



INTRODUCTION

Wars are a tragic part of human history. In fact, during the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. Statistics say that nearly 200 million people have died in wars and oppression in the twentieth century alone. From World War I to the Holocaust to World War II to the Korean War, Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and now the War on Terror. Estimates for the total number killed in wars throughout all of human history are as high as 1 billion. Some wonder if war is genetic. And on some level the answer is “yes”. Ever since the fall of man, war has been known. It began in a field between two brothers in Genesis 4.

James answers the age old question “who started it”? His answer is straight forward, “you started it”! “From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members” (James 4:1). After observing the symptoms of conflict, he diagnoses what causes it. The source of tension comes from our self-centered lusts that have not been subdued by the Spirit of God. You have it, I want it, you will not give it to me, so we are at war. Sadly, this does not just take place between opposing nations, but is found in interpersonal relationships including spouses, siblings, so called “friends”, coworkers, classmates, and even within the church. While you may win a conflict against your human opponent, there is a divine opponent that is, and will remain, undefeated. In chapter 4, James confronts his readers with how being the “friend of the world” makes you the enemy of God.

Transition: James draws the battle lines and decisively asks “which side are you on”? Are you a friend of the world which makes you the enemy of God? Or are you a friend of God making you an enemy of the world? Whose friend are you? He will help us discern what friendship with the world looks like, and then he will teach us how to develop our friendship with God.

1. Discerning friendship with the world (4:1-5)

There are certain attitudes and actions that place us in the enemy camp against God. James reveals some characteristics of worldliness that prove helpful in discerning if we are the “friend of the world”.

a. Sensual appetites (4:1) – “lust”

The term *lusts* denotes the enjoyment derived from the fulfillment of one’s desires, or the intense craving for pleasure. We get the English word “hedonism” from this Greek root (*hedonon*). Hedonism is the playboy philosophy that makes pleasure the chief end and ultimate goal of man. James is speaking of the insatiable appetite for sensual pleasure. It is from this pleasure seeking, self-gratifying attitude that constant strife is known. It begins internally within the heart of man, but it evidences itself externally as well. Outward tensions reveal inner turmoil and inner frustrations lead to outward conflict. Human conflicts are rooted in the sinful desires that arise within our evil, corrupt hearts.

The aim to find true satisfaction through self-gratification is an ever eluding goal. Failure and frustration harass the self-centered life. Three times James states that this self-seeking, sensual appetite is thwarted. “Ye lust, and **have not**: ye kill, and desire to have, and **cannot obtain**: ye fight and war, yet ye **have not**...” The failure to attain results in vicious reactions to achieve satisfaction at any cost – “killing, fighting, and warring” (v. 2). Tragically, a lustful person may take the life of another to acquire what they desire. People have been murdered for things such as money, drugs, cars, jewelry, even tennis shoes. However, it seems that James is speaking metaphorically to describe the emotional and verbal conflicts that divide God’s people.

Illustration: Two children desire the same toy, what is the result – war. Two teens want to the same position on the ball team, what is the outcome – conflict. Two drivers attempt to occupy the same lane at the same time, what happens – road rage. Two adults aspire for the same promotion at work, what commences – fighting. Why? Our inward lusts bring about outward conflict.

Application: A “friend of the world” is one who lives a hedonistic life. They are pleasure seekers not God seekers. How do I know if I am a “friend of the world”? Ask yourself the question, “Am I more interested in bringing pleasure to self or glory to God?” The ultimate choice in life lies between pleasing oneself and pleasing God. Ken Collier has phrased it, “Just two choices on the shelf, pleasing God or pleasing self”.

b. Selfish asking (4:2-3) – “ask amiss”

James identifies another discernible characteristic of a “friend of the world”. Their insatiable sensual desires lead to selfish asking. Even their prayers are tainted because of a wrong motivation. These verses do not mean that they were utterly prayerless, but rather that they were asking inappropriate things of God. They were trying to manipulate God into giving them what they selfishly desired. They were asking with selfish motives. God does not answer all prayers directed to Him, for true prayer must meet His conditions. True prayer is always answered according to God’s wisdom and will. Jesus told us to pray “Thy (God’s) will be done” (Lk. 11:2), but too often we pray “my will be done”. This is “asking amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (v.3).

