

Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights. (Psa 119:143)

One of our friends asked if I would look at James 4:4, and specifically what it means to be a friend of the world. So that is what I intend to explore with you today. James's warning is a companion to that of Paul to the Romans against being conformed to the world. Comparing the two verses

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Rom 12:2)

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (Jas 4:4)

Conformity and friendship are not the same thing. You can conform to a way of living without necessarily liking it, in a sort of going along to get along approach. Friendship is more involved. It is not only conforming to the way of the world but actively loving it and seeking the endorsement of your acceptance from those in the world.

These are companion passages addressing different aspects of the same larger issue – God's people are not of the world because we are at war with and occupying it. If you resist this notion or have reservations about this, if you think that there is some compromise to make with the world and those in it, or that we have some obligation out of some view of love or charity to make peace with the world, you sincerely should reconsider your definition of what it is to be a Christian.

Now that might seem a little strong and make you ask what about

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Rom 12:18)

Living peaceably doesn't mean to be at peace with its evil. The exhortation to live peaceably does not impart on us a responsibility to compromise our understanding of right and wrong or imply a duty of setting aside God's standard. It actually requires in us a discernment of what our duties are and an acknowledgement that there is a line that can be crossed. Living peaceably means not being contentious for the sake of contention, it doesn't mean to disregard our duties to God, each other, or in defending Gospel truth. It certainly doesn't mean to befriend sin.

Christ did not come to bring a general peace, nor did He tell us to mold ourselves to the world to be at peace. He tells us precisely the opposite

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.” (Mat 10:34-36)

And in another place similarly

“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.” (Luk 12:51-53)

If the King to whom we pledge our allegiance did not come to give peace on earth, what business would we as His Ambassadors have in pursuing it in some general and compromising way? Living peaceably is about humility and meekness, not about presenting a false face to others that their wickedness is anything but.

But doesn't David say to seek peace and pursue it? Indeed, he does

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” (Psa 34:14)

Living peaceably isn't about making friends of the world to the detriment of our souls. It is about not living such a surly and unnecessarily confrontational way of life that we create conflict centered on things of the world and flesh. Our conflict is one that will divide houses, there is no doubt about that. But we're not talking about red or blue, left or right. We're not talking about trivial things here. The conflict we engage in must represent the interests of and be engaged in according to the instruction and standards of our King. The conflict we engage in must be about our God and our message from Him, not about us.

Moreover, the pursuit of peace starts with pursuing peace with God. Without that, we are not going to have any peace with men.

“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Php 4:9)

It's easy to see how it is that there is literally no peace between the men of the world in any context when you consider they won't submit themselves to God's ways and make peace with Him. The peace we're exhorted to seek and pursue is that peace of the spirit that only comes by the grace of God. From that comes all other forms of peace.

We can seek out and be at peace without making friends with the world, because peace isn't a thing of the world. Don't be fooled by the mantra of this generation talking about peace and conflate that with friendship with them. Peaceable living delivered by the grace of God is not the same thing as being friends with the world. Christ clearly tells us

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (Joh 14:27)

Christ leaves to His people, who are actively pursuing and working to be peaceable toward all men a peace that is complete and effective. Unlike the world, which gives and takes away, when Christ gives a thing to His people it is a full and complete gift with no flaws or incompleteness. It is the source of courage and calm in the face of the enemy.

So let's look at the context here to dive into worldly friendship and why it is so dangerous:

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (Jas 4:1-4)

This is a very interesting passage with a lot buried in its rather simple language. In my estimation, many expositors gloss over it and make it out to be overly specific to the Jews, due to the salutation of the Epistle

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.” (Jas 1:1)

Context is always important, but the focus many commentaries put on this passage regarding the general contentiousness of Jews is too simplistic. It certainly can be applied to their tendency to conflict, but then what application does it have to us in our day? If this is all about the near constant rebellion of the Jews against the Romans, it's too limiting.

No, James' strong admonitions here are applicable to all of us as well as to the primary addressees of his Epistle, just like any other Scripture. The questions he asks and provides the answers to apply to us today just as much as they did those converted Jews of James' day. I'm going to try and break down the various pieces of the passage to highlight some things about it.

