

Worldliness & the Jealousy of God

War & Peace Part 4
James 4:4-6a 7-5-2015

Summary: Worldliness is living like this world is all there is – evidenced by adopting the world’s way of thinking and treasuring the world’s pleasures. We must avoid worldly influence. Worldliness is a betrayal of God – personal (adultery, hatred, being His enemy), and purposeful (a willful act of rebellion). It provokes His jealousy, which involves anger and punishment. But that protects us and shows His love for us. And His grace is greater than our worldliness. We can have that grace and avoid being treated as His enemy when we are humble.

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James 4:1 What causes wars and battles among you? Don’t they come from your desires that wage war within you? 2 You covet something but don’t get it – you murder. And you envy, but you cannot have [what you want] - you battle and war. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your desires. 4 Adulteresses! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he caused to live in us? 6 But he gives us more grace

Prayer:

Oh Lord, what a bone-chilling phrase that is at the end of verse 4 - **an enemy of God**. If any phrase could ever send chills up our spine, it should be that one. What could be more horrible? Nothing! There's no position we could ever be in that could possibly be worse than being an enemy of Almighty God. Those who oppose You do not win.

And who belongs to that unthinkable category? Which poor souls are in that most miserable conceivable position? Anyone who **chooses to be a friend of the world**. Oh dear Father, by the power of Your Spirit, use the words of Your servant James this morning to save us from the suicidal path of worldliness.

Introduction

So, if you didn't pick up on it from the passage yet, God really, really hates worldliness. He considers worldly people His enemies. Some biblical concepts our culture agrees with. The Bible says lying is bad, murder is bad, stealing is bad – and the culture says, “Yeah, we agree.” But what does our culture say about worldliness? I looked up the term *worldly* in a dictionary this week – here is what it says: *Worldly: experienced and sophisticated. Wise, knowledgeable, enlightened, shrewd, mature, seasoned, cosmopolitan, cultivated, cultured.* I think worldliness qualifies as one of those areas where our culture and God do not see eye to eye. God says, “It's hatred toward Me!” and they say, “No, it's the epitome of wisdom and knowledge and sophistication.”

And that is scary, because to some degree we are always a product of our culture. When everybody around us sees things one way, it is very easy to become influenced by that. Not only that, but the reason the world sees things the way they see them is because that is the direction that natural, fallen, human reasoning points. And since our flesh is still infected with the disease of natural, fallen, human reasoning, we are constantly vulnerable. We are at constant risk of falling into worldliness, because it is the current of the river we are in, and if we stop swimming upstream for a moment, we are immediately swept downstream right into that which God hates.

So if all the forces around us – the influences of the people surrounding us, the drives and impulses of our flesh, our natural way of thinking and reasoning – if all of that is pushing as hard in the direction of worldliness, but going in that direction would make us an enemy of God, would you agree with me that this is a pretty urgent passage for us to study? That it is urgent for us to learn exactly what worldliness is, how to avoid it, and how to recover once we have fallen into it? That is why there are so many warnings in the Bible about worldliness. And one of the strongest of those warnings is right here in today's text.

We have been studying through the book of James and we come this morning to chapter 4 verse 4, where James just explodes on the readers with a very strongly worded warning.

James 4:4 Adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

God and the World are Enemies

There is nothing subtle about the way God talks about worldliness. He doesn't mince words – God and the world are bitter enemies.

John 7:7 The world ... hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.

The world hates Jesus Christ.¹ And the more you become like Jesus, the more the world will hate you.

¹ They claim to love Him. They come up with a lot of revisionist history and false concepts of what Jesus is like, and they love that imaginary version of Jesus that they have invented. But the more you expose the real, actual, historical Jesus to them, the more their faces will turn red and they will seethe with anger and hatred.

John 15:19 ... I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

The world hates God's Word, they hate His people, and they hate Him. And God isn't exactly crazy about them either. The world is the object of God's wrath.

