

James Chapter 4

Verses 1-3: In chapter 3, the scripture ended by stressing the peace that results from heavenly wisdom. Now James emphasizes the strife so common among his readers, stemming from their unsatisfied, selfish desires. Instead of wrestling with God in prayer, these believers are striving with one another.

James 4:1 "From whence [come] wars and fightings among you? [come they] not hence, [even] of your lusts that war in your members?"

“Wars and fightings among you”: Quarrels; these are between people in the church, not internal conflict in individual people. “Quarrels” speaks of the conflict in general; “conflicts” of its specific manifestations. Discord in the church is not by God’s design (John 13:34-35, 17-21; 2 Cor. 12:20; Phil. 1:27), but results from the mix of tares (false believers), and wheat (truly redeemed people), that make up the church.

“Lusts”: Or could be translated “pleasures”. The Greek word (from which the English word “hedonism” derives), always has a negative connotation in the New Testament. The passionate desire for worldly pleasures that mark unbelievers (1:14; Eph. 2:3; 2 Tim. 3:4; Jude 18), are the internal source of the external conflict in the church (1:14-15).

“Your members”: Not church members, but bodily members. James, like Paul, uses “members” to speak of sinful, fallen human nature (Rom. 6:19; 7:5, 23). Unbelievers (who are in view here), fight (unsuccessfully), against the evil desires they cannot control.

The strongest statement someone can make is usually in the form of a question. It gets us to thinking about figuring out what the problem is. James is speaking to them about the “fightings” being caused, because of the worldliness they still have in their lives and their walks.

If we are dead in Christ, there should be no reason to fight the brethren.

James 4:2 "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not."

“Kill”, here meaning murder, is the ultimate result of thwarted desires. James had in mind actual murder and the gamut of sins (hate, anger, bitterness), leading up to it. The picture is of unbelievers so driven by their uncontrollable evil desires that they will fight to the death to fulfill them.

“You ask not”: True joy, peace, happiness, meaning, hope, and fulfillment in life, come only from God. Unbelievers however, are unwilling to ask for them on His terms, they refuse to submit to God or acknowledge their dependence on Him.

James is speaking here, supposedly to believers in Christ. It is unbelievable that Christians would be this caught up in the flesh. Lust is of the flesh, and not of God. It seems they want things so badly that are not their own, that they even kill to get them.

The real truth here, is these people may profess Christianity, but they really are not Christians. They have not crucified the flesh and its lust. He gives them the secret in the last few words of the verse. Christians, do not fight to get the things you want, pray for them instead.

If they are good for you, the Lord will give them to you. The answer is prayer. They do not have these things, because they have not asked in prayer.

James 4:3 "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume [it] upon your lusts."

“Ask amiss”: This refers to acting in an evil manner, motivated by personal gratification and selfish desire. Unbelievers seek things for their own pleasures, not for the honor and glory of God.

Sometimes we, like these Christians, pray for things that would not be for our own good, or the good of those around us. God will not answer a prayer to fill our greed. He will, however, answer a prayer for our needs.

James 4:4 "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

“Adulteresses”: A metaphorical description of spiritual unfaithfulness (Mat. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38). It would have been especially familiar to James’ Jewish readers, since the Old Testament often describes unfaithful Israel as a spiritual harlot. James has in view professing Christians, outwardly associated with the church, but holding a deep affection for the evil world system.

“Friend of the world”: The Greek word describes love in the sense of a strong emotional attachment. Those with a deep and intimate longing for the things of the world give evidence that they are not redeemed (1 John 2:15-17).

“Enemy of God”: The necessary corollary to friendship with the world. The sobering truth that unbelievers are God’s enemies is taught throughout Scripture.

As Israel was a spiritual adulteress, unfaithful to God, so the church is a spiritual adulteress when she is the unfaithful bride of Christ. (Hosea 2:5, 19, 20; Matt. 12:39). One cannot be both a lover of God and a lover of the world.

Adultery is one of the worst sins a Christian could commit, because it is a sin of the body. The Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit, would be involving the Holy Spirit in the sin. A person, who is still involved in adultery, is not a friend of God. They have chosen the way of the flesh.