The word *consume* means “to spend freely”. Their worldly, self-centered desires had invaded their prayer life and perverted their relation to God. “This is not the trusting child asking for a meal, but the greedy child asking for the best piece or the spoiled child demanding his or her own way” (Peter Davids).

Application: James 1:6 tells us that effective prayer must be in faith, without doubting. Now James explains the need for proper motives in offering petitions to God. “All prayer requires a submission of one’s desires to the will of God” (Pettit). Prayers motivated solely by selfishness and personal pleasures are inappropriate prayers. It is possible to ask for good things for a bad reason. We must pray according to God’s will not our own.

c. Sinful affections (4:4) – “friend of world”

A third characteristic of a “friend of the world” is identified, sinful affections. James confronts and sharply rebukes his readers with a bold accusation, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses” (v.4). He reveals the adulterous character of worldliness. His Jewish audience would have immediately understood the terminology. The Old Testament pictures Israel as bound to Jehovah by a marriage tie. Therefore, any turning to idols by the Israelites was stamped as spiritual adultery. So today, believers as the bride of Christ who have sinful affections towards the world are committing spiritual adultery against God.

The phrase “friendship with the world” points to the object of their affections. They had a feeling of friendliness and affection for the world. The *world* is that egocentric system that is hostile to God. Its central aim is self-enjoyment and self-glory in open opposition to God. To cultivate the world’s friendship implies conformity to its principles and goals. To be a “friend of the world” makes you the enemy of God. Having a love for the world and being loyal to God are wholly incompatible. They are diametrically opposed to one another. Jesus would say “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). The Apostle John would write, “Love

not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). You cannot embrace both God and the world because they are mutually exclusive.

Illustration: Friendships typically develop with those with whom we share common interests, hobbies, life experiences, values, and mindsets. We readily become friends those we grew up with, went to school with, played ball with, served in military with, or minister in church with. In becoming a “friend of the world” it means that we have adopted worldliness as our common interest, values, and mindset. We spend time pursuing the same “self-centered” priorities of this fallen world system. James warns, “friendship with the world is enmity with God”.

This picture is serious. The more we are conformed to the pattern of this world, the more we betray our God and cheat on him. James says that the one who “will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (v.4). The phrase “will be” points to a determined choice, a decision made by the will after deliberation. You do not unintentionally become the “friend of the world”. Becoming a “friend of the world” is a willful choice that is individually decided. By choosing to become a “friend of the world” we have also chosen to stand in opposition to God as His enemy. Neutrality with God is impossible. A decision to love the world defies God’s rightful claim for our total allegiance. Friendship with the world is spiritual adultery and results in hostility with God.

There are various views on verse 5. Instead of quoting a specific OT verse, James seems to be summarizing the truth expressed throughout the Old Testament. In essence, he is saying that God is righteously jealous for our affections. Like a good husband is jealous for the loyal affection of his wife, God is unwilling to share man’s affection with the world. For He has created man a spiritual being in His likeness and has imparted the Holy Spirit to us at salvation, so He yearns enviously for our total loyalty and devotion to Him. God’s jealousy desires the undivided love of His people.

Application: Where are your affections set? Do you long for the pleasures, prestige, popularity, and power of the world? Have you “set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2)? Friendship with the world is spiritual adultery and a deliberate choice to become the enemy of God. Recognize that you cannot be the “friend of the world” and remain a friend of God.

d. Stubborn arrogance (4:6) – “resist the proud”

James 4:6 is one of the most comforting and convicting verses in Scripture. It begins with great comfort, “but he giveth more grace” (v.6). Literally “greater grace”. Our sensual lusts and appetites, our selfish hearts filled with sinful

affections, and the pull of the world seem overwhelming and insurmountable, but God's grace is greater! We overcome worldliness through God's grace, the supernatural enablement to do that which cannot do ourselves. It is His grace that "brings salvation", but it is also His grace that teaches us how to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12). God's jealous love and abundant grace enables us to reject worldliness and reveal godliness in our lives. What encouragement for believers that God does not cast us off when we stumble. What comfort to know that even when we commit spiritual adultery with the world, God graciously seeks, forgives, and restores us.

