are fine and good, but are put above our relationship with Christ then that means we're not taking hold of the glory of God because of Christ's sufficiency. Do you remember your first heartbreak where you said you couldn't live without her? Then someone said you're lovesick. When we can't live without the applause of men or a perfect body or perfect I.Q. or this or that and the idols of this world come before Christ, then we're saying to Christ that He's not enough and I need to sleep with that idol. Even though He purchased me from it I'm still drawn back to it. Where is my hope? My hope is that my Beloved will not let me go. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. No matter what you've done I'll bring My people to myself. I will bring you from your harlotry back to Me in passionate intimacy.

He moves from this indictment and hope because of our marital relationship with Christ where we're constantly ready to break it but because of Him who will not let us go, he then moves to a rhetorical question. How do we get to the idolatry of spiritual adultery before the Lord? James tells us. James 4:4b says *[4b]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.* The idolatry of adultery begins with making friends with the world. It doesn't mean you don't make friends of people in the world. It means you make a friend of this world's system.

Scripture says do not love the world nor the things of the world. You have a friendship pact with the things of this world and that friendship eventually leads to adultery itself. That friendship will move into the false intimacies of life, the emptiness of it and it leads us into unfaithfulness before the Lord, even though there maybe momentary exhilaration in it. It is really ultimately emptiness before the Lord. We end

up returning to this harlotry that He purchased us from the world that positions us as enemies of God. We position ourselves against God as enemies of God when we make ourselves with this friendship leading to idolatrous adultery with the world and we establish grounds for divorce.

That leads us to rhetorical question number two. James 4:5 says [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"?* First of all, if you go look back in your Bible you won't find that quote, even though it is given as a quote – The Scripture says,... James is giving a distillation of a message that runs throughout the Old Testament. It is the message that He has given us a spirit that He yearns for jealously that is to find its fulfillment in Him.

What is he referring to? There are three possibilities. Possibility number one is when God made you, your physical being comes from the dust of the ground by way of your parent's genetics structure but He made you in His image. How did He do that and give you life? He breaths in you where you become a living soul. So He gives you a spirit. That spirit, to give you life, was designed with appetites, desires, and passions that are to be ultimately fulfilled in Him and then when you are fulfilled in Him then the good gifts He enjoys you can use for Him instead of in place of Him. When He made you He gave you a spirit that is to find fulfillment in Him but we play the harlot and go after the gods of this world that are empty and illusory.

The second possibility is that He is referring to your salvation, your redemption. You were spiritually dead in your sins and then He sent His Holy Spirit to indwell you and bring you from death unto life. Why did He put His Holy Spirit within you? Now that you are regenerate and born again you now say 'no' to the idols of this world and the adultery you were purchased from and 'yes' to this new One who gave you His Spirit that He yearns for you to find your all in all in Him.

The third possibility is both the first and second possibilities. He made you with a spirit, making you a living soul that will not be satisfied with the gods of this age but will be satisfied in Him. Who can satisfy my soul, but Him. Then so that you will know that He sent the Holy Spirit to live within you to give you a new birth so that you have been spiritually born again and even though we grieve the Holy Spirit with our trips into adultery He is always calling us back to Him because He yearns for us to find our all in Him. He longs for that. His Son went to the cross that you would know that. Your Beloved is the only One that has a love that is eternal and unmatchable in all of life.

What is the singular solution then? God has the same solution as our trips into idolatry that He had when He saved us from it. In other words, when you were born again to become a Christian, you were dead in your sins but God being rich in grace and mercy caused you to be born again. How did you get purchased from the idolatry of this world? You had a Beloved that went to the cross and purchased His bride which brought you from death unto life and He did that because of His loving grace and mercy. We didn't want, we didn't deserve it and He didn't need us but we who needed Him were saying 'no' to Him and 'yes' to everything else. He who did not need us said 'yes' to saving us at the cross that we might find our all in Him but when we wander away the solution is the same solution that brought us to eternal life. It is the sufficient grace of God. It is the wonderful grace of Jesus who saves us and keeps us.

