

Warning Against Worldliness – Part 3

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – James instructs his audience to avoid worldly passions while walking in faith
2. aim – to cause us to put aside worldly passions and strive for true humility before God and others
3. passage – James 4:1-12

b. outline

1. The Cause of Worldliness (James 4:1-3)
2. The Condemnation of Worldliness (James 4:4-6)
3. The Cure for Worldliness (James 4:7-12)

c. opening

1. the **pervasiveness of worldliness**
 - a. having our grandchildren this week demonstrates an interesting truth: as creatures, we are *inherently connected* to the physical world (**e.g.** clothes, toys, food, diapers, etc., etc.)
 1. **i.e.** our lives are *surrounded* by “stuff,” much of which we *inherently* enjoy and love
 - b. but, Christians are called *by Christ* to “abandon” our desires for this world and to pursue him
 1. **e.g.** the rich man sad because he was told to sell “*all he had*” to follow Christ (**see below**)
 2. **question:** does this imply that we are to have no connection to physical things?
 - a. **i.e.** is it a form of “adultery” to have any friends other than your spouse?
 - b. **answer:** the *distinction* is between what you desire (as in what you *simply must have in order to be happy or complete*) vs. what you need (as in what is needed *simply for survival*)
 - c. unfortunately, many Christians never make this distinction (**due to lack of training**)
 1. they continue to have an *inappropriate relationship* with material things, and it deeply interferes with what it means to *live by faith* – and *this* is the point James is making to the churches ...
2. the nature of the **second half of the letter**
 - a. **chaps. 1-2** = the great problem – the *definition* of faith (**i.e.** what is genuine saving faith?)
 - b. **chaps. 3-5** = the resulting problems – the *transformation* of faith (**i.e.** what are the works of faith?)
 1. (**now**) the nature of *desire* – the work of faith in which our *desires* in this world are conformed to the will of God in all things – **faith = transformed desires**
 2. **thesis: everyone who claims faith in Christ must be guided by a sense of humility and self-sacrifice, a transformation of our base desires which permeates our conduct**
 - a. **the work of faith in what we desire in this world (like speaking and understanding)**
 3. **problem:** strife and division *in the body of Christ* – not caused by external differences (**i.e.** opinions over things *outside of ourselves*), but by sinful passions that are at war with each other
 - a. the **lack of spiritual conflict** within the born-again individual, such that his inward desires are similar to the *unregenerate man*: a constant “pushing” and “pulling” of various desires, all vying for attention and gratification, *but never being controlled in self-sacrifice*
 - b. **IOW:** Christians acting like reprobate men – Christians **abusing their liberty in Christ** to *indulge* in sin, rather than taking that sin “captive” and being transformed in holiness
 - c. **IOW:** Christians imbibing in **worldliness**
 - d. **IOW:** Christians committing a form of **spiritual adultery** (**i.e.** as the bride of Christ) ...

II. The Condemnation of Worldliness (James 4:4-6)

Content

b. the indictment – the definition of worldliness (vv. 4b)

1. James now clarifies what he means in calling the believers “*adulteresses*”
 - a. **i.e.** he asks another *rhetorical question*, and then answers the question to make his point
2. “*do you not know*” = this is something that you must *inherently* know; something *obvious*
 - a. **IOW:** this is the sort of thing that should go without saying – it’s sad that I have to tell you this
3. “*friendship with the world*” = **an inappropriate flirtation by the believer with material things that ultimately harms or destroys his relationship to Christ and his discipleship in faith**
 - a. “*world*” = a general term used to describe a number of realities regarding human existence
 1. planet earth or the universe in general – the physical world
 2. the human race or a subset of humanity – the world of people occupying the planet

