

Text: James 4:4-6

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Series: James

Title: Restoration after Spiritual Adultery

You commit spiritual adultery (4)

God initiates purposeful restoration (5)

You receive excessive grace (6)

Open your Bibles to the letter of James, written for Christians scattered throughout this world.

READ James 4:4-10.

This passage is like all the OT prophets concentrated into 7 verses. I trust, by the explanation of these verses today, to expand them somewhat so you can sense the full picture of what was such a necessary message in the OT, and of what is still such a necessary message in our day.

Every one of these verses are loaded with OT force. The opening address of v. 4 springboards us into godless Israel that dominates most of the OT Scriptures. Verse 5 says it is referring to Scripture, except that there is no such quote in the Scriptures, until you realise that James is referring to the whole unity of the Scripture at the time, namely the entire OT.

By the way, James 4:5 is perhaps the most intense one-line summary of the entire OT: God has a profound purpose in His intense jealousy of His own.

Then verse 6 is a quote straight from Proverbs 3:34. Verse 7 and the beginning of verse 8 are not only expanded on by Peter in 1 Peter 5 (vv. 5-9), but its roots lie deep in Leviticus about how to approach the God Who is great and powerful, slow to anger, rich in love, and perfect in justice.

The rest of verse 8 and verse 9 is immersed in the washings of Leviticus and the repentances pleaded for by the prophets and evidenced in the Psalms. Verse 10 wraps it up with a return to the theme of verse 6 that quotes Proverbs 3, but more so, it reflects what was happening at the end of the OT and what the OT prophesied about the future that is yet to be fulfilled.

In other words, besides the whole OT included in the succinct words of verse 5, this whole passage is merely a NT Christian application of the age-old truth about 1) a God who chooses people for Himself, 2) of those people, be it the nation of Israel back then or Christians today, who sin against Him, and 3) of the beautiful restoration worked by God in those people to exalt them again.

"We sin, but God restores" is the take-home truth of our text for today, and indeed the take-home truth of the whole Bible!

"We sin, but God restores."

I trust that today will be both the sword of the Spirit that convicts, *and* the Fatherly love that lifts you up again.

By way of introduction, I want you to think of your faith as a marriage. God choose you, promised to love you, and you joyfully, eagerly, and with great devotion, promised to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Then, you sinned by spiritually flirting with another, and committing spiritual adultery. You were made to choose between God and sin, and you thought that you could have both—wearing the wedding ring from God, but secretly accepting the enticements of the world, and engaging in sinful deeds.

God is fully aware though, and knows your heart's desires before they ever produced the sinful acts. While you are compromising your loyalties, God acts. He doesn't respond in anger with a letter of divorce, but instead employs His loving jealousy over you to bring you back. He seeks you out, recognises your shame-filled humiliation, and offers you grace; grace, to renew your vows; grace, to help you resist the devil's

enticements; grace, to clean up your life; grace, to make of you a beautiful bride once again.

Is this not you and me? Are we not the ones who, by our daily sin, spurn God's love and seek the pleasures of our sinful hearts, the world, and the devil? Is God not the great lover of His own, initiating gracious restoration at great cost to Himself?

Will you not therefore accept that He knows the depths of your sins and still calls you back? Will you not then humble yourself, run back to Him, clean up your life and once again be the pure and exalted bride?

Is not this simply a romantic version of the Gospel?

Such marriage-adultery-restoration imagery is indeed the most common imagery for the Gospel in the Old Testament. We could turn to so many passages.

Take for example Isaiah 54:5-8,

"For your Maker is your husband,
the Lord of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.

For the Lord has called you
like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.

For a brief moment I deserted you,
but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing
anger for a moment I hid my face from you,

but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,"
says the Lord, your Redeemer."

A holy husband, wife deserted him, separation for while, then
"everlasting love" and "compassion".

Or later in Isaiah 62:4-5,

"You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land
[shall be called] Married;
for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.

For ... as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall
your God rejoice over you."

The prophet Jeremiah was tasked with calling Israel to
repentance when she was in the depth of her spiritual adultery
against the LORD.

