

The Great Danger of Friendship with the World

James 4:4-6

December 1, 2024

If you would turn to James chapter 4; it's been a little over a month since I was up here last, and in that sermon, we began to look at chapter 4 of this letter together, and those first three verses in chapter 4.

And I really do believe that those make for a good one-off sermon because of how intensely practical they are in helping us to think about and to deal with conflict righteously. And I do think that there is great value in studying that passage again and again, listening to sermons on it again and again regularly until you get to that point where you've eliminated all conflict from your life and have become perfectly content in Christ.

Until that day, you should continue to look at that passage. But every good point from that passage is strengthened

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by reminding ourselves of the immediate context of the letter. And that continues to be the case as we move on in this section, this section of James 4:1-10.

This section, 4:10, comes directly after James has compared and contrasted the wisdom that is from above and the wisdom that does not come from above, godly wisdom and worldly wisdom. He did this at the end of chapter 3, and just at the end of chapter 3, in verses 17 and 18, we get the description and the results of living in accordance with the wisdom from God.

Look at those verses again with me. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy, and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

That whole passage of James 3:13-18 concludes with that beautiful picture in verse 18, this picture of the fruit that comes from living according to the wisdom that is from above, this idea of a harvest of righteousness, meaning righteous

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living in obedience to the Word of God. It is a picture of the church doing what the church is supposed to do, producing disciples that are maturing and growing in conformity to Christ, and this in contrast to the lives that are lived for worthless practices and sin that come from the worldly wisdom.

So as we said before, we leave that passage at the end of chapter 3, longing for the harvest of righteousness, knowing that it can only be attained as those who strive after peace, so in a soil of peace, this idea of having godly families and a blessed church that are models of peace and unity with no backbiting, no grumbling going on. So we come out of chapter 3 with the desire to to put off all earthly wisdom and to long for and pray for the wisdom that comes from above in order to bring the picture of verse 18 into reality.

So with that desire firmly in our minds, then it makes sense that James would begin the next section, this section, the beginning of chapter 4, by helping us to think through our conflicts the way that he does in verse 1. It's not surprising

that he would do that. That makes logical sense coming out of that verse 18 talking about peace.

But what is kind of jarring is that within the span of just a few verses, we go from that beautiful picture of peace and righteousness in verse 18 to some of the strongest-sounding rebukes found anywhere in the New Testament.

So let's go ahead and look again at that entire section in chapter 4:1-10. Let's read that together. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have, so you murder. You're envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

"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 sets himself up as an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously

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desires the Spirit which he has made to dwell in us'? But he gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'

"Be subject 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 miserable and mourn and cry. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and he will exalt you."

So last time we looked at the first three verses of this passage, and we were reminded of the greatest obstacle of peace, which lies at the heart of our conflicts and our fights and quarrels, and that is our own selfish passions and desires.

So then, following up on peace and the desire for it that James has just left us with, he asked a question that makes a lot of sense coming out of that section. "What is the source of the quarrels and conflicts among you?" And that penetrating question, when answered appropriately, helps us to discover what

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the real enemy to seeing that harvest of righteousness sown in the soil of peace in our relationships and in our church, what that real enemy actually is.

And we pointed out how the usual way that we answer that question, if it's posed to us, if we're honest, it is actually instead of answering that question, the question that James poses, we decide to give an answer to another question, the question, "What happened?" So instead of answering the question, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts?" we answer the question, "What happened?"

We point to an event or a person and what they did or said as the reason that we have conflict, or the reason that we got mad, or the reason that we're grumbling and complaining. It's because this happened, because that guy said something. But if the real reason that your attitude changed or that you started yelling at someone was because of something they did, then every single time they did that to anyone, the exact same reaction would occur.

So the reason that someone can cut in line at a store in front of one person and have that person just kind of smile, shake their head; whereas another person would end up reacting in such a way that everyone around them pulls out their cell phones and starts recording one of those crazy public outbursts that ends up on the Internet, the reason those two reactions can happen point to the fact that it's not what happens to us that causes conflict, but rather what happens in us.

