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## HOW TO GO OVER TO THE DARK SIDE

James 4:4-6

Laurie and I have a name for our car. We call it R2. That's because it's a Nissan Rogue whose color, according to Nissan, is Cayenne Red. That makes it our Red Rogue. See what we did there? Red Rogue has 2 R's, thus R2. But of course the name R2 works because of the little rolling trash can droid in Star Wars called R2D2. It is astounding that a movie made 40 years ago still has such huge presence in pop culture today. Maybe even more amazing, it's influence, if anything, is still growing. See the new addition of Star Wars Land at Disneyland.

Of course from the Star Wars movie everyone knows the story of Darth Vader. He was a young, eager, potentially powerful Jedi knight in training. But he was impetuous and undisciplined. Eventually his anger got the best of him and he was seduced by the Dark Side and became a terrifying force for evil. Do you remember the first time you saw him in the original movie? This huge, intimidating masked figure dressed all in black appears as everyone cowers before his evil menace. He was a truly chilling character. I've got bad news today. You could very easily go over to the dark side too, rather like Vader. All of us could, and it turns out that it's a whole lot easier than you might think. In fact, it requires no effort whatsoever. Let's see how we can avoid such a horror by looking at James 4:4-6.

### FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD IS A PROBLEM

In the opening of this letter in James 1:2 the author addresses his readers as "brothers and sisters." He calls them brothers and sisters or "my dear brothers and sisters" again in 1:16, 1:19, 2:1, 2:5, 2:14, 3:10 and 3:12. In light of that James 4:4 comes as a shock. Suddenly he calls these people whom he has persistently addressed as brothers and sisters, "you adulterous people."

Yikes! What happened? We've abruptly gone from "my dear brothers and sisters" to "you bunch of adulterers." Had James been getting increasingly worked up as he wrote this letter? Had he been fuming over the way these Christians were living, and he finally just couldn't take it anymore? Had he just erupted, angry at the ugly compromises he saw these people making? It is possible that's what happened, but I personally don't think it was. I think there were two things in play here.

The first is that James saw a big issue in his readers' lives that they seriously needed to address. He felt the need to get their attention. The violent change in

tone from “brothers and sisters” to “adulterers” would have done that big time. It would have shocked them. This was a way of saying “this is a big deal” and doing it in all caps.

The second is that there is an Old Testament background to this statement. These people were all Jewish and thus were familiar with the fact that the spiritual adultery of Israel was a frequent theme. Jeremiah 3:6 says, “During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there.’” Jeremiah 2:25 depicts Israel saying, “It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.”

The most memorable instance is the case of the prophet Hosea. That poor guy was given one of the worst assignments any prophet has ever had. Hosea 1:2 says, “When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.” These verses would have come to the minds of James readers when he called them adulteresses. He was telling them that they were being as unfaithful to their God as their ancestors had been, albeit in a somewhat different fashion.

The unfaithfulness of ancient Israel was they persisted in worshiping foreign gods. The people James wrote to were not doing that. They weren’t worshiping the gods of Rome or Greece. Their friendship with the world consisted of worshiping at some of the same altars that the world did, just not idol altars. They were the altars of money, pleasure, security, power and comfort

James says in making that choice they were becoming enemies of God. James said that twice to make sure his readers got the message. If you become an enemy of God you've become a traitor. You've gone over to the Dark Side. You've followed in the footsteps of Darth Vader and become a traitor to your own cause, the greatest cause in all that exists.

Part of the issue for them came from the fact that they had the normal human desires to not be oppressed, to not be persecuted, to not be rejected and ridiculed. They wanted to be able to make their way in the world, earn enough money to live on, have a comfortable life, be accepted and respected. They were tending to do whatever was necessary to turn down the heat on themselves, to kind of blend in so they could just get along in this world.

Let's think about this idea of friendship with the world. What does that mean, and what does it not mean? Not wanting to have friendship with the world has been interpreted to mean that Christians need to distance themselves from people of the world. In the past this has caused some to go off and try to remove themselves from contact with the world, because the world will contaminate us. So they have created monasteries where the world supposedly does not intrude or Christian communities.

