November 20/21, 2010

Enemy or Friend

Practically Christian: A Study in the Book of James

James 4:1-10

Pastor Bryan Clark

For the last couple of weeks we've been celebrating what God has been doing around the world. I hope you didn't stay home for that. It was really pretty awesome. The consumer is always asking the question, "Hey, what's in it for me?" But the worshipper delights in celebrating what God is doing. Since it's been a couple of weeks since we were in James, I thought maybe I'd get us back in the groove by asking us a couple of questions. As I ask these questions, just think about them in relation to the last couple of weeks. *Over the last 2 weeks, have you committed adultery?* Are you sure about that? *Over the last 2 weeks, have you declared yourself to be an enemy of God?* Are you sure of that? Think about your life over the last 2 weeks. Think about your relationships, your marriage, your family, at work, your friends. Would you say they've been defined by peace, quietness? Or have they been defined by conflict and quarrels, chaos and disorder? If your relationships have been defined by conflict, by quarrels, by disorder, then I can assure you, you have committed adultery and you have declared yourself to be an enemy of God. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to James chapter 4. James chapter 4.

Just a little review, at the end of chapter 3, James began talking about our source of wisdom. If our source of wisdom is from God, is a heavenly wisdom, then we find our value, our significance, our life in Him. It sets us free from a life of selfishness and the result of that is peace, quietness in our relationships. But if we draw our source of wisdom from the world of flesh and the devil, then it by definition forces us to be selfish to the core. We've decided to be our own God, to be in charge of our own value, to be in charge of our own significance, to be in charge of meeting our own needs, and that system, by its very definition, forces us to be selfish, which creates conflict and disorder. Our lives are defined by this selfish ambition. It's this constantly canvassing for votes in order to maintain my sense of value and significance in the world. James reminded us at the end of chapter 3 that it's only in an environment of peace that the seed of righteousness can grow. With that in mind, I think he's continuing on this same basic discussion on into chapter 4.

> **What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?** (*NASB, James 4:1)

He's still talking about conflict, still talking about the source. These two words conflict and quarrels are actually military terms; they're typically used to talk about battles. The first one, quarrels, is a reference to kind of the campaign, the state of war. Why does it seem like you people always live in a state of war? Conflicts would be the battles within the war, the skirmishes along the way. Notice, too, that he says "among you," in other words in the context of believers. One of the things we've learned about these dispersed Jews that are the recipients, the first readers, of James' letter is that they're a pretty messed up bunch. They're rather dysfunctional. There's all kinds of stuff going on. I don't know that they're quite as dysfunctional as the Corinthians, but they're pretty messed up.

It's always interesting to hear people talk about the first century church: You know, "We need to be more like the early church." What we fail to realize is the early church was really messed up. It

was really dysfunctional. As a matter of fact, for 2000 years the church has always been messed up and dysfunctional. Ministry is always messy, but what do you expect when you recruit sinners and misfits and losers to come together and be a family? It's always dysfunctional. It's always messy. That's just part of the deal. And James is trying to deal with ongoing problems. In this case, he's asking the question: Where's this coming from—all this conflict, all these battles? The answer:

> **Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?** (vs. 1b)

It's really important we define this word "pleasures" correctly. If you think of it just in terms for example of sexual sin, things like that, you'll define it way too narrowly. It's the Greek word from which we get our English word *hedonism*. And hedonism essentially means selfish desires. What James is saying is that this conflict, these quarrels, this disorder flows out of this selfish orientation, where every moment of every day is about *me*. It's about me. It's about my needs. It's about my value. It's about my significance. It's about what I need from my spouse, what I need from my children, what children need from their parents, what I need from relationships: *Me, Me, Me*. And as long as that defines my life, then there's gonna be conflict, there's gonna be quarrels. Verse 2:

> **You lust and you do not have; so you commit murder.** (vs. 2a)

