

James 4:4-6 "Beware of the Friendship Of The World!"

Last time we began chapter James 4:1-3 in a sermon I called 'The Intention Of The Heart'. Although it is the beginning of a new chapter, I explained that in the original writing, it was not so. Chapter 4:1 flows directly from chapter 3:18: "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." And in v17 those eight godly attributes that mark the life of a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ! I

I also explained that there has been a to-ing and fro-ing within James' thinking, between those who merely claimed to be Christian but had only a verbal profession. Chapter 2:14-26 with v26 saying: "As the spirit without the body is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." And in chapter 3:13 those who possess that heavenly wisdom that comes down from God! Chapter 3:14-16, those who harbour of "bitter envy and selfish ambition." 17-18, again those true dwellers of the Kingdom!

And in chapter 4:1 he contrasts those Kingdom dwellers to those possessors of that other wisdom, of the earth, of the fallen world of humanity! v1: "What causes quarrels and fights, (*wars and conflicts*) among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle, (*that wage war*) within you? Yes the source of their troubles, came from their sensual lusts of various kinds. The Greek word "*hedone*" hedonism, self-obsessed sensual desires.

Chapter 3:17-18 was all about a humble selfless life of service. While chapter 4:1 is all about self-centred desires, with no regard for anyone else! V2a&b: "You want something but you don't get it, so you kill. You covet but you cannot have what you want, so you quarrel and fight." And I asked if he could really be writing to believers? "You want something but you don't get it, so you kill." Can such things really be part of the Christian? And so we looked at King David, that "Man after God's own heart" and sadly we discovered that yes they can. Those sensual lusts can grab hold of any one of us given the right circumstances!

Then in v2c-3, we saw the kind of prayer life that these people have. Firstly, it's basically non-existent: "You do not get because you do not ask God." And secondly, when or if they ever did pray, it was all about themselves! Remember, the word "you" occurs 15 times in the first three verses, because as were their lives, so too their prayers were all about themselves! Yes the source of the problems that the churches were experiencing, came from within the brethren!

And so we pick it up in chapter 4:4-6 'Beware of the Friendship Of The World!' After accusing them of their deeply ingrained "sensuality," (hedonism) he now holds nothing back by saying: "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?" The wording from the Greek is: "Adulteresses, Know ye not that the friendship of the world, is constituted an enemy of God?" Now brothers and sisters, I guess there could be many words that well up in our minds when we think of the word "Adultery." Temptation, lust, deception, betrayal, brokenness, devastation. The old words in the marriage vows taken from Matthew 19:6 come to mind: "For what God has joined together let not man separate." And with the old words saying: "put asunder," literally meaning tear apart. When "adultery" results in divorce, which it often does, the person, (that person which the two people have become in the sight of God) is torn apart. They are "put asunder." Yes deception and betrayal. Giving to someone else, that which belongs solely to our marriage partner. And of course, this is not only expressed in a sexual way. It is spending any part of what I call the currency of our intimacy, on someone else. Our time, our conversation, our confidences or finances.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-28: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'do not commit adultery.' But I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman, (or man) has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Clearly Jesus is also speaking of the intention, isn't He. That which comes from within. James has already spoken of those "sensual desires that wage war within." And although those things are true of the world in general, since he is writing to professing Christians, Blanchard explains that he is actually writing to those believers who have fallen back into their former ways. Backsliders, they used to be called in Christian circles. And as I mentioned in the original, he simply begins with the word "Adulteresses."

Heather and I were talking some time ago, and she explained how at some stage she had sent someone a text message, and had accidentally sent it all in capitals. And the person sent back a reply saying, 'Why are you yelling at me?' Because neither she nor I knew that that's what that meant. Well basically, that is what James is doing here, as he begins with the word, "Adulteresses." In v17, he said that the true believer whose wisdom is indeed from God, "is first of all pure;" "*agne*" chaste, unadulterated. But here it is, "Adulteresses."