This is not what James was referring to. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." So we are a group of priests. What do priests do? They represent God to people, and people to God. You can't be a priest if you are removed from people.

From the time of Abraham it has been God's plan to use his people and to make them a blessing to others. He wants us to be his witnesses. But we can only do that if we are engaged with the world around us. We can't be priests if we are isolated from the world. I told you about our recent trip to Maui in which our landing there was aborted due to a problem with the flaps on our plane. We were diverted to Honolulu where the longer runway could handle the higher speed our aircraft had to land at. By the time we landed, waited for paramedics to board the plane and take a medical patient off, then deplaned, it was after 9 P.M. We were all told to wait in the gate area for information about what the airline was going to do with us. I figured we were going to spend the night in Honolulu. Where were they going to find a spare airplane to fly us to Maui at that time of night? And what about pilots? So we all sat there and waited. Finally after maybe 45 minutes or more the pilot of our flight came out and made an announcement. He explained that it had been determined they just needed to replace one part, that maintenance was in the process of doing that, and that as soon as repairs were effected and confirmed we would re-board the aircraft and they would fly us to Maui. Then he said, "I'm going to remain out here and am happy to talk to anyone, so if you have any questions please come and ask me." At that point the pilot was acting as a priest for the airline. He was the contact point. He understood that the way he could put everyone at ease was by him coming and making contact with all the passengers. It was reassuring to know that someone who represented authority was there to talk to us and let us know what was happening. That's kind of like what our role is as followers of Jesus, and just like the pilot needed to be out making contact with the passengers, so we need to be out making contact with the world. The last thing God wants is that we would remove ourselves from the world. So clearly making

sure we are not “friends” with the world doesn’t mean isolating ourselves from the world around us.

Another misunderstanding is it has not been uncommon for Christians to think that not being a friend of the world meant we have to dress different than the world and not do things the world does like play cards, watch movies or dance. A year after I graduated from college I was at Purdue University for a summer of training for the ministry I was working for. I went to a church, an evangelical church, there in Lafayette, Indiana one Sunday. I was astounded when as a main point of his sermon the pastor related how he was appalled while driving down a street in town to see a man who was a member of their church mowing his lawn and *wearing shorts* as he did so! Gasp. He was wearing shorts? How worldly! Now looking back, when I see in pictures of the shorts that guys wore in those days, me included, I admit that was truly sinful. But it was a fashion sin, not a sin against God. Remember what 1 Corinthians 3:3 says. Paul wrote to the bickering Corinthian church, “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?” The sign of friendship with the world was that they were quarreling and jealous and competing with each other. The problem is you can dress totally different than the world. The women can refuse to wear pants or short skirts, they can avoid wearing any makeup, the men can wear the dullest, most drab clothes possible, all can never go to any movies, avoid dancing or playing any card games, and they can still quarrel and bicker and compete with each other. In other words, they will be just as worldly as possible.

What then was James referring to when he spoke of friendship with the world? What does that look like? Years ago before I was married I had a group of acquaintances that I wanted to become friends with. One of the most dynamic leaders in this group was a guy who was a terrific rugby player. He was the kind of guy who seemed to just sweep everyone along in his enthusiasm for whatever he happened to be excited about. So playing rugby kind of became just a thing you do. For fun they would play touch rugby, guys and girls together. As I got drawn into the group I ended up playing rugby. I actually played on the Colorado State University rugby team with some of those guys. My rugby playing came to an end one day when I playing in a tournament up at Stanford University where we played 4 games in one day. Half way through the second game I had an epiphany. I suddenly realized I didn’t especially like rugby. I was only doing it because it was what you did in that group. My desire to be part of that group had led me to do something I would otherwise not have done. The point here is that friendship with people is going to mean you start to be like them and adapt their ways.

