

Warning Against Worldliness – Part 6

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – James instructs his audience to avoid worldly passions while walking in faith
2. aim – to cause us to put aside worldly passions and strive for true humility before God and others
3. passage – James 4:1-12

b. outline

1. The Cause of Worldliness (James 4:1-3)
2. The Condemnation of Worldliness (James 4:4-6)
3. The Cure for Worldliness (James 4:7-10)
4. The Contrast of Worldliness (James 4:11-12)

c. opening

1. the **clichés** of the church
 - a. unbiblical statements like “God helps those who help themselves”
 - b. the use of **John 3:16** as “instructive” (e.g. as a placard at a football game)
 1. as though the verse has some sort of “magical” evangelistic ability over reprobate men
 - c. the *misuse* of **Matthew 7:1**: “judge not lest ye be judged”
 1. as though we are never to make any sort of *critical assessment* of another’s behavior
 2. **note**: at first glance, **James 4:11-12** looks like this phrase from Jesus (note the footnote “n” next to the word “judges” in the middle of v. 11)
 3. but ... what *is* this passage really all about ... and what does it have to do with *worldliness*?
2. the **conclusion** of the section
 - a. James indicts the readers of his letter (and us!) with a form of *cognitive dissonance*
 1. the condition of the mind whereby an individual holds two competing (or contradictory) positions simultaneously, believing that both are true; or, operates *at odds* with his own beliefs
 2. it is the believer **abusing his liberty in Christ, imbibing in materialism, committing forms of spiritual adultery by flirting with the world** (i.e. as the bride of Christ) ...
 3. it is caused by sinful passions (desires) that are at war with each other *within us*
 - b. James gives the good news that God will (must) guard his own through faith to the day of glory
 - c. James brings a set of imperatives, commanding believers to submit themselves to God, draw near to God, which will result in them resisting the devil, cleanse their hands and their hearts, and seek of life of self-discipline and meaning
 1. **meaning**: when we come before God in *humility* and *self-sacrifice*, our *base desires* are transformed, our *entire way of life* is transformed
 2. **IOW**: we *mature* and become true “doers of the Word”
 - d. (**now**) James *contrasts* this humility in the church: **not every believer has achieved this level of maturity, and these differences can cause “quarrels and strife” (v. 1)**
 1. James is completing the thought of v. 1 – a “bookend” to his opening of this section
 2. **principle: it is differences in the level of worldly focus or attachment (maturity) amongst members of the church that can cause division – because believers mature away from worldliness at different paces, these differences can cause strife amongst them**

IV. The Contrast of Worldliness (James 4:11-12)

Content

a. the content of the passage

1. “speak evil against” (*katalaleō*; **x3** in v. 11) = slander; accuse; criticize (HCB); lit. to say things that are ugly or nasty (esp. *in an unkind way*) about another follower of Christ in the church
 - a. **note**: James is *clearly* referencing how we speak *to each other as Christians* (i.e. he uses the term “brothers” [meaning: siblings; i.e. both men and women] to imply *other believers*) – even the term “neighbor” at the end of v. 12 is a reference to someone *near* (i.e. a fellow Christian)
 - b. James is condemning speech that is not *edifying* – speech that is unhelpful or designed to “tear down” another, rather than speech that is designed to “build up” (i.e. strengthen)
 1. *katalaleō* is *clarified* by James when he uses the next word ... (i.e. “or ...”)