The flesh, or the spirit, rules over our will. If the flesh rules over your will, you are of the flesh.

Verses 5-6: Although many believe that (verse 5), refers to the positive ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit, yearning jealously over the believer, the tenor (of verses 4 and 5), is negative, speaking of man's envy. The good work of God begins at verse 6 (in contrast to 4 and 5), as the conjunction indicates.

"But He giveth more grace" is literally "greater grace" (Greek *meizona*). God gives grace that is greater than the world's attraction of (verse 4), and the inner lust of (verse 5; Romans 5:20), and so can withstand both.

James 4:5 "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"

"Scripture saith": The quote that follows is not found as such in the Old Testament; it is a composite of general Old Testament teaching. This difficult phrase is best understood by seeing the "spirit" as a reference not to the Holy Spirit, but to the human spirit, and translating the phrase in the negative sense of "lusts to envy".

James' point is that an unbelieving person's spirit (inner person), is bent on evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Prov. 21:10; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21-23). Those who think otherwise defy the biblical diagnosis of fallen human nature; and those who live in worldly lusts give evidence that their faith is not genuine (Rom 8: 5-11; 1 Cor. 2:14).

God will not share you with any other. You are either 100% His or you are not His at all. To lust with envy would not be Godly. We must choose today whom we will serve. Is it God, or the fleshly lust, that we serve?

2 Corinthians 11:2 "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ."

If we are God's we will not lust with envy.

James 4:6 "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

"More grace": The only ray of hope in man's spiritual darkness is the sovereign grace of God, which alone can rescue man from his propensity to lust for evil things. That God gives "greater grace" shows that His grace is greater than the power of sin, the flesh, the world, and Satan (Rom. 5:20).

The Old Testament quote (from Prov. 3:34; 1 Peter 5:5), reveals who obtains God's grace, the humble, not the proud enemies of God. The word "humble" does not define a special class of Christians, but encompasses all believers (Isa. 57:15; 66:2; Matt. 18:3-4).

When we humble ourselves before God, we are in a place to receive from Him.

1 Peter 5:6 "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

We are saved by the grace of God, and we have nothing to be proud about. Salvation for us is a free gift. His grace is sufficient for me.

Wherefore: The exhortations that follow logically result from the conditions (in verses 1-6).

“Resist the devil”: Do not submit to, fear, or flee from Satan, but stand against him (1 Peter 5:8-10). Satan cannot lead into sin against one’s will.

“Draw nigh”: God will not be unmoved; His welcoming response is always near (Deut. 4:7; Lam. 3:57; Luke 15:20).

“Hands and hearts”: The cleansing of one’s life must involve both outwards deeds and inner thoughts (Psalms 24:3-4).

Verses 7-10: In a series of 10 commands, (10 imperative verbs in the Greek text), James reveals how to receive saving grace. These verses delineate man’s response to God’s gracious offer of salvation, and disclose what it means to be humble.

James 4:7 "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

“Submit”: Literally “to line up under.” The word was used of soldiers under the authority of their commander. In the New Testament, it describes Jesus’ submission to His parents’ authority (Luke 2:51), submission to human government (Romans 13:1), the church’s submission to Christ (Ephesians 5:24), and servants’ submission to their masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18).

James used the word to describe a willing, conscious submission to God’s authority as sovereign ruler of the universe. A truly humble person will give his allegiance to God, obey His commands, and follow His leadership (Mat. 10:38).

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”: The flip side of the first command, “Resist” literally means “take your stand against.” All people are either under the lordship of Christ or the lordship of Satan (John 8:44; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 3:8; 5:19); there is no middle ground. Those who transfer their allegiance from Satan to God will find that Satan “will flee from” them; he is a defeated foe.

This is just saying that it is within the willpower of every man to resist the devil and the temptations that he puts before him. We have been given the power of attorney to use the name of Jesus to defeat the devil. The temptations that the devil brings before us are really temptations of the flesh. The temptation will leave, if we say no to it.

God will not over-rule our will. He gives us the power to choose. We must decide right, or wrong, for ourselves. The minute you emphatically say no to the devil and his temptations, he will go on to someone else and leave you alone.

Flee means leave in a hurry. A heart and will controlled by God will have no difficulty in saying no to the devil and his temptations.

