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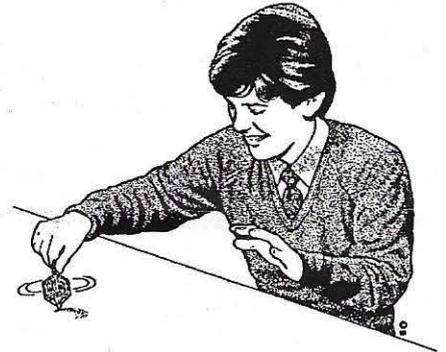
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## Double-Mindedness: Its Cause and Cure

An Exposition of James 4:1-10

by M. McLeod-Boyle



### INTRODUCTION

**M**OST ARE NO DOUBT familiar with the fictional characters of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The plot revolves around a person who is meek and mild one moment and an outrageous monster the next.

This story is in essence a good reflection of what it is to be a Christian. As those who are of the Holy Spirit we face a constant conflict. We are born again. The old has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). As such we are individuals who should not sin; must not sin and, indeed, need not sin. Yet our daily experience is that we do sin.

One of the chief causes of sin in the Christian's life is our willingness to play with fire. By this is meant that, too often, we look at, think about, or desire those objects which are at odds with our new way of life. Put another way, we can say that we are double-minded. This double-mindedness is due to our indecisiveness. We fail to make clear decisions based upon God's word, and, as a result, end up walking a path of compromise.

Double-mindedness is a real problem for the Christian. It has certainly caused the downfall of many through the centuries. The epitome of this trait can be seen on Carmel's lofty heights, when

Elijah was forced to challenge Israel saying: "How long will you hesitate between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21)?

Because of this reality that every Christian must contend with, it is good for us to learn ways in which we can become focused and single-minded (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Philippians 4:8). In this regard three areas can be recognised. Of priority we must identify the enemy and establish the mode by which it operates. Second, we must consider the consequences of our folly, and third we must seek a cure.

James 4:1-10 gives us this information and it is to this passage that we must turn for instruction.

### 1. THE PROBLEM IDENTIFIED

**I**N THE FIRST THREE VERSES of chapter four James outlines for us what the enemy is and how it operates.

#### A. The Enemy

James starts in verse one by asking two questions. The first question is to make the people think about the situation in which they find themselves. The second is a rhetorical question which answers the first. Through the asking of this second question, James positively iden-

tifies the source of "quarrels and conflicts" as the *pleasures* that wage war in our members. The 'members', spoken of here, refers to that which is in opposition to the Spirit of God. Just as the Bible refer to "the world" as that which is opposed to God on a global scale, so it is that the "members" or, as Paul would say, "the flesh" are what wage war against the individual (Romans 8:5-8).

This is a very important Biblical aspect that we must grasp. The reason for this is that Christians can tend to continually blame their failures upon others, in general, and Satan, in particular. We are all aware, no doubt, of the oft used cliché, "the devil made me do it." What needs to be understood at this point is that whilst the Devil is indeed a powerful enemy, he is only able to *exploit* the pleasures that are at work in our members. If we put to death these pleasures then we *deny the devil a foothold* in our lives. Without the foothold he is unable to work his sinister deeds.

Therefore, the real enemy that we face, and which we must eradicate, is the very *pleasures* that are to be found as squatters within our members.

#### B. Modus Operandi

The basic *modus operandi* can be termed simply as covetousness.<sup>1</sup> To

1. The use of the term "covetousness" is an attempt to sum up what is expressed by the text.

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covet is to express a strong desire for something. Appended to this emotional aspect is the physical reality that accompanies the desire. Thus, it is right to see covetousness as: a physical manifestation of an action that is contrived for the specific purpose of acquiring that upon which a desire has been set.

Now we must ask ourselves, is covetousness by definition wrong? The answer to this is: No! Covetousness is not by definition an invalid expression. However, at the same time, we must realise that the term as we use it strongly implies a desire to possess something which is not rightfully ours. Hence the term "covetousness" expresses a desire to obtain something *illegally*.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, we see that the *modus operandi* of our enemy is to stir up certain desires within us, that we as Christians have no right to have. It wants us to seek out those things which are illegal. We may, to use a modern term, say that the enemy wants us to be found "in receipt of stolen goods".<sup>3</sup>

## 2. THE CONSEQUENCES.

**W**HEN COVETOUS DESIRES are allowed to grow, or are fostered, in the life of the Christian it will only be a matter of time before disaster strikes. The harbouring of such desires will mean that, in the long run, they will gain

the ascendancy and begin to negatively influence our lives. If this state comes to fruition then there will, most definitely, be consequences.

