

The World According to Jim
“Two-Timing God”
James 4:4-10

Introduction

- There are some great opening lines from the world of literature.
 - “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” [J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*](#).
 - “Call me Ishmael.” *Moby-Dick* by [Herman Melville](#).
 - “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” *Pride and Prejudice* by [Jane Austen](#).
 - “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” [Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*](#).
 - “When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow.” *To Kill a Mockingbird* by [Harper Lee](#).
 - “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.” *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by [George Orwell](#).
 - “Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.” *Romeo and Juliet*.
 - “It was a pleasure to burn.” *Fahrenheit 451* by [Ray Bradbury](#).
 - And my personal favorite. “There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.” *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by [C.S. Lewis](#).
- James 4:4 has all the qualities of one of those great opening lines. It is shocking. It catches your attention. It makes you want to read more. It’s a great opening line with one exception. It’s just too personal. *You adulterous people*. All those other great opening lines are about someone else’s story. James 4:4 is about my story. It’s about your story. In the World According to Jim we have two-timed God. Or as the [New Living Translation](#) puts it, *You adulterers*, exclamation point. That’s harsh. I don’t know if I really like the fact that the Bible indicts me as a spiritual adulterer. Then again, if Scripture candy coated our situation we’d be less likely to seek a cure. This is a hard passage to hear. Even harder to do something about. Take heed of what [Dennis Johnson](#) says. “I probably do not believe this passage as surely, as radically, as I should. I probably do not understand the passage as fully as I should. Therefore, I probably need this text to correct my understanding and deepen my faith.”¹

Transition

¹ Quoted in [Putting the Truth to Work](#), by Daniel Doriani.

The message of James 4:4-10 is that [Slide #1]...

Proposition

- **God is a jealous lover**
- This passage is a shakedown from a God who more than cares. He passionately wants his people to return to him. We've strayed. We've wandered. God wants us back.
- These words are old school. They hearken back to things like Isaiah 54:5-6. *For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.*
- It's incredibly important that we understand James's use of marriage/fidelity language here. In the words of **D.A. Carson**, "theologically speaking, the theme of God's jealous love for his people is tied to the exclusiveness of his claims (like the exclusiveness of a spouse's claims in marriage), ratcheted up because God is not only the (metaphorical) husband of his people but also their God. God alone is God. For his creatures to betray this first allegiance is not freedom; it is the most horrific idolatry. Precisely because this God is personal, his response cannot possibly be dispassionate: he yearns for his image-bearers still and is outraged at their adultery. He longs for them with jealous longing."² Which is why God graphically describes our behavior as adulterous in Hosea 1:2. *When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."*
- The New Testament picks up this idea. It says Christians have been *promised to one husband, to Christ*, 2 Corinthians 11:2. And when we stray from pure devotion to Christ it's like spiritual adultery. **Verse 4** is as scathing and as loving as it gets. *You adulterous people.* It is with deep love that God utters these words.
- **Oprah Winfrey** once told the story of when she was a teenager. She was sitting in the pews at church and her pastor read a verse from the Old Testament that spoke of God as a jealous God. She remembers thinking how distasteful the idea was; that God was jealous just like she was. And it turned her off to God. Oprah's a bit confused. God's jealousy is not like ours. As one commentator suggests, "Jealousy, properly considered, is a necessary ingredient of all true love. It is on the one hand, a ceaseless longing for the loved one's welfare and, on the other, a desire for a responsive love as intense and as loyal as the love bestowed."³
- God isn't like the gods of Greek mythology who with raging hormones can't keep their divine pants on and jealously fight and quarrel with one another. God's not like that. He's not like us. He's not like Oprah's god. His jealousy is pure. And it's warranted. He is one. He alone is God. There are no others. He alone is to be worshiped. To worship anything less than what he is or anything other than Him is to two-time Him. He owns everything and he bought the Church with the blood of his Son. He is a jealous lover who demands everything we have and are. He expects complete allegiance. Absolute surrender. All-consuming worship. And he will settle for nothing less.

