

## THE FIRE OF FAITHFUL LOVE

### James 4:4-10

You adulterers! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility with God? So whoever wants to be a friend of this world is an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you think the Scripture means nothing when it says that the Spirit that God caused to live in us jealously yearns for us? <sup>6</sup> But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble [**Proverbs 3:34**]. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people! <sup>9</sup> Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.

### INTRODUCTION

Extensive research by the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University demonstrates Americans are marrying less than ever before and those who do marry are less happy. This has given rise to stories like the following from a pastor who visited the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade Sunday School class one day to talk about marriage as part of the lesson. He asked the class, "What does God say about marriage?" Immediately one boy replied, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." A husband sought counseling to cope with his nagging wife. His psychiatrist advised him to assert himself. "You don't have to let your wife henpeck you. Go home and show her you're the boss." The husband took the doctor's advice. He rushed home, slammed the door, shook his fist in his wife's face, and growled, "From now on, you're taking orders from me. I want my supper right now, and when you get it on the table, go upstairs, and lay out my best clothes. Tonight, I'm going out with the boys, and you are going to stay at home where you belong. And another thing, guess who's going to comb my hair, give me a shave, and tie my necktie?" His wife calmly said, "The undertaker."

Last week's sermon, *Who Holds Our Heart?* examined spiritual unfaithfulness to God within the context of faithfulness to one's marriage vows. The shock and heartbreak of adultery in a marriage applies to our relationship with God. This explains James' vehemence in **vss. 4:4-5** (ISV): "You adulterers! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility with God? So whoever wants to be a friend of this world is an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you think the Scripture means nothing when it says that the Spirit that God caused to live in us jealously yearns for us?" Such strong language describes the impact of flagrant infidelity upon God who "yearns" ("passionately longs") for our exclusive devotion. In **Isaiah 54:5** (NIV), God professed marriage-quality love to His 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 earth.'" James makes two emphatic points in **vss. 4:4-5**: (1): As our Creator and Savior, the Lord will not tolerate any rivals for our loyalty and worship; (2) Our relationship to the Lord is not like the distant relationship of a king and subject or of master and servant, but like the intimate relations between a husband and wife. When we sin, we break God's heart, as the heart of one partner in a marriage may be broken by the desertion of the other, morally or physically. Today's sermon, *The Fire of Faithful Love*, explores the power of faithful love to purify us.

### I. FAITHFUL LOVE PURIFIES US

Chuck Colson, former Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon, founded *Prison Fellowship* in 1976, a ministry committed to prison reform and prisoner rehabilitation now working in 113 countries. In 1985, Jack Eckerd, founder of the nation's second largest drugstore chain, invited Chuck Colson to Florida to help the state's criminal justice crisis. As Colson toured Florida with Eckerd advocating prison reforms, he shared **Jesus** with Eckerd. Finally, after Jack Eckerd read *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis and the evidence for Christ's Resurrection in Chuck Colson's book, *Loving God* (1983), he decided **Jesus** had truly risen from the dead! He called Colson and prayed to commit his heart to Christ. The next time he walked into one of his drugstores, he saw *Playboy* and *Penthouse* on the shelves. He'd seen them there many times, but this never bothered him before. Now he saw them with new eyes as one who belonged to **Jesus**. He called his

company's president into his office and ordered him to remove these magazines. The president said, "You can't mean that, Mr. Eckerd. We make three million dollars a year on those books." But Jack Eckerd insisted such smut be removed from all 1,700 stores across America. Chuck Colson called him and asked, "Did you do that because of your commitment to Christ?" Jack said, "Why else would I give away three million dollars? The Lord wouldn't let me off the hook." He then wrote to all other drugstore chains urging similar action. He got no response. He wrote more letters. Then word got out that new customers were flooding Eckerd Drug stores to support his bold moral stand for Christ. Soon, other drugstore chains followed suit, as did 5,000 7-11 stores. In a period of 12 months, 11,000 retail outlets in America removed their pornography; not because of new laws or lawsuits, but due to the faithful love of Jack Eckerd for his Savior!

