

THE FIRE OF FAITHFUL LOVE-PART TWO

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. ⁵ 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? ⁶ But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble [**Proverbs 3:34**]. ⁷ Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people! ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.

INTRODUCTION

Jacob Koshy grew up in Singapore with one driving ambition: to gain all the money and possessions he could as quickly as he could. This led him into the world of drugs and gambling. He became the lord of an international smuggling network. But in 1980, he was arrested and placed in a government drug rehabilitation prison in Singapore. Jacob became frustrated beyond endurance. All his goals, purposes, and dreams were locked up with him in a tiny cell. This filled his heart with cold emptiness. He smoked, but cigarettes weren't allowed in the prison. Yet, he smuggled in tobacco and rolled it in the thin pages of the Gideon Bible he'd been given. One day he fell asleep while smoking. He awoke to find to find the cigarette had burned out, leaving a mere scrap of charred paper. He unrolled it and read these words from **Acts 9:4**: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Jacob asked for another Bible and read the entire story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He suddenly realized if God could help someone like Saul, God could help him, too. He knelt in his cell in prayer, asking Christ to come into his life and to change him. He began crying and couldn't stop. As tears of a wasted life washed away his pain, God granted him rebirth by uniting Jacob's heart with His. He began sharing his story with other prisoners. Upon release, he immediately got involved in church. He met a Christian woman, married her, and is now a missionary in the Far East. He tells people far and wide, "Who would have believed that I could find the truth by smoking the word of God?"

Last Sunday, we focused upon the Power of Faithful Love to Purify Us; to ignite a burning desire within us to be rid of whatever *misbehavior* denies us the quality of life our Savior intends for us to enjoy in union with Him. Today we explore the Power of Faithful Love to Inspire Us; to stir within us the passion to develop whatever *good behavior* makes us more pleasing to the Lord. We long to gain intimacy with **Jesus Christ**, who loves us like a bridegroom and gave His life to save His beloved Bride from everlasting ruin.

American evangelist and pastor D. L. Moody (1837-99) preached one night in St. Louis on Paul's words to the Philippian jailer of **Acts 16:31**, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." A newspaper published Moody's sermon under the heading, "How the Jailer Got Caught." In a local jail, a career burglar named Ballintyne Booth read the sermon and gave his heart to **Jesus**. Love for his Savior inspired him now to be as pleasing to Christ as he'd once been displeasing. His jailers witnessed such an astounding change in his attitude and actions that he was released when his case came to trial. He moved to New York for a time to shed his ungodly local companions and to build a new life. He then returned to St. Louis. After a time, the Sheriff sent for him. He told Booth, "I want you to be a deputy sheriff. I had you shadowed for six months, and they wrote me you were O.K." Booth served St. Louis and his Savior honorably as a deputy sheriff for 10 years, till the day of his death. A preacher once asked him to preach but the Sheriff regretfully said he could not spare him that Sunday. A court had just assigned him the task of levying overdue taxes on a jewelry store in which there was a large stock of diamonds of which no inventory had yet been taken. The Sheriff told Booth, "There's no one I can trust with guarding these diamonds but you." Quite a dramatic change for a career burglar, whose love for his Savior inspired him to become the most trustworthy person that the Sheriff of a major U. S. city ever knew!

II. FAITHFUL LOVE INSPIRES US

James tackles our moral and spiritual unfaithfulness toward **Jesus** by placing "friendship with the world" in the context of faithfulness to one's marriage vows. James insists we have a God who "jealously yearns" ("passionately longs") for our exclusive devotion. As lead pastor over Jerusalem's house churches in the early days of Christianity, James would have been aware **Jesus** referred to Himself as "the bridegroom" of the Church, His bride, composed of all who have embraced Him as Lord and Savior (**Matthew 9:14-15; 25:1-13; Ephesians 5:25-32**). This explains James' two emphatic points in **vss. 4:4-5**: (1): The Lord will not tolerate any rivals for our affections. A man is reported to have inserted an ad in the classifieds: "Wife wanted." The next day, he claimed to have received a hundred letters. They all said the same thing: "You can have mine." As our Creator and Savior, **Jesus** advertises through us to the ungodly world, "You can't have Mine." (2) Our relationship to the Lord is not like the distant relations of a king and subject or a master and servant, but like the intimate relations between husband and wife. Sinful straying breaks God's heart, as the heart of one partner in a marriage may be broken by the desertion of the other, morally or physically.

There are 10 commands in **vss. 7-10** that give us opportunity to demonstrate our faithful devotion to our Savior-Lord, our Heavenly Bridegroom. We could despair of meeting such stringent demands if we did not claim God's promise to us in **vs. 6**: "But He gives greater grace." God's "greater grace" forgives anyone who sincerely places saving faith in **Jesus Christ** to be free of sin's penalty. But God's "greater grace" can also purify and inspire anyone who longs to be faithful in our love for **Jesus** by freeing us from sin's power.