To be in friendship with the world is to adopt its ways and become like it. Specifically that is going to mean adopting the world's thinking, its worldview, its values, its priorities, its ways of doing things and its morals. We will live for the things the world lives for and we will value the things the world values.

So what will that mean in our world? Our world starts with the idea that God is not relevant. At the extreme this means he doesn't exist at all, but at most it means it's okay to believe in him, but that he has nothing to do with life being full and enjoyable, which is what matters. Our world believes that living for right now, for this life, is what is most important by far, and that thinking about some life after death, some eternal life, is foolishness. Our world believes that having money and power and pleasure is more important than anything else, and that you must pursue these no matter what it takes. Our world believes that people only have value for what they can perform. Our world believes that there is no absolute right or wrong, and morality is defined only by whatever seems to suit you best. Our world believes that you have to take care of yourself above all else.

Becoming a friend of the world is adopting these ways of thinking, these values, priorities and morals as your own. Does this mean that if you're a success in this world, if you do well financially or have some successful position, that you have compromised and are pursuing friendship with the world? No, just being successful in this world does not automatically mean you are trying to be a friend with the world. Remember my foray into rugby. Well my brother also participated in that misguided adventure. He was certainly influenced in part by his friendship with several of the guys involved. But he didn't play rugby primarily to be a part of that group. He had friends in the group, but he mostly played the game because he was a good athlete and enjoyed sports. Rugby was an opportunity that presented itself one summer, so he played that summer then moved on. The point I am trying to make here is that playing rugby was not necessarily a function of joining that group of friends. It might or might not be. Similarly, being a success, or any of the other pursuits of people in the world, could be an attempt to have what the world has and be part of its system, but that is not necessarily the case.

The key is what is in our hearts. Are we obsessed with the world, longing to fit in, wishing for the things we see other people have and thinking that's what's most important? Or are we seeking to walk with God, to obey him, to do his will no matter what, and leaving the outcome to him?

You all know that we live in a prosperous area full of high achievers who all hope their children will surpass their high achievement. This creates an environment that

exerts a constant pressure, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt. It is to do everything possible to give your child every opportunity and every advantage, and to gently push them to ever higher accomplishments in academics, sports and the arts. That environment puts pressure on parents to help their kids keep up, to make sure they will go on to really good colleges and hopefully some day get a good career where they would make a lot of money. That forced us to think about what we wanted to see happen in our kids' lives. We realized almost all of the stuff that people around us were obsessed with was about friendship with the world. It was buying the world's ideas that what matters is the things the world values. It was about approval, fame, success, money, status. I felt the pull of that. It was hard to resist. But Laurie and I were able to remind ourselves of what we really wanted for our kids. We wanted them to believe in Jesus and live for the glory of God. we wanted them to live for his will. We wanted them to have integrity and live honestly. We wanted them to learn how to build relationships, how to love people and someday build a family. We wanted them to want to serve people and minister to them, whatever their role in life. We knew these were the things God wanted for them. We also knew if they had them they would have joyful, full lives, no matter what they ended up doing, and if they didn't have them their lives would be empty no matter how much money, status or success they gained.

### GOD DOESN'T ACCEPT HALF WAY MEASURES

Verse 5 presents us with a number of enigmas when it comes to interpretation. The NIV translates that verse "Or do you think the Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?" But if you look at the footnote you will notice it has not 1, but 2 alternative translations. One says, "or that the spirit he caused to dwell in us envies intensely" and the other says, "or that the Spirit he caused to dwell in us longs jealously." All 3 of those are legitimate and reasonable translations of that verse. That's one part of the problem. The other is that there is no verse in the Old Testament that matches any of those translations. So how are we to understand this?

On the basis of the context I am going to rule out the translation that suggests James was talking about how our human spirit tends to envy other people. That is true, but it does not address the point James intended to make. Whichever of the other translations you pick you get the point that God seriously wants our hearts. The verse says he jealously and intensely wants us. I lean towards that last translation. The Holy Spirit whom God has put in us jealously longs for us.

