

# He Gives Us More Grace

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[ 0 : 00 ] That is quite a Bible passage to read on a Sunday morning, isn't it? Verse 4, very, very stark and blunt. Did you see that?

James, the brother of Jesus, he's writing to first century Christian believers. He's writing to people who've put their faith in Jesus Christ, like so many of us. And in verse 4, he eyeballs them and he says to them, you adulterous people.

You adulterous people. Over this past month, reading through James, I think a lot of us have felt the challenge of this letter.

Do you not think? As James, like a skilled surgeon with a razor-sharp scalpel, has cut into church people.

That's what he's doing. Exposing how double-minded and half-hearted we can be sometimes in our devotion to the God who loves us. You've noticed that all the way through.

[ 1 : 00 ] It's all the way through the letter of James. Just notice this with me. Back in chapter 1, verse 22, just back a page. He says, do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, but do what it says.

So if you listen to the Bible and nod, but then you don't do it, you deceive yourself. Chapter 1, verse 26. Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues, deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

The religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. So question, do you control your tongue?

Do you care for the helpless? Do you avoid living like the world around? Is your religion worthless or pure in God's eyes?

Chapter 2, James pushes a bit further. He exposes no good faith. So when you pick your favourite friends at church and you push the needy and those not like you to one side, or when people are in physical need and we say, I'm sorry to hear that, I'll pray for you, and then walk away.

[ 2 : 16 ] Our God shows no favouritism, James says, because he is for the weak and the poor and the poor in spirit. And so what is going on? When I say I belong to this God, but actually doing what he says and becoming like him doesn't fit with my life and my leisure schedule.

James says that's useless faith, it's dead faith. Chapter 3 is about the tongue. With it I praise my Lord and Father, but to my shame this thing can be at the same time a restless evil full of deadly poison.

Innuendo and little lies and gossip and backbiting and manipulation and self-pitying whining and sniping and nastiness flowing out of here.

We talked about this passage in our growth group a few weeks ago and said it's so terribly true that our tongues are seemingly untameable. And James says, my brothers and sisters, this should not be.

And he's right, of course. Because when envy or ambition spew out of here and we fight and quarrel, that is hellish. I don't know how James has been for you so far.

[ 3 : 31 ] If you've been here, I imagine that something of what James said will have got to you. This good heavenly father utterly devoted to me and to us, but me to him?

And in our verses this morning, having spent chapters, two, three chapters, exposing blah, blah faith and half-hearted religion, James kind of stands back and faces his listeners and addresses them.

And through this letter to this point, he calls them dear brothers and sisters, but now he doesn't. Verses four to five, see this this morning, see James' accusation.

He says to them, you adulterous people. And let me read again. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?

Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he's caused to dwell in us? You adulterous people.

[ 4 : 38 ] Adultery, you know, I imagine, is when you are married to someone, you are publicly committed to them in exclusive intimate love, and then you turn away from your spouse and you slide off and you have sex with someone else.

Adultery is betrayal. It's treachery in a marriage. James hasn't randomly picked something shocking and cutting to say to them.

Like your behaviour, it's as bad as, oh, let me think about it, adultery. Now, do you see here in the text, there's a footnote to verse four. Now, do you see this at the bottom? An allusion to covenant unfaithfulness, see Hosea chapter three in the Old Testament.

So he accuses them of adultery because the relationship between God and his people all the way through the Bible is spoken of as a marriage covenant relationship.

In Isaiah 54, verse five, God speaks to the people of Israel and says, for your maker is your husband. The Lord Almighty is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your redeemer.

[ 5 : 49 ] He is the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife. Deserted and distressed in spirit. So the Lord God is a husband and a devoted lover and the people of God back then, Israel, his wife.

And as for old covenant Israel, so it is for God's new covenant people, for believers in Jesus Christ, for the church. Means that you don't just move in and out of being a Christian, a kind of casual connection with God.

Friends with benefits. When a person believes, when you are baptised, you turn your back on an old way of life and you turn to Christ.

Christ. In a baptism service, you might receive the sign of the cross on your forehead and the minister says, Christ claims you for his own. And from that point on, you belong in a relationship with God of binding, exclusive, total devotion, covenant commitment, he to you and you to him. Let's pause and just take a step to one side here. And I think it's worth reflecting that a binding covenant relationship with God, that which is true Christianity, it is actually very non-21st century, I think.

