

"JAMES" SERIES

#8: "Worldliness"

SCRIPTURE: James 4:1-12

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 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"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

INTRO:

James deals with two important questions in these verses:

- What is worldliness?
- How does a Christian fight the Devil?

Verses 1 through 6 answer the question:

WHAT IS WORLDLINESS?

How would YOU define worldliness? If you were to randomly ask members of conservative, fundamental churches in America, you would probably get answers like these:

- Worldliness has to do with the kind of amusements a person enjoys;
- It's the kind of movies people go to;
- It's going to dance halls and bars;
- It's the kind of crowd a person runs with;
- It's the kind of conversations a person engages in;

- It's the way a person dresses;
- It's the engaging in making money to the exclusion of all else;
- It's spending lots of time on the golf course, fishing, boating, etc., to the exclusion of church activities;
- And I suppose you could think of others.

Regardless of whether you approve of these or not, none of these things are the right answer to the question, what is worldliness?

Someone once approached Dr. Griffith Thomas and asked him, "Don't you think that the world is becoming more and more Christian today?" Dr. Thomas said, "No, I don't think that is true. I think the world is becoming a little churchy, but I think the church is becoming immensely worldly."

J. Vernon McGee has noted that "Since World War II there has been a breakdown of the wall of separation between the church and the world. The separation that many had practiced was legalistic and, I think, unscriptural. The church was like the little Dutch boy who was keeping his thumb in the dike. Then, in the aftermath of the war, along came television, lawlessness, immorality, and juvenile delinquency; first the beatniks, then the hippies, then dope and marijuana and the philosophy of existentialism. A tidal wave swept over the dikes of separation, and even the little Dutch boy was washed away."

James says that worldliness is giving in to our passions to the extent that we commit sin – even murder – in order to get what we want. Our passions – strong desires – lead to quarrels and fights among us. What we have we spend on our passions so, when we ask God for anything, He refuses to give it to us because He knows we'll waste it on our passions.

When we give in to our passions, we wind up becoming friends of the world, and we can't be friends of the world and friends of God at the same time. To be friends with the world is to be an enemy of God. Like Jesus said, "You who are not for me are against me."

How can we illustrate this truth from our lives? Pardon another personal story, but I think it illustrates what James is saying. I got a job with R. H. Macy's in Joplin that financed me through three years of college. In my third year with Macy's – my junior year in college – I was requested to come to the store manager's office. Now, this was a pretty big deal – the store was a five-story department store in downtown Joplin. The manager asked me to consider becoming a trainee in their managerial program. In other words, he believed me to be a candidate for a store manager.

It really didn't take me long to give him an answer. I was dead set on being a preacher, and nothing short of the Lord's hand was going to stop me. So, I said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

During my three years with Macy's, I saw what the retail business was like on a large scale in a national chain. It was a dog-eat-dog world. The company came before family and personal needs. Meeting the quotas took precedence over any other of life's goals. Climbing the ladder of success meant doing whatever seemed necessary to bump off the person or persons ahead of you. I saw department managers pink-slipped without notice. It was not the life I wanted to live.

I wanted to work with a local congregation of Christians, where there were never any of the things I saw at Macy's. Ha! Was I ever naïve! It didn't take me long to realize that the church was not only much like the world, but it had also allowed the world in!

When the spirit of the world gets into the church, the church becomes worldly. And if you think it's bad in the business world, you certainly don't want to get involved in a church fight!

I was called to a pretty old church (that I'll not name) as a "trouble-shooter." The establishment of the church had become afraid of the "new-comers" to the church, so, every suggestion of the newcomers was not only rejected but seen as an attempt to "take over." The problem festered to the point that the church split. When I arrived, things were still smoldering, and smoke was still hovering.

