

# James' Letter

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## 7: A Divided Heart

We now move into the fifth main teaching of James' letter where he uses some pretty strong language to address the underlying cause of most hostility and division that takes place within the Christian community. According to James, we cause problems for ourselves and the people around us when we primarily focus on what we want in life instead of what God wants for us. Our heart becomes divided between the way this world tells us to live and the way that God tells us to live. And a divided heart means that we are not devoted to God.

***According to James, we can be a follower of Jesus or a friend of the world, but we cannot have it both ways.***

## Turning Away from God

James paints a picture of serious conflict within the Christian community and then declares that all of this takes place because our hearts are divided between trying to serve God while we keep living life like we want to live it. He even mentions that our prayers are not answered in these situations because God can see the self-centered motives behind most of our prayers.

Do you feel like God has your whole heart or do you still feel like you're holding something back? Would you say that you are more concerned about what God wants for you than what you want for yourself? How much time do you spend in prayer asking God what he wants from you versus what you want from him?

We need to remember that God is not against us wanting things for ourselves. Scripture tells us to pray continually and to present our requests to God. But God does want us to find pleasure in wanting the things that he wants. He wants us to learn to love what he loves and to see the world like he sees it. We cannot claim to love God and yet only concern ourselves with what's important to us.

James uses some harsh language to describe this kind of divided heart.

He writes:

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (4:4)

We must not overlook the weight of these words. James calls the man with a divided heart an adulterer and enemy of God.

As the Creator of all things, God has given us the gift of life and desires our unwavering love, faithfulness and allegiance in return. The great temptation is to turn away from God and to live a life centered on what we want and desire for ourselves. And this kind of self-centeredness is the most common way life is lived in this world and that is why James describes a Christian's divided heart as *'friendship with the world'*.

You see, a man can say he loves his wife, but if he pursues relationships with other women then he is an adulterer. And a soldier can say he is committed to his country, but if he is too friendly with the enemy then he too becomes an enemy of his country.

Jesus said that, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."<sup>1</sup>

And so, when a follower of Jesus desires to be a friend of the world, he becomes unfaithful to God in that moment and runs the risk of making himself a bible-believing, church-going enemy of God.

## Turning Back to God

The strong language used by James and the directness with which he addresses a divided heart might cause some readers to feel shame, guilt and hopelessness over their own unfaithfulness and sin. But God is patient with us, and James declares that God is willing to extend even more grace to us if we would humble ourselves and turn back to him.

James quotes an ancient proverb saying, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Living a life fueled by our own passions and desires is no small matter. God opposes those who are self-centered, self-consumed and primarily concerned about what's important to them. But on the flip side of that he is so full of love that he will give grace to those who humble themselves and turn back to him.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:24

So what does it look like to turn back to God in humility?

James lays it out for us by listing five particular actions that we ought to take:

- *We must submit ourselves to God.* We must make a decisive decision of allegiance to Jesus as our King and commit ourselves to live under his authority. This means that we will stop doing what we were doing and start doing what God wants us to do.
- *We must resist the devil.* There are evil spiritual forces that target our own tendencies toward selfishness and tempt us in ways that exploit our weaknesses. The only way to resist these spiritual forces is to draw near to God.
- *We must draw near to God.* We must approach God ready to offer ourselves to him as a living sacrifice with a desire to be like Jesus. This means that we will devote ourselves to enjoying God, and we will concern ourselves with his reputation and extending his glory.
- *We must seek to be pure in heart.* This means that we get rid of sinful habits, and we devote ourselves completely to God. We confess when we mess up and immediately ask God to forgive us.
- *We must embrace the seriousness of our sin.* We must not take our sinfulness lightly. This means that we should feel sorrow for our sin and not be too quick to just move on like it's not a big deal.

If we draw near to God then he will draw near to us. And if we will humble ourselves before him then he will raise us up to experience the life of love, joy and peace that we were intended to live.

Let's never forget that Jesus came into this world demonstrating the way life was meant to be lived, and the world crucified him for it.

We can be a follower of Jesus or a friend of the world, but we cannot have it both ways.