Looking to our text, we see that the second and third verses portray clearly the consequences of covetousness.

### A. Evil Practices:

As we have noted above, the term "covetousness" tends to point toward the procurement of possessions that are not ours to have.<sup>4</sup>

When free reign is given to these desires the only proper expectation is that these desires will become realities. More importantly we must note that the advent of "quarrels and conflicts" signifies that the sinful desires have been allowed to gain the ascendancy. Having been placed in control these desires then begin to lead the Christian into extremely dangerous situations. They lead the Christian in a way that is contrary to the Spirit of God. James highlights this by the use of words such as "lust", "murder", "envy", "fighting" and "quarrelling".

Looking at this list of words we see that two of these words — lust and envy — form the motivation, whilst the rest speak of the consequences involved. To allow covetousness in our lives means that we will become one of these types of people.

Now, there is some conjecture amongst commentators as to whether we should interpret this statement metaphorically or literally. The point is, however, a mute one. Let us take as an example the issue of becoming a murderer through uncontrolled coveting. Metaphorically speaking, those who desire something so much that they care nothing for the welfare of other people can surely be charged with murder (See Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 2:9; 3:15; 4:20). On the literal front, there is no doubt that covetousness can cause people to resort to murder. It has been the plot of many a Hollywood movie and sadly of many real life dramas. Let us look at a few such events as found in Scripture. Consider: Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-11); David and Uriah (2 Samuel 11; Ahab and Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-17; Judas (Mat-

thew 10:4; 26:15 and 27:3; Luke 22:47-48; Acts 1:18-19); and Ananias and Saphira (Acts 4:36-5:11). These are just a few of the Biblical cases where covetousness drove a person to murder.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, we must realise that it is not uncommon for people to resort to murder in order to fulfil a wayward desire.

### B. Dissatisfaction With God

Moreover, we need to understand that there is more involved in coveting than just evil practices.

Examining the text further it is apparent that these people to whom James is writing have pushed God out of their lives. They are so consumed in their pursuit of worldly gain that God is either forgotten, or they ask of Him such as He can only refuse. By surrendering to their "pleasures" these people have drifted so far from God that they are willing to make requests which, under normal circumstances, they know God would frown upon.

We may say fairly confidently that the covetous desires these people are experiencing are a direct result of their coming to doubt the providence of God. Covetousness is, as it were, a slap in the face of God. It is saying to God that he does not know what He is doing. It is saying to God 'I deserve better than this'. It is the pot demanding that the Potter make him into a bigger and more majestic vessel for no other reason than to steal the Potter's glory.

We have noted above that coveting is in essence stealing. It is no different here. Dissatisfaction with God, as expressed through covetousness, is really an attempt to steal from God His sovereignty. He alone has the right to give and take; that is the Divine prerogative. Any effort by man to increase his lot through dishonest gain is an act of hostility toward God.

### C. Opposition to God

James illustrates this "hostility" by addressing these people as "adulteresses". What he is seeking to show is that these Christian people, by the way they act, have become covenant breakers. By

2. For a helpful discussion on this point see: R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), pp. 632ff.

3. There are many vice lists in Scripture that show what we are to be wary of. See e.g. Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

4. The term "possessions" here is used in its broadest sense. I include here such things as trying to win the affections, say, of a married woman. That which is sought — in this case the affection of a certain person — is not on the free market and therefore should not be sought.

5. Ananias and Saphira are classed under "self murder". Their covetousness saw them struck down by the Holy Spirit.

addressing these people as adulteresses, James draws a very strong parallel with the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the marriage analogy is referred to often as a way of showing the relationship between God and His people.<sup>6</sup> God is portrayed as a faithful husband whilst Israel is depicted as an adulteress.<sup>7</sup> So here, these Christians have betrayed their marriage bond to God by acting like an unfaithful wife. They are not satisfied with their husband's gifts, so they look over the fence to see if the grass is any greener. Their lust for unlawful gain drives them to break covenant with God.

The real tragedy here is that the Christians whom James is addressing are not even aware of the fact that they are enemies of God. The fact that they have gone "a whoring" after "the spoils of Egypt" means that they have moved from friendship to enmity. These people have deluded themselves into believing that they could be called "God's friend" whilst they forsake Him at every turn.