And that is what James points out. It is that something has gotten in the way of your desires. Your selfish desires in the ensuing conflict actually prove that this desire in you is an idolatrous desire. We can't get what we lust for. We don't get what we're envious of. And so whether that's a physical object, whether it's just a sense of security, whether it's an answer to our questions, whether it's love from someone who we want to be loved by, respect from someone we want to be respected by, a position of influence, it's just some peace and quiet, a good health diagnosis, or something as simple as the last piece of pie that we were saving for later.

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Whatever it is, often a sinful thing, but many times it's that which is not inherently sinful, might even be considered good in the right circumstances, whatever it is, now, not having it or being denied it, having someone or something keep it from you causes you to sin in your actions and or attitude through grumbling, quarreling, or some other form of conflict. This has now demonstrated, that whatever it is that you are being denied is actually an idol.

So we looked at that, and we went on to look at the end of verse 2, where James chides them for essentially going to war with one another over their idols instead of going to God in prayer.

But then, before someone might proudly respond in his heart that he has prayed about this thing, James quickly asserts that when they do pray, they're praying with wrong motives. "You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives so that you may spend it on your own pleasures." Essentially, they aren't going to God with the prayer for wisdom that we are told to be praying in chapter 1:5-8. They're praying to God to give

them their unmet idolatrous desires; and so essentially they're treating people like obstacles in the way of their idols, and they're treating God as nothing more than a means to receive their idols.

We also, don't we, oftentimes, rather than asking God to give us strength to endure a trial, we're asking that we might rejoice even more in our salvation so that the worldly desires that are becoming idols would just dim and lose their luster in light of the Gospel of Christ, in light of the unbelievable privilege of redemption. Rather than asking that we would rightly understand that Christ is enough, that he is all we need, we essentially in our prayers tell him, "God, I need you to give me something else to be truly happy, because as it turns out, you're not enough."

That's what our prayers essentially become. Prayers to the God of heaven that do not have a greater end in view than the fulfillment of selfish desires are totally inappropriate for those who have been saved from Hell by the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

And so it is this thought, getting that back into our minds, that if we think about what's going on here, it helps to make sense of what seems to be an abrupt tonal shift from what we have seen to this point in this letter as we get into verse 4.

So essentially, what James is pointing out in verses 1-3 is his concern for those who call themselves Christians and yet demonstrate the strong pull of their idolatrous desires by getting into conflicts with those who have been made their brothers and sisters in Christ through the blood of Jesus Christ, those who are fellow heirs of God.

And they're now being treated as nothing more than obstacles in the way of serving what has become an idol, and using the precious privilege, reconciled relationship with God that allows us to enter the very throne room of heaven with our request, now using that privilege to ask God to give us that which our actions have now demonstrated to be what we want more

than him. So when you think about it like that, it is no wonder what James says next.

So look again at our passage for this morning, beginning in verse 4, where he leads off, "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 sets himself as an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously desires the spirit which he has made to dwell in us'? But he gives a greater grace. Therefore, it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"

So if they were listening to James' message up to this point and they were tempted to maybe kind of just dismiss what he's bringing up in verses 1-3 as one of those issues that, "Yeah, okay, I need to work on that. It's not really that big of a deal. Everyone's got conflicts," if that's kind of their mindset, James certainly shakes them out of it, here.

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One commentator called this passage "one of the most strongly worded calls to repent we find anywhere in the New Testament." And these strongest rebukes from James, it's kind of odd, it's not over blatant idol worship as part of some recognized false religion, or blatant sexual immorality, or some of those other things that we might think would warrant this type of response. It is over what the actions and the prayers of these people has revealed about what is in their heart, the treason that's going on.

This is something we may see all too often in ourselves, as well: the covetous, ungrateful desire to have the same things that others have, or that which we believe we are owed for some reason or another, having these driving passions and desires for that which is passing away, desires which ultimately find their fulfillment ending in ourselves.

So this points to the very serious problem of a friendship with the world. And this is the problem, friendship with the world, that will occupy our time today as we examine these three verses with three points: number one, the dangerous situation;

number two, the divine spurning; number three, the dispensed solution. The dangerous situation, the divine spurning, the dispensed solution.

