

LIVING IN THE WORLD, NOT LIKE IT

(James 4:1–12)

WHAT IS TRUE, AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Submit to God, reject fighting, and seek Godly wisdom and humility. Unchecked human desire leads to destruction. Test yourself: How do you speak to/about others?

1.) Christians: **Reject** any conflict or fights resulting from **friendship** with the world (v.1–6)

- Source of Conflict: cravings/passions/pleasures/**evil desires** (v. 1).
- Fights among Christians cannot satisfy desires. This comes from the lustful desires that remain part of humanity's fallen nature, even after redemption (v. 2–3); we take up our cross daily (Lk. 9:23).
- Where does all this come from? Friendship with the **world** that is not fitting with your calling by God (v.4)
- Scripture tells us that God does not want us to act this way and enables us to overcome this type of evil behavior (2–3, 4–6). How? Scripture (5), Holy Spirit (5), and humility (6)

2.) Christians: **Humbly submit** to God in response to His grace (6 –11)

- The main idea: submit to God (v.7)
- How? Commanded to: Submit! Resist! Draw near! Cleanse! Purify! Lament! Mourn! Weep! Turn Around! Be Humble! Speak no evil!

3.) Christians: **Be on guard** against misusing your tongues and **reject** slander due to its evil effects (11–12)

- Slandering by Christians sinfully slanders God's law.
- Failure to obey usurps God's role as the lawgiver and judge who saves and destroys. We cannot decide which laws ought to be obeyed. Sins of speech judging others are sins against God.
- **A caution for verse 12!** James is **not**, prohibiting the proper, and necessary, discrimination that every Christian should exercise against sinning brothers and sisters. Nor is he forbidding the right of the body of Christ to discipline and exclude from its fellowship those it deems to be in flagrant disobedience to the standards of Scripture (1 Cor 5, Mt. 18). James [here] rebukes jealous, contemptuous speech by which we condemn others as being wrong in the sight of God [an assessment only God can make].
- Desire for the pleasures of the world always threatens our spiritual life (see Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3). Because believers are unable to divide their loyalty between God and the world (4:4), there will continue to be this battle within them.

APPLICATION:²

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING, CHRISTIANS MUST GUARD AGAINST ...

1.) CHURCH WARS: Weapons and strategies used in church fights and quarrels. To silence slander, examine your attitude and actions!

Missiles:	Attacking church members from long range
Guerilla tactics:	Ambushing the unsuspecting
Snipers:	Well-aimed criticisms
Terrorism:	No one is immune from being hurt
Mines:	Ensuring that others will fail in their service to God
Espionage:	Using friendships to get potentially damaging information about others
Propaganda:	Using gossip to spread damaging information
Cold War:	Freezing out an opponent by withdrawing or refusing to talk to him or her.
Nuclear Attack:	Willing to sacrifice the church and implode it all if my goals or my faction's goals are not met.

James tells us the exact location of the manufacturing plants for all these weapons. The trouble is in ourselves.²

2.) FAILURE TO PRAY: James mentions the most common problems in prayer: not asking, asking for the wrong things, and asking for the wrong reasons. Do we talk to God at all? When we do, what do we talk about? Do we ask only to satisfy our desires? Do we seek God's approval for what we already plan to do? Our prayers will become powerful when we allow God to change our desires so that they perfectly correspond to his will for us (1 John 3:21–22).

3.) NOT THINKING BEFORE YOU PRAY: Unexamined prayers slip into cliches and wish lists. James confronts careless prayer. Could our prayers be open to being corrupted or contaminated by bad motives? We may barely notice when selfish desires contaminate our prayers. While it is true that God gives us permission to ask for anything (see John 14:13–14; Philippians 4:6), we need to reexamine our requests from time to time, especially those that God does not grant. Several questions can help:

- Do I really need what I have asked for?
- Am I asking for special treatment from God?
- Is it in the best interest of God's kingdom and according to his will?
- What do I plan to do when God grants my request?

¹ Craig Blomberg, *James*, vol. 16, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on NT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 170.

² Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, *James, Life Application Bible Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 92.