2. “judge” (*krinō*; **x135** in the N.T.; **x4** in these verses) = a word with a wide semantic domain (**context**)
 - a. simply: to decide = to make a choice between two options, or to prefer = to like one thing more
 1. but, it is *impossible* to condemn the “making of choices”, so ...
 - b. possibly: to evaluate = to determine the *correctness* of something, or to have an *opinion*
 1. but, life is full of “opinions” about different things, and the context implies *harshness*, so ...
 - c. likely: to make a legal decision = to render a verdict, particularly in terms of “the law”
 1. **i.e.** a forensic decision regarding the acts of another – to sit “in judgment” – is this behavior “right” in terms of what has been established as “right” (**for the standard, see below**)?
 - d. most likely (in this context): to condemn = to establish guilt and proscribe punishment
 1. **i.e.** to “*speak evil against*” a brother (to judge him) is to condemn another **inappropriately**
 2. obviously, James considers this action to be “evil” (wrong) – thus, he *must be assuming* that the condemnation being passed is inappropriate – **why is it inappropriate?**
 3. “the law” (*nomos*) = a word that is used (generally) in three different ways in the N.T.:
 - a. the natural law = the nature of right and wrong (morality) established *naturally* in human beings by virtue of being created in the image of God – a law *inherent* within us *as human beings*
 - b. the Mosaic law = the specific law given at Sinai, particularly its *moral* component that codifies the inherent nature of right and wrong in human civilization (**i.e.** beyond Israel)
 1. certainly James has these two views in mind – when he says “*there is only one lawgiver*” (**v. 12**), he *must be* referring to the fact that these come from God by virtue of his nature as Creator
 2. but, there can *never* be a sense that judging behavior against *either* of these two standards is “evil,” for God *himself* judges all behavior against this standard (“*there is only one ... judge*”)
 - c. the interpreted (experiential) law = the various ways by which the basic standards of morality are *extended* into all of life by various “regulations” established by men over men (interpreted)
 1. **LOW:** men deciding what behaviors are “right” and what are “wrong” throughout the entirety of life – all of the various *opinions* of what constitutes “right” and “wrong” in society
 2. **e.g.** in Israel, the extension of the Mosaic law into a *massive* set of regulations – **e.g.** the Sabbath laws regarding walking distances, what constituted “work”, etc.
 3. **i.e.** not based on *objective* standards (in Scripture), but by *subjective opinions*
 4. **James is condemning “judgmentalism” by one believer over another in matters that are purely subjective in nature – to condemn a brother for his behavior based on an opinion only**
 - a. to do so is to “*judge the law*” = to become the **arbiter** of what is right and wrong – to establish **yourself** as the “standard-bearer” of what is considered acceptable and what is “wrong”
- b. the consideration of the passage**
1. **question:** is this what Jesus was teaching in **Matt. 7:1-6 (read)** – **answer:** emphatically, yes!!
 - a. Jesus was not teaching “never judge anyone else *period*” – that would make it impossible to determine if anyone needed to hear the message of repentance and faith (**note v. 6**)
 - b. Jesus was teaching “never judge anyone else *under your own subjective standards*” – the standard you apply to others *will be applied to you*, and you *will* be found lacking *to yourself*
 - c. Jesus was teaching his disciples that they should be much more concerned about their own behavior *before the standards set by God* than by *subjective standards they set for themselves*
 2. **comparison:** it seems that James expresses here the same sentiment of **Romans 14**
 - a. **note:** this would become the defining issue of James’ **Jerusalem Council** – how are Jewish and Gentile *believers* to “get along” in the church with such glaring differences over how to live?
 - b. Paul establishes two classes of believers: the “weak” brother and the “strong” brother
 1. **i.e.** the weak brother sees eating only certain things as essential; the strong eats anything, etc.
 - c. the *assumption* is that the weaker brother needs certain “boundaries” because he struggles to live his life entirely by faith in God – he needs man-made rules to “box him in” (to protect his “faith”)
 1. he thinks it is “sinful” to indulge in things “outside the box” – the stronger better understands the issues of morality in his greater understanding of God’s purposes in the world
 - d. **it is the less mature believer who imposes subjective standards upon other believers**
 1. **LOW:** the less mature believer doesn’t understand **Christian liberty** – he cannot understand why other believers “indulge” in things he considers sinful – he believes “maturity” comes in *artificial* standards imposed on everyone else (**i.e.** to conform their behavior, **ironically**)
 2. **e.g.** Fundamentalism in the 20th C. went from trying to hold the fundamentals *of the faith* (over against liberalism) to insisting on fundamentals *of behavior* over time
 - e. so, Paul (and James) insist that believers must be very careful not judge (condemn) each other over matters of *conscience* – it is wrong for one Christian to **bind the conscience** of another
 1. bind = to arbitrate that certain behaviors are *sinful*, even though those behaviors are not *explicitly* condemned under the *objective standards set by God* (**i.e.** in Scripture)

c. the conclusion of the passage

1. **question:** how does this conclude a section on *worldliness*?
2. **answer:** those who “flirt” with the world, those who are *enamored* more by the things of this world than they are with Christ Jesus are (by definition) the *weaker brother*, and they will *often* establish certain “standards” in order to “soothe their own consciences,” which produces “*quarrels*” and “*strife*”
 - a. worldliness is caused by “*passions ... at war within you*” (v. 1) – desires that *consume*
 - b. worldliness is a sign of the *weaker brother* –living temporally vs. living eternally (**immaturity**)
 - c. worldliness seeks a way to “justify” itself – in much the same way as **Rom. 1:32**, the worldly Christian needs others to “join” him in his worldliness, to make it “right” in his mind
 - d. worldliness (then) becomes a “standard” and the worldly insist that others follow them
3. **application: Christ alone sets the standard for living – we answer only to him, for he is the only judge over us, and his standard is infinitely higher than any we could set for one another**
 - a. **thus, we must be careful to help one another to move away from “worldly” passions to a true passion for Jesus – not to condemn one another for failure to keep “the rules,” but to urge one another on to good works in full faith**