

Are You Making This World Your Home? James 4:4

I want to begin this morning by telling you about our dog Blaze. He's 4 years old. We got him as a puppy. From the very beginning he was gentle, loved to be handled, and full of spunk and energy. He's also very fast. He and his half sister Lucy have the freedom to run around the whole back yard. There is a lot of room to run. Being a hunting dog, he chases squirrels, rabbits, ground hogs and birds and chased them all down. We have an in ground electric fence that sends a signal to his collar when he gets too close. For three years it's been on a low, puppy setting and we have had no problem leaving them out for the day while we are away. Several weeks ago, for some reason, he went through the line chasing a ground hog. Then a second and third time chasing a rabbit. We called the invisible fence people because they guarantee their product will keep your dog in. They came out and set the collar to its highest setting. Thursday Robyn received a call from someone in the back neighborhood because they found Blaze wandering around confused, dazed, and somewhat dehydrated. They called the number on his dog license. When Robyn showed up to get him, he was lethargic, full of burrs and still out of sorts. He didn't even respond when Robyn called his name. He slept most of the rest of the afternoon and evening. We ate outside for dinner and he laid underneath the table the whole time when usually he's running all over the yard.

In a sense, that reflects our lives. When we trust Christ as our Savior, the Bible provides some boundaries for us, an invisible fence if you will, to live within. They are for our protection. We have lots of freedom to roam around within those parameters that God has given us, but we can also see what's on the other side, the things that are out in the world that tempt and lure us to wander beyond God's fence. Like Eve, we begin to think that God has been holding out on us, that the stuff outside His boundaries don't look so bad. We rationalize away thinking that the consequences won't be as bad as they were made out to be. So we cross the line and step outside the spiritual fence.

Once outside of God's fence it's easy to wander around and before we know it, we have lost our way. We become disoriented, confused, and spiritually dehydrated. We might find our way back but we aren't sure if we can get back in because we know there will be consequences, so we linger outside. Besides, we aren't sure that after we have wandered around on the outside that God will want us back.

Our passage in **James 4:4** speaks about believers who have wandered outside God's protective barrier. They have gotten themselves disoriented and full of burrs from their worldly pursuits. James likens them to people who have committed adultery.

If you read through Proverbs, you can see on numerous occasions how Solomon describes the physical affects and consequences of someone who has been led astray into adultery. There are correlations between physical and spiritual adultery that we see in our passage.

“You adulteress 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.”

James is not here referring to those who commit physical adultery, which Solomon so vividly describes in Proverbs. Instead he points out that there are obvious correlations between physical adultery with that of spiritual adultery. Just as a person can be lured into a physical adulterous relationship, so a Christian can be lured into committing spiritual adultery by stepping outside the boundary of his relationship with Christ as he or she joins into a relationship with worldliness.

Israel was brought into a covenant relationship with God, which, if broken, would result in serious consequences. Marriage isn't a contract between two people, it is a covenant between the husband and wife. In like manner we have been brought into a covenant relationship with God through Christ and James says that when the believer chooses to follow worldliness, it's like committing spiritual adultery. He begins with a stinging criticism.

I. A STINGING CRITICISM – v. 4a

“You adulterous people”

He first of all makes a piercing accusation.

A. A Piercing Accusation

It’s a shocking accusation. We might sarcastically say “why, that’s a fine how do you do?” Absent are the words of affection noted in previous sections where the author uses a different term to address a new thought. Up to this point in the letter James has referred to them as his brothers or dear brothers on seven different occasions. The terms speak of their family relationship and his endearment to them. It serves to let them know he is about to change topic.

But that affection is absent here as he speaks to them in a scathing tone by calling them an adulterous people. We have to believe that got their attention. Even with what he had to say up to this point about challenging their Christian faith and walk this had to knock them off their spiritual high horse and out of their smugness. *The Amplified Bible* reads **“you are like unfaithful wives.”** *The Living Bible* says **“you are like an unfaithful wife who loves her husband’s enemies.”**

It is similar in tone to Jesus’s words recorded for us in **Revelation 2:4** where He rebukes the church at Ephesus because they had forsaken their first love. Of course, we understand that James is not referring to literal adultery where one spouse cheats on another. Instead he is referring to adultery here in a spiritual sense. These believers had been unfaithful to God to whom they had been married through Christ because they had chosen to love other things more than God.

When the Bible speaks of God being a jealous God, that is not in a negative or sinful sense as when the Bible speaks about our need to put away jealousy. Our jealousy is sinful. His is not. Jealousy that is sinful is the deep desire to want something we do not have. God is jealous when someone gives to another something that rightly belongs to Him. When people make idols of things and worship them instead of Him, He is jealous because God is

possessive of the worship that belongs to Him. So when we give our affection to something else other than to God, it’s committing spiritual adultery.