Ephesians 2:2 ... you followed the ways of this world ...³ Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Why is there so much animosity between God and the world? Why do they hate Him so much? And why does God have such extreme wrath against them? It is because the sins of the world are not just random sins. They are influenced by their leader – the devil himself.

1 John 5:19 ... the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Three times Jesus referred to Satan as the ruler of the world.² He is the one organizing the system of evil in society. When five Supreme Court justices make a mockery of the institution of marriage, that is not just because they happen to have a liberal approach to interpreting the Constitution. It is because they use worldly reasoning, and the author of worldly reasoning is Satan, who is on a mission to destroy everything God does. When university professors brainwash students with their anti-God rhetoric, or when evolution is crammed down everyone's throat as gospel-truth, when Richard Dawkins is considered brilliant, or when ISIS is beheading Christians, and babies are being aborted by the millions – those are not random sins. Those things are the results of the ruler of this world persuading his lackeys in the world to think the way he thinks.

Satan hates God. And so he spends all his energy trying to destroy whatever God loves. And he has a system for doing that, and his system is called *the world*. And so God and the world are bitter enemies, which means our attitude toward the world is a very big deal. Remember back at the end of chapter 1 when James boiled all of true religion down to just three things?

True Religion

#1 - a controlled tongue

#2 - love and care for the needy

Do you remember the third one?

1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: ... to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Avoiding worldliness is a fundamental aspect of true religion so in this passage today James is going to give us some priceless instruction about worldliness that can rescue us from sliding down the suicidal path of becoming worldly.

The Anatomy of Worldliness

So what is the definition of worldliness? If you grew up in a legalistic church you might have been taught a very shallow definition of worldliness- getting a tattoo or body piercing or something. But the biblical concept of worldliness runs a lot deeper than that. It is not mainly about external behaviors.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world.

The things **in the world** are the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life. So one form of worldliness is to fall in love with those things. Don't love those things; but he also says don't love the world itself. What's that? That is the philosophies and attitudes and ways of thinking and values that characterize unbelieving society. So here is a working definition of worldliness:

² 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.

Worldliness is thinking, feeling, and acting like this world is all there is.

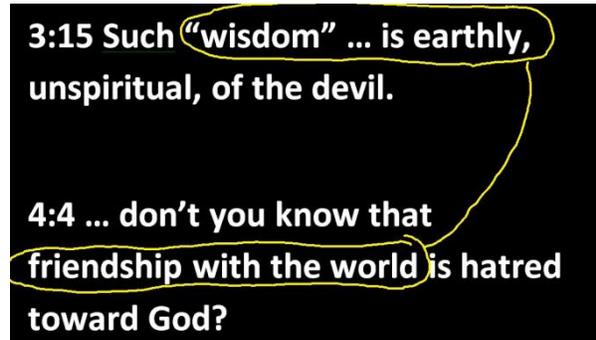
As Christians we all believe there is a God and an afterlife and a spiritual world. We hold that belief in our head, but sometimes our feelings or thought processes or actions don't line up with that belief. Sometimes my emotions are responding as if there were no God. Sometimes my thoughts are not taking the afterlife into consideration – only this world. Sometimes my behavior doesn't reflect any indication that I believe there is a spiritual world. And yet in my head I am claiming to believe all of those things. So how can you spot worldliness in your heart? How do you know when you are infected with that disease? It will manifest itself in two ways. The first one we saw back in chapter 3.

Adopting Earthly Wisdom

You might see this section here on worldliness and think it kind of came out of the blue. But James has actually been talking about worldliness ever since 3:15.

He was talking about their hostilities toward each other, and he says:

James 3:15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil.



In other words, worldly. So one mark of worldliness is human wisdom – adopting their way of thinking. Adopting their outlook and their reasoning. Worldly thinking is what you come up with if you don't take what God says into consideration, and you go by what seems reasonable based on what you observe with your senses.

