

James - He Gives More Grace
Sign Title: He Gives More Grace

September 4, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! If you are one of our summer visitors getting a final time at the lakes before winter, we are glad to have you. This summer, we are studying the book of James. This morning, we continue working our way through the book.

Last week, we studied the greatest love story. It is the love story all other love stories are based on. It is the original love story. It is the love story between Jesus Christ and his people, the church. Christ is the groom. The church is the bride. Christ loves his bride so deeply that he died for her to buy her back from her sin. Right now Christians are in a time of engagement to Christ. Jesus is in heaven getting ready to take his bride to be with him forever when he returns. This marriage to Jesus, the original love story, will define how we relate to Christ forever.

We need to remember the marriage of Christ to his church is not imagery or picture or metaphor. It is the relationship between us and Christ. The marriage between Christ and his church is the pattern that earthly marriage is based upon. The joys of relational intimacy in earthly marriage are to whet our appetite for the much greater joy of our much greater marriage to Christ.

This is what makes our spiritual adultery against Jesus so serious.

Remember our verse last week?

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4 (ESV)

This is a scary passage. Friendship with the world, which is spiritual adultery, makes me an enemy of God. God is not somebody I want as my enemy. I don't know your heart, but I know my own. I know my thoughts can be pretty friendly to the world. I mentally give in to sinful thoughts on a daily basis. When I really think about this passage, I begin to wonder. Can someone have all the sinful thoughts I have and still be saved?

Does anybody remember *The Truman Show*? Truman didn't want his life to be put on the big screen for everyone to watch. What would any of us feel like if our thought lives were put on the projector screens of the church for everyone to watch? I have no question that when our thought lives were featured, we would run out of the building.

This is why I love the passage we are looking at this morning and why you will love it when you leave today. Let's begin by reading James 4:4 then follow it though into the verse we are studying today.

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." James 4:4–6 (ESV)

Lets take this apart and examine it. To begin with, verse 5 is a very hard verse to translate. Bible scholars are all over the map in understanding it. Some scholars think it talks about our human tendency towards jealousy, others believe it is talking about the Holy Spirit's jealousy within us. The NIV takes a slightly different way of translating the text than the ESV. In fact, if you are using an NIV, you will see it offers a footnote with an alternate translation. I think the NIV's

alternate translation and the ESV translation are the best way to understand this. Even then with these alternate translations, the verse is still confusing. Let me explain it.

The Holy Spirit has a right to be jealous.

When we come to Christ in salvation, God gives his spirit to dwell within us. This is known as the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. While God's spirit is, in one sense, everywhere, there is a special kind of indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the heart and life of a Christian. The Holy Spirit empowers God's love in us. He convicts us of sin. He helps us understand God's Word. He cultivates the fruit of the Spirit within us. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit dwells in a special way in your life, and he is cultivating those external visible evidences of his internal invisible presence in your life.

Now before we get too excited about the Holy Spirit living in us, remember the Holy Spirit is fully God, and he carries with him the characteristics of God. He longs for God to be honored and glorified. He is repulsed by sin. Since we are God's blood-bought children through the death of Jesus, the Holy Spirit jealousy longs for us to delight in who we are in Jesus and relish what we have in Christ. The Holy Spirit knows that sin degrades us while obedience to God brings God glory and each of us the greatest possible happiness.

The Holy Spirit is jealous for our affections to respond to God's affections for us. When we commit spiritual adultery, the emotion the Holy Spirit within us feels is the same emotion a husband feels when his wife commits adultery with another man, except this is worse. Adultery is often committed behind closed

doors. It is bad enough to commit adultery when someone is absent from their spouse, but there is a whole new level of jealous rage when adultery is committed in the presence of your spouse.

This is why the Holy Spirit becomes so jealous when we commit spiritual adultery. Everywhere we go, he is with us. Every thought we think, he is watching on the silver screen of our mind. Every desire we cultivate, he examines. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. He is in the room watching us commit spiritual adultery on Christ, our groom.