Now again, if we define "lust" so narrowly as something for example just related to sex, we define it way too narrowly and we miss the point. This is actually a word that means a strong desire. There are occasions in the New Testament where this word is translated in a sense that's good, that we strongly desire something that's right and good. Most of the time it's negative; it certainly is in this particular text. What he's saying is the problem is we strongly desire something, we strongly desire something that's gonna make me happy, that's gonna give me joy, that's gonna give me value, that's gonna give me significance. It's what I want, and if I don't get what I want it makes me mad. There's a lot of debate about whether "commit murder" is hyperbole—just exaggerated speech—or literally. Most likely it's hyperbole. This word is used that way in several places in the New Testament. But certainly we would say that murder is the ultimate end of this. People that don't get what they want, they don't get their way, they're being blocked from what they think they need could push it all the way to actually committing murder. But for our discussion, it's simply saying that when our orientation is primarily selfish, and every day everything runs through the grid of what I want, what I need, what I expect, and when I don't get my way it creates this anger, it creates this explosion, it creates this chaos, this disorder that starts to define my relationships; it starts to define my life. The idea here that he's talking about is that in order to be happy, in order to be valued, in order to be significant, I have to get my way. Now think about that. Over the course of a day, how many people and how many things are completely out of your control? Almost everything. In the course of a day, the number of things that I can actually control is a very short list. So if my orientation every day is about me, it's about my needs, it's about what I want, what I need to be happy, what I need to be fulfilled, what I need to have value, what I need to have significance, almost everything out there and almost everybody out there can block that, which makes me mad, which gets me in this framework of constantly about conflict and being out-of-sorts and this disorder and this chaos that defines my life.

> **You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.** (vs. 2b)

Now that's an interesting statement. We do not ask whom? Of course, the obvious answer, we do not ask God. In other words, what he's saying is oftentimes, at the core of these issues are

legitimate needs. I do need to feel valued. I do need to feel significant. I do need to experience pleasure. I do need a lot of these things that drive me each day. God has promised to be the One who will meet that need. But I don't ask. The reason I don't ask is because I've bought into the value system of the world. Somewhere along the way, I decided, "You know, God, I'm not sure You're gonna do it, so I'm taking charge. I'm gonna be my own god. I'm gonna make sure my needs are met. I'm gonna make sure I'm happy. I'm gonna make sure I have value and significance." Therefore, each day is about *me* accomplishing this. Therefore, I don't ask. It's symptomatic of the fact that we have bought into the value system of the world.

Have you ever found yourself starting to ask God for something, and before you can even finish the sentence, you know it's so off track, it's so selfish, "I can't even get myself to verbalize this before God"? I've been there many times. You start to pray something, and before you even really get to it you think, "I just can't even do this. I just can't even verbalize this before God. I know it's off track. I know it's selfish to the core." That's the moment of truth. The moment of truth is at that moment, do I back up and say, "You know, God, I can't even get that out of my mouth. I know it's selfish. I know it's off track. I know it's wrong. I need to back up and rethink some things because I think right now I'm being really selfish."

The alternative is to stop our prayer because we have this sense in which I can't even verbalize this before God, but I still want it so I'm gonna do it myself. And so we go down that path, and the more we go down that path, the more selfish we become. The more we don't ask, the more it means we need to do it ourselves and we just get farther and farther and farther down that path of destruction. Now some of you are saying, "Well wait a minute, I do ask and God doesn't seem to answer." Hmmm, verse 3 might be for you!

> **You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

See, this is actually even worse. In the midst of verbalizing this before God, you're still clueless that this is selfish. So you ask, but your motive is self. You want it for yourself. You want it for your own selfish needs and desires. And so, while God hears your prayer, God's up in Heaven saying, "Hmmm, I don't think so." He hears that you ask, but He's not gonna answer. He's not gonna answer that kind of selfish, destructive prayer. You ask but God doesn't answer because your prayers are wrongly motivated. Now wouldn't it be interesting if we just polled all of our prayers from the last 2 weeks and we assessed: "What percentage of my prayer life is me asking God for what I want, and what percentage is me asking God what He wants? How much of my prayer life is about me, me, me? And how much of it is really about God? God, what do You want? What do You want from me? What do You want me to do? How do You want to use me to build Your kingdom in this world? The consumer is constantly asking the question, "What about me? What's in it for me?" And that is reflected in our prayer life. Verse 4:

> **You adulteresses…**

Whoa, did you hear what he just called us?! I am continually struck by the language of this letter. It is so intense. James does not pull any punches. He just accused us of adultery. What does he mean by that? This is a concept in both the Old and the New Testament, that when we trust Christ as Savior, when we enter into this relationship with God, we enter in as lovers. We are the bride. He is the groom. God has not just offered us a ticket to heaven. God longs to have an intimate relationship with us. But when we determine to be our own gods, to become a friend of the world,

to operate according to the operating system of the world which is selfish at its core, we are in essence cheating on God. We're having ourselves a spiritual affair. We've become adulteresses. He says,

> **You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?** (vs. 4a)

In other words, James is saying, "Hey, when you decide to have a spiritual affair, God's not neutral about that. Grace doesn't mean that God says, "Oh, grace covers it all. My grace is enough, live it up. Come back when you're done." He's saying just the opposite: You are creating hostility between you and God. I want to raise this question this morning several times: *Are you sure that's the path you want to travel*? *Are you sure you want to pick a fight with this God? Are you sure you want to create hostility between you and this God?* Because what James is saying is that is what you're doing.