Transition

It's with this framework that James presents two reprimands to the adulterous Church. [Slide #2]

² CNTUOT, p. 1007.

³ Motyer, p. 149.

Organizational Sentence

- **Two reprimands from a God who passionately wants us to return to Him**

Transition

Look at verses 4-6 for the **first**. [Slide #3] **Stop flirting with the world** James says. Listen. *You adulterous people, 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 the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Main Points

- James's reprimand? Don't be friends with the world. He says friendship with the world is spiritual adultery and it's hatred toward God. *Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.* God is a jealous lover. He tolerates no rival.⁴
- The obvious questions these verses pose are what is friendship with the world? And why is that so bad? Let's deal with the latter first.
- Friendship in the ancient world was a bit different than friendship now. Now we assign someone as a "friend" on Facebook with the click of the mouse. They become our friends with little or no personal connection whatsoever. Someone once observed a billboard that read, "Caring and forgiving...it's more than a credit card, it's a relationship."⁵ Yeah, right. In the ancient world friendship was so much more. It involved sharing all things in a unity that was both spiritual and physical.⁶ James's indictment here of friendship with the world is a serious charge. *You adulterous people.* Infidelity to the marriage vows.⁷ James says stop flirting with the world—you're committing adultery.
- So what exactly is friendship with the world? What does it involve? From the context of James itself, he's already answered that question. You flirt with the world when you show partiality and favoritism, 2:1-13. It's not controlling the tongue; it's speaking like the rest of the world speaks, 3:1-12. It's bitter envy and selfish ambition, 3:13-18. It's pursuing our own destructive pleasures, James 4:1-3. All these things demonstrate an uncomfortable closeness with the world. God is a jealous lover. He cannot, he will not tolerate this flirtatious behavior. It's more than flirting. It's spiritual prostitution. Physical adultery is repulsive. Why isn't spiritual adultery as repulsive?
- How chummy are you and the world right now? How's your speech? Your impartiality or lack thereof? How peaceful are your personal relationships? Are you mere acquaintances with the world? Causal friends? Bedfellows? There are degrees of friendship. But in the World According to Jim one ounce of adulterous friendship is one ounce too much.
- James presents us with God's response to our spiritual adultery in **verses 5-6**. And his response blows my mind every time I read it. Look at the text. As we read it think about how you'd feel if someone cheated on you. *Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is*

⁴ Moo, p. 187.

⁵ Baker and Ellsworth, p. 116.

⁶ Moo, p. 187.

⁷ Reinecker, p. 736.

why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." God responds to our spiritual whoredom with more grace.

- Let me see if I can explain. There are actually two options for translating [verse 5](#). Look at [verse 5](#). The question is who's being jealous. Either James is referring to God's jealousy for his people or James is referring to the human spirit's tendency to be jealous. The Greek could go either way. You see this reflected in the various translations. The NIV says *Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?* Human spirit envies. Note the difference in how the ESV translates [verse 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 envies. Either James is talking about human envy or he's talking about God's envy for us. Personally, I think the case for God's envy is the stronger claim. Against the NIV I think [verse 5](#) says that God *jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us*.⁸
- What James seems to be saying here is spite of our spiritual adultery, our flirtations with the world God wants us back. He is a jealous lover who demands total allegiance. To two-time him is to make him our enemy. But he doesn't respond like we do when we've been two-timed. [Verse 6](#). *But he gives us more grace*. He gives the adulterer what the adulterer does not deserve. Grace. He supplies all we need to meet his holy demands.⁹
- Think about that for a second. In the words of [J.A. Motyer](#). "What a great comfort there is in this verse! It tells us that God is tirelessly on our side. He never falters in respect of our needs, he always has *more grace* at hand for us. He is never less than sufficient, he always has more and yet more to give. Whatever we may forfeit when we put self first, we cannot forfeit our salvation, for there is always more grace. No matter what we do to him, he is never beaten. We may play false to the grace of election, contradict the grace of reconciliation, overlook the grace of indwelling—but he gives more grace. Even if we were to turn to him and say, 'What I have received so far is much less than enough,' he would reply, 'well, you may have more.' His resources are never at an end, his patience is never exhausted, his initiative never stops, his generosity knows no limit: *he gives more grace*."¹⁰
- Amen? Again I say amen. We're spiritual whores. But there's more grace. We've made friends with the world and ourselves God's enemies. And he gives more grace. More grace to come back to him. Grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon unending grace. On one condition. Yep, you heard me. One condition.
- Look at [verse 6](#) and James's quote of Proverbs 3:34. *That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* Humility is the prerequisite of grace. If we come back to God with prideful self-sufficiency in our heart he will oppose us; his grace withheld. We must become humble if we expect to enjoy his grace.¹¹