Being Jewish, these believers were familiar with the covenant between God and Israel from the Old Testament. They would be familiar with His denunciation of Israel for its spiritual adultery throughout their history. The Old Testament is filled with examples of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. The phrase “to play the harlot” is used some 40 times referring to Israel’s spiritual harlotry. Multiple times in the book of Judges we have the recurring theme of spiritual adultery on the part of Israel who had left their affection for and worship of God to follow and worship the gods of the nations around them.

Arthur Pink says that spiritual adultery is **“a giving to the world that love and devotion, time and strength, which the Lord alone is entitled to.”**

One author stated that spiritual adultery is worshipping false gods, while pretending to worship the true God.

Warren Wiersbe defines spiritual adultery as being married to Christ (**Romans 7:4**) yet loving the world (**II Corinthians 11:2-3**). He then asked a pointed question: How can Christians have friendship with the world when they have been called out of the world (**John 15:18-19**)?

That is the intent of the word James uses to identify the affection of these believers. They were unfaithful to the One to whom they should have remained faithful. They had left their first love. To call these believers an adulterous people was a stinging criticism. He then speaks about a painful assessment.

B. A Painful Assessment

“Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?”

A question is often used to generate dialogue. To cause reflection or introspection for the purpose of getting a response of some kind. James asks his

audience if they knew something about the topic he was addressing. There are two words in the Greek for “know”. One word means to know about something by experience.

I know how to swim.

I know speeding can result in a ticket.

I know how to change my car’s oil.

We all know things based on personal experience. James however, uses the other Greek word in this verse for “know”. This word speaks of having a knowledge that comes from intuition or observation. It literally means perception by sight. I don’t have to experience gravity to know about it because I have observed it around me. I know about wind by what I observe.

This word also suggests fullness of knowledge or absolute knowledge referring to that which is without doubt.

In the question James asks, he is saying they know without a doubt by observation that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. They didn’t have to experience it to know it. We know it because the Holy Spirit has told us so through the Word of God.

The term friendship that James uses was a much richer word in his day than it is today. I have over 300 friends on Facebook. Some friends I know through church or parents of David’s classmates. Others are people I knew from High school or college. There are family members, people I have met through ministry who are pastors or who are missionaries. I know some much better than others. Some I consider friends who are close, while others I know only casually.

Friendship in the culture in which James lived spoke of a covenant relationship between individuals. Friendship had deep meaning and great affection and implied a unity or oneness in thought and purpose. For example, when the Old Testament refers to Abraham being the friend of God, it was no casual relationship. It was a term that meant he was faithful to God and unity between them in pursuing a common purpose.

As we consider what James says about these believers, they had effectually turned away from their friendship with God to being friends with the world. They had changed their affection and in doing so, changed their purpose.

One of the saddest passages I find in the Bible is found in **II Timothy 4:9-10** as Paul urges Timothy to join him. **“Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.”**

In that verse Paul uses the word for love that is the most endearing, unconditional kind of love known. It’s not just a friendly liking but a deep abiding love. Demas didn’t just like what the world had to offer, he was in love with the world.

James is not saying we ought to be opposed to anything that brings pleasure. John Piper points out that the Bible isn’t against our having pleasure. Instead, it is against us finding pleasure in the wrong things or in the wrong ways. For example, there are things the world says will bring pleasure that the Bible is adamantly opposed to like cheating on your spouse or amassing wealth for the soul purpose of being greedy or the pleasure some find in exploiting others. On the other hand, there are things that are pleasurable that are not in themselves wrong to enjoy like an outing to a baseball game or spending time on a lake fishing or taking up a hobby. Those things are not inherently wrong, but they can be if we let them. When they begin to consume us and replace the affection we are to have for God, we have allowed that thing to enter into a spiritually adulterous relationship.

James is saying that when my affection for something in the world turns my heart away from God, I can rightly be called adulterous. We probably all know someone who was like Demas. Something came along that stole their heart and love for God and they changed affections having loved this present world.

Warren Wiersbe provides us with four dangerous steps that the believer can take which moves him or her into a wrong relationship with the world.

1. **James 4:4** – Friendship with the world. It's when we cozy up to it and think it's harmless.
2. **James 1:27** – Being soiled by the world. It's when we fall in line with and follow those who are not believers. We follow their rebellion. We walk after the counsel of the ungodly; we stand in the way of sinners; we sit with the scornful (**Psalm 1:1**).
3. **I John 2:15-17** – We fall in love with the world. The implication in what James says is that the person not only loves the world, but the world loves back. It opens its door wide and invites the person in to experience all it has to offer. It is a growing comfort with the world system and all it has to offer. Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. Then he moved into Sodom. Then he was sitting at the gate of Sodom. Finally, he had to be dragged from Sodom.
4. **Romans 12:2** – The final step is conformity to the world. The person becomes just like the world having been pressed into its mold.