It is rather vivid in Jeremiah 3:2,

"Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see! Where
have you not been ravished? By the waysides you have sat
awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness. You have
polluted the land with your vile whoredom."

And yet, ten verses later in Jeremiah 3:12 the LORD's plea is,

"Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord.
I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares
the Lord; I will not be angry forever."

And in Jeremiah 4:1 "If you return, O Israel, declares the LORD, to me you should return."

In Ezekiel 16 the extreme nature of spiritual adultery is exposed. Normally a prostitute accepts payment to commit adultery, but the LORD says that Israel *gave* payment in order to commit adultery against the LORD.

Is that not true of us every time we sin against the LORD in order to live like the world? Are we not also those who *willingly* embrace the sinful desires of the world—the world doesn't even offer us anything in return, but we are quick to fight and quarrel, envy and boast, sin and sin simply because we *think* the world's way is somehow better than God.

The most vivid of all the spiritual adultery images of sin against God is from the life, and writings of Hosea the prophet. You can read the prophet Hosea this week to fill in the gaps, but here is the short version of his life and ministry.

The first time God spoke to Hosea was not to call him as prophet as much as it was instruction to go and marry an unfaithful woman. Israel was unfaithful to God, and Hosea's wife was going to be a very vivid picture of the same.

Likewise, God's instructions to Hosea on how to deal with an unfaithful wife would be a very vivid picture to Israel of how God deals with spiritual adultery.

This is a picture of how God deals with us every time we sin and every time we disregard Him in favour of our own ways or the ways of the world.

Well, back to Hosea, he went and married an unfaithful woman called Gomer. She bore a son, and then a daughter, whom God

told Hosea to name "No-mercy" because God would show Israel no mercy. Then, their third child was a son, instructed by God to be named "Not-my-people" because Israel had departed from the Lord and was no longer the people of the Lord. This all happens in Hosea chapter 1.

Then chapter 2 is a prophecy explaining how Israel had departed from God, but how the Lord would woo her back again. God will again betroth Israel to Himself and love her.

In chapter 3, we realise that Gomer had left Hosea to commit adultery, to the point where she, like Ezekiel 16 had already said, had paid others, yes, eventually even sold herself into slavery, to be able to commit adultery. But Hosea is commanded to go to the slave market, and buy her back, not as a slave, but as a wife.

The following chapters speak of the stubbornness of spiritual adultery, and the subsequent calls by God to bring Israel back to Himself.

Listen now to some of the closing verses of the prophecies of Hosea.

Hosea 14:1-2,

"Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Take with you words and return to the Lord"

That is a call to repentance and confession!

How does God always respond to confession of sins and repentance?

Hosea 14:4-8,

"I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.

...

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. ...
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit."

And then, the closing verse of the entire book, verse 9,

"Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of
the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but
transgressors stumble in them."

Every time that we transgress the commandments of the LORD,
we are, like Israel was—spiritual adulterers.

But God has set his love upon us. He uses His Word to call us to
repentance. He shows us grace, upon grace, upon grace.

James is going to make us wise and understanding in these
things.

So, back in James chapter 4, we begin with the same pattern
found in Hosea.

You commit spiritual adultery.

But, God initiates purposeful restoration.

Therefore you experience gracious restoration.

That is our initial outline today.

First, ...

YOU COMMIT SPIRITUAL ADULTERY (4)

James has the strongest of words for us today. He is using terms that you might think are best reserved for unbelievers, but he is addressing the same scattered believers that he encouraged so much in chapter 1.

You see, we, especially being so few in number in this world, might be tempted to take sin lightly. The world is so overtly evil, that we might be tempted to think that we don't have to worry about every little sin. We think that some sins are OK.

We are not as bad as the world, and we feel that life is easier if we practise some of the more respected sins. We won't imitate the murderous thieves of the world, but we realise that we *do* get ahead by speaking evil of another from time to time.

Or, we won't forge ahead in corrupt business practises, but we still boast of our earthly plans as though God isn't the great determiner of all success.