James 4:8 "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse [your] hands, [ye] sinners; and purify [your] hearts, [ye] double minded."

“Draw nigh”: Pursue an intimate love relationship with God (Phil. 3:10). The concept of drawing near to God was associated originally with the Levitical priests, but eventually came to describe anyone’s approach to God. Salvation involves more than submitting to God and resisting the devil; the redeemed heart longs for communion with God (Psalms 27:8; 42:1-2; 63:1-2; 84:2; 143:6; Matt. 22:37).

“Cleanse your hands”: The Old Testament priests had to ceremonially wash their hands before approaching God (Exodus 30:19-21), and sinners (a term used only for unbelievers), who would approach Him must recognize and confess their sin.

“Purify your hearts”: Cleansing the hands symbolizes external behavior; this phrase refers to the inner thoughts, motives, and desires of the heart.

To be double minded means you cannot make up your mind just what you want to do. We see from the following verse, that we cannot ride the fence. We must decide who we will serve, God or man.

Luke 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Cleansing of the hands means the work you put your hands to must be clean, as well as your heart being pure, stayed upon God. When we make a step toward God, we will find that He has been there to help us all along. He just wanted us to reach out to Him.

James 4:9 "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and [your] joy to heaviness."

“Be afflicted”: Be afflicted and wretched. This is the state of those truly broken over their sin.

“Mourn”: God will not turn away a heart broken and contrite over sin (Psalm 51:17; 2 Cor. 7:10). Mourning is the inner response to such brokenness.

This is speaking of true repentance from the heart. Worldly laughter and worldly joy must change into a true repentance for sin. The joy that comes later is from God, not worldly pleasures.

“Weep”: The outward manifestation of inner sorrow over sin (Mark 14:72).

“Laughter”: Used only here in the New Testament, the word signifies the flippant laughter of those foolishly indulging in worldly pleasures. The picture is of people who give no thought to God, life, death, sin, judgment, or holiness. James calls on such people to mourn over their sin (Luke 18:13-14).

To be a sinner and to be truly sorry for the sin means a grieving, a mourning, and even crying for forgiveness. The new life that true repentance brings is not a life of worldly pleasures, but of Godly joy.

James 4:10 "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

(See Psalm 75:6; Matt. 23:12). This final command sums up the preceding 9 commands, which mark the truly humble person. “Humble” comes from a word meaning “to make oneself low.” Those conscious of being in the presence of the majestic, infinitely holy God are humble (Isa. 6:5).

When we are down as far as we can go, we look up and see Jesus who gave His body on the cross that we might be lifted up. He will lift us up from the depths of despair.

Psalms 147:6 "The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground."

James 4:11 "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of [his] brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."

“Speak not evil”: This means to slander or defame. James does not forbid confronting those in sin, which is elsewhere commanded in Scripture. Rather, he condemns careless, derogatory, critical, slanderous accusations against others.

“Speaketh evil of his brother ... speaketh evil of the law”: Those who speak evil of other believers set themselves up as judges and condemn them (2:4). They thereby defame and disregard God’s law, which expressly forbids such slanderous condemnation.

“Judgeth the law”: By refusing to submit to the law, slanderers place themselves above it as its judges.

Thank goodness, we are not the judge, Jesus is. How can we judge another? We are free from sin ourselves, only because we are forgiven. Judge not, that you be not judged. The very best thing we can do is live our own life as free from sin as we can, and leave the judgment up to Jesus.

We do not fully understand the law, or grace, how could we judge fairly?

James 4:12 "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?"

“One lawgiver”: God, who gave the law (Isa. 33:22). He alone has the authority to save those who repent from its penalty, and destroy those who refuse to repent.

When we pass judgment on someone else, it is as if we think we are perfect ourselves, and we are not. I love what Jesus did when the accusers had the woman caught in adultery, and were about to stone her to death. I truly believe that Jesus wrote their sins in the sand, and that is why they left.

He had said, you without sin cast the first stone. They all had to leave, because they were not without sin.

1 John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

We Christians are justified (just as if we had never sinned), in Jesus. Jesus as Judge, decides who are saved and who are lost. He is the just Judge.