To live like the world is to become the enemy of God. Kent Hughes offers this understanding of the text. "God regards pleasure-dominated believers adversarially, as James 4:4 makes so clear. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Thus we understand that a Christian, someone who has trusted in Christ alone for salvation, can become an enemy of God – God's adversary. This is horrifying!...These are painful thoughts – that a Christian for whom Christ died when he was still an enemy (Romans 5:10) should in effect lower himself to live as a redeemed enemy of God! Yet this is the very focus of our text because James is writing to Christians. And it rings true to our Christian experience. Many Christians, believers who have not disclaimed God or announced their allegiance to the world, derive their pleasures and entertainments in things which are patently hostile to God."

If you think it not possible that a believer can be considered an enemy of God for changing affection to the world, you only have to look back in the Old

Testament and the nation of Israel. As we noted earlier, they often changed their faithfulness and affection from God to the world resulting in God's punishment, treating them as an enemy. But where sin abounds, grace super abounds and through repentance their faithfulness to God was restored until the cycle started again.

When it comes to loving God and loving the world, Jesus so aptly stated that you can't love two masters. It's either one or the other. (**Matt. 6:24**)

Where is your affection? If you took a good look into the mirror of your life, where is your friendship?

John Piper says that knowing God is the ultimate pleasure.

Psalm 16:11 "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever."

James gives a stinging criticism with a piercing accusation along with a painful assessment.

Is he writing to you? Have you become a friend of the world?

Musicians in London noticed that errand boys in a certain part of the city all whistled out of tune as they did their work. Someone suggested that it was because the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune. Something had gone wrong with the chimes and they were discordant. The boys didn't know there was anything wrong with the peals, and unconsciously had copied their pitch.

Donald Grey Barnhouse suggested this analogy by saying that we tend to copy the people with whom we associate; we borrow thoughts from the books we read and the programs to which we listen, almost without knowing it. God has given us His Word which is the absolute pitch of life and living. If we learn to sing by it, we shall easily detect the false in all of the music of the world.

The person who determines to be a friend of the world shares its outlook on life and feels very much at home in it.

James offers a stinging criticism but also tells us that we have a serious choice.

II. A SERIOUS CHOICE – v. 4b

Many of the choices we make on any given day don't have any serious consequences. It doesn't really matter if I make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch or take baloney.

It doesn't matter much whether we buy Del Monte or Kroger brand peas.

Other decisions are more serious like whether I will take my blood pressure medicine, rob a bank, or purposely smash my car into a concrete barrier.

James presents us with a serious choice that we must consider. The insinuation by James is that it's a battle of two wills.

A. A Battle Of Two Wills

Paul put it best in **Romans 7:14-24**. We looked at it last week, but it bears consideration again as it describes the inner conflict that we face as believers. Without reading the text again, he essentially says there are things he doesn't want to do that he ends up doing and things he knows he should do that he doesn't want to do. It is a battle of the wills: doing what is right because we are a new creation or doing what is wrong because we listen to the old nature. Will we obey our own will and do what is wrong or will we obey God's will and do what is right?

As a new creation we now have the Holy Spirit living in us wanting to direct our lives so that we obey the will of God. His way leads us away from worldliness and toward godliness. But there is also the lingering old nature that wants to pull us away from godliness and toward worldliness.

An old Indian described the battle between the two wills referring to the old nature and the new nature, as having two wolves living inside. The one that wins is the one we feed.

James makes it clear that it is a matter of choice to become the friend of the world. It's our decision. In writing to Timothy, Paul said we are either a lover of pleasure or a lover of God. He then described the person who chose to love the world as having a form of godliness but denying its power. (**II Timothy 3:4**)

It is a myth that we can enjoy worldliness and not get tangled up in it.

I came across some sobering quotes.

John Blanchard wrote "A man caught up with this world is not ready for the next one."

He also said "Jesus did not pray that His Father would take Christians out of the world, but that He would take the world out of the Christian."

John Brown said "It is infinitely better to have the whole world for our enemies and God for our friend, than to have the whole world for our friends and God for our enemy."

John Calvin said "The mind of a Christian ought not to be filled with thoughts of earthly things, or find satisfaction in them, for we ought to be living as if we might have to leave this world at any moment."

Thomas Guthrie said "If you find yourself loving any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than the Bible, any house better than the house of God, any table better than the Lord's table, any person better than Christ, any indulgence better than the hope of heaven – take alarm!"

Vance Havner "If you stand on the Word, you do not stand in with the world."

I take that to mean if you stand on the Word, you won't stand with the world, you won't let it squeeze you into its mold.

Warren Wiersbe wrote that "Identification with the world and its needs is one thing, imitation of the world and its foolishness is quite another."