Where does the Old Testament say that? I don't think James intended to give an exact quotation. I said earlier in the sermon that God wants us to be his witnesses. I

could have quoted a verse, but instead I just generally referred to a truth from Scripture. The Bible tells us God wants us to be his witnesses. That's what James was doing. He was referring to the fact that the Old Testament says God is not interested in sharing our devotion with anyone or anything else.

In Exodus 20:5 after telling us we must not make idols to worship the Lord says, "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God." In other words, "I'm not the least bit interested in being one of the gods you worship. It's all or nothing. Worship me, and no other god."

Do you remember what Jesus said about what the greatest commandment is? He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." How many things can you love with all your heart, soul and strength? Let's imagine a situation that will illustrate the issue for us. Imagine that you are in a contest. This contest will determine how much weight you can bench press. Just one repetition. This is to test your max. So you warm up in order to make sure you don't injure yourself. Then you have your spotters put those big plates on the bar. They get to the most you have ever lifted in your life. You settle yourself under that bar. You inhale a big breath and blow it out to clear your system. Then you inhale another big breath and with all your strength lift that bar off the stand. You lower it to your chest, then with every ounce of strength you have try to shove that bar back up to set it on the stand. Here's the question. At that moment, how many other things will you have the strength to do? That answer is zero. You can only do that one thing with all your strength. And you can only love one thing with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength.

God is not real interested in anything less than you going all in. You will not find a verse that says, "Love the Lord your God a little," or "love the Lord your God with some of your heart." Even "Love the Lord your God with most of your heart" seems to be missing in action. There is no verse that says, "Occasionally max out on loving God with all your strength, then go back to doing other stuff." This is what we are to do at all times. Love God with all that is in us. All. One preacher I once heard many years ago said, "All means all, and that's all all means."

We are all familiar with the traditional wedding vows. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live. Actually the traditional Episcopalian and Methodist vows have an added phrase. It is "and forsaking all others." That's implied in some of the other forms of the vows, but that's important. No one else is now allowed to compete for my love, devotion and faithfulness. We understand that. Imagine if Laurie said,

"Hey, Rick, my old boyfriend, Rob, called and asked me out. We're going out to dinner on Friday night." "Oh, all right. That's kind of random, but where are we going to go." "Oh, it's not 'we.' You're not invited. I'm just going out with Rob." I'm not going to approve of that. Laurie promised to forsake all others and love me with all her heart, and I'm not willing to share her with anybody else.

James' point here is that God has said all along that he is not willing to share us with anyone or anything else. In fact, if you pursue anything else you become his enemy. That's because you are rejecting him as the Lord of all, the only one worthy of worship and true devotion. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." You can't serve both God and anything else.

There's no inherent conflict between the success of the world, for instance, and worshiping God, right? No, there isn't, but like it or not, it sets up a competition in our hearts. I know a guy who is a Christian, a dedicated follower of Jesus. He is married and has been for a long time. But he has always been devoted to his career. He knows there are things a Christian husband is supposed to do. So he takes his wife out on a date, and he tries to remember special dates. He does some of the things you would expect a husband to do to love his wife. But there is never a moment where she knows she is the passion of his life. She knows he loves her and is faithful to her, but what he loves most is his job, and it hurts.

God has laid down the gauntlet. He wants us to love him with all our heart. Sometimes loving God will be an out what we do. But it will always be about why and how we do it. You can play rugby for the right reason or the wrong reason. And whatever else you do in life it can be for the right reason or the wrong reason. The right reason is always to love God.