But Beloved, of course the relationship which he is talking about here is our relationship with God. This is that giving to someone or something else, all of that which belongs solely and rightfully to God! Exodus 20:1-6: "And God spoke all these words, "I Am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image of anything of the heavens above or of the earth beneath, or the seas and all that is in them. You shall not bow down to them or worship them. For I the Lord your God am a jealous God. Punishing the sons for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

When asked which is the most important commandment, in Mark 12:29-30 we read: "The most important one,' answered Jesus is this: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The Commentator points out that over and over God refers to Himself as being a "husband" to His people. In Isaiah 54:4-8, God speaks as it were, to a wayward wife, of Him having abandoning her for a time because of her infidelity. And yet in His compassion and unfailing love He brings her back to Himself. "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord Almighty is His Name, the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit, a wife who married young, only to be rejected, says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you' says the Lord your Redeemer."

In Revelation 21:2, 21:9, 22:17, and 19:5-8, Jesus` church is referred to as his "bride." As we read, "Then a voice came from the throne, saying: 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great'. Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah. For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding of the lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine Linen stands for the righteous acts of the Saints."

So friends this idea of chastity, (of purity within the marriage bond) is of the utmost importance to God, from the first Commandment at Mount Sinai, to the end of the Book of Revelation. But Brethren, what does constitute this spiritual kind of “adultery” against God, that James speaks of? It’s that “friendship of the world.”

But what does this really mean? Because we are called by Jesus to love everyone. Family, friends, neighbours even enemies. And yet we are called to love God, first of all! “With all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength.” I again come back to the marriage vows. Forsaking all others they say, well at least they used to! Yes “Adulteresses.” You have turned your back on your first love! In Revelation 2, (after singing their praises for certain things) Jesus says to the church at Ephesus in chapter 2:4-5b: “Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first.”

This is what James is accusing the people of, losing their “first love.” You know friends, within any relationship, if it is not worked on, if it is taken for granted, treated with an ungrateful familiarity, it will eventually fall apart. That's the way the seed of “adultery” can be planted I believe. And Brethren, as Christians, we are all in danger of this in relation to God, I believe. That joy of our salvation if it is not worked upon, can almost lose its shine! Yes the wonder of Christ’s Grace upon us, (if the Cross is not visited again and again) can become drowned out by the clanging's, the roarings and even the whisperings of the world! Yes those things that we turned our back on when we first came to Jesus swearing our allegiance to Him, if we are not working on that relationship, can begin to reel us back in.

And particularly so if it is difficult times that we find ourselves in the midst of! That all familiar coat of our old life that we had taken off when we first came to Jesus, is still hanging in the cupboard. And it looks so comfortable, and we know that it's a perfect fit. The problem is, that “the friendship of the world” goes hand in hand with that “Wisdom of the world” from chapter 3, and it comes with two masters! Rejecting everything that we have laid claim to in Christ, (and not only turning our back on God) but also raising our hearts and our hands of war against Him! “Adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

Friends, the words “chooses to be” are very important here. The word which encapsulates them is “*boulethe*” and it brings with it the notion of coming to a conclusion, making a firm decision. And this is important for us to understand. These are not people who, (as we all do at times) are simply struggling with sin, no. They've tasted and seen that the Lord is good, as the scriptures say, but then they have made a decision to turn their back on Him and head back into old familiar ways. Yes they have made a decision to become God's enemy.

What a terrifying thought! In Hebrews 10:29-31 we read: “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the spirit of grace? For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay, and again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!’ V5: Or do you think that the scripture says without reason, that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?” We’ve come now to what Blanchard calls perhaps the most difficult verse to understand in the New Testament. For a start, there’s actually no scripture in the Old Testament that uses these words that James speaks of. And he explains that what James is doing is speaking of that spirit of teaching which exists and flows through all of the scriptures concerning the matter of having our loyalties divided between

God and the world! That can never work, because in effect, our Christianity reaches our lips, but it goes no further!

And when he says “don't you know” in v14, he's actually asserting that of course they did know. They were not ignorant of those things concerning the teachings of God upon spiritual adultery: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, up out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” Of course God is not saying that as long as He is on the top of the heap, we can have as many of those other gods as we like, no. When he says, “before me,” He means in My sight, before My presence. And again, of course God sees all, and is present everywhere! So “don't you know” v4, and “or do you think the scripture says without reason” v5, we must link the together, because they are part of the same argument!

As he continues to assert that “friendship with the world” (in that embracing of our old lives sense, while turning our back on God) will never be acceptable in His sight! But the problem arises though, when we come to the words: “that the spirit he, (meaning God) caused to live in us envies intensely.” The question is: Which “spirit” is James talking about here? Is it the Spirit of God which he places within us on the day that we are born again that “envies intensely?” Or is it the spirit of fallen humanity, that continues to wage war within us, as it constantly reminds us of who we once were, that “envies intensely?”