And point one: the dangerous situation. We see this again in verse 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 sets himself as an enemy of God."

Again, this is a jarring statement to open this section. It would be shocking to hear. Those who are in the crowd the first time this letter was being read, who are maybe beginning to kind of let their minds drift or wander, they would immediately perk back up in attention. "Wait, what? What did I just hear? What did you just say?"

Imagine if you and your spouse or maybe a close friend are having a conflict. There's yelling and arguing, and they just don't seem to understand the points you are making. So you go to seek help from a more mature brother or sister in the Lord,

maybe a pastor. Then you both kind of lay out your case of why what this person is doing is making you so mad, and you really just want to know who is right, or really want verification that you are right.

And as this older brother examines the evidence before him, maybe you began to prepare a defense in case he takes the other person's side, but upon opening his mouth to now add that clarity and spiritual maturity to the situation that you wanted, to your surprise he doesn't seem to really care at all about your well-laid out argument or that the facts are on your side.

Instead, he looks at the desire to be right, the desire to have this thing that is making you mad, to have whatever it is that's being denied to you. He only focuses on the actions and attitudes of one who claims to have taken up his cross to follow the Lord, and he looks right into your face and says, "You adulteress!"

When that happens, suddenly the issue that you originally came in there with that seemed like such a big deal at the time,

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now is questionable, it seems kind of insignificant. Maybe you try for a different angle, thinking you've been misunderstood, but ultimately this mature Christian that you trust has just said something that should totally change the focus of your concern. It's like going to the doctor because you need him to give you a prescription for a lingering cough and then being told that you have terminal cancer.

This really is a shocking statement coming from James at the beginning of verse 4 when you consider the entire letter. Up to this point in the letter, we have heard him address this congregation with sweet, familial, loving terms, calling them "brothers" repeatedly, sometimes even "dear brothers."

And that should serve, by the way, as a reminder that James really does love these people. They really are dear to him. This is one of those examples that demonstrates that just because you don't feel like you aren't being loved doesn't mean that you aren't being loved. James didn't just get to verse 4 of this letter and suddenly remember that "Oh, yeah, I don't like these people. I forgot. I've been calling them dear brothers, but I

actually have a bunch of stuff against them," so he starts calling them names. That's not what's going on.

No, his point is to say what needs to be said in order to communicate that these beloved believers are in a dangerous situation: the fact that there are conflicts and quarrels in their midst, that they attempt to use their prayers to spend it on their pleasures, it's revealed spiritual adultery in them. It is the evidence that the world's priorities have become their priorities, that they are friends of the world.

And even though some other translations say "adulterers and adulteresses," so maybe some of your translations say that, "You adulterous people," you need to notice that it is actually the feminine form, here. It is the feminine form, here, that's being used. James isn't just saying, "You are guilty of committing adultery." He is specifically calling them "adulteresses."

And this is intentional, but it's not intentional in that James is kind of going after the ego of the men by saying, "You're acting like a bunch of women." This is pointing them

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back to the reality of their relationship with God. Remember, this is primarily a Jewish congregation, so they will be quite familiar with the Old Testament. And James is using a common vivid illustration for God's relationship with his people that's found in Scripture.

So Israel, if you remember from the Old Testament, is often represented as the wife of God. God chose Israel, he bought her, he bought her for himself, he bought Israel to be his. And when Israel would worship foreign gods, it was likened to adultery.

And you can see the imagery of Israel being a lot like the wife of God in passages like Isaiah 54:5-6, which says, "Your husband is your Maker, whose name is Yahweh of hosts. Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth. For God has called you like a wife, forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected," says your God." So you see that picture, there. You can find it in other places in the Old Testament.

And then with that picture in mind, we see other places in the prophets where God therefore likens Israel, since Israel's like a wife to him, likens the Israelites' pursuit and worship of idols as heinous adultery against him. In Jeremiah 3:20, "Surely as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O House of Israel," declares the Lord." Ezekiel 16:35-38. I'm not going to read all of these. Write that down, though. Ezekiel 16:35-38. You can look it up there.

And then you could go into further detail. If you look at Ezekiel 23, that is one of the places where the prophet just vividly portrays Jerusalem and Samaria and their spiritual infidelity against God in some rather graphic terms of adultery and harlotry.