## APPLICATION

### REALIZE THE URGENCY OF THE ISSUE

Laurie has an interesting quirk. She is dazzled by shiny things. Jewelry to her is like light to a moth. But put anything shiny on an article of clothing and she is magnetically drawn to it. We were in a store while on vacation and she saw some sandals that had gold on them. Lots of gold. She tried on a couple of pair to get the size right, she debated, but she couldn't resist. They were so shiny! So she bought them. She was quite happy and pleased with her new sandals. The next morning one of the first things she said to me after we woke up was, "I'm going to take those sandals back." I was surprised and asked why. She said, "During the night I



woke up and couldn't go back to sleep. I tried for a long time and finally gave up. I got out of bed, put those sandals on and walked around the hotel room for quite a while wearing them." As you can imagine I was a bit surprised at this. I slept through the whole thing. I also wasn't clear on what that had to do with taking the sandals back. She explained. "There was on spot on the sandals that felt a little funny when I tried them on. So last night I walked around in them to find out if that was my imagination or if it would actually bother me. I found out that spot is really going to be a problem. I'm not going to wear them because of it, so even though I love how they look, I need to take them back."

I thought that was really smart. You might be wondering what that has to do with anything. Laurie wisely paid attention to what at first seemed like a small thing, because she knew it was actually a significant thing. For us, friendship with the world might seem like no big deal. It's just being normal, doing what everyone else does. It doesn't necessarily involve some heinous sin, it's just fitting in and acting naturally. But it actually is a big deal that we need to pay attention to, for by doing it we end up being an enemy of God.

That sounds extreme doesn't it? But we need to remember that Satan is called the god of this age. He is the one who is behind the world system. He designed it and controls it. He designed it with the purpose of separating us from God. So the logic isn't too hard to see. When you jump into the world system, when you ally yourself with it, who are you allying yourself with? You are lining up on Satan's team. Uh oh. Do you really want to be an enemy of the Person who loves you more than anyone else in existence? Do you really want to oppose your own Creator, the Almighty God? That is true insanity. So we need to pay attention to this issue, for it is dangerously subtle.

In his book, *Brandwashed*, Martin Lindstrom, a former market research expert, explains that advertisers know that humans have something in common with birds and termites. That is that we operate with a herd mentality. You may have noticed how a flock of birds will fly out of a field together in an almost choreographed way. Scientists say many birds act as if they share one collective brain. Termites do the same thing. Lindstrom says "Only by observing and mimicking the behavior of its neighbors can a termite figure out what it should be doing." He says curiously, humans exhibit some similar traits. We size up what those around us are doing and modify our actions accordingly. Researchers have done experiments in which they put people in a large hall and instruct them to walk aimlessly around the room without talking to each other. They instruct just a few people on exactly where to walk. No matter how large or small the group, inevitably everyone ends

up following those few. The researchers concluded "Humans flock like sheep and birds, subconsciously following a minority of individuals."

The point here is the actions, opinions and behaviors of the enormous majority of people around us are constantly exerting an influence on us that we are not even aware of. So if you want to know how to go over to the Dark Side, here's what you must do. Just take the easy way. Go with the flow. Try to fit in. Try to make your life easier, more comfortable, safer. Don't buck the tide. Don't rock the boat. Don't be weird. Just take it easy, and you'll end up on the Dark Side. To follow God will require deliberate and sometimes uncomfortable choices.

### RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE.

In Revelation 2:2-3 the Lord addressed the church at Ephesus and described some of their positives. He said, "I know your deeds, your hard work and perseverance." He went on, "You have persevered and endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary." They were terrific. They did great deeds, they worked hard, they endured hardship and didn't get weary.

But verse 4 says something was lacking. "Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first." They were doing many of the right things. They hadn't stopped. They hadn't given up. But something was missing. They didn't have the fervor they once had, the passion for the Lord. God wants us to love him with all our heart. Unfortunately our tendency is for that love to cool a bit and for us to lapse back into the old habits of pursuing what the world pursues, of fitting right back into the system.

Does this mean we all need to quit our jobs, sell our homes and become missionaries in Mali or the Congo? No, not at all. What it means is that we need to never be lacking in spiritual fervor, as Romans 12:11 says. That means that we are to love God first and foremost. Loving him is to be the point of everything we do. If you have a job, do it in a way that expresses love to him. When you vacuum the carpet, do it as a way of loving him. Make him, honoring him, knowing him, loving him the center, the focus of everything in your life.

Remember loving God at times is about what we do, but it is always about why we do what we do and how we do it.