After about a year, when I had achieved some trust of some of the influential leaders, they and I got together and determined what needed to be done. At their request, I produced a Constitution and By-Laws for the church. They had never had any. These elders and I got them approved by a majority vote of the elders. We then took the documents to the congregation, and they were approved by a strong majority. They called for selecting elders anew. When we had our last meeting with the "old" elders, three of them resigned and quit the church. One of them pronounced "Anathema!" on me, stomped his feet, and left, and I never saw him again.

We selected a whole new slate of elders and deacons, and in spite of the exodus of several people – friends of the elders and deacons who resigned and left the church – our numbers grew until our attendance was such that has never been equaled since I left to plant a new church in Round Rock, Texas.

VERSES 7 THROUGH 10 TELL US HOW TO DEFEAT THE DEVIL.

Do you believe in the Devil? A friend of mine once said, "If you believe in the Holy Spirit, you must also believe in the unholy spirit." Who is the Devil? What does he do?

The Devil – also known as Satan – does really exist! However, one of the most successful things he has done is convince people that he really doesn't exist!

The apostle Paul believed the Devil exists. He warned the Ephesian church in chapter 6, verse 11: ***“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the Devil.”***

He warned the Thessalonian church in 2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10: ***“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”***

He warned the Corinthian church in 2nd Corinthians 11:14: ***“...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”***

And here James doesn't bother to prove the Devil exists; he simply assumes it and says, ***“Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.”***

Who is Satan? Where'd he come from? Well, originally, Satan was a heavenly creation, or an angel, by the name of Lucifer. He, along with other creations of God, were not robots; they had minds of their own. Well, Lucifer became quite proud, and his pride led him to desire to be on an equal with God. His attitude was one of “Move over, God; I'm taking over.” God wasn't going to allow that to happen, so He not only said, “No” to him; He punished him by confining him to an earthly existence.

After that, God created man and began his plan for the utter destruction of Lucifer. The angels who followed him and any human beings who would follow him became the Devil's disciples.

Someone has suggested that the Devil may believe that if he can claim a vast number of human souls, God will let him escape his fate so that all the lost souls can be reclaimed. Haven't you heard someone say, “I just can't believe God would allow so many people to be lost”? However, Scripture doesn't support such an idea.

But note what he says along with this exhortation: ***“...he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. . . Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”***

If you don't humble yourself before the Lord, you won't have the wherewithal to resist the Devil. Your pride will keep you from drawing near to God and purifying your heart.

This is the reason Jesus said to the rich young ruler, ***“How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God”*** (Luke 18:24-25).

Finally,

JAMES ADDRESSES THE MATTER OF JUDGING A BROTHER IN VERSES 11 AND 12.

What does it mean to “judge” a brother? Is criticism judgment? Is trying to get him on the right track judging? Jesus said in Luke 6:37 and 38, *“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you.”* The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1, *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”*

Could it be that there is a difference between “judging” and identifying a brother’s sin or moral failures? The truth is, I am responsible to you as far as helping you follow Christ – I must make judgments in order to do that. But judging you, as in the sense of making a determination as to the destiny of your soul, that’s far beyond my pay grade. Only God or Christ is to judge in that sense.

One commentator says, “...James is not prohibiting the proper and necessary determination that every Christian should exercise. Nor is he forbidding the right of the community to exclude from its fellowship those it deems to be in flagrant disobedience to the standards of the faith, or to determine right and wrong among its members (See 1st Corinthians 5 and 6)” [Douglas J. Moo, James, p. 152].

In the early church there were Jewish believers who questioned the salvation of non-circumcised Gentile believers. They made judgments that they shouldn’t have made.

Do you make judgments that you shouldn’t make? Do you judge those who may be less mature in the faith than you are? Do you judge those who look different or sound different? Do you judge those whose expression in worship is different from yours? As James says, *“Who are you to judge your neighbor?”*

IN CLOSING...

These problems James deals with are the results of worldliness in the church and Christians buying into the world’s view of things. Next Sunday, we’ll look at what he has to say about it.