> **Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.** (vs. 4b)

Wow. When you choose to have a spiritual affair, when you choose to become a friend of the world—it's not talking about friend of the people of the world, but a friend of the operating system of the world—when you decide, "I'm gonna be my own god. I'm gonna make myself valuable. I'm gonna give myself significance. I'm gonna meet my own needs. I'm gonna take care of myself. I'm gonna make myself happy." When every day is about me, me, me, you have become a friend of the world and in doing that you have declared yourself to be an enemy of God. Again, I want to raise the question: *Are you sure that's the decision you want to make? Do you really want to put yourself in a position where you are declaring yourself to be an enemy of God?* You're picking a fight with the God of the universe, who is brokenhearted because you've made a decision to have an affair. Verse 5:

> **Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?**

Now, there's a lot of debate about whether Spirit is capital S or small s. Is this the Spirit of God in us, or our human spirit. It really makes no difference because the point is the same either way. What he's saying is the Scripture says that God is a jealous God, and the question James is asking is, "Do you think God is joking when He says, 'I am a jealous God'? Do you think He doesn't mean that? Do you think God's just joking? Do you think grace just covers it all?" There's a tendency to think that the doctrine of grace means God's okay with whatever we do. Whatever we do, God's grace is enough. He'll get over it. Now we don't verbalize that, but we certainly think that. I did actually have somebody verbalize to me once, "You know, I know that I can sin on Friday night and God will forgive me on Saturday. What's the problem?" The problem is this: That's spiritual adultery. The problem is this: You have created hostility between you and God. The problem is this: You have declared yourself to be God's enemy. That seems to be a rather significant thing. And again I raise the question: *Are you sure that's the path you want to travel? Are you sure that's what you want in life?*

Twenty-nine and a half years ago, Patty and I stood at an altar and we made a vow to one another. She vowed to me that she would save herself for me and me alone. So imagine today, she says, "You know, I still like you and everything, but you're getting kinda old and you're kinda goofy, and

I found a new lover!" Do you suppose I would respond by saying, "You know, that's okay. I knew you were joking 29 years ago. I knew you didn't really mean that. Grace covers it all! No problem." I will guarantee you that would not be my response. I am insanely jealous for my wife's love. She belongs to me. She made that commitment. That's very important to me. That's a righteous jealousy. If I found out there was another man who was pursuing my wife romantically, I am a pretty easy-going guy, but I guarantee you, there would be fireworks. I would not roll over and say, "Well, whatever." Because I love her, I have a jealous love for her. She belongs to me. That was the deal: I belong to her, she belongs to me. I'm very jealous about that. That's exactly what God is saying, "Hey, this wasn't just a ticket to Heaven, we're lovers! That was the commitment we made, and I expect you to be faithful to Me." James is asking the question, do you think God was just joking when He said that? Do you think God really didn't mean it? Or do you understand that God loves you with a jealous love, and when you decide to cheat on Him, when you decide to have your affair, it creates hostility. You've declared war on God. You've made yourself an enemy of God.

Now there's probably several of you this morning—probably quite a few of you—that at this point are thinking, "I didn't know that was the deal! I kinda thought grace just covers all that stuff. I don't want to fight God. I don't want to be at war with God. I don't want hostility with God. I didn't want to commit adultery against God. I don't want to declare myself to be an enemy of God. This sounds like a disaster. It kinda feels like Jonathan Edwards—the floor is gonna open and we're all gonna be swallowed up!" So what do we do? Well, it's right there in the text.