We won't ever commit the atrocities of human-trafficking slavery, but we still exploit the helpless lower income bracket for personal enrichment.

We forget about the second coming of Christ.

We grumble against one another.

We lie.

We sin and watch others sin.

And this list of sins is merely from the rest of the book of James!

Every transgression or sin, every replacement of God's Word for the ways of the world is spiritual adultery!

READ James 4:4.

Strong words! Words so specific that it excludes *unbelievers* but includes all *believers*. Unlike the world, we have been joined to God with a covenant of love. He chose us, set His love upon us, called us, redeemed us, cleansed us from all unrighteousness, and made us His pure bride.

Then, in that blessed state, we looked across to the world. We thought the grass looked greener on that side. So we walked closer to the moral boundary between the world and us, leaned over, and started flirting with the world.

And, as verses 1-3 exposed, we start *desiring* the things of the world. Perhaps we want to be accepted by the world and not be so morally strange to them. Or perhaps we want a higher profit margin in our businesses too. Or perhaps we want to feel superior to another. Or perhaps we want to escape the suffering that is testing our faith. Or perhaps we want to boast a little in ourselves too and not only in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever the desire, we, being the possession of the God of Heaven and Earth, flirt with the world. The world of course embraces us with both arms, and we become spiritual adulterers.

We, the ones who know better, sink down to the world's methods, values, and practices. Spiritual adultery against the most perfect God.

Is not this sadly true of us all? And do we not truly know better?

READ v. 4 " ... *do you not know* ...".

This is one of the many *know* statements in James. 1:3 *You know* that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 1:19 *You know* that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 3:1 *You know* that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. And now, "*do you not know* that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"

Surely we know that God and the world are polar opposites!? Surely we know that God is light and the world is blinded in darkness! Surely we know that God is Truth and the world is steeped in deception! Surely we know that God is holy and perfect and that the world is wicked and evil!

Surely then also, *do you not know* that if you choose the world, you are choosing to desert the Lord?!

Whoever then flirts with the world, makes himself the enemy of God. Whoever befriends the world's earthly wisdom makes himself the enemy of the wisdom that is from above. Whoever embraces the ways of the world in organising one's daily life makes himself the enemy of the ways of God. Whoever seeks the world's proposed solutions to heart and behavioural problems makes himself the enemy of God's solution. Whoever tolerates the morality of the world makes himself intolerant of God—an enemy of holiness and purity. Whoever seeks his best

life now like the world makes himself an enemy of eternal life with God.

"Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Now you know why the verse started with "You adulterous people!"

Like Israel in the OT repeatedly falling in love with the idols of the nations around them, so we commit spiritual adultery against God when we practise worldliness.

Worldliness is not the historical taboos of "drinking, smoking, or going with girls who do", but is the fighting and quarrelling of verses 1-3, the evil speaking and personal judging of verses 11-12, the hypocritical tongue of chapter 3, the discrimination and false Christianity of chapter 2, the lack of compassion and abundance of anger, hearing-but-not-doing, blaming God for your problems kind of false faith of chapter 1.

Worldliness is responding to difficulty with fear, anger, bitterness and depression instead of patient endurance. Worldliness is seeking the approval of man over the approval of God, or fearing man instead of fearing God. Worldliness is prioritising self, sin, sport, food, pleasure, education, wealth or work over God and His people. Worldliness is everything from overt idol worship to the most respected secret sin.

As a Christian, any and every form of worldliness is like a wife flirting with another man, eventually forsaking her marriage vows altogether, and placing herself as an enemy of her husband.

That is why I entitled verse 4 as "You commit spiritual adultery", for that is the reality of our every unfaithfulness to God. We should know this—surely we *do* know this!

Verse 5 continues with something we should know well, or at least be able to figure out. We commit spiritual adultery, but ...

GOD INITIATES PURPOSEFUL RESTORATION (5)

Verse 5 is about the jealousy of marriage—that justified zeal for another because of a covenant of love,—that natural impulse to restore what is broken because the thing broken is so precious, in this case, it is about the relationship between God and us.

READ James 4:5.