The 10 commands are: **1)** "Submit to God," better understood in Greek as "Submit yourselves to God," means "voluntarily place yourself in subjection to God's will." This means His standards of right and wrong become our standards. To the extent we approve or disapprove of what anyone else but God tells us how we should live—as in our dress, speech, honesty, the stewardship of our time, money, and health, our marriage and sexual values, our commitment to fellow members of Christ's "Bride," a local church—we fail the Lord; **2)** "Resist the Devil": Submission to God's will and the standards of our Savior-Creator is our primary act of resisting the Devil's lies, whose main goal since the Garden of Eden is to separate us from God so he can destroy us in this life, the next life, or both (**Genesis 3:1-19; I John 3:8; 5:19**). To the extent we allow ourselves to be kept from close fellowship with the Lord or His people, we yield to the Devil rather than resist him; **3)** "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you": Everything James says in **vss. 4-10** pivots around this appeal. To the extent we embrace Christ fully with our hearts, **Jesus** showers us with the sweet blessings of His presence and power; **4)** "Cleanse your hands, sinners": James employs the imagery of the external cleansing and purifying required of Old Testament Israelites before they could participate in public worship of the Lord (**Leviticus 15:1-31**). We are to clean up our outward appearance and conduct to honor **Jesus** we claim to serve. The changes Christ makes in our appearance and conduct may shock some who know us. There's a story of a man who would come home sweaty and dirty after a hard day's work. He would usually stumble in the back door, get something to drink from the refrigerator, go the rec room, and watch TV until his wife called him to supper. Soon after he gave his heart to **Jesus**, he decided to change his ways. Before leaving work one day, he used the fitness center to shower and shave. He put on a clean shirt. He stopped at a florist and bought a bouquet of roses. Instead of coming in the back door, he went to the front door and rang the doorbell. His wife opened the door, took one look at him, and began to cry. He asked her, "What's wrong?" She said, "I've had a horrible day. First I had to take Billy to the emergency room and get stitches in his leg, then your mother called and said she's coming to stay with us for 2 weeks, then the washing machine broke and there's water all over the floor, and now this! You come home drunk!"

5) "Purify your hearts, double-minded people!": "double-minded" here means "two-natured." We show we are "double-minded" about loyalty to **Jesus** when we continue to satisfy some longings of our old, Satan-led nature along with satisfying some longings of our new Spirit-filled nature we received the moment we pledged loyal love to **Christ** (**John 3:1-8; Colossians 3:1-10**). Such internal or external defilement keeps us from experiencing our Savior's full embrace. How much do we deceive ourselves that we live only to please

our Heavenly Bridegroom if we limit our acts of devotion to Him to what also serves our own self-interest? When a wife lost her voice completely for two days, due to an attack of laryngitis, her husband devised a system of taps to help her communicate. She read these instructions he'd printed for her: "One tap means, 'Give me a kiss.' Two taps mean, 'No.' Three taps means, 'Yes.'" 95 taps means, "Take out the garbage."

James invokes language of Old Testament prophets to urge a clean break with whatever is depriving us of **Jesus'** full embrace: **6)** "Be miserable": literally "afflict yourselves"; **7)** "mourn and weep" means, "grieve and sorrow." If we accept responsibility for failing or breaking the heart of one we love, we cannot rest until we put a stop to such action and make amends. The 8th & 9th commands, **8)** "Your laughter must change to mourning," & **9)** "Your joy" [must change] to sorrow," drive home the heart-wrenching impact of our unfaithfulness toward **Jesus**. These nine commands hinge upon **10)** "Humble yourselves before the Lord," which echoes the emphasis of **vs. 6)** "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." Our Savior is ready to "exalt" us, to flood our lives with His "greater grace," when we "humble ourselves" by confessing our faults rather than pridefully excusing them. We "humble" ourselves by admitting our need for God's grace because we cannot defeat our sinful impulses alone. But we most demonstrate godly humility when we most "submit" to God's authority; when "Jesus Christ" truly is "our only Master and Lord" (**Jude 4**).

A husband and wife lacked real love for each other. The man was so demanding he even prepared a list of rules and regulations for his wife to follow. He insisted she read them every day and obey them to the letter. Among other things, his "do's and don'ts" stipulated such details as what time she had to get up in the morning, when his breakfast should be served, and how the housework should be done. After several long years, the husband died. As time passed, the woman came to love another man, who cherished her. They soon married. This husband did everything he could to make his new wife happy, continually showering her with tokens of his appreciation. One day as she cleaned house, she found tucked away in a drawer the list of commands her first husband had drawn up. As she looked it over, it dawned on her that although her present husband hadn't given her any kind of list, she was doing everything her first husband required. She realized she was so devoted to this man that her deepest desire was to please him out of love, not obligation. This is how **Jesus**, by showering us with His sacrificial love, should inspire us. Our desire to please Him can turn the fulfillment of His wishes into a joy we voluntarily *choose* to do rather than an obligation we *resent* to do.

CONCLUSION

There's a tale of two, quite content caterpillars. They were earthbound, but they had friends and plenty to eat. What more could they want? A butterfly flew over their heads one day as they crawled in the grass. As they looked up, one said to the other, "You couldn't get me up in one of those things for anything!" You know what happened. Metamorphosis marvelously transformed them into butterflies; soaring creatures of beauty able to travel to distant wonders and enjoy sweet delights they'd despised as ignorant caterpillars.

Years ago, a crippled woman became a spiritual power in her Chinese province. As a child, she'd been dropped by careless hands. She lived for many years as a bad-tempered young girl, lashing with her sharp tongue against her dismal fate and miserable life. Then she gave her heart to **Jesus** and everything changed. She went to school to make something of herself to better serve her Savior. She became a teacher. But when sent to her first school, the townspeople rioted. They feared this crippled woman would bring them bad luck. She persevered in faithfully loving **Jesus**, her students, and their families. Her efforts were richly rewarded. When word came after several years that she was being transferred to another school, an even greater riot occurred than when she first arrived. The people had come to treasure her as the finest teacher they'd ever known, and no one in this town had ever drawn more people into the arms of her Savior to experience the quality of life her faithful love for **Jesus** had inspired her to demonstrate! "But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"⁷ Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.⁸ Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. . . .¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you."