Illustration: The Prophet Hosea is a vivid picture of God's grace to the wayward and sinful. God told Hosea to take a wife "of whoredoms" named Gomer (Hosea 1:2). After being married and having several children with Hosea, Gomer returned to herself lifestyle of prostitution. Hosea was instructed by God to seek, purchase, and receive her back from her sinful ways (Hosea 3:1-2). This was to serve as an illustration of God's faithfulness, loving-kindness, and mercies (Hosea 2:19-20). Praise God for His marvelous grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! It is grace that is greater than all our sin.

There is great comfort here, but also great confrontation and conviction. The verse continues with a quote from Proverbs 3:34, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (v.6). Here is a solemn warning against stubborn arrogance. The word *proud* refers to one who is "haughty or arrogant" in their attitude. It is one who has a false sense of self-sufficiency and independence from God. The individual who is the "friend of the world" lives in stubborn insubordination and arrogance before God. Because of this, God will "resist" them. The word *resist* is a military term that pictures God placing Himself in battle array against the proud. God is the active antagonistic of the proud and self-sufficient. The proud pick a fight with God that they will always lose. For God "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble".

Transition: The antithesis of pride is humility. The proud person falsely believes he can live independently of God. The humble person knows that he is dependent on God for everything. The humble are deeply aware of their sinfulness and keenly aware of their need of grace. The experience of God's grace is conditioned by the attitude of the human heart. Only those who wave the white flag of surrender and prostrate themselves in utter dependence on the Lord, receive grace. He gives grace to the humble. Humility opens the way for God's grace to flow into our lives and it is the key to developing our relationship with God.

2. Developing friendship with God (4:6-10)

Worldliness is the love God hates, but humility is virtue that unlocks the door to the pathway of victory and vitality in our spiritual walk. James rattles off ten imperatives in these verses that constitute an urgent call to repentance through decisive action. These are not unrelated commands, but interconnected biblical steps toward developing friendship with God.

a. Submitting to God (4:7) – "submit"

James begins verse 7 "submit yourselves therefore to God". Because God resists the proud and because we need His grace to overcome worldliness, we must therefore submit to Him. The word *submit* conveys a sense of urgency, demanding immediate compliance. It literally means "to place under". This is a call for voluntary submission and subordination to God and His will. Submitting to God requires humility. Subordination is difficult for the proud and self-reliant, but it is the cure to worldliness.

b. Standing against Satan (4:7) – "resist"

Here is the other side of the first basic command. Not only are we to submit to God, but we must resist the devil. The word *resist* is a military term meaning "to stand against or withstand attack". The "friend of the world" took a stand with the world making God their enemy. Here believers are commanded to take their stand with God in opposition to their true enemy, the devil. James specifically uses the title *devil* to describe our enemy's principle activity as "the slanderer". Satan slanders believers to believers, believers to God, and God to believers. He twists truth to his liking and mixes in error. But this verse gives us a promise of victory that when we resist him, "he will flee from you". We must put on the whole armor of God that we might stand and withstand our enemy (Eph. 6:10-17). When we unmask the devil's lies with the belt of truth, he flees. When we extinguish his fiery darts with the shield of faith, he has no other recourse. When we stand firm in the gospel, are assured of salvation, walking in obedience to the Word, the enemy must retreat. Humility is still key, for we are "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" not our own (Eph. 6:10).

c. Seeking the Lord (4:8) – "draw nigh"

To "draw nigh to God" was a common OT concept that described the priest's responsibility in the worship of God. A priest was commissioned with one task, to serve God, and one allegiance toward God. So a believer is to continually seek and serve the Lord. We are commanded to "draw nigh to God". A "friend of the world" identified and pursued worldly things which resulted in a distant separation from God. However, a friend of God is one who is drawing closer to Him each day. He identifies and pursues spiritual things. This is a call for a

return to an intimate relationship with the Lord. Thus the term conveys the thought of entering into communion with God as acceptable worshippers. Again a promise is made, when we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. Those who approach God in humble sincerity are assured of a favorable response. God is waiting to welcome and restore them, just as the prodigal's father was.

