

Warning Against Worldliness – Part 4

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 **“good news – bad news” scenario**
 - a. the **“bad news”**: we are all, as *Christians*, subject to the “adultery” of worldliness
 1. we have *inappropriate relationships* with the material world, and it interferes with *living by faith*
 2. it is caused by sinful passions (desires) that are at war with each other *within us*
 3. it is Christians **abusing their liberty in Christ, imbibing in materialism, committing forms of spiritual adultery by flirting with the world** (i.e. as the bride of Christ) ...
 4. this is the *indictment* James levels upon the believers in his day *and upon every generation*
 - a. **e.g. Ananias and Sapphira** keeping back a portion of the proceeds from the sale of land – failing to report the entire transaction was viewed as an act of **greed (Acts 5:1-11)**
 - b. the **“good news” (crassly): God is not going to give up on his own without a fight**
 1. **e.g.** my discussion with “someone” about how *convicting* this chapter has been to them
 - a. **i.e.** the conviction of seeing these forms of “adultery” in their own life
 - b. **but ... my response:** the born-again person *must be* convicted by such things, otherwise there is a good chance that he or she is not actually regenerated
 - c. **if you have endured 31 sermons from James and have not been convicted by them, then you may need to “examine yourself” to see if you truly are “in the faith”**
 2. the good news is that God, who has decreed your salvation, accomplished it in Jesus, and drawn you to Christ in faith, *will* (must) guard you through faith to the day of glory
 - a. so, James gives the “good news” of *God’s* response to our worldliness in **vv. 5-6**
 - b. which is followed by a series of imperatives in **vv. 7-12** on how *we* are to respond
 3. **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**

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

Content

d. the hope – the response of God to worldliness (v. 5)

1. *“or do you suppose ...”* – another **rhetorical** question designed to make a point
 - a. unfortunately, a difficult phrase translated from Greek to English (**i.e.** like a double-negative)
 - b. it can be rephrased as: are you assuming (or have you concluded) that a certain *biblical truth* is untrue – or (simply) have you *forgotten* the great truth that has been revealed to you?
 1. NIV: *“or do you think Scripture says without reason that ...”*
 - c. **IOW:** James is asking his audience if they *still believe* the fundamental *biblical truth* he is about to bring to their remembrance – **in light of our worldly tendencies, have we forgotten ... ?**
2. **problem:** the “quotation” that appears in the verse is not found *directly* in the Old Testament
 - a. **remember:** James’ Bible (in 45AD) would have been *primarily* the Septuagint (LXX), the Hebrew-to-Greek translation of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Scriptures from the 3rd C. BC
 1. there is *no* New Testament for James to bring forth this truth (although it will come later)
 2. and, there is no *direct* reference to this quotation in any English Bible (just *cross-references*)
 - b. so, this is *probably* a **paraphrase** of a basic, biblical concept *gleaned* from “experience”
 1. **i.e.** something that we do all the time – **e.g.** see my account of **Acts 5** above; or, (negatively) the “biblical” paraphrase of “love thy neighbor” trumping the *larger* “love God with all your heart”
 2. **IOW:** James, *under inspiration*, knows a biblical principle that applies to this situation – it’s not a “direct quote,” but it is clearly *warranted* from what he has learned from his “elder brother”