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? – Selfishness born out of pride and lust are the sources of all conflict. It isn't unique to our situation in the body of Christ or the world at large that lusting after what we don't have leads to some form of conflict, from simple disagreement to murder and wars. It leads to conflict with men as well as conflict with God. Discontentment is exceptionally displeasing to God.

Covetousness is an absolute affront to God, because it dismisses as untrue and faithless His promises to care for His people. Coveting things you don't have turns your attention toward those things you covet instead of Him. Covetousness taken to its extreme leads to conflict between people violently fighting over those things they lust after. While we might not see such extreme behavior in our ranks, don't for one second think it couldn't come to that.

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. – Lusting after a thing is not a productive use of our energies. It doesn't produce anything good. Lusting after a thing certainly doesn't bring it into your possession.

The phrase "ye kill" is a bit difficult to comprehend, and it leads expositors to try and twist the word kill into being "envy". The word translated kill, as far as I can tell, is never used for anything but kill or murder. So the exposition seems very strained to me to try and make it be anything other than kill.

If you consider that James *is* addressing the Jews of the first century in the Epistle, there was a lot of killing going on in their frequent rebellions against Rome. So in that sense, it is very literal. The Jews were a seditious and violently rebellious people until Titus crushed them in 70 A.D. We know the Jews bristled and chafed under the Roman yoke and desired their freedom. They absolutely did fight and war, and obviously never really gained what they wanted.

That said, I think that there is an obvious way to look at this which makes it simple to understand and expands the sense of it. Apply the same reasoning Christ gives us here to any sin

"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Mat 5:28)

Many people look at this the wrong way, I believe, and miss the overall point. This admonition against lusting in your heart is not to be specifically applied only to adultery. It is true of all sin. If you covet and lust after anything in your heart, if you look to steal, or hate someone so vehemently you want them dead, I want you to consider that it is the same as actually putting your hand to it directly.

The worldly notion that “at least you didn’t actually do it” absolving you of sin is a fleshly attempt to reason away the guilt of sin. Christ makes it very clear here that sinning is not just the physical act. You may not have sinned against your neighbor by restraining your hand, but in your heart you have still sinned against God. Just because you put a happy face on and use happy words when you address a person, if you’re holding onto some grudge against them in your heart, you’re still sinning against God. You have to address that breach with Him to pursue peace with Him.

Overcoming the flesh to not fully engage in a sin is of course a desirable state of affairs, but the fact that you considered it in your heart doesn’t leave you at peace with God. You still have to resolve that breach with the Almighty.

If you are spending all your time and energy fighting to obtain what you want, you don’t even stop to consider the proper and appropriate way to get whatever it is – asking.

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”
(Mat 21:22)

Of course, this is not an absolute, and as we see in the next piece, it doesn’t mean every little thing that you lust after will be yours. That’s the trap of prosperity doctrines. When you spend all your energy selfishly seeking to take what you want, you spend no time or energy looking to God. This isn’t a pontification, it’s a fact James is stating here. That use of energy puts you into a breach with God.

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. – The result of this breach with God is that you are out of alignment with Him and focused on yourself. When we ask for anything, whether it is a deliverance from an enemy, relief from affliction, or anything at all, and we are asking from a position of our lusts and fleshly desires it can not be from the position of glorifying God. Those two things can’t be in play at the same time. When we are in that place, we will not achieve whatever it is we seek, even if we do take the time to stop the expending of our energy selfishly to take a moment to ask Him.

A thing to keep in mind at all times is that God is under no obligation or required to answer our prayers. He is not accountable to us. He doesn’t have to answer at all, much less deliver our demands to us. He does not have to “bless America” just because a bunch of people say it. He is under no obligation to relieve or bless us just because we all pray for it. The motivation behind the request matters, and this passage makes that abundantly clear.

Approaching our requests to God with the proper impetus is a thing that separates Christians from Gentiles. Consider how many times David says something like this

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.” (Psa 115:1)

In everything we do, including in our thoughts and prayers, we should be seeking the glory of God, not the fleeting and vain lusts of our flesh. “Hallowed be thy name” should be a method we are regularly imitating – calling into praise God’s attributes and His truth, expressing thanks for what He has done, not just demanding what we want.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? – James isn’t bringing an accusation that these people are committing adultery against their spouses, but something even worse. The adultery here is of the Bride betraying the Bridegroom. And that is a terrible mistake to make.