3. systems established by humans – governmental, the business world, or religious systems
4. ways of interpreting the world – a worldview; making sense of reality; our “lens”
5. the evil realm – the systems of thought promoted by Satan over against God’s purposes
6. **ITC**: the temporal world, its forms of priority (**i.e.** materialism), especially as promoted by Satan away from the desires of God in creation – **that which runs contrary to righteousness**
- b. “friendship” (*philia*) = a term used to describe a form of “connection” to someone/something else
 1. **note**: the word can be translated as “love” (**i.e.** see *phileo*; a brotherly love), but the intention of the word is simply to indicate a friendliness rather than a deep affection
 - a. **IMO**: James uses this word (rather than love) because he is attacking a more **subtle** form of unfaithfulness – not an **overt** love of the world, but ...
 2. a **flirtation** with the world – a flirtation with the temporal world that is **contrary** to a relationship with Christ, contrary to the **covenant** that one binds himself with *in Christ*
 - a. **e.g.** the **beginning** of adultery in “flirtation” – where the covenant of marriage is “ignored” because of something in another that “seems” better or more “fulfilling”
 3. an unhealthy desire for material things **combined with** a tendency to see the effect of those things through the lens of a non-Christian worldview **and** an inability to truly see that desire in oneself (**i.e.** a blindness)
 - a. James has already mentioned “*spend[ing] it on your passions [desires]*” (negatively; **v. 3**) – an “unhealthy” desire for that which is material in nature (**i.e.** stuff)
 - b. but, for Christians, worldliness is **also** about thinking like the world thinks, particularly about living in a material world – to “flirt” with that which we should no longer be “attracted to”
 4. **question**: are we not **material creatures**, beholden to the things of this world – are we not **created** to be material beings **by nature**, thus having a “natural” desire for them?
 - a. yes, we are material creatures, and we **are** free to enjoy that which God has made
 - b. but, the **Creation Mandate** belongs to *Adam’s race* (**i.e.** to “fill the earth” by using its resources to the glory of God) – the **Christian Mandate** belongs to *Christ’s race* (**i.e.** to “fill the earth” with the glory of Christ in anticipation of his kingdom on a **new earth**; **1 Cor. 7:29ff**)
“This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, ... those who deal with the world [live] as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”
 4. “**enmity with God**” = a term used to describe a form of hostility or antagonism towards another
 - a. **i.e.** the **equal** of “friendship with the world” (“**is**” = the same thing; parallels to one another)
 - b. **i.e.** to maintain a friendship with the world is the same as being **antagonistic** towards God
 1. **question**: how would the father of the groom (or bride!) feel if his new daughter-in-law committed adultery against his son – would he be angry (furious even)?
 2. **reminder**: **Christian liberty** sets us **free** from the wrath of God – by trusting in Christ, the believer becomes a member of God’s household; the anger of God against the sinner is turned into a relationship of peace and harmony
 3. but, for a member of *God’s own house* (the bride of his own Son) to “flirt” with things of **far less value** would be to rekindle that anger and break that relationship
 - a. apostasy = to abandon the commitment one makes to God in Christ, resulting in either an overt renunciation of the faith (and the church!) or a simple “walking away”
 - c. **the condemnation – the effect of worldliness (vv. 4c)**
 1. **i.e.** a virtual restatement of the question as an answer (the same terms: friend, world, enemy)
 2. “**whoever wishes**” = the person who **purposely** desires to “flirt” with the things of this world
 - a. **again**: since this **entire letter** is being written to Christians, James is thinking of the **believer**
 - b. **i.e.** the reprobate man is **always desiring** the things of this world – the **regenerate man** possesses an inward nature that desires the things of God (over against his flesh)
 - c. thus, it is that sense of “push” and “pull” of the desires in mind here – the person who “wishes” (**i.e.** chooses) to pursue material things over against his commitment to Christ
 3. “**makes himself**” = the **purposeful sense** of choosing and chasing after being “**an enemy of God**”
 - a. **note**: James doesn’t assume a “passive” sense of such a person just “becoming” God’s enemy – he sees such flirtation with the world to be **an active choice to once again come under the wrath of God** – to **literally** pursue (again!) a state of being under God’s wrath
 4. **application**: how many of us actually **internalize** the story of the rich man in **Mark 10:17-22**
 - a. we cheer the principle of faith = to give up the things of this world in utter commitment to Christ
 - b. but, we **apply** that principle to **everyone else** (“preach it, brother; ‘that guy’ needs to hear it!!”)
 - c. thus, we **walk away like the rich man**, only we don’t walk away “disheartened” – we **assume** that we are being faithful to Christ even while we continue to love our “stuff”
 - d. **our spiritual adultery, as believers, is often characterized by blindness to our own passions**