

THE CURE FOR WORLDLINESS

TEXT: JAMES 4:4-10

INTRODUCTION:

1. Last week we looked at the problems of strife and unrest, "wars and fightings" (4:1).
2. We looked at the problem of prayerlessness -- "ye have not, because ye ask not" (4:2b).
3. And the problem of "asking amiss," i.e., praying with the wrong motives (4:3).
4. And we spent considerable time with James 4:4, which deals with the problem of worldliness. Many years ago evangelist James Stewart wrote these words, "The vast majority of Christians are living a sub-normal Christian life."
5. This is because of worldliness. Over 100 years ago, A.T. Pierson said, "Adopting worldly maxims, catering to worldly tastes, corrupted by worldly leaven, there has been a gradual letting down of the severe standard of New Testament piety, and a constant effort to robe the gospel in worldly charms, in order to attract worldly men to the church...These worldly expedients have proved very successful in secularizing the Church, but have sadly failed in evangelizing the world. They do not even draw the people except so far and so long as their novelty attracts curiosity seekers, or feeds the morbid appetite for excitement. It is time all such measures were abandoned as helps to the work of evangelization. They are rather hindrances; for they destroy the peculiar character of God's people as a separate people, they divert attention from eternal things, and they grieve the Spirit of God, on whose presence all power depends...The fact is, Zion's attractions are unique; like her Lord, they are not of the world; they belong to another order of beauty, 'the beauty of holiness.' When the Church robes herself in the charms of worldly attire and adornment, she not only fails to draw the world to herself and to Christ, but she actually takes the infection of the 'Spirit of the Age,' which, however disguised, is hostile to God" (from *Evangelistic Work*, 1887).
6. Albert Barnes, a contemporary of Pierson, describes the "friendship of the world" as "the *love* of that world; of the maxims which govern it, the principles which reign there, the ends that are sought, the amusements and gratifications which characterize it as distinguished from the church of God. It consists in setting our hearts on those things; in conforming to them; in making them the object of our pursuit with the same spirit with which they by those who make no pretensions to religion."

7. In our text tonight we have the cure for worldliness, as well as a prescription for revival. We have in verses 7-10 ten imperatives -- "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God..."
8. One expositor likened them to "curt military commands" which "demand incisive action."

I. SUBMISSION (4:6, 7).

1. "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (4:6). We need God's grace to be submissive. We need God's grace to be humble, because pride is in the heart of man. "He giveth grace unto the humble" (4:6).
2. "God resisteth the proud." Pride is the root of all sin. Pride is devilish. Referring to the qualifications for a bishop, I Timothy 3:6 says, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil."
3. We need to be mindful of our own pride and our own sinfulness. We need to stop making excuses for our sins.
4. A.W. Tozer said, "It is our wretched habit of tolerating sin that keeps us in our half-dead condition."
5. We need to acknowledge our dependence on God. We must deny self and yield to God. "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself..." (Luke 9:23).
6. A humble spirit and a submissive spirit go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other.
7. "Submit yourselves therefore to God" (4:7). Submission is seldom preached these days, and yet it is basic Christianity.
 - "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21).
 - "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands" (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:8; I Peter 3:1).
 - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Eph. 6:1).
 - "Children, obey your parents in all things" (Col. 3:20).
 - "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls..." (Heb. 13:17).
 - "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (I Peter 2:13).
 - All of these ultimately touch upon our submission to God – "Submit yourselves therefore to God" (James 4:7).

8. Submission to God means resisting the devil, and resisting God means submitting to the devil. There is no middle ground. We must be completely and fully surrendered to the Lord.
9. Pride and stubbornness keep sinners from getting saved. And pride and stubbornness keep Christians from getting right with God.
10. God hates pride. "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look..." (Proverbs 6:16, 17).
11. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chron. 7:14).
12. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7b). The devil is constantly trying to break down our resistance and our separation.
13. Barnes said, "While you yield to God in all things, you are to yield to the devil in none. You are to resist and oppose him in whatever way he may approach you, whether by allurements, by flattering promises, by the fascinations of the world, by temptation, or by threats."
14. Beloved, let us "draw nigh to God" and He will draw nigh to us (4:8a).
15. In II Chronicles 15, we read that "the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (II Chron. 15:1, 2).
16. This was true for King Asa, and it is also true for me and you (James 4:8a). When King Asa stayed close to the LORD, the LORD blessed him. But when King Asa forsook the LORD, he got into trouble.