That means that loving him is the most important thing you do. I received an email recently from the company that makes and sells Turbo Tax, the tax software I use to do our taxes. When I read it I got that little sinking feeling in my gut. Oh no, it's

mid October. The year is coming to an end. That means tax time is just a few months ahead. I hate filling out those tax forms. I am not a detail person, and tax forms are specifically designed to make life miserable for a non-detail person. The whole thing is such an unnecessarily complicated ordeal, even using the helpful tax software. Every year when I finish I rejoice and think, "Yay, it's a whole year before I have to do this again, and maybe Jesus will come back before that happens again." As I reflected on this I thought, "What if I do my taxes to love the Lord my God? What if I see doing this as a way to express love to him?" That will change a lot. First it will mean my main purpose is not to just get as much money back from the IRS as possible, and it's not to just get an onerous government agency off my back. It's something I can do because it pleases God. So I can do this to love God. That changes both the goal and my attitude about it as I do it.

Loving God is also a big help during the difficult times of life. When life is not great, when it is just hard, even painful, focus on loving God. You can still love him and rejoice in him, even when your circumstances are crummy. You can say to him, "If it is your will that I go through this, then I accept it. And I will express love to you by living in peace and gratitude and hope as a way of glorifying you." My point here is we can love God by going through whatever he asks us to with a willing, trusting attitude, because if this is what it takes to love God then I will do it enthusiastically.

Laurie and I haven't seen many movies recently. I think maybe just 3 in the past 18 months. Two of them were *Beauty and The Beast* and *La La Land*. Two musicals. No action, no suspense, no airplanes, no sports. My man card is in jeopardy. We went because I knew Laurie wanted to see them. I could love her by going to them with her. She wouldn't feel love if I yawned and expressed boredom and indifference all the way through, making sure she knew I was just enduring the experience. That second one was difficult, not because it bored me but because its message really irked me. But my point is as we love God we will go through hard times. We can love him by rejoicing in him, trusting in him, giving thanks, blessing others even in the hard times.

## DON'T DESPAIR

One of my favorite old stories is about a young woman who lived in an apartment in our area. She looked out her window one day and saw a man sitting on the grass outside her second floor apartment who looked down on his luck. He appeared to be homeless and depressed. Her heart went out to the poor man and she wanted to encourage him. What could she do? She couldn't fix whatever his problem was, but maybe a gesture of encouragement would help. She got a \$20 bill, wrote a note that

said, "Don't despair," and wrapped them around a small rock she happened to have in her place. She opened her window and tossed it down below so it landed near him on the grass. He saw it land, seemed a bit puzzled, but he picked it up and read the note. He looked at it, scratched his head, but then obviously brightened. He looked up at her with a big grin on his face, nodded affirmatively, waved, then walked away. The woman felt really good, because she could see that the change in the man's demeanor was much greater than she could have hoped for. Obviously her encouragement was just what he needed. However, she was surprised two days later when there was a knock on her door. She opened it to see that same man standing there, smiling. He handed her \$100 and said, "Don't despair." Dumbfounded, she said, "What? I don't understand." He said, "Don't despair. You know. Don't Despair finished first in the third race at Del Mar yesterday. He came in at 5 to 1."

I share that silly story because it is awfully easy to despair about how much we compromise and how fickle and frail our love for God can be. We don't have to look very hard to find ways we fail to love God as we should or ways we get distracted by everything but loving God. We can easily get discouraged and down on ourselves because of how cool we've gotten about our first love. It's not hard to see how we sought friendship with the world.

It is crucial to notice the first phrase of verse 6. "But he gives us more grace." Yes, God jealously desires us and yes, we easily lapse into friendship with the world. But God just keeps giving us grace. He keeps loving us and he keeps working to draw us to himself. So don't despair. Don't get discouraged. Don't keep beating yourself up. Thank him for his grace, thank him that even though tomorrow you will fail again he still gives more grace, thank him that you will never exhaust his grace or his love, and return to loving him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.