Attraction to Their Treasures

And how does that result in fighting and quarrels and disordered relationships? When you adopt their way of thinking, that will cause your heart to be attracted to their treasures. You will look to temporal, earthly things for your happiness. And the more we fall in love with earthly pleasures as our source of happiness, the more our desires for those pleasures will become hostile desires. When someone gets in the way of you getting those things, you will get mad. Why do your kids fight in the back seat? Because of worldliness. They adopted a worldly way of thinking, which led to worldly values and treasures in their heart, and a worldly way of seeking happiness. They think getting their way or not being touched or annoyed by their brother or having a longer turn with a game is a source of happiness. They think some situation or some thing besides God is what they need for joy, and their sibling is interfering with that, and so they fight. You won't ever cure the problem of their fighting until you cure the problem of their worldly outlook.

Avoiding Worldly Influence

This is why Scripture warns us so many times to avoid worldly influences. If worldliness were just a list of taboo actions, it would be easy to spot, and easy to avoid. But if it is an outlook – a way of thinking – an attitude – we can be influenced toward that in very subtle ways. And so Scripture warns us.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. ... **17** “come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.”... **7:1** Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of fear for God.

Is it worldliness to have non-Christian friends or to listen to secular music or to watch movies? Not necessarily. But we need to be very careful with those things because they can influence us toward worldly thinking and feeling.

Psalm 101:2 I will be careful to lead a blameless life ...3 I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. 4 Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. ...6 My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me

David says, “I’m going to steer clear of anything that can influence me toward loving this world.” In our pride we always want to say, “I can handle it. Those influences will have no impact on my heart.” But, if David couldn’t handle it, I don’t know why I think I could.

The thing is, those influences can be so subtle. You listen to secular music or watch movies, and they aren’t full of all kinds of trash and blatant immorality, so we think they’re okay. But the most dangerous stuff is not always the trash. Sometimes it’s the stuff that is clean and wholesome, but that portrays human wisdom in a favorable light.

Anger

For example, the world’s doctrine on anger. Their idea is you shouldn’t get angry over little things, if you have been hurt severely enough, you have a right to be angry. God says selfish anger is never appropriate, no matter how much you have been hurt. Righteous anger is when you are angry not because someone offended you, but because someone dishonored God. Those are two completely different ways of thinking about anger. But the world can make their way of thinking seem so reasonable and right.

Self-Esteem

According to Scripture self-esteem the great problem that we need to fight against is in our hearts. But the world has a way of making it seem like a good, healthy thing that we should pursue.

Severity of Sin

In Scripture the severity of a sin is based on how much it dishonors God. In the world’s philosophy, something is more evil or less evil based on how many people it hurts.

All these ideas and attitudes run counter to Scripture, but they are portrayed in ways that make them seem so reasonable and good. And it’s hard to spot because very often their arguments are not intellectual arguments – they are emotional ones. They don’t give you a reasoned, logical string of arguments for why it’s okay to withhold forgiveness if someone hurt you really bad, or why it’s okay to sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend. They just portray it in a way that makes it seem good. So your emotions are affected and your brain is oblivious that anything is even happening.

Think of how many times in the Christian life your brain is on board with something that God wants, but your emotions aren’t there. Your brain knows there is greater joy in God’s way than from sin, but your emotions don’t agree. Your brain knows that God can be fully trusted, but your emotions can’t seem to get there. The subtleties of worldliness come in and destroy us.

So all that is the anatomy of worldliness. Worldliness is when we think, feel, or act like this world is all there is. And how can you spot it in your life? Delighting in their treasures, and adopting their wisdom. That is what worldliness is. Now in verse 4 James is going to show us why it matters so much. It matters because it is a betrayal of God. Look at the first word in verse 4.