II. CLEANSING (4:8)

1. James 4:8 refers to our hands and to our hearts.
2. Our hands are the instruments by which we execute our purposes, whether good or bad. If they are bad, we need to clean them (4:8).
3. This of course is symbolic, because merely washing our hands won't do us any good if our heart's not right, so James also says, "and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (4:8).
4. James has already referred to the "double minded man" in James 1:8. "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."
5. So merely washing the hands will not help, if the heart is not right with God. Matthew 27:24 says Pontius Pilate "washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it."
6. Pontius Pilate went to hell with clean hands but a dirty heart.

7. In Scripture, the heart is the seat of motives and intentions.
8. The Psalmist wrote, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24).
9. Conviction of sin, accompanied by godly sorrow leads to genuine repentance. Then comes the cleansing (4:8).
10. The filth of this world is constantly splattering us. We are constantly stained and defiled and contaminated by the pollutions of this world (cf. 1:27).
11. Second Corinthians 7:1 says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."
12. James is writing to Christians because he refers to them as "brethren" in verse 11. Yet he says, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners" (4:8).

III. HUMILITY (4:9, 10).

1. "Be afflicted" (4:9) – *Strong's Concordance* says it means literally, "be wretched, i.e., to realize one's own misery."
2. It means to "grieve over your sin." In fact James calls us "sinners" in 4:8. We must see our sin the way God sees it.
3. The word rendered "be afflicted" means they were to feel distressed and sad on account of their transgressions.
4. Ezra 8:21 says, "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us..."
5. Notice Ezra called for a fast. Prayer and fasting is a good response to this feeling of grief and remorse, this feeling that we need to get right with God.
6. Barnes says the words of James 4:9 "are those which are expressive of deep grief or sorrow. The language here used shows that the apostle supposed that it was possible that those who had done wrong should voluntarily feel sorrow for it, and that, therefore, it was proper to call upon them to do it."
7. "Be afflicted, and mourn (James 4:9). Mourning and heaviness always accompany a deep sense of sin.
8. The apostle Paul cried out, "O wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:24).
9. "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep..." (4:9). The great evangelist Hyman Appelman said revival "is a time of weeping. I told you that I have seen revival meetings without much advertising, but I have never seen a revival without tears."
10. Our Lord said in Luke 6:25, "Woe unto you that laugh now! For ye shall mourn and weep." Most Americans are laughing themselves right into hell.

11. Most so called comedy shows and films are full of dirty jokes and bad language.
12. Earlier I referred to A.W. Tozer. In his tract, "A Formula For Personal Revival," he said, "Be serious-minded. You can well afford to see fewer comedy shows on TV. Unless you break away from the funny boys, every spiritual impression will continue to be lost to your heart, and that right in your own living room. The people of the world used to go to the movies to escape serious thinking about God and religion. You would not join them there, but you now enjoy spiritual communion with them in your own home."
13. During WWI a man wrote an immensely popular song that went, "Pack up your troubles in your old kit back and smile, smile, smile." Later on, during WWII, he committed suicide.
14. The Bible does not say to pack up our troubles and smile, smile, smile – it says to "be afflicted, and mourn, and weep..." (4:9).
15. Worldly people are laughing themselves silly when they ought to be on their knees asking God for forgiveness.
16. "Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness" (James 4:9b). "Heaviness" means sorrow on account of sin. Mourning and heaviness always accompany a deep sense of sin (4:9).
17. The worldly lusts that once thrilled the old nature ought to grieve the new nature and cause us to "be afflicted and mourn, and weep" (4:9).
18. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord" (4:10). Our Lord said in Matthew 23:12, "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

CONCLUSION:

1. Here in our text we find the cure for worldliness. This passage in James 4 calls for repentance. God bends us and breaks us so that He can restore us and use us (James 4:10).
2. I have read a few books and heard quite a few sermons about some of the great revivals. One thing these revivals all have in common is that they started with prayer. Cf. James 4:2 – "Ye have not because ye ask not."