Hence, James plainly draws their attention to the old adage that says "you cannot have your cake and eat it too." There are only two positions possible. We can stand with God or we can set our face against Him. Jesus said, in Matthew 12:30, "He who is not for Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

The fact that the Biblical doctrine of *no neutrality* is overlooked in our day shows how our perception of God has fallen. There is no way that we can have a foot in both the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. We can not love both God and Mammon. When we as Christians wilfully pursue gain, as described here by James, then we are actively opposing God to His face. This is why double-mindedness is such a dangerous state of mind for the Christian. If we begin to entertain "pet sins" then we will be lead, slowly but surely, down a path that will bring us into direct opposition to God.

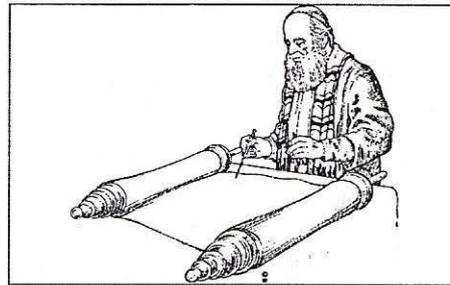
Too many Christians in our day try to find a balance between being saved and being able to live with worldly pleasures.<sup>8</sup> Such reasoning is completely

false. *We are either for God or we are against Him.*

In support of his position James turns to Scripture. In verse five James strives to show that there is opposition between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man.<sup>9</sup> The point that James labours here is that there is indeed a dividing line. Christians must, therefore, make sure they never cross it.

In verse six James quotes Psalm 138:6 which once again highlights the separation between man and God. Understood aright this text depicts how the Christian, being humble, will be content with what he receives from God's hand. Whereas he who is apart from God will be haughty and proud - always disputing the Umpires call and never satisfied with anything.

There is no need for double-mindedness. God's abundant grace is for the humble. If we place ourselves in His care He will indeed care for us, for His eye will



always be upon us. This is what Scripture teaches us.

For example: God declares in Isaiah 66:2: "... *I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of Spirit, and who trembles at my word*".

And again, in Psalm 51:17 we read: "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*"

But as for the proud, the Lord sets Himself against them. He is opposed to their self-righteousness and their flattering lips which are always employed to gain more power and wealth through any deceitful means possible (See Psalm 5:4-6 and 9; Proverbs 2:16 and 29:5).

This teaching can not be ignored. Double-mindedness is not something that is to be tolerated by the Christian. The entertaining of evil thoughts means

that we have crossed the dividing line and that we now oppose God. The Scripture's require us to "choose this day whom we will follow."

We shall do well if we choose the Lord; choose life; choose to dwell in the abundant grace of God and put any thought of gratifying sinful desires away from ourselves.

### 3. THE CURE.

**J**AMES, BEING PASTORALLY minded, does not leave us at this cross road. He proceeds to give us clear direction as to how we might become single-minded.

In verses 7-10, James outlines ten steps that are to be followed. These steps take the form of 10 imperatives (commands) each of which builds logically upon the others.

**1. Submit:** Submission is the first and most important action. Many today talk of Commitment. My father spent several years as a home missionary in a small rural town. One of the things that never ceased to amaze him were the number of middle aged people he came across who had "made a commitment". These people were of the Billy Graham crusade era. They had gone forward and made a commitment, but they had no idea as to what. Most of today's evangelists call for people to "commit" their lives to Christ, yet it is interesting that Scripture calls us to *submit* our lives to Christ. Is this being pedantic? No, not at all. It is necessary for us to distinguish carefully between these two words.

It is one thing to commit yourself to a person or cause. It is quite another to talk of submission. When we "commit" ourselves, we remain in control of our resources. We decide when, where, and how those resources are to be used. The decision is always ours to make.

However, when we "submit", we are required to surrender all into the control of another. This is what the Christian has done. He has taken himself off the throne of his life and placed Christ there. He has relinquished control of his resources and

6. Ephesians 5:22ff uses the identical analogy.

7. A prime example of this can be found in the book of Hosea.

8. This is most commonly seen in denominations where antinomianism is taught.

9. There is quite a debate over the translation of this verse. Does it refer to the Spirit of God or the spirit of man? The point that needs to be made is that the context is one in which the opposition between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God is under-scored. Hence either rendering serves to bring this out.

placed himself in submission to Jesus Christ.

Therefore, of first priority, we must submit to God. We must exemplify Christ — "not my will be done but Thine."

**2. Resist:** This passage has clearly taught us that there is *no neutrality*. Therefore, if we submit to God we must, of consequence, resist the Devil.

We must also note the encouragement at this point. We are promised that when we resist the Devil he will flee, and he will do this primarily for two reasons:

1. Because the more we submit to God the more Christ-like we become, and the Devil cannot stand in the presence of Christ;

2. Because we will be denying him a foothold.

Therefore, the more we shun being double-minded the easier it is for us to stand firm and the more difficult it is for the Devil to distract us, precisely because we deny the Devil any footholds.