> **But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."** (vs. 6)

It is true that God's grace doesn't mean God is indifferent—"Hey, live it up and come back when you're done." God is opposed to the proud. If you're going to continue down that path, you're going to experience the hostility of God. You have declared yourself an enemy of God and God is jealous for your love, and He will respond to that. But if in your brokenness, if in your repentance, in your humility, you call out to God, there is grace enough to call you home, to forgive your sin, and to restore the intimate, passionate love affair that God has always wanted. For those who in their brokenness say, "God, it's enough. I want to come home," there is grace enough. No matter where you've been, no matter what you've done, God is ready to take you home again. But you've gotta make some changes. You say, "What do we do? What do we do?" Well, it's right there in the text. From verses 7 to 10, there are ten very quick, very specific commands. In the Greek these are just rapid-fire in the text. Verse 7:

> **Submit therefore to God.**

The word "submit" is a military term. It means to arrange yourself under. Imagine a commanding officer calling the troops, and the troops immediately assemble and come to attention. That's the word—to arrange yourself under authority. This is where it all starts. You got yourself into this mess because you decided you would be in charge. You decided that you would give yourself value and significance, you would make yourself happy, you would demand from your spouse, you would demand from your children, you would demand from your parents and the people at work, and your relationships that somehow they would make you happy and significant. You've made a mess because you've been in charge. The change starts by saying, "All right, I've made a mess of things, so now I'm going to submit. I'm going to surrender. God, You're in charge, not me." One of the questions we need to ask ourselves if we've been in charge of our own lives: How is that working?

How's that working? Everything wonderful? Relationship with your marriage really wonderful? With your kids? With your parents? With the people you work with? With your relationships? "Everything in life is wonderful, just always what I thought it would be." If it's not working, then maybe it's time to rethink some things, and it starts by saying, "Okay God, I took charge and I made a mess, so let's try this again with You in charge.

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (vs. 7)

The word "resist" is also a military term. It means to take my stand. I got into this mess because I'm listening to the voices of the culture. I'm drawing my wisdom from the world of flesh and the devil. To resist means to stand up and say, "You know, I'm going to take my stand. I'm not going to listen to those voices anymore. I'm not gonna operate according to the operating system of this world. I'm gonna make some dramatic changes." If I resist the devil, he flees from me. He's gonna go find more fertile ground, but I have to take my stand.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (vs. 8a)

This is a remarkable statement. This is the picture of the husband standing in the doorway calling out to his bride who has been having an affair saying "I'm not just asking you to give up your affair. I'm asking you to come home! I'm asking you to come home! I love you. I want to be intimate with you again. I want to be lovers again. You draw near to me and I'll draw near to you. I want us to be passionate lovers again." It's amazing that God's grace—no matter what we've done to Him—still causes Him to stand at the door and say, "Come home. Come home."

Cleanse your hands, you sinners… (vs. 8a)

The reason it says "you sinners" is we have to acknowledge: We're sinners. That's why we need to wash our hands. They're dirty. We're all messed up. This is a reference to our conduct, to our behavior, our outward behavior. We understand, "Hey, I've made a mess of things, and there's things in my outward behavior that must change, so I'm washing my hands clean of these behaviors."

Purify your hearts, you double-minded. (vs. 8b)

It's the internal. The double-minded is referring to the fact that we're trying to live off two different operating systems. On one hand we say we're Christ followers. On the other hand we're operating according to the value system of this world. So when he says "purify your hearts," he means it the same way he meant it in chapter 3. We have to be purified from ourselves. We have to have a heart that's purely devoted to God and we have to rid ourselves of this selfishness that defines the value system of the world. Verse 9:

Be miserable and mourn and weep…

Those are 3 different commands, but in essence what they're saying is we have to feel deeply the pain of our sin. We have to mourn. We have to weep. We have to have sorrow. There has to be a sense in which at the deepest part of my being I genuinely am broken over this. Over the years, we've found a dramatic difference between those people who get caught and are sorry about that

and those people that are truly broken over the devastation and the hurt they have caused. These three commandments basically capture the essence of true repentance. This isn't "I got caught." This is a deep brokenness that I've been on the wrong path. "I've been breaking the heart of God. I've been committing adultery. I've created hostility between me and God. And God, I'm broken over this. I never imagined that. I don't want that. In the deepest part of my being, I'm saying God I'm done with that, and I want to come home."

Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. (vs. 9b)

Now there's those of you, immediately you think, "I knew it! I knew it! The party's over!" Commit yourself to God, that's the end of the laughter. It's the end of the joy. It's time to be miserable." That's not what he means. As a matter of fact, the Bible is very clear that you ultimately *only* find your pleasure and your joy and your life in your relationship with God. What it is saying in this context is sin is fun for a season. There is a moment in adultery where it is joyful—this moment where it's exciting. But for every one of those moments, the sun comes up the next day and there is a price to be paid. What James is saying is, "Hey, you've had your fun. You've given it your best shot, but the party's over. It's time to face the music. You'll never come up the other side until you go down through the valley. You need to pay the ticket and acknowledge, "What I did was wrong. It was sin. And it's time to face that before I move on." Finally, verse 10:

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

The idea of exalting you is a very graphic picture. It's the picture of someone coming before the king and falling prostrate before the king with their face in the dirt, and it's the responsibility of the king to choose to reach down and put his hand under the chin and lift the face, which is a way of saying that you can look at me—you're worthy to look at me in my presence—and to stand that person up and say, "You're worthy to stand before me." But it's the king's choice. What has gotten you into all this trouble is *you've* been exalting yourself. And now it's time to fall on your face before God, and *He* will exalt you.

Whenever we go through a text like this, it's just really hard to just sing a song and call it a day. There's some of you right now, you are very uncomfortable. The Spirit is speaking to your heart and you feel that, and you're getting more uncomfortable. There's a part of you that wishes he'd just be quiet and let me get outta here. But there's another part of you—and I think a better part of you—that is saying, "You know, it's time to deal with this. Enough is enough. I don't want to be an adulterer. I don't want this hostility with God. I don't want to declare war with God. I don't want to be His enemy. I don't want it to be this way. I've made a mess of things." If we just sing a song and go, an hour from now you're going to be, "Well, that was close! It was close. It almost got to me!" And you'll just continue down the same destructive path. If the Spirit is speaking to you, you have to have the courage to say, "I need to deal with this. That's enough. That's enough. Before I make this such a disaster, and it's only gonna get worse and worse."

So what we're going to do is this: I'm going to pray, the worship team is going to come. We're going to sing a couple of songs to close the service. If you want to respond, to step out and say, "I've gotta act on this right now. I feel the conviction, the movement of the Spirit, and I need to do something. I need to step out. I need to settle this. That's enough of this path. I need to make some changes." We're just going to invite you to step out, come down to the steps, kneel at the steps, and do your business with God. When you're done with that, you can go back to your seats. I just want you to act on what the Spirit is doing before the moment passes and you go right back to

the same destructive behavior. You need to ask yourself this question this morning: *Is my way working?* If it's not working, then maybe it's time to say, "I need to rethink some things. I need to make some changes. I need to return to the One who loves me and enter back into this passionate love affair with Jesus." So let me pray, we'll sing, as the Spirit leads you feel free to come down and do your business with God.

Our Father, we are thankful this morning that You love us. You love us with this jealous love, as a husband loves his bride. Lord, it is a big deal when we commit adultery. It's hostility between us. Lord, we actually declare ourselves to be Your enemy. We're fighting You. Lord, right now I know there's people here that are wrestling with this. For them it's getting really uncomfortable. Your Spirit is stirring their hearts and they know something needs to change, that this needs to be an hour of decision. Lord I pray that You would give them the courage to deal with whatever it is that needs to be dealt with. Lord, that they would weep and mourn, that they would submit and surrender, that they would draw near, that they would see You standing in the doorway as a lover begging them to come home because You want to love them again. Lord, we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Enemy or Friend

Practically Christian: A Study in the Book of James

James 4:1-10

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What do you think of when you think about Spiritual Adultery? What emotions does that phrase stir up? Who is guilty of Spiritual Adultery?

2. What does it mean to you to be an enemy of God? Who is an enemy of God? Can a Christian be such an enemy?

3. What is at the core of all conflict?

Bible Study

1. Review the summary statement in James 3:18. What are the proper growing conditions for the seed of righteousness? In practical terms, what does this mean?

2. Read James 4:1-5. What is the source of conflicts and quarrels? How is this similar to the discussion in 3:13-18?

3. James states that we "do not have because you do not ask". What does he mean? Why don't we ask?

4. Why does James call us adulteresses? What does it mean to be a friend of the world? What do we make ourselves if we pursue friendship with the world?

5. What does he mean by greater grace in 4:6? Greater than what?

6. What are the 10 commands that must be obeyed to go from enemy to friend?

Application

1. Would you say your life is characterized daily by friendship with God or friendship with the world? Why?

2. What three specific things do you need to do to draw near to God and reject the friendship of the world?

3. What should characterize you on a daily basis if you've humbled yourself in the presence of the Lord and allowed Him to exalt you? List 5 things from 3:13-4:10.

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