“(For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.” (Deu 6:15)

This isn’t hyperbole. Remember that this is one of His inherent attributes and one of His names:

“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Exo 34:14)

To disregard His jealousy is to court destruction. For those who profess to be Christians, to make friends with the world is to abandon the role the church plays as the bride of Christ and take up that role for Satan.

Go back to who James is writing to. He isn’t accusing them of something, he’s warning them that even those who most think themselves incapable of falling into the clutches of the enemy are in fact, vulnerable.

“Friendship of the world” is an interesting phrase. It implies a reciprocation. You’re not only friends with but you have the friendship of the world. You can perceive someone as your friend and not truly have the intimacy of the relationship you think you have. If you have the friendship of someone else, it indicates a real relationship. It’s a relationship that requires work and cultivation. The world places the same demands on your time and energy as God does. The enemy wants to own you completely, and it will seemingly reciprocate your friendship if you will only abandon your first love.

The word for enmity and enemy in the next part of the phrase are actually masculine and feminine variants of the same word, and in the definition of enemy it is implied to be Satan. It is the same word used here

“Till I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Luk 20:43)

Satan is the clear and obvious reference in this passage, being the head of Christ's enemies. To become friends with the enemy of God and attract His enmity? That friendship is of no value if its result is the enmity of God.

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Mat 10:28)

The world can't do anything to you – favorable or unfavorable – after you're dead. The God whose enmity you risk by befriending the world and being befriended by it has power well beyond anything the world could offer or provide. That's a thing never to forget.

whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God – To befriend the world is to betray our Lord, friend, Savior and God. I refer you to Ben's last sermon to see a good definition of what it looks like to be a friend of the world, specifically this text from Ephesians 2:

*“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also **we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.**” (Eph 2:2-3)*

Being a friend to the world must obviously make you an enemy of God, given that walking according to its course means you are walking “according to the prince of the power of the air”. Satan is of course the stated enemy of God, having tried to overthrow Him. If we are aligned to Satan's ways, enjoying the comforts of his dainties, consumed with consuming the pleasures of this life and losing perspective, then we are a friend of the world. If all we are about in this life is “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” and not sacrificing that to seek the will and mind of God, we are in the process of making the world our friend.

This is a constant point of analysis that we must conduct literally minute by minute, decision by decision. I said in my last sermon that it is not a sin to enjoy the pleasurable elements of God's creation, and there are plenty of Scriptures to support that idea, like this one:

“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God” (Ecc 2:24)

The thing to keep in perspective when enjoying these things is that none of these things of the flesh are capable of providing comfort to the soul. The good things of the

creation are intended to bring comfort to the body if used in a reasonable and sober manner. That requires us to be circumspect and introspective on every use of the material prosperity God has provided us, so as to not misuse them and fall into sin or sacrifice them in an attempt to befriend the world.

The word translated “friend” is *philos*, and Thayer’s provides this as a definition

- 1) friend, to be friendly to one, wish him well
- 1a) a friend
- 1b) an associate
- 1c) he who associates familiarly with one, a companion
- 1d) one of the bridegroom’s friends who on his behalf asked the hand of the bride and rendered him various services in closing the marriage and celebrating the nuptials

Pay special attention to 1d to get the fullest sense of what James is warning against here. There is a fine line between enjoying and taking relief from the good things of this life and befriending the enemy. It isn’t hard to cross over it and leave our obligation to the Bridegroom.

Here's the danger for us, and why this warning is provided here. We can deceive ourselves into thinking we are not conformed to the world by putting on outward appearances but be so invested in the comfort of the flesh that we have in fact made friends with the world and its prince. The changes required to cement that friendship are perhaps subtle and slow to take shape.

This isn’t empty pontification or idle theory. Our souls are in absolute peril. I fear sometimes that we say this so much and go to such great lengths to make the point that it might drive people to numbness to the reality.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1Pe 5:8)

I want to drive your attention to the simple but perhaps overlooked element of this description. Our adversary hunts and seeks to devour. But he doesn’t hunt like a lion hunts.

Lions are stealthy. They aren’t as fast as the cheetah running down the antelope at 70 miles per hour. They almost invisibly blend into the savannah to ambush their prey. They certainly don’t announce their presence by roaring.