The Betrayal of Worldliness

It's Personal

4 Adulteresses!

He calls all of them – both men and women, **adulteresses**. This is a very strong metaphor. When we are worldly, God is the husband, we are the wife, and we are having relations with another man. That is a shocking analogy, but it is a common one in Scripture. The main reason marriage exists is to teach us about the kind of love that God has for His people, and the kind of love that we are to have toward Him. That is why God designed marriage as the one relationship in all human existence that is exclusive. Every other kind of love can be shared. You are not being unfaithful to one child if you also love his siblings. If I'm your friend, you are not being unfaithful to me if you also love your other friends. But marital love is the one kind of love that can't be shared – it is only for your spouse. Share it outside the marriage and you destroy the marriage. If I snuggle up to Tracy and put my arm around her and look into her eyes and say, "Tracy, of all the women I love, I love you the most" – that doesn't honor her. Marital love teaches us that it is not enough to have God as your favorite shelter to run to, or your favorite water source to drink from when your soul is dried up. He must be the only source. Our marriage to God is not an open marriage.

Definition of Marriage

This is one reason why it is such a wicked thing to tamper with the definition of marriage. Our culture is currently engaged in a frenzied attempt to redefine marriage. Or, more accurately, to un-define marriage. No definition. It is just whatever you want – opposite sex, same-sex, permanent, temporary, one partner, multiple partners. I read an article about a teenage girl who has been dating her father for two years and now they're getting "married." They plan to move to New Jersey where incest is legal. In Pennsylvania there's a father and son who are getting "married." And I saw in the news one woman is marrying her cat, and another woman is marrying a tree. She says she has fallen in love with a tree named Tim. Take away God's definition of marriage and you have no definition and the entire institution is completely destroyed.

That is evil. Why? Because it destabilizes the most foundational building block of our entire society? That's part of it, but worse than that is the fact that the more we distort the way God designed marriage, the less ability we have to understand the nature of God's relationship with His people. Take away the permanence of marriage, and the exclusivity of the one-flesh relationship, and the male and female roles, and you pervert our ability to understand what God is talking about when He calls Himself our Husband.

Betrayal

James uses this image of an adulteress wife to teach us why worldliness is such a big deal to God – it's because it is personal. It is not mainly a legal issue, or a behavioral issue, or a religious issue, where you fell short of some institutional standard. It is a *marital* issue. When our hearts fall in love with this world, God takes that personally. If you became infatuated with another woman to the point where your love for her dictated the whole direction of your life, and you commit adultery with her, and then, when you confessed to your wife, you just say, "Sorry honey, I guess I broke the no adultery rule," - that kind of confession is going to do more harm than good. If all you can see is that you broke a rule, and you don't realize what a personal assault it was on your wife, then you are not even coming close to appreciating the gravity of what you have done. When I sin, the main problem is not that I messed up. It is not that I just caused whatever consequences it brought about. It is that I broke faith with my God. I cheated on Him. I violated the covenant between me and Him. I took His friendship lightly, and despised Him. And I chose to behave as His enemy.

Why is it such a terrible thing to have conflicts and fights and quarrels in the church? Because it hurts people? Because it hinders the work of the ministry? Because it is a poor witness to the world? Those are true but they are secondary. The big reason why fights and quarrels and disunity in the church

are so evil is because of what it says about our relationship with God. Fighting comes from worldliness, which is an unconscionable act of betrayal against God. R.C. Sproul calls it cosmic treason. But James puts it in much more personal, relational terms – adultery against God, hatred toward God, and becoming an enemy of God.

Betrayal really is a horrible thing. And the more intimate the relationship the more horrible betrayal is. Have you ever had someone very close to you - someone you have opened your heart to and exposed your life to, entrusted yourself to, turn around and stab you in the back? That is what our worldly affections do to God. He has opened his heart to us. He has welcomed us into his inner circle. Psalm 25:14 says he has confided in us. He has bound Himself to us with an eternal covenant - even stronger and more intimate and more profound than the marriage covenant. This relationship with us cost Him His Son. It is one thing to stumble into a momentary sin and do something offensive to God. But to join sides with his enemies - the ones who hate Him and mock Him and blaspheme against Him and despise Him and ignore Him - the ones to spend themselves fighting against His kingdom, oh, what a betrayal that is! It is one thing to commit adultery against your husband; it's another thing to do it with his worst enemy. When your most intimate companion joins her heart with your worst enemy – that is just a special kind of pain. But that's what we do to God when we fall in love with this world. It is personal.