You commit spiritual adultery, therefore God initiates purposeful restoration.

Like Hosea's wife, Gomer, at the slave market, when we are least likely to humble ourselves and return to God, God very purposefully acts to restore us.

Let's look at the verse in reverse for the sake of understanding the main point. It ends with "the spirit that he has made to dwell in us." God has given us His Holy Spirit the day He married us—the day of our conversion, to stay with us since then.

You could say that the Holy Spirit is like a wedding ring—the ever-present reminder that you have been loved and have promised to love.

But, when we sin against God, especially in the persistent ways of the world, then we are like an unfaithful wife living loosely with all kinds of men *while still wearing the beautiful, gold, precious, diamond studded, wedding ring.*

God gave us the ring and made sure it fits well and will never come off. Now, the verse says, when we sin and commit spiritual adultery, God *yearns jealously over* that ring.

It is not that God wants the Holy Spirit to be given back—He doesn't yearn *for* the spirit, but *over* the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.

God's intense love and New Covenant promise to be our God and for us to be His people was sealed with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is in us to always bring to our remembrance who Jesus is and what He has taught us and what He has done for us.

So God the Father looks at us in our adultery, sees the ring still on our finger, and yearns over that ring to once again be the sign of our mutual love for one another.

God looks at us in our sin, sees the Holy Spirit Whom He has given us, and yearns over the Spirit to once again be recognised by us as the great comforter who is always with us, convicting us of sin and and righteousness.

So, thus far in the verse, from back to front, we have "the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.", we have "God yearns jealousy over the spirit", and now the main point.

Verse 5 "Do you suppose it is *to no purpose* that the Scripture says" all this.

The Scripture reference here is not any one particular verse, but it is, as the introduction today briefly exposed, the entire OT Scripture!

James, the very first NT letter to be written is pointing to the entire OT as evidence of this truth about God. God has a marital jealousy over us when we sin just like He had over Israel throughout the OT, witnessing her adultery, but always restoring her. God has always been the one who initiates restoration between Him and His own when they sin.

But it is the "Do you suppose it is *to no purpose*" that is really the point here. Or, as another translation says "do you think *there is no reason*" to this truth about God? Of course there is a purpose to God's jealous love over us! Of course there is a great reason for giving us the Holy Spirit at our conversion to be with us forever!

A wedding ring is not just an expensive wedding gift with no purpose; it has a purpose, a great, wonderful, precious, public purpose! It tells the world we are not available to them any more! It tells the world that you are supremely loved and cherished by another. It tells the world that there is One who will act on your behalf if you are violated and mistreated.

But, it also has a purpose for you and me, does it not? It tell us that we cannot flirt with another. It tells us that we belong to the one who gave us that ring. It tells us that we ought to excel in love and faithfulness.

The Holy Spirit is not just a nice gift to celebrate your new birth. He is the guarantee of eternal life (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:14).

He is our teacher reminding us of the Truth that Jesus taught (John 14:13). He is our helper Who dwells in us and will be in us (John 14:26; 16:13). There is a *purpose* to the Holy Spirit Whom God has made to dwell in us. There is therefore a great *purpose* also for God to yearn jealousy over the Holy Spirit in us when we have strayed from Him.

The text here in James affirms that surely there is a purpose! That purpose itself is not stated, but it is still not difficult to answer the question in our verse.

READ v. 5.

The answer? "I suppose there is a purpose!" Of course there is a purpose!

The purpose of God's jealousy over the Holy Spirit within us when we are in the depths of worldliness, is to restore us!

The very next line, starting verse 6 says "But God gives grace." Hosea married Gomer; Gomer left him for others; Hosea went and bought her back. God saved you; you sin against Him; God shows grace.

Like a faithful spouse hopes that the wedding ring will remind an unfaithful spouse of the wedding vows, so God activates the work of the Holy Spirit to restore us to Him.

Never, ever, ever, think little God's love for you as His bride. He has purchased you with His blood, He will never let you go. You might be in the very depths of sin, the very depths of world-like depression, anxiety, fear, or bitterness, but God's love is still active, and He will, through the Holy Spirit Whom He has given you, seek you out and restore you.