And then probably most famously, you're all familiar with the story of the prophet Hosea, who is told by God to take a wife of harlotry and then remain committed to her as she continues in her adultery in order that it might serve as a powerful picture of God's covenant people and how they have treated him.

So all throughout the Old Testament we see this. We also see even Jesus uses this type of comparison on more than one occasion also. In Matthew 12:38-39, Matthew 16:4, Jesus rebukes the scribes and the Pharisees and then again in 16, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, for testing him by demanding a sign. And in both of those places, he tells them, "An evil and adulterous generation eagerly seeks for a sign," adulterous in a similar way that these recipients in this letter have been adulteresses. They're not so much interested in a relationship with Jesus, but they just want him to give them what they want.

So this sharp rebuke from James hearkens back to much biblical language. It has a biblical precedent, and it's meant to throw his hearers into a serious examination of themselves. They might not be falling down on their faces and worshipping foreign idols, but their selfish desires that cause them to fight with one another are the demonstration that they were not being true to their God.

It is particularly impactful given what consistently happened in these situations throughout the Old Testament, because again, they would know that the situations that caused God to rebuke his people for adultery in the Old Testament were not situations where they totally abandoned the God of Israel for another religion entirely.

Rather, those who fell into idolatry were looking to serve, their desire was to serve both Yahweh and this new God. They didn't want to totally leave, but they didn't want that full commitment to Yahweh that wouldn't allow them to go after other gods also. They wanted it both ways. And God routinely used the image of adultery to show them that this was impossible. Attempting to split devotion between the one true God and anything else is adultery.

This is the danger that James is warning us about, not that we're making the conscious decision to leave Christ, but that in our pursuit of our own passions, that's actually exactly what's going on. James goes on to point out the seriousness of the

situation that these people are in by essentially implying that they are acting like friends of the world.

Look again at verse 4. He says, "Do you not know?" "Do you not know?" That suggests that they are familiar with what he is saying, that they know all of these Old Testament passages. This is a concept that they know. It also implies that they are being rebuked for something that they are familiar with, that this should not be catching them off guard. "You know the danger of living as a friend of the world. You know what that means, and yet you are not living like this is actually a big deal."

The sentence seems, maybe it may seem a little strong to us because the term "friend" is generally like a good word for us to use with anyone. We have this broad and weak definition, understanding, of what a friend is in our culture. Going out of your way to not be a friend to someone actually seems kind of rude, right? Even rejecting a friend request on social media, on a media platform, seems to mean even if you don't really know the person. "Yeah, I guess I'll accept him as my friend. I don't want to look like a jerk."

When you think about this, what is the big deal? You can have more than one friend, right? Right? What's the big deal? But you can't usually say what's being said here about any other relationship. You can't go, you know, "Sorry, Ryan, to be a friend of Bill means you can't be my friend anymore. In fact, we're enemies now." You can't say that; that's not how we think of friendship. I mean, maybe that might have been the case in middle school or high school, but not for mature adults.

This isn't being used in the same flippant kind of way that we use the word "friend," as someone who is just an acquaintance that we kind of get along with. I was talking to Joel Phyllaier this week, and he, one of our congregation told me about someone who said that he wanted to still be friends but not really talk to him anymore.

So you have situations like that. So if you think of Facebook friends, and just the way that term is just thrown around, and then this passage gets murky. So there's a pretty

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weak understanding of what it means to be a friend in our culture right now.

But friends are supposed to be those who you share life with, and you share the same values, the same goals. You're on the same path. You're drawing strength from one another. So we're not talking about being a mere acquaintance of the world, just knowing facts about it, understanding what worldly pursuits and passions and goals look like. It's that those things just can't become ours also. They can't become our pursuits, our passions, our goals, or to be, as Jesus prayed, "in the world, but not of the world."

So we ask questions like, "Do you live for the same things that everyone else lives for? Are the things that excite the world the things that excite you? Are those who are of the world comfortable around you the more they get to know you because you have so many important things in common with them? Are you more comfortable around the people you work with or go to school with, or around the people at church? Where are you truly yourself? What is it that receives your best time and energy?"