Secondly, it is purposeful. Look at the end of verse 4.

It's Purposeful

4 ...Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

It may not be a conscious decision (“I’m going to betray God and join my heart with the world”) – but conscious or not, it is most definitely an act of the will. It is not something we accidentally stumble into. Worldliness is a willful rebellion against God, because it is a choice to ignore Him. The world cares nothing about God. Search every story of every newscast for the last year and all the major media outlets and you will not find one single reference to God as having any significance whatsoever on the affairs of the day. They don't think there is anything about God that is even remotely relevant. And in some ways that is even worse than blaspheming God. The people who blaspheme God and rage against God - they are hostile toward Him, but at least they assign some significance to Him. But the vast majority of people in our society behave and think as though God is absolutely irrelevant in every way.

And when we choose to join them in that, that is a decision of the will.

Pick a Side

You have to pick a side. He doesn't say it is unwise to be friends with God and with the world. He says it is impossible. It can't be done. It is like driving on I-25 and trying to travel with the northbound traffic and the southbound traffic at the same time. You can straddle cross the center line, but that will just cause collisions. As soon as you turn and go with the southbound flow of traffic, you are no longer northbound.

If I don't have a major collision with the devil as soon as I wake up in the morning, it's because he and I are travelling the same direction. It is impossible to travel two directions at the same time. And it is impossible to run after God and run after this world at the same time.

Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Worldliness is personal, it is purposeful, and one more – it is prideful.

So – what is the anatomy of worldliness? Worldliness is thinking, feeling, or acting like this world is all there is, which makes me attracted to their treasures, and makes me buy into their ways of thinking. Then James shows us the betrayal of worldliness. It is personal with God – like adultery and being His

enemy and hating Him. And it is purposeful – a rebellious act of the will. And what is the result of all that? What is the consequence of worldliness?

The Consequence of Worldliness

The Jealousy of God

The consequence is this – it provokes the jealousy of God. Take a look at verse 5. I'll read it from the ESV. (Verse 5 is one of the most difficult verses in the entire New Testament – both to translate and to interpret. And I wrote an appendix in the sermon manuscript that describes my reasoning for why I believe that ESV translation is most likely what James was saying.)

5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

God breathed into us the breath of life. He gave us a spirit that is capable of a love relationship with Him. And so God is jealous for our spirit. When we commit adultery with the world – we fall in love with their ideas and ways of thinking and their earthly pleasures - that provokes God's jealousy.

The Jealousy of God in the Old Testament

And he begins the verse by saying, **or do you suppose it is for no purpose that Scripture says...** There is no specific verse in the Old Testament that is being quoted here, so evidently James is referring not to a particular passage, but to a major Old Testament theme.³ And the jealousy of God for his people is definitely a major theme in Scripture.

False Ideas about Jealousy

You would never know that from how often you hear about it in church. I think that, of all God's attributes, this one has to be the least popular. Oprah Winfrey says that is what made her decide to walk away from Christianity – the day she found out that God is a jealous God. It's not a popular idea. And that is probably because of all the attributes of God's, jealousy is the one that gets the most twisted when human beings try to do it. When we try to reflect God's jealousy, we usually mess it up so royally that what we do ends up looking nothing like the real thing. And for that reason, very few people think of jealousy is a virtue. When is the last time someone in your prayer group had that for their prayer request – "I just really need a lot more jealousy in my life"? Or when we are shouting out attributes of God in our corporate prayer time – how often do you hear, "Jealousy!"?

But popular or not, it's a major theme in Scripture.

Exodus 34:14 Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

Jealousy is His middle name. And it is important that we understand and appreciate this attribute, and learn to love it, because it is just as good and beautiful and holy and righteous and pure and delightful and beneficial as God's other attributes. And since it is an attribute of God, it is something that we should mimic in our own lives.