3. “the spirit that he has made to dwell in us” = the essence of what it means to be Christian *by nature*
 - a. “spirit” (*pneuma*) = a term with a wide semantic domain, *all of which* is relevant here:
 1. like “world” (*kosmos*) in **v. 4**: earth, humanity (subset), systems, ideologies (worldviews), etc.
 2. **wind or breath**: the fundamental nature of *life itself* within us (e.g. see pneumonia)
 - a. we “live and breathe and have our being,” just as God gave the “breath of life” to Adam
 - b. so, James *could* be referring simply to the idea of life, or *how we live that life before God*
 3. **the Spirit**: the *Third Person of the Trinity* indwelling us for the purpose of sanctification
 - a. Jesus refers to him as a “wind” blowing where he wills (**John 3**) – invisibly accomplishing the work of *regeneration* and *conversion*, followed by the work of *sanctification*
 1. the Spirit “invading” every aspect of the *Imago Dei* (i.e. speech, thought, desire)
 2. to bring about the sanctification of the individual towards the goal of glorification
 - b. so, James *could* be referring to the Holy Spirit that God “has made to dwell in us”
 1. **but**: most English translations (all except the NASB) use a lowercase “s”, implying that this is *probably not* what James is referring to – i.e. not a reference to the Holy Spirit
 - a. (technical) given that this *paraphrase* is from the O.T. *and the work of the Spirit under the old covenant* is mostly “external”, it is unlikely that James would glean a principle about *his work as an internal agent* from that source
 - b. so, although the *agent* of our sanctification is surely the Spirit of God, the *context* seems to suggest that James is concerned *with our spirit* (nature) rather than *his*
 4. **the regenerated nature**: the new nature endowed within us *by the Spirit*
 - a. the work of the Spirit to remove the “heart of stone” to make us “new creations” – the new nature within us that *desires* to come to Christ by faith and *now desires to live by faith*
 - b. i.e. the new nature that God “has made to dwell in us” that has, *by virtue of its divine origin*, a set of inherent desires to love Jesus *more than the things of this world*
 - c. i.e. a spiritual nature that comes from Christ (as spiritual), not Adam (as physical)
 - b. **in light of our worldly tendencies, have we forgotten that God has made us born-again creatures, with a new nature that inherently wants to love Christ more than anything else?**
 4. “he yearns jealously over” = the “fight” that God puts up for his own
 - a. **question**: is God simply going to “accept” our “flirtations” once he draws us to his Son?
 1. **IOW**: how does a jilted spouse react *emotionally* to such a betrayal?
 2. **note**: James uses this word *explicitly (IMO)* to counter the word “adulteresses” in **v. 4**
 - b. **answer**: “I the Lord your God am a jealous God” (**Exo. 20:4**) = those whom God has drawn to himself, that he has *chosen to be his own*, he will jealously guard *as his own*
 1. e.g. the Second Commandment is *clearly* God expressing the “guarding” of his own
 2. e.g. the story of Gomer (**Hosea 3**) as *representative* of God “going after” his people
 - c. **in light of our worldly tendencies, have we forgotten that God has purposed us to be his eternal children, and that salvation is his work from beginning to end, which he will finish?**
 1. **paraphrasing**: that what he began in us, he *will complete*; that Christ *will lose nothing* of all he has been given; that the Spirit *will mold us* more and more into the likeness of his Son?

e. the gift – the action of God in worldliness (v. 6)

 1. “he gives more grace” = God pours out *even more* of the grace that saved us in the first place
 - a. grace = not some “honey from heaven,” but the *choice* of a holy God to act towards sinners in ways that are (in fact) contrary to both his nature and his will (as holy)
 1. i.e. the choice of a *holy God* to act benevolently towards those who are inherently *unholy*
 2. **ITC**: the **continuing action** of a holy God to “hold” his own – i.e. for them to *persevere in faith*
 - b. **perseverance** = “those who are elect, regenerated by the Spirit, and trust in Christ by faith *will persist in their saved condition* through life *in spite of* their various moral failures ...”
 1. **IOW**: grace = the Father’s choice to save us → Christ’s work to accomplish our salvation → the Spirit’s effort to draw us to it → *the Spirit’s ongoing work of sanctification in us* → our glory
 - c. **in light of our worldly tendencies, the response of God is the gift of continuing grace – to pour out greater measures of benevolence that convict us of sin and lead us to repentance**
 1. “God opposes the proud ... gives grace to the humble” = a quotation from **Prov. 3:34 (LXX)**
 - a. the reprobate heart is proud (scornful) – it *loves* the things of this world more than God
 - b. the regenerate heart is humble – it recognizes that Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer, so it seeks for “the flesh” to be brought under the sanctifying power of the Spirit
 - c. **God chooses to transform the base desires of the flesh in the believer away from the world, rather than to simply “ignore” our flirtations with it**
 1. and, the list of imperatives to follow is what we are then called to do in obedience