Our adversary is too prideful, too bold in his hubris and arrogance to do anything else – and that works to our advantage. The enemy is known and he announces himself

loudly. He is powerful in a way we may not be able to fully comprehend, but he is not an unknowable mystery for those who serve God and read His word.

Our adversary doesn't hide from us. He puts his temptations, his refutations, his lies right in front of us every day. He roars at us. Did you know that you can hear a lion's roar from some 5 miles away? It's a fitting analogy used. That's loud and provides an absolute warning for us. He isn't sneaking around trying to come at us from an oblique angle we won't see. Yes, he is devious, yes absolutely he is subtle in how he entices us each individually. But he's right there in front of us all the time.

Being the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2) gives him access to us. Yes, it is limited access, walled and limited by our God. But it is access that we have to be wary of and not callous to disregard.

Every song, every movie, every TV show, every podcast, every social media post, every advertisement of every form, every book, every game – all of it is at his disposal. Every screen large or small is available to him to use against us. And use them he does. We don't control that. We have no influence over it. Even becoming hermits wouldn't stop his access to us in all reality – he **is** the prince of the power of the air. But those aren't his only tools, remember. He has been working to devour God's people from before the time screens existed, and these new techniques only add to those which he has been using for millennia now. He has been hunting successfully for a long time, using even the loved ones of the saints to deceive and drive them out of peace with God. He hunts constantly, just like a natural lion. He is never satisfied.

When lions hunt, one of their key tools is their claws. They're big, not the biggest in the animal kingdom, but big enough. They're sharp enough to pierce water buffalo and even elephant hide. They're as strong or stronger than carbon fiber. When they hunt and put their weight behind them they go deep into the flesh of their prey and they do not come out easily. These elements he has at his disposal are like the claws of the natural lion. They go in and you may not even realize how deep they are. You might not realize how deeply a thing from this culture has embedded itself into your thinking until he has you in his jaws. He's sunk the claws in and pulled you back to him for the kill.

That is why I bring this up all the time. These claws, these tools that he has at his disposal are insidious and literally around us all the time. I pray to God that He doesn't let them invent some way to invade our sleep directly, because that's about the only time we aren't under the influence of these tools, these claws sinking their way into us.

It is important to steel ourselves and help one another to influence how much we invite his tools into our daily lives. We can control how much stock and dependence we put on those things that comfort our flesh. We can directly limit how much we let his lexicon, his idols, his dainties invade our thoughts, our hearts, our conversations and

how much it fuels our lusts. We can rise up every day ready and willing to do battle against these enticements and reject being drawn into the friendship of the world.

And don't bristle at that notion that our lusts are fueled by these things the adversary entices us with, my friends. We all have lusts. The lust of the flesh is common to all men and something that must be directly warred against every day. If you don't know the enemy, how can you war against them? I am not suggesting some deviance in anyone but let us call the thing what it is that we battle against – the lusts of the flesh in all their forms and varieties.

To become numb to the realities of this simple truth such that we think ourselves immune to his weapons is dangerous. It prevents us from being at peace with God because we shun friendship with Him and become friends with the enemy. It is a raw and enraging betrayal when it happens. It is why we are chastened, because to allow these claws to sink into our flesh indicates we have not properly armored ourselves (Eph. 6:11) against them, and that means we are not dwelling on the glory of our God. We are not pursuing peace with Him. And likely not genuine and true peace with each other.

Making friends with and becoming friends of the world is a soul endangering thing to do. It detracts from our obligations as Christians and wastes energy pursuing vain and unenduring things. This doesn't necessarily happen all at once. It can take decades to do. In the IT security realm it is what we call an advanced persistent threat. It comes from any and all angles, and that assault is literally unending.

Friends, there are not enough words of warning to issue here. There is no end to the need for vigilance. We have to avoid this friendship while still living peaceably with the world around us. That takes definitive effort and forethought to be effective. It starts with pursuing peace with our God through obedience and diligence. Peter give us the pattern to execute this diligence

“Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” (1Pe 5:9)

Faith is the answer to overcoming the hunting skills of the enemy and keeping proper perspective on friendship of the world. Faith is of course a gift of God, and what I suggest should be a primary focus of our prayers.

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” (1Pe 5:10)