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What are you most passionate for? What are the things that occupy your mind the most? Again, what is it that causes fights and quarrels among you? What is the desire that you're being denied, that causes you to react in conflict?"

These are some of the types of questions that we ought to be asking ourselves and asking ourselves regularly and that will help us to diagnose how serious the friendship with the world is in our own lives. And the reason that we should be diligent to do this is because of what James says here.

It's not just, this is scary, it's not just that friendship with the world is bad; it's that it equals hostility toward God. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. There's no middle ground, here, and that's kind of scary. Everyone, everyone, in the world right now is either a friend of the world and an enemy of God or a friend of God. Despite, you know, the call of so many churches today, no one is on some sort of journey or path between the two. You're in one camp or the other.

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Puritan Thomas Manton said of this passage, "When you begin to please the world, you wage war against heaven and bid open defiance to the Lord of hosts." All lovers of the world are enemies of God. Some never go to church and some might go every Sunday. So why do you do what you do? Is it for love of Christ and that the glory of God might be magnified in your life? Or is it because you know you should, and you feel better about going back into the world and living for your true passions if you know you've given God some on a Sunday?

Just like James expects his audience to know this general truth, so, too, do we, right? We know that general truth. None of you, if you've been a Christian for very long at all, I'm not telling you anything you haven't heard before. We make it obvious in our day-to-day lives that we know this truth, make it obvious because when we're confronted with a teaching like this, most of the time our response is to try and apply this truth that we know by asking ourselves and others questions like, "So in light of that passage or this principle, or that sermon, how much is too much when it comes to entertainment? How much is too much when it comes to video games? How much should I give myself to sports, to watching sports or to playing sports, or the

involvement in this social club or in all of my kids' extracurricular activities?"

Or maybe even even slightly deeper questions, like, "What?", I mean, you wouldn't ask this out loud, but this is what we do, "What righteous behaviors can I actually get away with compromising in the home for the sake of my comfort or maybe forgetting some much needed me time?" Or "What kind of righteousness can I not take so seriously, so that I can maybe have a false peace with my spouse or my children, not having to go far down that uncomfortable path of confrontation and discipline?" "What can I compromise at work or school for the sake of fitting in or not stirring the pot too much?"

Those are the questions we ask when we try and apply a passage like this. Some of you might have already been asking those things, but it's even in our asking of those types of questions, the questions that I get asked all the time, and if I'm honest, I ask myself also, those things give us away.

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That reveals the danger that we are in because look what he says in this verse. Look at verse 4: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world sets himself as an enemy of God." Or "Therefore, whoever wants to be a friend of the world, whoever desires to be a friend of the world."

These types of questions, those that we just went through, they're almost never coming from a place of love for God, right? You don't ask that question, "How much is too much?" because you love God so much. They come from a love for the world. They reveal that what we want to do is we want as much of the world as we can possibly have, but not so much that we get into trouble. They come from the desire to live for that which we know could place us in danger of becoming an enemy of God.

And since we know that, because we've all read our Bibles, that the passage I read from 1 John today wasn't new to any of you, we know that the love of the world places us in great danger, our natural response because of our love for the world is to try and get as close as possible to the line while still

being able to hang on to some kind of identity in Christ. But it's even in the asking that our hearts are revealed.

So as an example, one of the chief ways that Christians and churches have been compromising on the issue of homosexuality in recent years is by saying that the act of homosexuality is a sin, that there are homosexuals who desire same sex relationships who are refraining themselves, and they're not in sin just because they have homosexual desires. That's the "side B" Christianity. They say that.

And when we at Grace Church have had to engage in that conversation, and we hold firm to biblical principles by pointing out that if something is a sin, then the desire for it is also a sin. If you don't murder, but you still desire to murder, that's not good; you're still in sin.

So I think most of you have heard that argument before, but here we see in a similar way what we are doing when we ask questions about "How much can I live for the world? How much can I live for all the same things that the world lives for without

going too far?", whether those questions are out loud to others because you really want to figure it out, or just said to yourself as you go about planning your schedule and your life.