Transition

So what does it mean to be humble? Does it mean we grovel like a dog who returns to its master with its tail between its legs? I'm glad you asked. Look at verses 7-10 and the [second reprimand](#) from a God who passionately wants us to return to Him. [[Slide #4](#)] [Stop being](#)

⁸ TNIV.

⁹ CNTUOT, p. 1008.

¹⁰ Motyer, p. 150.

¹¹ Moo, p. 192.

prideful and repent! *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

- Our pride keeps us from returning to the God who loves us with an everlasting love. The one condition for our return and his grace is humility. So James says repent. He gives nine separate commands defining what it means to humbly return to God. Submit. Resist. Come near. Wash. Purify. Grieve. Mourn. Wail. Change. No matter how despicable the nature of our adultery when we return to God like this the promise of more grace is ours.
- James says submit and then resist the devil and he will flee. Submission is not the same thing as obedience. Submission involves the surrender of the will which then leads to a desire to obey. Surrender your will to his. Submit and then resist.
- Bend your will to his then come near. Approach God as the prodigal son returning home. *So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. 21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.*¹² Stop wandering. Come back to him.
- Wash and purify James says. Remember the blood of Christ that cleansed you.
- Grieve, mourn, wail. Grieve over what? Over your sin. Over what you've done. *Blessed are those who mourn*, Matthew 5:4. Recognize your spiritual poverty before God, your desperate need for his help.
- *Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.* Change your carefree attitude toward sin into mourning. Change your joy at sin's delight into gloom because of what that sinful adultery has cost you. *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.* Or in the words of Luke 14:11, *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*"
- Listen to how [Daniel Doriani](#) summarizes what God is asking of you right here, right now. "If we have followed James's logic, we understand our desperate need for this word of grace. We have failed the tests of true religion; we have not cared for the poor, controlled our tongues, or remained unpolluted by the world. We need the gospel now, and James supplies it, not a gospel of atonement, but a gospel of repentance. Again, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore repent. Submit to God. Resist the devil. Draw near to God. Grieve, mourn and wail over sin. 'Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.' That is the gospel according to James."¹³

Conclusion

- *You adulterous people. For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name--the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the*

¹² Luke 15:21-24

¹³ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, p. 293.

earth.¹⁴ *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ.*¹⁵ *"Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you, you are my servant; O Israel, I will not forget you. 22 I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."*¹⁶

- The only question is will you come?
- *Jealous Kind* by Jars of Clay (Who We Are Instead, 2003)

I built another temple to a stranger.
I gave away my heart to the rushing wind.
I set my course to run right into danger;
Sought the company of fools instead of friends.

You know I've been unfaithful,
Lovers in line,
While you're turning over tables,
With the rage of a jealous kind.
I chose the gallows to the aisle,
Thought that love would never find,
Hanging ropes will never keep you,
And your love of a jealous kind.
Love of a jealous kind.

Tryin' to jump away from rock that keeps on spreading,
For solace in the shift of the sinking sand.
I'd rather feel the pain all too familiar,
Then be broken by a lover I don't understand,
'Cause I don't understand.

One hundred other lovers, more, one hundred other altars,
If I should slow my pace and finally subject me to grace;
And love that shames the wise, betrays the heart's deceit and lies,
And breaks the back of foolish pride.

¹⁴ Isaiah 54:5-6

¹⁵ 2 Corinthian 11:2

¹⁶ Isaiah 44:21-22