Such as we read of in Roman 7:15-19,21-25a: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do. But what I hate, I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it but it is seen living in me. I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. So I find this law at work: when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. Where in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Blanchard explains that he consulted 18 different translations in his effort to understand this verse. Nine took a certain view, Six took a different view, and three were basically undecided! If it is the Spirit of God who he has placed within us that “envies intensely,” then he would be adding to his warning in v4, of “don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?” Yet again from the Commandment, “For the Lord your God is a jealous God.” But Brethren, when we think of the word “jealous” in relation to God, we need to be careful not to think of those things in purely humanistic terms. No, God's “jealousy” is not about human obsession and possessiveness, it speaks of His concern and love for His children. As indeed all parents who love their children do. The message to us would then be, that God's Spirit within us is jealous, envies intensely over His loving concern for His children, that we don't go back down those old roads that lead to hell. No we don't fall back into those pits of hell, that because of Jesus` Blood, we have been delivered out of!

But if the “spirit that he caused to live in us,” (meaning that spirit of now fallen humanity) is that one which “envies intensely,” then the message to us is something altogether different! It would be that we need to be on guard, against those things of our old life, those “desires which wage war from within us” from v1. They are always on the lookout for an opening. And like the Evil One himself, they never sleep! In the infamous words of the movie The Godfather: ‘Every time I think I'm out, they pull me back in!’ As the Commentator explains, we've not had a heart transplant, we have a heart that has been cleansed, forgiven and renewed. But it's still the same heart!

Friends, there may be things that you struggle with, that the Lord delivers you from and you never think of them again. The Eternity man is a wonderful example. And praise God for those deliverances. But then you may have things such as I have, that you battle with the whole of your Christian life. The war over such things has been won by Jesus at the Cross, but the battle continues until He takes us home!

Now although that application is true for us all, as I mentioned earlier, he is really addressing those who have in effect turned their back on God, after tasting of His goodness and mercy! Brothers and sisters, this second application of this verse the old Commentator Thomas Manton lays hold of, and with which I agree. That like Satan, "the spirit" of our old nature "desires," "envies intensely" to have us! 1 Peter:5-8: "Beware your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking souls to devour. This second explanation of v5 rings true, as we come into v6: "But God gives us more grace. That is why the scripture says: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Beloved, in v6, James shows us how these warnings from within in v1-5, are overcome. And of course it's all about grace! It's the idea which flows from the Hebrew word *Chen*, and in Greek is translated '*charis*' which means gifts. And it's first found in Genesis 6, where "Noah found favour with God." But it was not that there was something inherently good in Noah that was not in other men, no. It was simply that God's "favour," that free gift of His choosing, was poured out upon Noah and his family. God's Grace is simply His unmerited favour, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and of course it is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ!

'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.' That's grace, that's the gospel! Yet here James writes: "But God gives us more grace." Yet what does he mean? Well we don't need "more grace" to be saved, that price was paid at the Cross. No he means that God continues to give us His never ending eternal "favour," to do battle with those old "desires that wage war within us." Yes the spring of His "favour" is ongoing and it never runs dry. If we would seek the "favour" of God in any given situation, we need simply to come to Him. Even as Jesus Himself said: "Come to me all you who weary and burdened and, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Psalm 46:10a: "Be still, (*stop striving*) and know that I Am God."

Beloved, we don't stand alone. God is our strength and our refuge, our present help in trouble. And wars will cease across the world, when He shatters the spear. And those wars which we face from within He will also shatter, as we keep returning to Him in prayer for shelter! That is why the scripture says: "God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble." Dear friends, to turn our back on God, (to give in and to again walk upon those roads of sensuality from which we have been delivered) is to again become friends with, to be in love with the world. And yet at the same time, it means to again become God's enemy! It's to believe that we can do it on our own, even though we maintain a profession of Jesus upon our lips, it is to say, that we are even self-sufficient! I know who You are O God, what You have done for me in Jesus and what You require from me. But I'm going back to my own ways for now. I have no need of You! "But God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble." Hebrews 10:31: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

Let's pray!