But when we ask these types of questions, we're trying to get away with the same thing that the "side B" so-called Christians are doing. We're trying to pretend that the fact that we really do desire the world isn't sinful. When we try and curb the desires and the fact that we're not acting on them as strongly as we could, "that shows that I'm a true Christian," whoever wishes to be a friend of the world, even if he stops himself from going all-in, he still sets himself as an enemy of God.

Back to the adultery analogy. We're like a wife who wants to commit adultery, but no, she shouldn't, so she tries to just flirt with and befriend the man, spend as much time with him as possible without going over some arbitrary line that would be too far, never addressing the fact that the heart is desiring someone other than her husband.

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Doing this and convincing ourselves that we are acting righteously because we're not going as far as we would like to with that which we truly desire, that is the issue. It is the desires that are the problem. It's what we obviously prioritize and give our best time and energy to as well. Questions we ask of ourselves that reveal our desires, the conflicts that we have, and even the prayers that we pray can clue us in to the dangerous situation that we may be in.

And that brings us to point two, point two: the divine spurning. Look at verse 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'?" This verse, verse 5, is one of the more difficult verses to interpret in the Bible. Actually, so far in my study of James, I haven't seen a verse whose interpretation divided up the authors of the commentaries I own so successfully.

Thankfully, no matter which interpretation is right, a biblical point is being made, and no essential doctrine is on the line. But there doesn't really seem to be a majority

consensus, and thankfully, it isn't really a contentious debate. Almost all of the commentators sound really open to the fact that they might be totally wrong on this, that it isn't wise to take a dogmatic position on the interpretation of this verse.

In general, the questions that need to be answered in this in this verse are: "Is James attempting to quote Scripture, here, and if so, what Scripture is he quoting?" That's one question. Another question, probably the central, most important question is, "Is it God who jealously desires the spirit which dwells in us, or the spirit which dwells in us that lusts and envies?" Third question is, "Is the word 'spirit' supposed to refer to the Holy Spirit or just more generally to the spirit that gives us life?"

And if you want to go home this afternoon, you can see all of these different interpretations represented in all of the major translations. You see them all. They're all slightly different: KJV, NAS, LSB, ESV, NIV. You'll see slight differences in all of them in this.

And so I'm not going to go through all the arguments for and against everything because we don't have the time to, and you don't need to be sifting through all of that while you're trying to apply the sermon. But I will mention some of the pieces as we go through a little bit.

So for the main question, so this is the main question of the text that actually would have an effect, at least, on the name of the second point of my outline. But I agree with the LSB, the NAS, and the ESV that this verse is about God's jealousy for his people and not the human tendency to be envious and jealous. Even though this verse could be translated, and in some places it is translated this way, as "the spirit that he caused to dwell in us envies intensely," but this is the most important distinction to be made, and it seems like commentators are pretty close to split down the middle, slightly more going in the direction that I proposed.

I mean contextually, I just think that this goes much better with the preceding verse that has talked about adultery against God and becoming an enemy of God. It makes sense that he

would go into speaking about God's jealousy for his people. In other words, I think that this verse is supposed to connect directly to verse 4 and isn't bringing back in the concepts of human envy from verses 1-3.

So this helps to answer the other issue at the beginning of the verse, also. So coming out of the warning on the danger of friendship with the world, James says, "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose when it says that he, "God jealously desires the spirit which he has made to dwell in us?"

But the issue is that that phrase does not really look like any specific passage in the Old Testament, and most people would expect with the language that James uses, here, when he says, "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose?" and that a quote from Scripture should follow. But there's no phrase, there's no quote from the Old Testament that looks like that.

And some commentators have played around in some dangerous waters by saying that it is a quote from some apocryphal book,

or something that we've lost, or a saying of Jesus that's just been lost to history. But the word, there, is *graphe*, which means writing or scripture. So that can't be the case, that it's from oral tradition. A few others say that this section should be seen almost parenthetically, so that you can get to verse 6, where there really is a scriptural quotation.