[ 7 : 19 ] Do you agree? Because we live in a world of low commitment relationships and low commitment spirituality. So in the 21st century, if you want some kind of spiritual boost, there's all sorts of things you can plug into or try for a bit.

You could take a course in yoga or Zen or mindfulness or meditation and see if that helps you a bit in your spiritual life. You pay your money and get your input. And you can dip into Buddhist teaching for a while and maybe some good principles you can adopt.

You can give church a try because the church community can be positive. There are friendly faces and childcare and coffee. There's a spiritual focus. You can get that at church and hold devotion to God at arm's length.

And in the 21st century with all those things, when it's not working for you anymore, you can just turn around and walk away because you're free. I think that's the kind of society we live in.

There's also a strain of Christianity, so-called Christianity, I think, that is low commitment. Where I discover he's a God of grace, that's what they always keep telling me and that's how I got drawn in.

[ 8 : 30 ] And he'll always forgive anything and I love that and I nurture a relationship with him where he is a bit like a doting grandfather or an undemanding boyfriend. He's gentle.

He gives me a spiritual boost when I need it or what I want and I feel better and saved and kind of safe for a bit. That is, I think, so much of modern day and religion.

but it's a million miles from this, from true Christianity. When you are bound in exclusive love with almighty God, our husband.

I'm still kind of on one side just thinking about this. This covenant relationship, very un-21st century, I think at the same time it should be very compelling to us that our God is so much more than a casual mentor or a doting grandfather or an undemanding boyfriend.

Like, actually, you step back and think about it. It's just incredible that the Lord of heaven and earth would step into our world and love us and offer us life to the full. just incredible that when you

accept his proposal, this God and King, he promises to never leave you or forsake you and that the Lord Jesus lays down his life in sacrifice for you and this God is exclusively committed to you in love and that you, for your part, devote yourself to him such that you burn every other bridge and option and declare him to be your Lord and God such that he belongs to you and you belong body and soul to him, a lifelong, exclusive covenant commitment.

[10:17] That is Christianity. That's the relationship every human is made for. It should capture us that. All-consuming devotion from our God and to our God.

And all of that, just to dwell on that, just because what it means is that you can't turn away from him casually. You just can't. When Old Testament Israel turned away from God and worshipped idols and took for themselves a rival lover, it was adultery.

In Jeremiah 3, verse 20, like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you, Israel, have been unfaithful to me, declares the Lord. And now, back to James chapter 4, to double-minded and half-hearted Christian believers, chapter 4, verse 4, you adulterous people, he says.

I spent a good five minutes just dwelling on this, but I wonder, therefore, if you can sense how covenant unfaithfulness is just awful, but just awful to be like that with our God.

If you're married and you deceive your spouse and sleep with someone else, and where the door to open and he or she catches you at it and looks you in the eye and you see the sense of betrayal and burning jealous anger, I guess you would know in the moment the deep offence you committed against your spouse.

[12:02] That is verses 4 and 5 here. See, you adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

So when you're a person who is committed to him and then you jump in bed with the world, the culture and the way of life which ignores God, when you take a rival lover because that's what it is. Think back through James. Were we to be people who listen to what God says but do nothing? If we're those who fight and quarrel and get angry at home, devoted to ourselves but not to him.

If we refuse to care for the needy unlike our God. If we have faith without deeds or when out of our mouth comes praise of God and from the same source gossip, innuendo, cursing, nastiness towards those made in his image.

If we talk the talk of devotion to him but your body and your life screams something different, that's adultery. It's enmity against God.

[13:13] And like a jilted husband he is rightly jealous. Do you see that here? Jealousy is not always bad.

Jealousy is a right passionate zeal to guard a relationship. Verse 5, Or do you think scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

Like as his creatures he's breathed his breath into us. But more than that when you become a Christian believer and declare love for him he causes his Holy Spirit to dwell in you.

You belong to him body and soul in committed love. And when we will not be devoted to him he's offended. and jealous over us.

And he will not stand for it. And he's right. Verses 4 and 5 James chapter 4 just here in the text in front of us his accusation he says to them then you adulterous people.

[14:29] And in part very simply I think we're meant to sense whether we're Christians or not actually something of the something of the treachery of living in a double-minded half-hearted way something of the treachery of spiritual adultery.

And were that to start to sink in for us or to put it in another way if in some small way you might be able to see as I can how this charge might stick to us because to my shame I'm not as loyal to him as I should be with my lips or my life.

If it starts to sink in the offence of spiritual adultery well I think then verse 6 might become very very stunningly precious to you.