Tragically, unfaithfulness to the Lord has as much power to *putrefy* us as faithful love to the Lord *purifies* us. Years ago, a man arranged to meet his buddies one Sunday for a day of fishing and drinking. He was running late. Just as he drove up to the dock, he saw a boat pulling out, assumed his drinking buddies were on it, ran toward the water, jumped, and barely made it on board. But he'd landed on the wrong boat. He found himself with a church group going to a nearby island for a picnic—complete with hymn singing, a devotional message from the Bible, and a time of prayer and praise to the God they loved. Toward evening, when the boat returned, the man's buddies laughed and teased him over the mix-up about the boats. When they asked, "What kind of a time did you have with the church crowd?" he replied, "It was hell!"

*The Great Divorce* (1945), by C. S. Lewis, illustrates the power of the freedom of choice God gives us, and the power our choices gain over us to bind us faithfully to the Lord or to divorce us from Him forever. In his preface, Lewis qualifies his book as "a fantasy" with "a moral." It's not meant to be a "factual" account of what happens to us when we die. Lewis sought to explain *why* we end up either in Heaven or Hell. As *The Great Divorce* opens, the unnamed lead character, who is like C. S. Lewis in his skeptical, pre-Christian days, finds himself in a "dream" on the fringes of Hell; a dim town of eternal drizzle and never-ending twilight. Everyone is so shadowy in appearance they are but "ghosts" of what they were on earth. They are dead but refuse to accept it; or that where they live is actually Hell and not a real existence. Most of the streets and the shops are empty because in Hell, as he soon learns, "You've only got to *think* a house and there it is." Soon after people arrive, their natural selfish and quarrelsome nature, no longer restrained by God's grace as when they were on earth, puts them at odds with others. They then think new houses into existence and keep moving farther and farther away in isolation from everyone else (18-19, 28, 127).

The only people the unnamed lead character can see are in a bus stop line, so he joins them. Boarding the bus with him is George MacDonald (65), a 19<sup>th</sup> century pastor and novelist whose writings played a key role in leading C. S. Lewis to commit himself to Christ. MacDonald explains that every "ghost" gets a chance to go to Heaven, but most don't go. Their now unrestrained sins crush their nobler desires. These "ghosts" do not embody murder, theft, rape, genocide, or oppression—what Lewis calls the chief infernal forces behind 20<sup>th</sup>-century human destruction. These bus riders appear to be merely quarrelsome, cynical, distrustful, and manipulative. But as they draw nearer to Heaven, deeper sins surface: selfishness, pride, prejudice, stubborn close-mindedness, a wilting control that passes itself off as love, consuming lust, and self-serving lying. Worst of all, they never accept blame for their actions; their problems are always the result of others' failings.

When the bus arrives on the outskirts of Heaven, some are so uncomfortable in its dazzling light that they retreat to the security of the bus. Angelic-like people approach each rider—people they knew on earth—to encourage them to leave their sin-cursed, shadowy existence. Heaven shimmers before them in a dazzling display of light, sparkling waters, luxuriant growth, and breathtaking beauty! But they've become so accustomed to Hell's miserable conditions as "normal" that clean air seems foul to their lungs. The cost of journeying to the deeper parts of Heaven in the mountains—death to self and a severance from the sins upon which they have long fed—proves too great for all but a few. They return to the bus, choosing to ride back to Hell. George MacDonald, as the "Teacher" of the main character, explains, "Milton was right. The choice

of every lost soul can be expressed in the words, 'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven'" [a line from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), quoting why Lucifer became the Devil]. "There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy" (69).

When the main character asks MacDonald what happens to "the poor Ghosts who never get into the omnibus at all?"; in other words, do all have the same opportunity he's had to repent of sin's foolishness and experience the "infinite happiness" God offers to any who commit their hearts to Him, pastor George MacDonald replies, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened" [citing **Matthew 7:7**] (61, 72-73).

One day, when Calvin Coolidge presided over the Senate as the Vice President (1921-23), a Senator angrily told another Senator to go "straight to hell." The offended Senator complained to Coolidge. Nick-named "Silent Cal" for being a man a few words, Coolidge looked up from the book he was leafing through while listening to the debate. "I've been looking through the rule book," he said. "You don't have to go."

