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TRUE FAITH IS NOT A FRIEND OF THIS WORLD-PART 4: JAMES 4:1-6

TO: COLORADO LEGISLATORS, SPOUSES AND THE GOVERNOR

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James makes it clear that having a friendship with the world is incompatible with a true believer whose loyalties will be to God. In fact, James says there is no middle ground; you are either God's friend or His enemy. James makes it clear that hostility and hatred is toward God. The focus of the "world" is sinful, self enjoyment and gratification and this is in disregard to God. The world system is hostile to God and the hostility is not on God's side, but rather from the one who makes himself a friend of the world. Friendship with the world reveals and points to hostility toward God on man's part, not God's. Total allegiance cannot be pledged to God and the world for they are in opposition to one another. Romans 8:6-8 says, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

I. A STERN REPROOF - JAMES 4:5-6

James 4:1-6: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2. You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious 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 with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us."? 6. But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

In chapter 4, James deals with sin in the church. He reminds his readers that a true and living faith is not a friend of this world but devoted to God. It has clearly been stated that you cannot love this world and love God.

A. IS SCRIPTURE MEANINGLESS? - JAMES 4:5A

James 4:5a: "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose..."

James asks another rhetorical question and the answer is obvious. James asks, "Or do you think..." In other words, is it your own personal, subjective opinion that Scripture speaks to us with no purpose or point?

%no purpose+Greek %kenos, "without reason or authority.

They are living as though they can be friends with the world and love God at the same time. So the question is, does Scripture speak with purpose and authority or not? If it has no authority, then there can be no ultimate demand on how we live. And it would seem that many who call themselves believers live as though God's Word has no influence over their lives. James warns not to be deceived for Scripture speaks with absolute authority admonishing all as it relates to practice and not just profession from our lips.

B. OUR TENDANCY TOWARDS ENVY - JAMES 4:5B

James 4:5: "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us."?"

This part of Scripture is one of the most difficult to interpret. First there is no clear reference to a specific Scripture, however the previous context points to a main theme or teaching in Scripture with two different translations to consider.

1. VIEW #1: GOD IS JEALOUS FOR HIS PEOPLE- JAMES 4:5B

This verse in James could certainly refer to the fact that God desires with a strong longing, yearning for His people to be completely His. The Spirit which He made to dwell in us yearns enviously, jealously for our total loyalty and devotion to Him. The Holy Spirit seeks and claims our undivided devotion and love. There can be no rival. God has a claim on us by virtue of His work in our lives.¹

2. VIEW #2: THE HUMAN SPIRIT TENDS TOWARD ENVY- JAMES 4:5B

James could be referring to our human spirit and its natural tendency towards envy. The spirit caused to live in us envies intensely. It is a sinful, human attitude of envy. The natural man has a spirit of envy in spiritual conflict with God. The spirit that God implanted in man turns toward envious desires. The spirit then is the soul or evil impulse, the corruption of humanity.² Dr. MacArthur notes that one cannot be dogmatic, but the rendering is preferable: "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy." James would therefore be saying, in effect, "Don't you know that you yourselves are living proof of the veracity of Scripture which clearly teaches that the natural man has a spirit of envy?"³ To give added consideration, several words in biblical Greek must be considered. First, the word for "desires" refers to a yearning or a very strong, intense desire, a craving. Second, the word for "jealously" refers to envy meaning ill will or malice and in Scripture, it always has a negative connotation and is never used in reference to God for it describes a sinful, human condition. And so this passage could be saying that the spirit, the sinful human condition tends towards this desire or envy.

Regardless, we know from James that he has issued a stinging rebuke for their flirtation with worldliness. And God tolerates no rival. You cannot love God and the things of this world. God demands total allegiance from His people. You cannot have a friendship with the world which amounts to spiritual adultery. Our flesh desires and in our sinful human condition, we tend toward fulfilling our sinful desires.