But what is most likely going on here is that James is just giving a general teaching of Scripture similar to what Jesus does in John 7. In John 7:37-38, it says, "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

So Jesus also is not quoting any specific passage, there. He's just giving a scriptural summary statement. And this is what James is doing, here, which makes a lot of sense because there is, as we've already talked about, a definite general teaching in the Old Testament, which we've again seen in some of

the passages I read earlier, that indicate that God is jealous for his people.

In addition to those, you remember what it says famously in Exodus 20:5: “‘I, Yahweh, your God, am a jealous God.’” Also places like Zechariah 8:2, “Thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘I am jealous with great jealousy for Zion, and with great wrath I am jealous for her.’” This is the jealousy of God, which is not a sinful jealousy like we have, but a desire that he has to receive what is due to him.

James is making the similar point here. He's kind of chiding his readers about that which they should surely know from the whole teaching of the Old Testament. “You know how serious this all is. You know how bad it is to be a friend of the world. You know that, right? Or do you just think Scripture has all that to say about God being jealous for his people for no purpose?”

That's kind of what's being said, here, in verse 5, and I do actually think that this is what's being referred to. I don't

think that "spirit," here, is in reference to the Holy Spirit. They don't utilize capitalization in the Greek in the same way that we do, so the word for "spirit" isn't capitalized, and you just have to make a contextual decision whether or not it refers to the Holy Spirit or just the spirit by which he invigorates us to life.

Some translations have it capitalized, indicating it's the Holy Spirit, some don't. LSB does, ESV doesn't. But James doesn't speak of the Holy Spirit by his proper name anywhere else, and I don't think he is, here, either. I think this makes more sense, here, that James is using "spirit" the same way he used the same word in 2:26, where he says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." So it's the life-animating principle within this. So in this case, it's similar to saying something like, "Our lives are to be used for the glory of God, and he is jealous for this to happen."

And James uses some really strong language to communicate this. He uses the word *phthonos*, a Greek word, which is a really

strong word for "jealousy" because it's not used generally to describe the jealousy of God. It's that strong of a word. In fact, that's the main reason that those who say that this verse has to be interpreted as man's jealousy, because that word is so strong. That's the primary argument they use. It wouldn't be used to describe God. This would be the only place in the New Testament where it's used to describe the jealousy of God. Usually, the more common word "zealous" is used for God's jealousy.

It is a much stronger word, but the strong language is in keeping in step with the shockingly strong language and strong rebuke that James is using to try and communicate just how serious a matter this is. And the word is combined with the word *epipotheo*. So that's the word translated here in the LSB as "desire." But it can also be translated as "yearning" or having a deep longing for something. It's generally seen as a positive, as a more positive word, whereas the other one is seen as more negative.

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But the overall idea, then, is that we are reminded that it is God who gives us life as his creation, and he yearns jealously that our lives would desire him and to live for him, to live for our Creator, to live for our Savior above all other things.

So when we give our lives to the same vain pursuits of the world, when we become friends of the world, instead of longing for our Creator, we are spurning him in the same way we see example after example in the Old Testament, the examples of the Israelites forsaking God to follow after other gods and follow their own pleasure.

This is a righteous jealousy. Thinking back again to verse 4, it's like the jealousy of a husband for his wife's affections to be only for him. It's for the Creator to desire the affections of his creation, for the Savior to desire the affections of the saved. It's righteous and right that that take place.

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So if you have seen in yourself, if you seen yourself in this text, in these first five verses of chapter 4, you're going to come to a place of great concern. The point of everything we have seen so far is to show us just how serious of a situation we are in. We have spurned our Creator and our Savior, the one who jealously desires for us to live our lives for his glory.

He longs for us to live for him, and yet we demonstrate through our selfish relationships with others and our selfish relationship with God that we are adulteresses. We have shown ourselves to be friends of the world and therefore enemies of God. If you see this in you, if you see all this, and if you're tempted to think, "That's okay, that's not that big of a deal," or maybe to use the old words, "I definitely see myself in there, but nobody's perfect," or, "Yeah, everyone sins," we say those things to get ourselves off the hook, that strong language of adultery, being an enemy of God that refuses to let us get away with those excuses, so what are we to do?

