

Introduction:

“It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.” At least, so goes the common wisdom of the day. In many ways, success at many endeavors can be attributed to who your friends are. After all, when you have the right friends, doors will open; and when you have the wrong friends, doors can close. That is definitely true when it comes to your eternal destiny. The doors of heaven are opened based on who your best friend is. One of the greatest commendations in all of Scripture is found in **James 2:23**. “‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God” (ESV; emphasis added, *etc*). Wouldn’t you love that to be said of you? Wouldn’t it be great to have written on you tombstone underneath your name, “Friend of God”? In **James 4:4-10**, he comes back to this idea, though he addresses it from the opposite angle. James assumes the Christians to whom he is writing want to be friends of God as Abraham was. However, in this passage, he rebukes them because they are falling short. Rather than being friends of God, they are becoming friends of the world. James asserts they simply couldn’t be both. I am making a similar assumption as James. That is, I assume we all want to be friends of God. With that in mind, let’s look at what James says about being God’s friend.

Discussion:

I. The accusation.

- A. In **James 4:4**, he makes some pretty serious accusations and charges against these Christians. “You adulteresses!” he says (see footnote in the ESV). Let’s see if we can unpack this accusation.
 1. In **James 3:13-18**, he had talked about two kinds of wisdom. One is from above and the other is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. The wisdom from below is marked by jealousy and selfish ambition which produce disorder and every vile practice. However, the wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of reason, mercy, good fruits, impartial, and sincere. And especially note that James comes back to the “peaceable” idea by saying those who follow this wisdom are peacemakers who produce a harvest of righteousness sown in peace.
 2. The unfortunate chapter break detracts from the flow of the passage. But we need to see **James 3:18** leading into **James 4:1**. “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” (**James 4:1**). What is the obvious problem among James’s audience? If there are quarrels and fights, they aren’t following God’s heavenly wisdom. Rather, they have been pursuing the earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom that produces disorder and every vile practice.
 3. What was causing the quarrels and fights? What was leading them away from God’s wisdom? According to **James 4:1-3**, their passions or pleasures. Their pleasures were at war within them and even when they did ask for anything from God (Who is, remember, the giver of every good gift; **James 1:17**), He did not grant it to them because their only purpose was to fulfill their own pleasures.
 4. What then has James established about his audience in these verses? Their own pleasures and passions had taken the place of God in their lives, leading them to have selfish ambition and bitter jealousy, causing them to have fights and feuds with their brethren. And based on all of this, James says, “You adulteresses!”
- B. While James is not directly referring to the physical adultery he brought up in **James 2:10-11**. I do find it interesting that in this one section of his letter, James accuses his audience of both murder and adultery in a spiritual sense. In other words, his audience was again guilty of violating God’s law. They were not loving their neighbor as themselves (**James 2:8**) and were convicted by the law as transgressors.
- C. But this “adultery” is more than not loving their neighbor. It was an accusation of not loving God. True religion is caring for the needy among us and keeping oneself unstained from the world (**James 1:27**). However, they had allowed their tongues, which are in themselves a world of unrighteousness that stains the whole body (**James 3:6**), to set the course of their lives on fire with fires from hell. That is, their boasting (**James 4:14**) was false to the truth. Their quarreling and fighting (**James 4:1, 11**) was a stain of the world in their persons and in their fellowship with one another. And all of this came from their passions and pleasures, which, no doubt, tied back to the desires that give birth to sin and death (**James 1:14-15**).
- D. But here is the crux of the matter.

1. This quarreling they had among themselves was not merely a violation of some congregational contract. It was not merely breaking one of God's rules. The boasting, the quarreling, and the grumbling against each other was merely a symptom of a much, much deeper problem: idolatry. No, they weren't bringing statues into their assemblies and bowing before them. They weren't naming other deities as greater than God. They were still gathering in their assemblies. They were still singing their songs, praying their prayers, reading their Scriptures, hearing God's Word proclaimed, but they were still pursuing idolatry. The claim of adultery calls to mind the Old Testament accusations against Israel. Consider passages like **Jeremiah 3:6-10** and **Ezekiel 16:35-38**.
2. Do you see what this says to us? We have a tendency to think that quarrels among brethren, grumbling about one another, looking down on others, envying others are just minor sins. After all, we're still going to church and worshiping God. But James explains these sins are symptoms of a greater problem. When we are grumbling against our brethren, disputing with them, fussing and feuding in jealousy, we are idolaters. We are unfaithful to our God and have become adulteresses like our ancient Israelite counterparts.

II. Friends of God; Friends of the World

- A. With all this in the background, we can finally get to James's statement about being friends of God. "Do you not know," James asks, "that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" (**James 4:4**). Do you not know "whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"? John made a similar statement in **I John 2:15-17**. If we love the world, the love of God is not in us. Worldly desires and passions wage war against God. Jesus Himself made the exact same point in **Matthew 6:24**. We cannot have two masters. We cannot walk arm in arm with God on one side and the world on the other. If we think we can have just enough God to get to heaven, but enough world to keep our pleasures filled, we are sadly mistaken. That is like the man who wants the wife who will continue to keep the home fires burning, the laundry done, food on the table when he gets home from work, and raising the kids but wants to keep a young mistress on the side in order to fulfill his pleasures and delights. You simply can't have both.
- B. So, where does this leave us? We need to take stock of our lives. If you are like me, it is easy to view life as this balancing act. As long as my good works outweigh the bad, I'll be okay. "I know I am jealous of brother and sister so and so, but I made it to church three times a week all year long, so I should be okay." The problem is that jealousy is the marker of something deeper and darker. It is the marker that Jehovah is not really the greatest God in my heart. There is something else that is taking God's sovereign place in my heart and mind. Too often, we are like the person who is taking cough syrup and throat spray to deal with the minor cough, not realizing it is actually the symptom of a growing lung cancer. Take stock. Do you struggle with jealousies? Do you pursue selfish ambitions? Do you grumble against brethren? Do you look longingly on the things of the world? Do you quarrel with your brothers and sisters? Is there some pleasure that takes precedence over all other things? Do not view these as minor infractions that will be swept aside in judgment because of your "major obedience" in other areas. Recognize these as the symptoms they are. Understand what they are saying about your heart. Understand the difficult and dangerous road you are walking. If you try to be a friend of the world, by that you will become an enemy of God.

Conclusion:

If you are like me, you may wonder at this point how God could actually be your friend. Even just a few moments of taking an honest inventory causes us to see how often we really are getting cozy with the world and allowing our passions and pleasures still dictate what we do. Allow me to remind you that God actually wants to be your friend so badly that He sent His Son to die for you on the cross in order to wash those idols and sins away. May I encourage you to follow the example of the tax collector in **Luke 18:13-14**? Humble yourself before the Lord and let Him exalt you by the sacrifice, blood, and grace of Jesus Christ.