It is that grace that we are utterly and absolutely dependent upon. Even though we positioned ourselves as enemies He said ‘I will not make you My enemy. I will make you My redeemed.’ Even though we give Him grounds for divorce He will not enact on it. Out of His grace and mercy He keeps buying us back and bringing us back to Himself that we might find our all in Him. The solution we have is that God gives greater grace or more grace or wonderful grace, not only converting grace but keeping grace. James 4:6a says [6] *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

What does that keeping grace look like? James 4:6b says [6] *Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* Keeping grace is a humbling grace. What are the marks of keeping grace that brings grace-derived humility? The first thing you’ll see is submission to God instead of submission to the idols of this world. James 4:7 says [7] *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Submit yourself to God and there will be a resisting against the devil.

In other words, when God’s keeping grace gets hold of you, instead of submitting to the false idols of this world to sleep with them in rebellion against God, you’ll say ‘no’ to them and ‘yes’ to Him. When you say ‘yes’ to Him you will then turn around to the side corner pimp in this world which is Satan. You will say to him ‘your prostitutes I will not go to because of God’s grace.’ You will resist him who will bring as a pimp the harlots of this world to us and who would pimp us out to the idols of this world. When you say ‘no’ to Satan and ‘yes’ to the Living God the God who brought you to Himself that enables you to resist Satan, then Satan has to flee you because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (I John 4:4).

What happens when you resist him? First when you resist him, he’ll flee from you but then look at James 4:8 which says [8] *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.* You will draw near to God and He’ll draw near to you. That is intimate language. Your intimacy of love with the Lord is restored. See the reciprocal relationship. Do you see the two of you drawing together in the Lord? Now instead of separated in the idolatry of spiritual adultery now you’re drawn together to be with Him, the Lord of glory. When you’re drawn back into intimacy with the Lord you’re not only reconciled and intimate there are three more things that happen.

James 4:8b says *Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* One, you’ll want to cleanse your hands. Two, you’ll want to purify your heart. God, I thank You that you have not only given me a new heart but You have exposed the strongholds of idolatry in my heart that I might leave them. I see them. I want my heart purified from anything that would draw me away from You. Thirdly, you won’t want to be double-minded. You won’t want wisdom from below and try to marry it with wisdom from above. I want to be single-minded. I want the mind of the Lord, not the mind of this world. I don’t want the wisdom from men or from hell but I want the wisdom from above that gives me a single-minded understanding of this world in and through my Lover, Jesus Christ who loves me and has loosed me from my sins and who keeps drawing me back to Himself. I want that single-minded devotion to Jesus Christ.

After that occurs then what happens? James 4:9 says [9] *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* Here is what happens. The laughter of the adulteress (you) is turned to gloom. The joy of unfaithfulness is turned to mourning and in its place is the laughter and smile of God. In

its place is the joy of the Lord. Your joy you are broken from and His joy fills your soul. Your laughter is dismissed as mourning. The laughter of God and the smile of God begins to fill your soul.

Then James as a good preacher ends with a life takeaway. James 4:10 says *[10] Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.* God's grace is sufficient and searches you. God's grace keeps bringing you back and because of that grace your drawing near to God in a reciprocal relationship of intimacy. He is drawing near to you and you are submitting to Him. You are resisting the evil one and he is fleeing you. Your old laughter is gone and a new laughter is given. Your joy is gone and the joy of the Lord has been given to you. When all of that has occurred and is occurring in your life, now your new life of faithfulness by God's grace is a lifestyle of humbling yourself. There is the command of God's grace. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and there is God's promise, "I will exalt you at the right time."