That brings us to our final, concluding point, point three, the dispensed solution. The dispensed solution. So we are in

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this place of conviction, of potential enemies of God who have spurned his good purpose for us. The true believers reading these things find themselves in a desperate situation as they hear this.

And then we get to read this in verse 6 from our desperate situation: "But he gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" God gives more grace, greater grace, the word *megas*. As overwhelmed and as terrified as we might be when we look at our lives and are distraught with what the mirror of God's Word has exposed in us reading this passage, we're reminded that God gives a greater grace. He deals with us kindly in a way that we don't deserve because of what God has done for us in Christ.

Yes, he jealously yearns for us to live for him, and he so strongly desires this from his people that he won't allow us to feebly fail at it in our own power. He provides for us. God's grace is fully able to work in us to meet all the requirements for our lives that his jealousy demands of us.

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It's like the prayer from Augustine that Travis reminded the men of in the last STM: "Father, command what you will and grant what you command." "Command whatever you will from us; grant us the grace to obey." And he has done that.

There's a world out there that's doing everything in its power to make you its best friend. There are sights and sounds and pleasures and so many activities trying to draw you in, trying to pull you toward that which doesn't actually matter, but which everyone else seems to relish giving their lives for. They look crossways at you when you don't. And sometimes the pull and the power of the world seems impossible to resist.

But God has commanded us not to love the world or the things of the world, so that means we don't have to, and he's given us the grace to not. We're able to respond to a text like this by humbly admitting our weakness and asking God not for the things of the world that we're missing out on, but that we might be totally content in him.

And that's the key: it's humility. And that's what we see in this quote. This is a quote from Proverbs 3:34, a familiar one: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." So the true believer responds to this passage as they hear it with humility. The lover of the world responds to this passage with pride.

The right response to all that we've seen in this passage is to feel, yes, it is to feel overwhelmed and desperate for God to give you the grace to live a life in peace with your fellow man, and the grace to maintain a faithful and true friendship with God through Christ, and the grace to rejoice that we need nothing else. All we really have is Christ and our union in him, and we don't need anything else.

That's the response of the true Christian as they see this passage: "God give me grace to believe these things, to be totally content in you and to rejoice in you, and to need nothing else."

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But the proud person, demonstrating themselves to be, yes, an enemy of God, reads a passage like this and either decides that he must do something to prove that his desire for the world isn't actually that big of a deal, "I need to prove that it's not," or makes excuses for why his situation is different, why this thing is actually okay, and continues to live a life trying to split the difference. There is no greater form of pride than to continue to live your life for yourself before the Creator and Judge of the world.

The humble person sees the picture painted here, and they want no part of it, want no part of it. They have no desire to try and find some sort of peace between their worldly desires and serving God. They don't pray for peace between those things or to make those things work. They kill those worldly desires. That's what they pray.

They ask God to reveal himself to them more and more, that they might see him clearer and know him better, so that, as the hymn writer says, "the things of the world will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." They commit to live

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for him and beg him for the strength to do it, and then, and only then, they're able to live for God and even occasionally enjoy some of the best of what has been produced in the earth as blessings and gifts from God, and not that which they serve and live for. He gives grace to the humble.

Beloved, if you've been convicted through this very strong rebuke, humble yourselves before the Lord. Call out to him for his grace. He gives a greater grace. He gives grace to the humble, and part of that grace is seen as we, as true Christians, read a text like this and respond with appropriate repentance and humility. And that is the right response of true humility that we'll look at next week as we finish this section. But for now, let's close in prayer.

Father, we are again so thankful for your Word. We're thankful that you love us enough to speak as strongly to us as we need to hear it for our good in order to see the seriousness of our situation, so that we might reject, repent of, worldly desires and strive after you.

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Lord, I pray for each of us in here that we would be a church that takes the warning here seriously, that we would not be adulteresses, that we would be wary of becoming friends of the world, and Lord, that you would give us a greater grace, that the Gospel would be magnified more and more in our lives every day so that all of those things that hold such a strong attraction to the world will look like nothing to us, table scraps to those who have been given a banquet.

We pray that you would help us to see these things, to be content in you, and to joyfully proclaim, "Hallelujah! All I have is Christ." And it's in his name we pray. Amen.