In other words, be in the world but not of the world. There are plenty of hurting people all around us with needs that as Christians we can meet by exhibiting the love of Christ, but don't imitate its sin or love it more than God.

When it comes to the choice of loving the world or loving God it is a battle of two wills.

James then concludes the verse by noting there is a battle of two worlds.

B. A Battle Of Two Worlds

The world says it can indulge your desires right away, it can satisfy your wants, your longings, your aspirations. But think about it in this way. A scuba

diver lives in the water but breathes the air. He is able to function in that environment because he takes his environment with him. If he conforms to the environment around him, he will die.

In the movie *God's Not Dead*, teacher Grace Wesley is on trial for her faith. She makes a statement that should challenge every believer. "I would rather stand with God and be judged by the world than to stand with the world and be judged by God."

As Christians we must stand with God and not be afraid of what man may do to us. It is time to ask whether we are standing with the world or standing with God. It is time to stand against compromise.

D.L. Moody wrote "The church is full of people who want one eye for the world and the other for the kingdom of God. Therefore, everything is blurred; one eye is long, and the other is short; all is confusion... When the Spirit of God is on us, the world looks very empty; the world has a very small hold on us, and we begin to let go our hold of it and lay hold of things eternal."

We opened the service with a song that reminds us of the importance of loving the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.

Which world do you love, the one where pleasure is temporary and flawed and might I add a world system that hates God, or the one that is eternal? It is a matter of serious choice. The command we are given in Scripture is not to love the world, not to let it conform us into its likeness. This world system is passing away, but the world where God is will live forever. Don't let the world become the object of your love. Don't become someone considered as a spiritual adulteress, one who is judged by God.

James isn't talking about the person who falls into sin from time to time, who gives into the world on occasion. Instead, he is speaking about perpetually following of the world, someone who habitually chooses to be unfaithful to God. Don't be a Demas and love this present world. John says the person who loves the world is not loved by God. James says he is an enemy of God.

This stinging criticism leaves us with a serious

choice that presents a significant challenge because the world is so alluring. Its pull is so strong.

III.A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE

No one wants to buy stock in a company that isn't going to be around very long. **I John 2:17** reminds us that this world and its lusts, its desires, its pull is passing away. Why buy stock in it.

How do we overcome the pull of the world so that we love God instead?

A. Pray Fervently – Matthew 26:41 (below)

Jesus has just been praying in Gethsemane about the bitter cup of death and bearing the sins of the world. He asked Peter, James and John to accompany Him deeper into the garden. It says that His soul became overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He then asked them to watch with Him while He went a little further ahead to pray. When He returned, He found them asleep. After waking them up, He asked why they couldn't watch and pray with Him for one hour. **"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."**

To the church at Ephesus, Paul concludes his exhortation to put on the whole armor of God by exhorting them to **"pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."** (Ephesians 6:18)

That tells me there is at our disposal a whole battery of different kinds of prayers available to us to offer God so that we won't be pulled by the world. It also tells me that I need to be praying for others so that they won't be pulled into worldliness. When God brings someone to mind, shoot up a quick prayer: "Lord, I don't know why but so and so just came to mind and I don't know what they're going through right now, but You do, so I'm praying that they will be kept from whatever it is that might be pulling them away from loving You."

Are you praying fervently?

B. Stand Firmly – Ephesians 6:12-13

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and

against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

Paul says our fight isn't against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness. To fight against this evil force God has given us His armor to assist in our battle. The key to victory is to use all the armor as it is intended. Each piece is vital for us to win.

Are you standing firmly?

C. Walk Faithfully – Galatians 5:16-17

“So I say, live (walk) by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

The Spirit has been given to us to guide us into right living so that when we walk in step with Him, the world loses its pull, its allurements on our lives and we won't give in to the desires of the flesh.

Are you walking firmly?

D. Transform Fully – Romans 12:1-2

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Such a transformation comes first by fully giving yourself to be a living sacrifice, willingly yielding to the control of the Holy Spirit in your life as He works to make you godly, works to make you holy. We must transform the mind by the Word of God allowing it to take root so that what is developed is godly character that pursues righteousness in the inner man.

Are you transforming fully?

E. Run Freely – II Timothy 2:22

“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

Be ready to run freely away from temptation and sin. Be ready to go in the opposite direction to get out of its path. Do whatever it takes.

Hebrews 12:1 “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Are you running freely away from sin?

If we don't want to conform to the world, it will be a challenge for us. But be encouraged because there is victory over the world. **“Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.” (I John 4:4)**

I Corinthians 15:57 “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Titus 2:11-13 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Are you a victim of the world or a victor over the world? Would James call you a spiritual adulterer?

We need to learn to stay within the fence God has given us through His Word and not wander out into worldliness thinking everything will be okay.