C. A GREATER GRACE - JAMES 4:6A

James 4:6a: "But He gives a greater grace..."

James makes a definite assertion with a contrast. "But" suggests a contrast between the yearning of the spirit that competes for our love and the gift of grace God gives enabling us to overcome our own sinful desires. James says God gives a "greater grace". One must ask, greater than what? No matter what the desire or temptation from our flesh or the world, God gives us more grace to overcome those sinful, selfish desires and we can walk the way God calls us to. God willingly and abundantly supplies all that we need to

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please Him. But this grace demands a response as James continues. That response is one of humility.

D. PRIDE REPROVED/HUMILITY EXALTED - JAMES 4:6B

James 4:6a: "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

James refers again to Scripture and this time a specific verse found in Proverbs 3:34, "*Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.*" While James has issued such sharp rebuke to his readers regarding their sin, he also states the encouraging good news of God's amazing grace given. Yet the availability of that grace is conditioned by the attitude of ones heart and God makes clear who He offers this "*greater grace*" to.

1. "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD" - JAMES 4:6B

James issues a solemn warning here specifically to those who are proud.

%proud+Greek **%huperephanos**, "-*huper*" meaning over, beyond, above and "*phainomai*" meaning to appear, to show oneself to manifest.

This word for "*proud*" stresses character and not identity. To be proud then refers to one who shows himself above others. It is having the sense of superiority and arrogance over others. It is an attitude where you suppose yourself to be better than others; self sufficient and independent even of God. The Greeks despised this kind of pride.

Scripture is clear on God's view of pride and in Proverbs 6:16-17, it is one of seven things which the Lord hates and it is an abomination to Him. In fact, God is opposed to the proud.

%opposed+Greek **%antitassetai**, "-*anti*" meaning opposite over and against and "*tasso*" a verb meaning to station, order, arrange, a military term depicting a full army ready for battle.

This verb vividly pictures God as placing Himself in battle array against such an individual. God is the active antagonist of the proud and self sufficient.⁴ So God is stationed in full battle array against the proud.

It has been said that from pride comes all other forms of sin. God is opposed and against the arrogant person and this theme is apparent from Scripture. You can look at Psalm 18:27, 34:18, 51:17, 72:4, 138:6, Isaiah 61:1 or Zephaniah 3:11-12 for a refresher on God's view of pride. And the gift of God's grace is conditioned by the attitude of our hearts. God's grace demands a response, and that response cannot be one of pride.

2. "GOD GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE"- JAMES 4:6B

God gives grace to the humble. God's grace demands a response...the response of the humble. James begins with the word, "*But*", introducing quite a contrasting message from "*God is opposed to the proud*". While God has taken up His station against the proud and arrogant sinner who exalts himself, James now offers encouragement for all who are humble. God will abundantly give His grace to those who have a humble heart.

Grace is unmerited favor. It is favor from God that could never be earned or deserved. It is just given by God to those who acknowledge their sinfulness and need of God. Those are the ones who are humble. The humble understand their dependence on God and like empty vessels, they are ready to receive His grace and help which goes far beyond what they deserve or expect.⁵

God has always given grace to the humble. Through Isaiah, He assured His ancient people Israel that "*to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.*" (Isaiah 66:2) The first and foundational Beatitude is "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*", that's humble, "*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:3) Just as pride is the root of all sin, so humility is the root of all righteousness. It is only when self concern is replaced for God's glory, that God's Spirit can work His sovereign and gracious will in a heart, changing it from being an enemy to being a friend.⁶

God gives grace to the humble. And though His grace is free, it is never intended to enable us to take our sin lightly. If we will simply humble ourselves, God will extend His great grace and mercy so undeserved to us who are in such great need. And this promise of grace is the basis for what follows in James 4:7-10; a message of hope and encouragement to all who will heed the call.

¹Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.190.

²Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.191.

³MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.198.

⁴Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 235.

⁵Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 236.

⁶MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.200.