Verses 13-14: This one is a fool, for he thinks he knows something that he doesn't. He presumes he has the resources to control his destiny (Prov. 27:1; Luke 12:13-21).

James 4:13 "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:"

James does not condemn wise business planning, but rather planning that leaves out God. The people so depicted are practical atheists, living their lives and making their plans as if God did not exist. Such conduct is inconsistent with genuine saving faith, which submits to God.

James 4:14 "Whereas ye know not what [shall be] on the morrow. For what [is] your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

“Know not what shall be on the morrow” (see Proverbs 27:1). James exposes the presumptuous folly of the practical atheists he condemned (in verse 13), those who do not know what the future holds for them (Luke 12:16-21). God alone knows the future. (Isaiah 46:9-10).

“Vapor”: This refers either to a puff of smoke or one's breath that appears for a moment in cold air. It stresses the transitory nature of life.

We see from this, that we do not even know whether we will be alive tomorrow or not. Our life is of God. We are born when and to whom the Lord has planned for us to be. Our death is the same. There is an allotted time for each of us to die.

We leave this house of flesh when the breath of life that God put in it leaves. We leave at the time that God has chosen, and not at our own choosing. We leave not one second before our allotted time.

Man's days are numbered as the hair on his head. Let me share what Jesus had to say about this very thing. This is about a rich man, who had no idea he was about to die. He had a very big harvest, and we will see what he did with his abundance.

Luke 12:17-20 "And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" "And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, [and] be merry." "But God said unto him, [Thou] fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

We do not have control of how long we live, God does. Make good of today, it may be the only day you have.

James 4:15 "For that ye [ought] to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

“If the Lord will”: The true Christian submits his plans to the lordship of Christ.

“This or that”: This verse teaches that God does have something for Christians to do and that they should plan accordingly. James condemns only elaborate planning that omits God (Prov. 16:9).

It is a very rash statement on our part to say what we will do tomorrow. Only God knows if we will be alive tomorrow. The only truthful statement we can make is, if it is the Lord's will, I will do it.

James 4:16 "But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."

“Boastings”: Arrogant bragging about their anticipated business accomplishments.

Why should we boast? We know that God has control over everything and everyone. Then where is there room for boasting. We do not control even our own life and death. Knowing this, we should be humble above all men. To think of our self too highly is sin. In fact, it is the same sin that got Lucifer thrown out of heaven.

James 4:17 "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth [it] not, to him it is sin."

“Sin”: The implication is that they also did what they shouldn't do. Sins of omission lead directly to sins of commission.

“To do good” here requires including God in one's plans. Omitting God is not merely bad planning; “it is sin”.

This is saying that not only the bad things we do are sin, but we can sin by omitting to do good. Sin is anything displeasing to God. When we know to do good and do not do it, it is displeasing to God. Then, it is sin. The sin here, is in full knowledge, so that would make it worse.

James Chapter 4 Question

1. What caused the fightings among them?
2. What is one of the strongest ways to make a point?
3. If we are _____ in _____, there should be no reason to fight.
4. Ye have not, because ye _____.
5. Who is James speaking to in this book?
6. Lust is of the _____, and not of God.
7. What is the extreme that they will go to, to fill their lust?
8. Instead of fighting for what we want, we should do what?
9. In verse 3, they ask _____.
10. God will not answer a prayer to fill our _____.
11. Friendship of the world is _____ with God.
12. Why is adultery such a terrible sin for a Christian.
13. The _____, or the _____, rules over the will.
14. What percentage of you must the Lord have?
15. God resisteth the _____, but giveth grace to the _____.
16. _____ the devil and he will flee from you.
17. What have we been given power of attorney to do?
18. What will cause the devil to leave you alone?
19. What does being doubleminded mean?
20. What is the mourning in verse 9?
21. Who is the Judge of the world?
22. What did Jesus do when the woman caught in adultery was brought before Him?
23. Why should we not say for sure what we are going to do tomorrow?

24. What happened to the rich man, in Luke chapter 12, who thought he would live forever?
25. What should we say regarding the things we are going to do?
26. What got Lucifer thrown out of heaven?
27. What, besides the commission of sin, is sin?