2 Corinthians 11:2 I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God.

So what is godly jealousy? Since there are so many distortions of jealousy, let's start by talking about what it is not. First, jealousy is not envy. Envy is when you have a negative attitude toward

³ For an example of this phrase introducing a theme from Scripture rather than a specific verse, see John 7:37-39, and possibly Matthew 2:23, and Galatians 3:22.

someone because they have what you wish you had. Secondly, jealousy is not suspicion or paranoia – like the guy who never lets his wife go anywhere alone because he is so insecure about her love.

True Jealousy

What is true jealousy?

True jealousy is when you feel pain, anger, loss, and sorrow when your spouse gives their heart to someone else.

Their marital affections are rightfully yours, and it is fitting that you would be angered if they are shared with someone else.

Anger

Jealousy is always connected with anger.

Deuteronomy 32:21 They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols.

Psalms 78:58 They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols.

Jealousy is nothing to mess around with, because it involves anger. It is not like the storyline in those ridiculous romantic comedies where the woman wants to win the man's affections, so she starts dating someone else to arouse the first guy's jealousy. First of all, you can't cause someone to love you by making him jealous. He will only be jealous if he already loves you. But the other reason it's a dumb storyline is because along with jealousy comes anger - anger toward the man who is stealing the wife's affections, and anger toward the wife as well. God made jealousy a part of marital love in order to protect the marriage. The possibility of that fiery anger prevents the wife from allowing her affections to stray. And it is that aspect of God's jealousy that we are so often warned about.

Deuteronomy 6:15 the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.

1 Corinthians 10:22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

If you are going to provoke God's jealousy you had better be stronger than Him, otherwise you're going to suffer some serious punishment.

The Beauty of Jealousy

And if that sounds like an ugly thing to you, think again. Jealousy in marriage is a beautiful thing, for a couple reasons. The first one I already mentioned – it protects the marriage.

Protection

Jealousy stands like a guard against any third party that would break in and destroy the holy, precious, beautiful exclusivity of marital love. If I truly love my wife, and I see her heart start drifting toward another man, I am going to do everything I can possibly do to win her heart back and restore our marriage. The more her love means to me, the harder I work to win back her affections.

God's jealousy for us protects us. It is His jealousy that is behind His work of preservation. My sinful heart is so prone to wander from God, and so prone to drift off toward some earthly thing, that if God were not constantly working in my heart to preserve my love for Him, I would fall away from Him and apostatize completely every day. And so when your love strays, He will do what it takes to get it back.

Zechariah 1:14 ...This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion ... 16 “Therefore, this is what the LORD says: ‘I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. ... 17 My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.’ ”

God is at work preserving our faith and keeping us from apostasy.

God’s jealousy is not like the jealousy of the high school boyfriend who is jealous because his girlfriend is interested in the quarterback instead of him. This is the jealousy of a husband. The difference between the jealousy of a boyfriend and the jealousy the husband is this – the boyfriend has no right to jealousy. He never gave her a ring, he never pledged his whole life to her, and so her love does not rightfully belong to him. The husband is jealous for what belongs to him. God is not pining away like a jealous boyfriend. He thunders with the anger and love of a jealous husband who refuses to let his wife be taken away without a fight.

A Sign of Love

So God’s jealousy is a beautiful thing because it protects our relationship with Him. Secondly, it is beautiful because it shows His love for us. If a woman goes off with another man, how jealous will her husband be? It depends on how much he loves her. If he is indifferent about it, that shows that he doesn’t care about his wife’s affections. You don’t get jealous if some woman you don’t love goes off with another man. If he doesn’t care whether he is desired by her, it’s because he does not desire her. And a wife in a marriage like that is to be pitied. It is a terrible thing for a woman to be married to a man who is indifferent about her love.

