

Warning Against Worldliness – Part 5

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 4:7-10)
4. The Contrast of Worldliness (James 4:11-12)

c. opening

1. the issue of **cognitive dissonance**
 - a. a condition that has “infected” the thinking of modern people (**i.e.** the *result* of relativism)
 - b. cognitive dissonance = the condition of the mind whereby an individual holds two competing (or contradictory) positions simultaneously, believing that both are true (or, at least, valid)
 1. **e.g.** the individual who hates capitalism, but tweets against it *on his iPhone*
 - c. unfortunately, also a condition affecting Christians – the embrace of *dissonant* worldviews
 1. **i.e.** that is possible to love Jesus *while also loving the things of the world* – to hold an eternal “hope” while nursing a set of temporal “hopes”, many of which *conflict with that eternal hope*
 2. **e.g.** in terms of our goals, desires, plans, pursuits, and priorities, not appearing much different from any unregenerate person living out their life in the pursuit of worldly things
 3. **e.g.** how would you react if Christ decreed for your entire physical and/or financial health to entirely collapse tomorrow – what would be your *first thought*?
 - d. it is this cognitive dissonance that James indicts the readers of his letter (and us!)
 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 us **abusing our liberty in Christ, imbibing in materialism, committing forms of spiritual adultery by flirting with the world** (**i.e.** as the bride of Christ) ...
 - e. 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
 1. James gives this “good news” of *God’s* response to our worldliness in **vv. 5-6**
 2. but ... what is to be *our response* – how do *we* respond to this good news?
 3. **LOW:** how do we overcome the natural desires of the flesh to flirt with the world; how do we respond to the conviction of this indictment (assuming we *are* convicted!)
 4. **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. James (**now**) gives a series of imperatives that are designed to bring the *cure* for this worldliness – **they are all centered on a willingness to come humbly before God**

III. The Cure for Worldliness (James 4:7-10)

Content

a. the structure (pattern) of the imperatives

1. by my count: eight (**8**) explicit imperatives (commands), each based on an action verb
 - a. **i.e.** submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, purify, be [wretched], let [your laughter], humble yourselves
2. by my observation: a series of **back-and-forth focuses** between God (above) and the world (below)
 - a. first, to God (**i.e.** “submit yourselves”, **v. 7**; “draw near”, **v. 8**; “be wretched”, **v. 9**; “humble yourselves”, **v. 10** – **i.e.** all ways of approaching God (**the primary thought**))
 - b. then, to the world (**i.e.** “resist”, **v. 7**; “cleanse”, **v. 8**; “let your laughter”, **v. 9** – **i.e.** all ways of approaching the world (the *resultant* thought of a humble relationship to God))
 1. **note:** “submit yourselves” and “humble yourselves” are the two **bookend phrases** – the point of the entire pericope – the entire set of commands makes the point of **the thesis above**
 2. **LOW:** coming before God in humility is a **set of actions** followed by a **set of reactions**