d. Sanctifying your life (4:8) – “cleanse, purify”

Just as the priest was ceremonially cleansed of all contamination before approaching God, so developing a friendship with God requires cleansing. Worldliness leaves us polluted with sin and thorough cleansing is necessary. Those who would humbly develop a relationship with God must “cleanse your hands” and “purify your hearts”. For it is only those who with clean hands and pure hearts can enter into communion with God in His holiness. James points to both an outward and inward cleansing, a sanctifying of one's life. To “cleanse your hands” is to withdraw from every evil deed and reaching after the world's contaminating pleasures. To “purify your hearts” is to remove all that disqualifies one for acceptable worship before God. It is an inner purity and chastity. An undivided affection for God, not being “two-souled” (double-minded). This person is not trying to hang onto the world and God at the same time.

e. Sorrowing over sin (4:9) – “be afflicted, mourn, weep”

James presents another step in humility and closeness with God. He speaks of an open and thorough repentance from sin by stating, “be afflicted, and mourn, and weep”. To “be afflicted” was to recognize one's wretchedness and shame over their sin. It is being grieved over your sin. When a true realization of our sinfulness strikes home in our hearts, the sense of our wretchedness will be followed by genuine sorrow. “Mourn and weep” denote the outward manifestations of a sense of wretchedness. This is a person who is gripped by deep grief and weeps over their sin. Paul would call this response to our sin “godly sorrow” (II Cor. 7:10).

Illustration: Can you think of some individual's in scripture that demonstrated this godly sorrow over their sin? **Job** – “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). **David** – “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Ps. 51).

When James says, “let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness” he is not condemning wholesome laughter and biblical joy. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine”. Rather, he is

talking about a reversal in attitude and emotional expression towards sin. Instead of laughing and mocking at sin, humility mourns and weeps over it. A “friend of the world” enjoys sin, but God's friends are grieved by sin. For only “fools make a mock at sin” (Prov. 14:9). When we are close to God, we feel the gravity about sin; but when we are worldly, our attitude is more carefree about sin.

Application: When was the last time you demonstrated this type of sorrow over your sin before God? When was the last time you grieved over your sin before God? Godly sorrow is a litmus test of humility.

f. Sensing your unworthiness (4:10) – “humble yourself”

Like bookends, humility is listed at the start and finish of this list (v. 6, 10). The word *humble* referred to one who had a sense of their own utter unworthiness in the presence of greatness. We are commanded to “humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord”. Humbling ourselves means recognizing that our worth comes from God alone. Sometimes we may ask God to humble us, but this is not to be a forced humiliation, but a voluntary self-abasement. This verse also contains a wonderful promise that when we humble ourselves, God will lift us up. The true way to exaltation leads through the valley of humility. Our Savior is the supreme example of this. “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him” (Phil. 2:8-9).

Illustration: Humility is depicted in one lying prostrate at the feet of a sovereign king begging for mercy. The monarch would lean down from the throne and lift the petitioner's face from the dust. The person rises with grateful joy, knowing he or she is forgiven. This is what genuine humility looks like.

Humility brings the grace of God that grants both His favor and His forgiveness to sinful man. This is the promise of pardoning grace which restores the penitent sinner to a position of favor with God. One of the most touching biblical illustrations of this truth is found in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son and the forgiving father (Lk. 15). When the wayward son humbly confessed his unworthiness the father lifted him up and welcomed him back into the family.

CONCLUSION

Whose friend are you? A “friend of the world” or a friend of God. Are you guilty of spiritual adultery? God wants his people to be humble, Satan wants us to be proud. God wants us to depend on His grace, Satan wants us to depend on self. “Self-confidence and self-satisfaction argue self-ignorance. The only healthy Christian is the humble, broken-hearted Christian” (J.I. Packer).

Unconditional surrender to God is the only way to complete victory. We must draw near to God by cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts. We must humble ourselves before God by confessing our sin, weeping over them, and turning from them. James message is clear, real faith produces humility. Instead of putting up a fight, put on faith. Instead of causing conflict, nurture contentment. Instead of stomping and stonewalling, willingly submit to God. The grace of God flows into your life through humility.