Here are some takeaways from this study. Here is the question. How do I reconcile with my Beloved...eradicate my adultery...restore my passionate intimacy? The answer is that it is a work of God's grace in you. So what is my response to God's grace? Here are these five takeaways. One, is pray for Jeremiahs, Isaiahs, Ezekiels, John the Baptists, Nathans, James', me, etc. What is it that will bring you back from the voice of the world to faithfulness to Christ? It is the voice of your Lover. It is the voice of your Beloved One. How does Jesus speak to His beloved? Romans 10:13-17 says *[13] For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

You need to pray because if you believe that our new heart is prone to wander into the adulterous relationship of unfaithfulness to our forever faithful Christ, then you want to hear the voice of your Beloved. The way He is designed to do it is through the Biblically faithful Holy Spirit inspired, Christ-centered preaching whereby Christ Himself begins to speak to your heart. You want to pray that such preaching will do two things. One is to expose my sin because I'm always trying to cover it up and two exalt my Savior because there is my only Hope, my ever faithful Beloved, Christ the Lord of glory.

It is just like David who walked into spiritual adultery through an act of physical adultery and then a preacher named Nathan came to him, the most powerful man in the world and he gave David an illustration through a sermon. He told him about a rich man who owned all this sheep and there was a poor man that only owns one sheep. The rich man killed the poor man to get his sheep. King David, what do you think we ought to do with the rich man that killed the poor man to get his sheep? David said with all the indignation of his soul, "Kill that rich man!" Nathan said "You're that rich man." Therefore you have the greatest statement of repentance written in your Bibles in Psalm 51 and Psalm 32, because of God's grace and mercy. The voice of the Lord turned David back to the Lord. So pray for those who will handle truth with love into our hearts to expose our sin and to exalt Christ.

Secondly, understand the relationship of amity and enmity. I grew up in Sharon amity of Charlotte, North Carolina – rose of Sharon, amity friend. It was a way to say in the neighborhood that only Jesus could be the Friend that's trustworthy forever. Amity means friendship. Friendship with the world, amity with the world makes us enemies of God. What I am saying about spiritual adultery is also true about physical adultery. Spiritual adultery begins with careless, thoughtless friendships of the world, not of people of the world and it positions us as enemies against God. The same thing is true of physical adultery.

Thirdly, preach the Gospel of grace to yourself. You have to remind yourself that you are saved by grace, kept by grace and you grow in grace. That's why this metaphor of marriage is here. Marriage is here to teach you that you have a God given grace relationship with a Bridegroom who won't let you go. Yesterday I did a marriage ceremony here at the church. The Bible tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and wives submit to your husband as Christ does to the church and then the Apostle Paul says he is speaking in reference to Christ and the church. Do you know why Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea all compare the marriage relationship with the Lord as a marriage relationship? It's not because Jesus came and died for us to purchase us and bring us to Himself and then God thought of marriage as a good example. Marriage, it's secondary purpose is our benefit and this is why I'm so passionate for the sanctity of marriage in our culture.

The reason I'm so passionate is that marriage does not exist for humanity as a social solution. It is a creation ordinance of one man, one woman, for one life and yes it provides the foundation for human flourishing but it's number one reason to exist is to tell you of your relationship with the living God. In other words, our marriages are not illustrations to understand our relationship with Christ but our marriages are to be a reflection of the Marriage that will consummate in the glorious day of the wedding feast when we go to be with Him. It exists for that purpose. God put marriage in here to tell you that you have a relentless, unstoppable Bridegroom, Husband and Lover that bought you from adultery and harlotry and even when you wander back into it He will not let you go.

It is that glorious statement of His faithfulness to us. You would position yourself as an enemy to Me but I refuse for you to be My enemy. You would be My enemy but I will not be your enemy. While we were enemies He died for us. While you would give Me ground for divorce, I will not divorce you. I will keep you, redeem you and sustain you. More than that, My relationship is not simply hierarchical but it's reciprocal. You draw near to Me and I draw near to you. This grace relationship gives you life to love Me and gives you a love for Me because I have a relentless, unstoppable, unfathomable love for you.