He will, like the father of the prodigal son, welcome you back the moment you repent. He will, like the lady with the ten coins, sweep the house for the one that was lost. He will, like the shepherd of a hundred sheep, leave the 99 to find the one.

You commit spiritual adultery.

God initiates purposeful restoration, and because it involves the Holy Spirit, it always works, and ...

YOU RECEIVE EXCESSIVE GRACE (6)

READ v. 6.

You receive grace. Gomer received Hosea's gracious forgiveness and restoration. That was a vivid picture of Israel who received the Lord's gracious forgiveness and restoration.

The same is true for you and for me. Spiritual adulterers at heart, receiving God's grace.

Is that not *excessive* grace? Is that not truly the extent of proper forgiveness? Is that not so undeserved? "But God gives more grace."

And then a somewhat reworded quoted from Proverbs 3:34, that says:

"Toward the scorers he is scornful,
but to the humble he gives favour."

God opposes the proud by showing them the same response they show Him. Despise and mock God, then God will be scornful to you.

Sin against God and keep on ignoring Him, and His grace will ignore you. Love the world and become God's enemy and God will act like an enemy to you.

But humble yourself, and God shows grace.

Proverbs 3:34 says "favour"—God deals kindly, favourably, graciously to you if you realise your sin, humble yourself, repent and return to Him.

Just fast-forward to next week's text here in James: READ James 4:7-8a.

Like Israel, and like Gomer, we often resist repentance. We are like the prodigal son that first has to reach a spiritual rock-bottom before we draw near to God again. We are too proud to repent, too proud to uncover our sin and confess it, too proud to agree that we are wrong.

In pride we think nobody understands, nobody cares, nobody knows. In pride we blame our circumstances, our trials, and each other for our sins.

Let's stop that.

Let's return to God quickly.

If you have sinned, repent instantly, ask for forgiveness and return to the joy of your salvation, for "God gives more grace". If you have spiralled into the darkness of spiritual depression, draw near to God, receive the implanted Word, as chapter 1 already said, be a doer and not a hearer only of that Word, for "He gives more grace".

You know my favourite conversion story in the Scriptures is that of evil, wicked, stubborn, scornful, rebellious King Mannasseh.

But even he, in 2 Chronicles 33 "humbled himself greatly before the LORD his God" and was restored. "God gives grace to the humble".

Verses 7-10 continue this text with rapid-fire commandments—ten in total.

v. 7 "submit to God", "Resist the devil".

v. 8 "draw near to God", "cleanse your hands", "purify your hearts".

v. 9 "Be wretched", "mourn", "weep", "Let your laughter and joy be turned to mourning and gloom."

v. 10 again "Humble yourselves".

These are indeed the Ten Commandments of true humility that always receive God's excessive grace.

Lord willing, we will get to them next week.

Our verses today opened with a surprising address "You adulterous people!" But it is sadly all too accurate of every believer. When we sin, when we think and act like the world, when we act upon our own desires, we are committing spiritual adultery against our Lord God.

But God never leaves us like that.

He very purposefully, and with the time-proven work of the Holy Spirit always initiates restoration.

As a result, we, as in the day of our conversion, become the blessed recipients of excessive grace. Are "but he gives more grace" not just the most perfect words to come after "You adulterous people"?!

In marriage we say "Choose your love and then love your choice." God has always excelled at that.

Throughout the OT, time, and time, and time again He has loved, and loved some more, and then loved even more, His choice. Through sin and rebellion, indifference and unfaithfulness, God has always shown more grace. The proud were destroyed, the humble were always forgiven.

The same is true for you and for me.

The restoration-initiating God of the OT is the same as the ever-gracious God of the NT In fact, James' references to the entire OT Scriptures, and then specifically again to Proverbs in the OT makes that extra clear.

Be wise and understand these things; be discerning and know this about your God (Hos 14:9).

"Submit yourselves therefore to God."

"Draw near to God."

"Cleanse your hands."

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you."

Amen