If you are like me, you are thinking, “Better stop there Kurt. I’m in big trouble!” I understand why the Holy Spirit has a jealous rage because he sees everything I do and think. I am not very faithful to Jesus, my husband.

I think James would also raise his hand and say, “Guess what, I’m in big trouble too!” This is what makes the next little phrase so exciting... *But he gives more grace!*

God has more grace than we have sin.

Literally it says that God gives *greater* grace. Greater than what? His grace is greater than all the guilt we have because of our sin. His grace is greater than our spiritual bankruptcy. His grace is greater than the shame we feel every time we look in the mirror and are shocked by what we have done. It is greater than the horror we feel when we see the infidelity of our hearts for what it really is. It is greater than the terror we feel as we understand the fury of God’s wrath that we deserve. God’s grace is greater than the septic tank full of sin

called our hearts. That is the amount of grace God has *for me* and the grace God wants to give *to me*.

Let me quote the church father Augustine who said it so well. “God gives what he demands.” The demands of holiness God makes on us are overwhelming. “Be holy, because I am holy.” To look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery in your heart. All the guys hang their heads on that one. To be angry with your brother is to murder him in your mind. Nobody wants to think about that one. Love your enemies. The list could go on and on. The longer the list, the more inadequate we realize we are. This is where this little phrase is of such help. *He gives greater grace*. As the old hymn says, “It is grace that is greater than all our sin!” *God gives us greater grace than the demands of his holiness create upon us*. Why does he do this? He does it because he loves us. He does this because he is filled with mercy. God supplies the grace his holiness demands.

Now this sounds too good to be true. Incredible levels of infidelity are in our heart towards our bride. The revulsion we feel with marital adultery is nothing compared to the feeling of rage God has when his bride wanders from him. The Holy Spirit burns with jealousy when we pour our love and energy after sin rather than Christ, our rightful husband.

But God gives greater grace. Grace that is greater than all the sinful whoring of our heart. Isn’t this great news? (*pause*)

But James has a little more to say.

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6 (ESV)

This is a quote from Proverbs 3:34. James uses it to help us understand that the promise of God's incredible and inexhaustible grace is *not* a blank check. In this quote from Proverbs, God gives a warning and a promise about how God's grace becomes operative in our lives.

Warning - God opposes the proud

The word for *opposes* is a military term meaning an army has taken up its battle position and is ready to fight. That is what God does to those who are proud. If we are proud, God will take a battle position against us. I wrestled in high school, college and two summers of international competition. I fought some tough hombres but none of us wants to step on the mat with God when he is in full battle array. The word *proud* is also important.

Proud - Disdainfully or arrogantly thinking you are better than others. That you are the exception to the rule.

We say proud people are full of themselves. They are people who wear a big hat but have no cattle.

A great picture of pride in action is the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18. The Pharisee was a religious stud. When he went to the temple to pray, he didn't pray with his face in the dirt but kept his thumbs in his armpits and said,

...'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'
Luke 18:11–12 (ESV)

The tax collector did his prayer time a little differently.

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other... Luke 18:13–14 (ESV)

Who went home justified that day? The pride of the religious stud shut off God's grace. What is it about pride that can shut off the inexhaustible grace of God?

- Pride refuses to acknowledge a need for God.
- Pride refuses to repent of sin.
- The man or woman full of pride will not admit he or she needs anything.
- Prideful people have no desire for repentance. That would be to acknowledge their insufficiency. That would take humility.
- The one condition required for receiving grace is we acknowledge our sin and ask God to step in.

Parents, we try to teach this to our kids. When they want something, we make them use the magic word. What is the word? *Please!* Saying please is a way for them to acknowledge they don't have a right to the thing they are asking for. When they say, "Give me the hot dogs," they imply they have a right to demand of your time to give them the hot dogs. When they say, "Can you please pass the hot dogs?" They are asking for grace to receive hot dogs. Saying *please* is a way to honor the giver for their generosity. Kids, when you don't say, "please", it is not just bad manners, it is a little bit of pride sneaking into your thinking.