Could you see what it says in the text here? To adulterous people who have turned from him James says in verse 6 he gives us more grace.

five words to cling onto in your life. Do you expect that? The God against whom his people commit spiritual adultery he gives us not separation and not a divorce but rather see his amazing offer here he offers verse 6 grace to the humble God in his being is a fountain of giving goodness towards us we mentioned that this morning thinking about harvest and it says here in the text that instead of

rejecting or divorcing us for our double-minded half-hearted discipleship he gives us more grace he gives us undeserved unmerited favour grace for sinners is not a weak smile and a there there let's pretend that nothing happened not like that he is our divine husband and he is rightly jealous for our total devotion to him we belong together grace means that in his mercy he will willingly have us back and forgive us and restore us to himself and verse 6 he gives us more grace that is why scripture says

[ 17 : 12 ] God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble it is part of the excellence and beauty of who God is that we have a God who shows favour don't you love that about him he offers grace but grace and restoration does not come to all that is you can't live how you like as a Christian believer and effectively mock the living God and expect him to turn a blind eye no no he gives grace here to the humble and that is why we come now in verses 7 to 10 to his command humble yourselves and verses 7 to 10 the commands right at the heart of the letter of James to those who recognise their sins and are sorry and want to be restored to their God what must you and I do as Christian believers so conscious of how half hearted and double minded we can be verse 7 begins look at this with me submit yourselves then to God and verse 10 begins humble yourselves before the

Lord so rather than proudly carrying on claiming spiritual safety and living how we want we're meant to repent and return to the one who loves us verse 7 submit yourselves then to God that is come and place yourself under his lordship now the commands come thick and fast resist the devil decide in your life I'm going to shun the envy and selfishness in my life that's demonic resist the devil and God promises he will flee from you verse 8 come near to God and he will come near to you James in his teaching depends so much on the teaching of Jesus I think you've got to almost must think of Jesus parable of the prodigal son here do you know that where the son having turned away from his father and lived for himself comes to his senses and decides to return he decides quote I will set out and go back to my father and say to him father I've sinned against heaven and against you I'm no longer worthy to be called your son make me like one of your hired servants so he got up and went to his father come near to God is the command but while he was still a long way off the father saw him and was filled with compassion for him he ran to his son threw his arms round him and kissed him he will come near to you as a father to his dear returning child as a lover to his repentant returning bride God he will repent repent of merely listening to what God says and then doing nothing decide you've had enough of filthy bile coming out of your heart and your mouth I wonder if you've ever done that kind of serious business with

God before grieve and mourn and wail change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom that's Old Testament language of repentance I'm going to stop grinning and sinning and just being casual about ignoring and not living for my God I see the evil of it I lament the horror of my behaviour and so final command for us verse 10 humble yourselves before the Lord cast yourself before him and he will lift you up promise and that's James 4 verses 4 to 10 talking today about spiritual adultery deeply unfashionable but what you must talk about when you know that true Christianity is a total relationship with the

God who loves you and what you quite make of it a God of 100% devotion and love who enters an exclusive covenant relationship with all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ a God who would have our every waking moment rightly devoted to him as he is to us the stakes are very high it is all or nothing with God and some of us with the book of James open in front of us over the last month over the coming month will be ongoingly exposed by James' teaching adulterous people and verse turns sums up how we should be towards our jealous and gracious God humble yourselves before the Lord that is my God your word undoes me and you've caught me and you know me my tongue my life my devotion not what it should be my

[ 22 : 43 ] Lord I come near to you I confess my sins I mourn them I'm done with them I would change save me and help me my God as I bow before you and if the book of James would move us to do that do you know how our God responds like a husband full of deep and jealous love he stoops down to you and he lifts you up and he envelops you in grace and he restores you to himself how glorious is that humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up promise!

I'm going to lead us in a prayer let's pray together our gracious father we read these words in James chapter four so stark and bold words for them then and many of us might admit words in part for us today our Lord we are conscious of how we say we believe stuff yet sometimes do so little conscious of how with our tongues we praise you and then at the same time bad mouth others so

tempted to bitter envy and selfish ambition and to fighting and quarreling your word exposes us yet you are the

God who gives us more grace and we cannot hold on to anything apart from that make us men and women we pray who are serious with you in our lives for we can't hide from you make us those who submit to you and resist the devil and wash our hands of evil and grieve and mourn over our sins grant us in a clear-eyed way to humble ourselves before you knowing that you are the God who will lift us up we pray in Jesus name Amen