3. the “therefore” in the middle of **v. 7** could actually be at the beginning of the phrase
 - a. **IOW:** this is what it means that “God gives grace to the humble” in **v. 6**
 - b. the “proud” do not care about overcoming their worldliness – they are either reprobate in nature (i.e. unregenerate), or continue to act in ways that appear reprobate due to their own pride
 - c. the “humble” submit themselves to God because they focus their desires on him – **they want to act in accordance with their new nature**
 - d. **so, it is humility and self-sacrifice before God which is the key to remaking our desires**
- b. the substance of the imperatives**
 1. **action:** “submit yourselves to God” (**v. 7**) = commit to a subjection to Christ; be obedient to him
 - a. “submit” (*hypotagēte*) = an aorist, passive, second-person plural; a command to all of you to **continue** in doing what you have already committed (aorist is an action begun in the past)
 1. i.e. faith in Christ is not just a profession (**remember James 2:14?**) – it is life-long commitment to being a disciple of Jesus – one who “walks by faith” (as a “doer of the word”)
 2. to submit to God is to admit that **his law is good** and desire to do it (**Rom. 7:12ff**)
“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”
 - a. e.g. the very first thing God did for his people was give them a law (**Exo. 20**)
 - b. the reprobate man hates the law – it represents enslavement (and brings death)
 - c. the regenerate man loves the law – it represents freedom (and brings life)
 - b. **the reaction:** “resist the devil” = by an *intelligent* act of the will, refuse to bow to his temptations
 1. “resist” = a command to be hostile to the devil – to **know his tactics** and to withstand them
 - a. e.g. the three-fold method that Satan uses to attack humans (i.e. the subtlety of Satan)
 - b. e.g. as seen in both **Genesis 3** and **Matthew 4** (i.e. Jesus’ use of the Word of God)
 1. Eve experienced *cognitive dissonance* in the Garden – she knew that the fruit was deadly, yet she looked upon it as desirable and wanted what it “offered”
 - c. “flee from you” = the devil will not waste his time on those he cannot sway
 - c. **the humility to change our base desires begins by submitting ourselves to God – to cling to the means he has ordained and to love what he loves**
 1. **honestly, what do you love most in this world, and how does it tempt you to sin?**
 2. **action:** “draw near to God” (**v. 8**) = prioritize a relationship with God over all others
 - a. **note:** not a “spatial” matter (i.e. searching for the “presence” of God) – the omnipresent God is infinitely close to all (even those in hell) – it is about us seeking him as *our priority*
 1. i.e. in Christ Jesus, God has already “drawn near” to us – he has come to us (**Rom. 10:6-9**)
“the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
 2. i.e. God has sought us out with *his love* – now, we must seek him out *with our love*
 - b. **the reaction:** “cleanse your hands ... purify your hearts” = take *concrete* steps towards holiness
 1. “cleanse” and “purify” hearken back to the O.T. system of ritualistic washings – i.e. the **Bronze Basin** where the priests would **ceremonially cleanse** themselves before offering sacrifices
 - a. symbolic rituals designed to demonstrate the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God
 2. i.e. the priests took *concrete* steps towards holiness – they did *specific things* to be holy
 - a. “double-minded” (see **James 1:8**) = lit. **cognitive dissonance** – believing that it is possible to have a “relationship with God” but not having to purify your heart and life of sin
 - c. **the humility to change our base desires continues by coming to God with clean hands – to approach God with our hands outstretched in faith and washed clean in repentance**
 1. **honestly, what “dirt” is still on your hands – what filth still clings to you?**
 3. **action:** “be wretched and mourn” (**v. 9**) = have the right *attitude* about approaching God
 - a. **note:** there are far too many who believe that coming to God is a “light” thing (**contra Isaiah 6**)
 1. based on the mistaken notion that God is “just like us” and that we relate to him *on our terms*
 2. thus, sin is treated in evangelical circles as a “light” thing (i.e. the “downplaying” of sin as the central matter between us and God [and one another]; replaced with Jesus as “our buddy”)
 3. but, Jesus contended in the opening of the **Sermon on the Mount** that only those who recognize that they are spiritually “poor” and “mourn” can enter the kingdom (**Matt. 5:3-4**)
 4. thus, our approach to God must be **with the right attitude:** not coming under the assumption we are owed something, but coming under the recognition *that we need grace*
 - b. **the reaction:** “let your laughter be turned to mourning” = assume a new posture towards life
 1. **posture:** a focus on what *truly matters* – we must overcome the **superficiality** of (modern) life
 - a. e.g. “Amusing Ourselves to Death” (Neil Postman, 1985) – TV is the exchange of “rights” for amusements – sacrificing the seriousness of living to the “drug” of entertainment

1. **question:** how would we have responded *differently* to COVID-19 if we did not have ubiquitous internet access – would we have “quarantined” ourselves when healthy?
- b. **i.e.** the constant focus on entertainment (“*laughter*”) must be replaced by a seriousness of discipleship – the believer needs to “get serious” about living for Christ, rather than for self
- c. **the humility to change our base desires continues by abandoning the superficial – to seek out those serious things he has given us with which we grow in knowledge and holiness**
 1. **honestly, what “entertainment” or “pleasure” can you simply not live without?**
4. **action:** “*humble yourselves before the Lord*” (v. 10) = in summary, to be “exalted” by God
 - a. “exalted” = to lift up; to raise up; to elevate; lit. to bring up from a lowly place to one of prominence
 1. **i.e.** to exalt God is to proclaim our vision of him as being great and might
 2. **ITC:** the result of humbling ourselves before God is for him to exalt us *in his presence* – **IOW:** it is for us to hear those fateful words (Matt. 25:21):
“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”
 - b. **the humility to change our base desires flows from our born-again nature to please our Father, and to be exalted into his presence rather than to be exalted in this world**