God doesn't like pride. He hates it. Pride is saying we have a right to life. We have a right to happiness. We have a right to have things our way. In reality, we don't have rights to anything. Everything we have is only because of God's

grace. To be proud is to be more like the devil than like Jesus. Most importantly, pride is the way we shut off God's immeasurable grace from flowing into our life.

A promise - God gives grace to the humble.

While pride shuts off God's grace, humility frees God to fully meet our needs, because in humility, we will give God the glory rather than keeping it for ourselves.

Where does humility come from? It comes from thinking on the cross of Christ. The cross shows us who we are and how desperately we need grace. To see Jesus, the son of God, hanging in anguish on the cross dying in our place for our sins and to think my sin is not a big deal or to think I am basically a good person is the pride that shuts off grace. If it took God humbling himself to take on human flesh to die in our place, for our sins, to deal with those sins, then the plight of our sin is serious. The cross is the lens we need to see the desperation of our situation. As we contemplate the cross, our pride is melted like the wax of a candle next to a flame.

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. ("When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," *public domain*)

The cross doesn't just humble us at the point of our salvation with the first experience of God's grace, but it needs to humble us every day. When we take our eyes off the cross, we will lose sight of how desperately sinful we are, and our prayer times will sound more like the Pharisee than the tax collector. The bottom line is, the river of God's immeasurable grace is shut off from our lives, because in our pride, we don't think we need it.

Are you here this morning broken in your heart? Are you here saying to God that you can't believe you are asking for more grace again because you failed him again? If you humbly desire grace, you will find it. God loves to give it when we humbly come before him asking for it. If this morning, you are here for another religious service to pump up your self-righteousness, if you think this service will make you thankful you are better than the people around you, if when you walk in the sanctuary you are not looking at the cross saying, "God, this week, I need more grace again," your pride has shut off the one thing you need most. More grace! Do any of us ever advance beyond the need for more grace every day?

Conclusion

At a Great Lakes District conference, I heard Erwin Lutzer do his impression of Billy Graham. It is funny and a really good impersonation. If you want to see it, on the Small Group Worksheet I gave you the web address where you can watch Erwin Lutzer do this impersonation on YouTube. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZYqyKT1XNM>).

Erwin tells how he admired Billy Graham as he grew up. When his friends were playing baseball, he was home listening to Billy Graham on the radio. After Erwin became the pastor of Moody Church, Billy Graham visited Chicago for meetings and he stopped by to visit Dr. Lutzer in his office.

For Erwin, it was a dream come true. He was a life-long fan of Billy. Erwin began gushing over Dr. Graham as he sat in his office. He told him how he had listened to his preaching for years. He told him how when other kids were

playing baseball, he was listening to Dr. Graham preach. The more Erwin gushed over Billy, the more dejected Dr. Graham became. Erwin was perplexed by Dr. Graham's forlorn face so he asked him if he had said anything wrong.

Dr. Graham got up from his chair, knelt down and put his head in Erwin's lap and said, "Erwin. I have failed God so many times. Would you please pray for me?" Erwin was dumbfounded. Here is the man who had led more people to Christ than anyone in modern history. Here is his hero. The man he idolized is kneeling before him and asking Erwin to pray that God would give him more grace. *(pause)*

Is God willing to give grace? He promises to give us more grace than his holiness demands; our pride is the one thing that can stop it. Our unwillingness to say we desperately need it is the one thing that will keep us from receiving it. This morning, as we close, I am going to give you a few moments of silence to look at the cross, to repent of sin and in humility, ask God for more grace. One thing to remember, don't forget to use the magic word... *Please*.

Remember, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Amen.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.christ2Rculture.com

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.christ2Rculture.com>) on the copied resource.