Imagine this: There is a young woman who is depressed because no one loves her. The more aware she becomes of how unwanted she is, the more she is overcome with feelings of despair and worthlessness. There is a man she is in love with, but she doesn’t know how he feels. One day that man hears a rumor that she is going out with someone. And when he hears that rumor he doesn’t care in the least. That will break her heart, right? Why? Because it means he doesn’t care about her love. But what if when that man hears that rumor, and he’s crushed? When the woman sees that, it will thrill her heart because it shows that he loves her.

Jealousy is a sign of love because the pain of jealousy is caused by the loss of something that is valuable to you. That is why it should thrill our hearts when we hear the news that God is jealous for our love. It means He actually cares about our love. Even though my love is weak and fickle and shot through with all kinds of sin, amazingly, it is precious to God.

Do you realize that God’s jealousy is the only thing that gives your love for Him any value? If your faithful love for God meant nothing to God, then your faithful love for God would be utterly worthless, which means you would be utterly worthless because if the best thing about you is worthless, then you really are worthless. The only thing that gives my existence any meaning or value at all is the fact that my love means something to God. What an amazing gift of grace that I have something that God wants!

There are some of you who have no sense at all of God loving you. If you want to feel loved by God, feel His jealousy. He cares about your love.

In fact, the language James uses in verse 5 is striking. Not only is God jealous, but it says he *longs* jealously for our spirit. Can you even picture God longing for your spirit? Some of you think of God as being disgusted with you, barely putting up with you, sick and tired of all your failures. And you don’t even have a category in your mind for a God who longs jealously for your heart.

Verse 4 is a painful verse. We find out we are adulteresses, behaving as enemies of God – hatred toward God. The skies are pitch black when we are reading verse 4. But then there is a glimmer of hope in verse 5 with this concept of God’s jealousy. He longs for our affections to be returned to Him. It is still pretty stormy in that verse, with the anger that goes along with jealousy, but still, there’s a glimmer of light. And then, in verse 6, the bright, brilliant sun comes out in full glory.

The Demise of Worldliness: Greater Grace

In verse 4 you realize you have been a friend of the world, which means you have behaved as an enemy of God. And God destroys His enemies. Does that mean you're doomed? You say, "When I take a hard look at my desires, and I'm totally honest, there's no way around the fact that I am guilty of committing adultery against God." Does that mean you are no longer married to God? Well, it's definitely a step in that direction, but here is some great news – it does not have to end in divorce. At this point we expect God to thunder from heaven: "How dare you! Who do you think you are? You think nothing of provoking My wrath? Here it comes!"

But take a look at verse 6.

6 But he gives greater grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

What does that mean that He **gives grace**? Well, whatever it is, it is the opposite of what God does to His enemies. Can you see that in verse 6? He opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble – that means this thing that God does for the humble is the opposite of God opposing you. Instead of opposing you - fighting against you as His enemy, He does the opposite of that ... but only if you are in this category called **the humble**.

We have seen the ABC's of worldliness – the anatomy, the betrayal, and the consequence. But now we see the D – the demise of worldliness!

Greater Grace

When it says **greater grace** – what does that mean? Greater than what? It does not link grammatically to any particular word or phrase. The best I can figure is that James is just saying grace is greater than the whole problem we just got done describing in verse 4. Greater than my attraction to the world? Yes!

Titus 2:11 the grace of God that brings salvation ... 12 teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions

His grace is greater than my heart's attachment to worldly pleasures!

What about my guilt and the punishment I deserve for choosing to be an enemy of God. Is His grace greater than that? Yes!

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Is His grace greater than His own jealous anger? Is God's grace greater than God's wrath? Yes – even that.

Psalms 30:4 Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. 5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime

His grace is greater.

Romans 5:20 ...where sin increased, grace increased all the more

James doesn't qualify it – His grace is greater than the whole mess we are in.

Romans 5:17 ... how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

It is an abundant provision of grace. It is greater grace. It is not like grace wins the race against your sin in a squeaker. Grace finishes the race, takes a shower, changes clothes, has a meal, takes a nap, and then sin crosses the finish line. There is never a problem with not enough grace – I don't care what you've done.