James would have appreciated C. S. Lewis' thought-provoking work, *The Great Divorce*. **James 4:4-8** emphasizes the power of the freedom of choice God gives us, and the power our choices gain over us to bind us faithfully to the Lord or to divorce us from Him. "You adulterers! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility with God? So whoever wants to be a friend of this world is an enemy of God.<sup>5</sup> Or do you think the Scripture means nothing when it says that the Spirit that God caused to live in us jealously yearns for us?<sup>6</sup> But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people!" "Friendship with the world," in this context, is anything we allow as Christians to weaken, undermine, or lure us away from faithful devotion to Christ. It's not living up to the marriage vow, "forsaking all others, I will keep myself for him (or her) alone." When we truly give our heart to someone in marriage, we know instinctively, if we're honest with ourselves and with God, if we're allowing ourselves to stray from our mate by what we allow ourselves to watch, to think about, by the friends we keep, or by what we do.

When James wrote in **vss. 6-7**, "But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, submit to God," James assured us that God's "grace" not only *accepts* anyone, and *forgives* anyone, but God's grace *purifies* anyone who longs to be faithful in their love for Him. We "humble" ourselves when we admit our need for God's grace; we cannot defeat our sinful impulses alone. We "humble" ourselves when we admit our faults rather than pridefully excusing them. But we most demonstrate godly humility when we most "submit" to God's authority. "Submit yourselves," in Greek, means "voluntarily place yourself in subjection to His will." His standards become our standards. When Jack Eckerd began to view his drugstores through new eyes, as one who now belonged to **Jesus**, he chose not to stray from loving **Jesus**, regardless of the mammoth financial loss he thought it would cost him!

Do you approve of **James 4:8b-9** being in the Bible? "Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people!<sup>9</sup> Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow." "Double-minded" means "two-natured." Revival begins in any heart, in any family, in any church, when we become disgusted with whatever in our lives is still under control of our old, sinful nature instead of under control of our new, Spirit-filled nature that we received at the moment we pledged loyal love to **Jesus Christ**. We too often accept as "normal" the standards of our society that reflect Satan's values, not God's. For example, **Malachi 2:16** (MEV) states plainly, "[T]he LORD, the God of Israel, says that He hates divorce; for it covers one's garment with violence, says the LORD of Hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." Probably no true Christian likes divorce, but

fewer and fewer Christians "hate" it as God does, or we would be doing much more to save marriages than choosing to end them. A young man named Ron sought a bride with staying power. He was discussing with his girlfriend the fragility of many marriages and posed the following question to her: "What if you wake up one morning and don't love me anymore?" She immediately replied with a smile, "There's always obedience." He'd found a bride with staying power! **Jesus Christ**, who referred to Himself as "the bridegroom" (**Matthew 9:14-15; 25:1-13**), has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the Church (composed of all believers of the ages), to be His bride (**Ephesians 5:25-32**). Has he found in us a bride with staying power? Next week, we will turn our attention to the power of faithful love for **Jesus** to inspire us.

## CONCLUSION

Dr. Tony Campolo, an American pastor and sociologist, tells those who come to him for marriage counseling, "If you do what I tell you to do for an entire month, I can promise you that by the end of the month, you will be in love with your mate. Are you willing to give it a try?" When couples accept his challenge, the results have been hugely successful. He says, "My prescription for creating love is simple: do ten things each day that you would do if you really were in love. I know that if people do loving things, it will not be long before they experience the feelings that are often identified as being in love. Love is not those feelings. Love is what one wills to do to make the other person happy and fulfilled. Often, we don't realize that what a person does influences what he feels."

What should you do if you don't feel much warmth or passion in your relationship with the Lord? Do at least 10 things each day that you would do if your heart burned with joyous love for your Savior. We can organize these things according to what counselor Gary Chapman describes as *The Five Love Languages* (2004):

- 1) Acts of Service: Volunteer for acts of service in the Lord's name, in your church, school, workplace, or community.
- 2) Words of Affirmation: Sing or hum "love songs" to and about the Lord or pray words of love to Him.
- 3) Giving of Gifts: Give away material items of value, as furniture or clothing, or financial gifts, to help others in need and to support the ministry of your church.
- 4) Quality Time: Dream up ways to squeeze more time out of your day to be with Jesus, as lovebirds do when they are courting; read the Bible and memorize and quote Scripture to align your heart more with the Lord's.
- 5) Meaningful Touch: You cannot physically touch **Christ**, but you communicate love to Him by actions that caringly touch "the church, which is His body" (**Ephesians 1:22b-23a**). In **Matthew 25:40** (CSB) **Jesus** says, "[W]hatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for Me."