The greatest error of music was the 1960s. Probably the most interesting moment was the British invasion where we would learn the ferry crossed the Mersey. Notice how they came over with the deification of love. 'Love makes the world go round,' 'What the world needs now is love, sweet love.' I'm very indebted to my friend Sandy Wilson and Tim Keller for the insight to this because they are children of the same age as I am. Perhaps one of the greatest examples is Petula Clark and her song, My Love. Here are some of the lyrics;

*My love is warmer than the warmest sunshine
Softer than a sigh.
My love is deeper than the deepest ocean
Wider than the sky.
My love is brighter than the brightest star
That shines every night above
And there is nothing in this world
That can ever change my love*

Why do we write such poppycock? Here is why we write that when we get in love. It is because God made us for that kind of love. We say it to people because we want it from people but there are no people that can give it to you. There is One in which all of our words about love are fulfilled and beyond what we would do. There is One whose love is higher than the highest mountain, whose love is deeper than the deepest sea, whose love is wider than the skies. There is One who before there was a star in the heavens loved you. Ephesians 1:4b-5 says *[4b] In love [5] he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.* Before there was ever a created thing He chose to love us harlots, save us and give us a Husband in His Son, Jesus, who will not let us go. This is the glorious promise that we have.

What does that look like when that's at work in our lives? Think of that one day when we'll see Him at the wedding feast. What does that grace enabled road back to intimacy and reconciliation that God's love through Jesus Christ gives us look like? It is that relationship that is identified by a reciprocal intimacy. You draw near and He draws near. It upsets me when I hear people saying that people making movements toward God must not believe in grace because that is a dwarf view of grace. When grace lays hold of you it empowers you to pursue your Lover because His love has pursued you. You draw near to Him who out of love came for you and now you love Him and you draw near to Him. That's why I love His law because His law tells me what He loves. I know how to love my Savior. When we reciprocate to Him we are doing what grace has enabled us to do, entering into the passionate intimacy with our great Lover and to do that He breaks us. He turns our laughter into mourning and our joy into sorrow.

The fourth one is that He breaks us that we might become bold for Him. The road back is a reciprocal, passionate intimacy with the Lord who has bought you and brought you and will not let you go, who will not let you become His enemy, who will not let you divorce Him and who will bring you back to Himself. As He does that He enables you, restores you and reconciles you and now you have His laughter and His joy and now you draw near to Him in the intimacy of life. Now you walk with Him, you follow Him and you want to be with Him. Praise the Lord that He breaks us to make us bold. Brokenness is not the objective of grace. It's the instrument of grace to set us free to be bold for Jesus Christ. Brokenness without boldness is arrogance but brokenness with no boldness is apathy. He breaks us to embolden us.

Finally He gives us an empowered privilege and God's unfailing promise. By His grace we're able to humble ourselves. He gives us an unfailing promise that we're now able to love Him who so loved us. I Peter 5:6 says *[6] Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* Follow your Savior. Philippians 2:5-9a says *[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God*

a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9a] Therefore God has highly exalted him... We humble ourselves to Him who humbled Himself that exalted He now brings us to Himself so that we have a lifestyle of humility that works through brokenness to boldness and victories in Christ and that we might walk with our Beloved One with faithfulness.

I'm going to close using the Beatles. Here are some lyrics from their song She Was Just 17.

*Well she was just seventeen
You know what I mean
And the way she looked
Was way beyond compare
So how could I dance with another,
Oh, when I saw her standing there.*

Don't you just love at wedding receptions how the father dances with his daughter? Then he gives her to the groom. That is all highly symbolized language of the groom and the bride will leave for the night of intimacy and the consummation of the marriage. That is what all of that is there for. So the Beatles didn't know what they were saying but they said much if I could put it in the terms of James. How could I dance with another when I see Him standing there? He is my Lord, my Lover, my Friend, my Savior. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You that we have a friend in Jesus who made us His bride that we might love Him who has loved us into eternity. Thank You dear Jesus that even though we would be enemies and walk away in our adultery with false lovers, You will pursue us and You will bring Your people to Yourself. See them, their submission to You. See them, their resistance to the evil one. See them, they draw near now to You and You draw near to them. See them in the brokenness of no self-confidence but in the boldness of 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.