"How do I get that grace?"

What does it say?

6 But he gives greater grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the ... humble.”

Benediction: Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

Worldliness is thinking, feeling, or behaving in ways that say, “This world is all there is.”

1. Think of one of the more common sources of sinful anger in your heart (big or small). What worldly treasure were you delighting in, or what worldly attitude or way of thinking were you adopting?
2. Of all the world’s “pulpits” (book, magazines, reality shows, worldly friends, newscasts, school, etc.), which poses the greatest threat to influence you?
3. Do you have a story of God’s greater grace in the face of your worldliness that you could share with the group?

Appendix

It is unclear whether the word **spirit** is the subject or the direct object. If it is the subject of the sentence, then it would be translated this way:

The spirit he caused to live in us longs to the point of envy

If it is the direct object then it would be translated this way:

He longs jealously for the spirit which He caused to live in us

So either 1) it is our spirit longing with the sinful envy, or 2) it’s God longing for our spirit with His righteous jealousy. Either way there are some major difficulties, but most scholars opt for #2.

My biggest reason for agreeing with them is this: if the point of the verse is that the human spirit longs to the point of sinful envy, why would James emphasize the fact that God caused that envying spirit to dwell in us?

Another big problem with view #1 is that James begins the verse by saying “Scripture says...” There is no verse in the Old Testament that is being quoted here, which means it must be a summary of a major Old Testament doctrine. It is much easier to conceive of the jealousy of God as a major Old Testament theme than the human spirit longing to the point of envy is a major Old Testament theme.

For those reasons, I agree with view #2. However, that view is not without its problems either. The word **envy** is always an evil thing in the Bible. It is never used to describe God’s jealousy. It is unlikely that James would depart from the Old Testament language in referring to this attribute of God. Although, in 1 Maccabees 8:16 and several other extra biblical sources envy is used interchangeably with jealousy. Ralph Martin, in the WBC on James says that in extra biblical literature the words envy and jealousy are

“often” used interchangeably.⁴ And some have suggested that James opted for this word because in the preceding context he had used the normal word for jealousy in a negative way to refer to our sinful hostility toward each other.

McCartney makes this point: “We may note that James is often imprecise in his use of words. We have seen that in 4:1, 3 James uses the word *hadonai* in a way that somewhat loosely related to the more precise meaning “pleasures.” James employs phrases such as “cycle of generation” without regard to their technical meanings, sentences such as “He must show by good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom” that do not reward overly-exact analysis, and illustrations such as “brackish water does not make sweet” and “where the will of the pilot wishes” that resist being pressed for precision. Therefore, the ordinary connotations of *epipitheo* and *phthonos* are not decisive considerations.” - Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, p.213.

Another difficulty with view #2 is that the Bible never says that God **longs** for us. That word is used in ways that seem too human to describe God – almost a pining away for something. (Although in Jer.13:14 it sounds like there might be a possibility of God longing for His people – even though in that context He says He will not.)

Another difficulty in this verse has to do with the word spirit. Is it a reference to the human spirit or to the Holy Spirit? I believe it is the former for the following reasons:

- If we take it to refer to the Holy Spirit, this would be the only place in the entire book where James refers to the Holy Spirit.
- In 2:26 James used the word spirit to refer to the human spirit.
- If the word *spirit* is taken as the subject of the verb, then the Holy Spirit would be the one who is jealous. But jealousy is more naturally attributed to the Father. It would be odd to identify the Holy Spirit as the one who is jealous, especially since James never speaks of the Holy Spirit anywhere else in the book.
- If the word *spirit* is taken as the object of the verb, it would mean God the Father is jealous for His Spirit in us. That thought would not fit the context, as it is not the Holy Spirit who is guilty of adultery.

⁴ Martin, R. P. (1998). *James* (Vol. 48, p. 150). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.