

The Spirit in Man

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Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God. Or think ye that the scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying? (James 4:4-5 ASV).

Many denominational commentators consider the word *spirit* in verse five refers to the Holy Spirit. However, there are serious problems with this view.

The context shows that James was writing about “jealous envying and contentions” on the part of the Jewish converts (James 1:1). An evil disposition is under consideration. He stipulates “bitter envy and strife” (James 3:14). He speaks of “lusts that war in your members” ... killing ... praying for wrong things ... friendship with a sinful world ... unclean hands and impure hearts ... evil speaking against each other and the law (James 4:1-12).

In his commentary on the book of James, brother Guy N. Woods gives the sense of this verse as: “The spirit which is in you is a covetous and envious one” (p. 217). Brother Woods makes this observation:

It is incredible to us that the writer would affirm of deity that which he had earlier so severely condemned in men! If, as indeed it is, envy and jealousy are wrong in man, we cannot believe that James intended to assert that such are characteristic of God (p. 218).

Not that it carries much weight, but the translators of the KJV, ASV, NIV, and the RSV all rendered “spirit” in James

chapter 4, verse five, with a small s to indicate the human spirit.

The ASV (1901) has it, "The spirit which he made to dwell in us"; the KJV has, "The spirit that dwelleth in us." God appointed the spirit to dwell in and quicken the human body. He created the body and gave the spirit. The spirit is in the image and likeness of its giver. Today, of course, God makes the human body through the process of his law of procreation, and he still imparts the human spirit for the fleshly body, which gives it life. God is the "father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9). "Father of spirits" is used in contradiction with "fathers of the flesh." There is but one father of all spirits. There are many fleshly fathers.

The spirit which comes from God the Father into the bodies of babies is pure and innocent and is not depraved. Calvinists mistakenly teach that every baby's spirit is corrupt and vile. If the spirits within humans are depraved at birth, God is the Father of those sinful spirits and the source of an imperfect and filthy gift. In the nature of God, this cannot be the case; the spirit God gives is perfect and good. It is sinless at the time it is given. Otherwise, God is not God (good).

The innocent spirit arrives in a sin-cursed world in the body of a baby. It is a free moral agent in the image of God, and, therefore, has the power of free choice. It does not have infinite attributes, but is limited. The spirit is susceptible to the influence of flesh. Therefore, without discipline, and under the improper influence of the body and the world, it becomes depraved. It is not born depraved but becomes sinful by its own choice. The Jewish disciples to whom James wrote acquired spirits "lusting to envy." James rebukes their jealousy and thereby demonstrates they owned the fault, and had not inherited it from the Father of their spirits.

We must be careful not to read into this "spirit" passage a literal indwelling of the person of the Holy Spirit, as this

would be an indictment of God.