**3. Draw Near:** We mentioned before that there are Christians today who would like to nestle as close to the line between God and Satan as possible. This command denies the validity of such an act. The Christian, in submission to God, *can only* draw near to Him; can only seek to dwell in His very presence.

We can illustrate this by asking a simple question. If we lived in a country that was about to be invaded by our enemy, would we desire to live on the border that was about to be crossed by our hostile neighbour, or in the capital city beside the king's palace? The answer is obvious. The safest place would be to dwell as close to the king as possible. Likewise, we should always seek to dwell as close to The King as we can.

Again we must note the promise. When we move toward God, God will reciprocate by drawing near to us. God is no sadist. He does not let the Christian struggle all the way until he reaches home. No! Like the prodigal's father, He runs out to meet us, ready with a loving embrace.

**4. Cleanse-Purify:** These dual images bring to mind the ceremonial washing as depicted in the Old Testament. All those who had sinned were required to undergo a ceremonial cleansing which signified a purifying from sin.

Thus, those who submit to God show that they are His by cleansing themselves from all unrighteousness. Psalm 24 emphasises this when it acknowledges that it is only he who has *clean* hands and a *pure* heart that may ascend to the hill of the Lord, i.e, dwell in His presence.

We can only draw near to God when we are without falsehood. Therefore, we must cleanse and purify (Cf. 1 Peter 1:22-23) ourselves from each spot and blemish.

**5. Miserable-Mourn-Weep-Change:** This passage is in no way saying that Christians are to walk along with long faces, looking downcast all the time (Cf. Matthew 6:16). What it is saying, however, is that there is an appropriate place for grave sorrow in the Christian walk. It is a disturbing thing to see that in certain streams of Christianity the emphasis is always upon having "fun".<sup>10</sup>

Sin in our lives and in the lives of others is no laughing matter. Sin should always cause us grief.<sup>11</sup> Let me ask you personally, when was the last time that you wept over personal sin or the state of the Church? Do not misunderstand me. I am not asking for Christians to walk around with their heart on their sleeve, as so many do. Rather, I am asking that we realise what an abhorrence sin is in the sight of a Righteous and Holy God, and that we weep over it because it is abhorrent to us also.

We should be overwhelmed constantly with the pathetic state of sinful man and the sheer magnitude of God's grace, righteousness and holiness.

**6. Humble:** Again we see that as those who belong to God we must humble ourselves. There is no room for pride and arrogance in the Christian soldier. Remember those people whom James described. They had become violent in the pursuit of their covetous desires, yet

what did they achieve — *nothing*. All their fighting and scrapping saw them empty handed.

In contrast to this, the Lord here invites us to humble ourselves. He invites us to be content with the lot that He has given to us. Moreover, He promises that if we humble ourselves He Himself will lift us up and exalt us (Cf. Matthew 6:33 and Luke 14:7-11). This is a great promise for when we are exalted by the Lord no man can steal this from us.

The proud and arrogant covet and crave and they may have gain but it is for a short time. Moth and rust will soon destroy all that they have.

However, the Christian who humbles himself before God will be lifted up by God and from there no one shall remove him. His treasure shall be imperishable.

## CONCLUSION

**T**HE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN is scattered with temptations. The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. If your fingers are being burnt, then please, put down the matches. Realise your weaknesses and make every effort to abstain from any activity that remotely resembles them.

Brothers and Sisters, I urge in the name of God the Father, of Jesus Christ the Son and of the Holy Spirit to choose life. Follow the directives James has laid down and experience that inexpressible joy that comes from living wholly for God and in His presence.

Shun sin and double-mindedness. The road of compromise is an impossible one. You cannot serve two masters. Beware of Satan's tricks and subtleties. He will seek to convince you that a little of this and a little of that is acceptable. *Do not fall for it*. Resist the Devil by standing in the safety of the Father's arms.

Choose the path of Sacrifice; Do not be ashamed of Christ; Hold fast to the truth and you shall never be disappointed (See 1 Peter 2:6).

10. The recent phenomena known as the "Toronto Blessing" is a prime example of this. Christians are to have joy and pleasure, but this is always derived from the Lord. Frivolous and trivial activities should always be avoided. Note well how many church bulletins advertise their activities in a pleasing way by adding the catch phrase "fun and fellowship". These times are usually always fun and fellowship, well, it just never happens. Rather we should derive our joy and pleasure from fellowship.

11. Isaiah 53 tell us that Messiah was one who was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief".