

James Chapter 4

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Introduction:

Following James' warning about being teachers, he then turns to other misconduct among the churches that he is writing to.

(James 4:1) What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?

A. Quarreling And Fighting Existed

- The church is designed to be a place of peace, but there were exceptions among these brethren and James gets to the heart of the cause of their **quarrels** and **fights**.

B. The Cause

- **Evil desires** that rage in the heart. The causes are inward, not outward. Not cultural. Not due to outward circumstances.
- **William Barclay** defines the scene very aptly:
James is setting before his people a basic question — whether their aim in life is to submit to the will of God or to gratify their own desires for the pleasures of this world? He warns that, if pleasure is the policy of life, nothing but strife and hatred and division can possibly follow.

(2) You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.

A. Covetousness

- His Jewish readers were all familiar with the 10th Commandment:

You must not covet your neighbor's wife. You must not covet your neighbor's house or land, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor. Deuteronomy 5:21

This is the only commandment of the Ten that addresses the heart. These believers were violating the commandment they could recite so well.

B. Jealousy

- While coveting is **wanting** what a neighbor has, **jealousy** is being upset because he has it. This, too, is not what God wants His people to be doing.

C. Solution: Ask

- One reason they don't have something that is important to them is they simply haven't **asked God** for it. Such a simple solution. Do we ask **God**?

(3) And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

A. Asking For The Wrong Reason

- Even **asking** may not get the desired results because of the motives. Personal **pleasure** is not a motive that moves God to action.

(4) You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

A. Figurative Adultery

- **Donald Fream** explains this passage:

As terrible as physical adultery is, there is an adultery more terrible yet! This is spiritual adultery. Of course, he who continues in physical adultery is also committing spiritual adultery. And what is this “spiritual adultery?”

Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. When we obeyed the Lord in full surrender through baptism, He added us to His body, the church. This church body is also called the “bride” of Christ, for whom Christ will one day come and receive unto Himself.

After a discussion of the relationship of husband and wife, in which the Spirit speaks of a pure love, being holy and without blemish, He says, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: *But I speak in regard to Christ and the Church.* So we, the members that make up the bride of Christ, are presented to Him “a glorious church, not having spot or blemish.” (See Ephesians 5 :22-33).

B. Can't Be Friends With God And World

- Jesus said the same thing about money:

No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Matthew 6:24

(5) What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the spirit God has placed within us is filled with envy?

A. The Old Testament Agrees?

- The problem here is no words like this are in the Old Testament **Scriptures** (or even the Apocrypha).
- **Donald Fream** offers his solution to this problem:
The clearer and most compatible rendering (to this writer) would be to say, “*Or do you think that the*

Scripture (as a whole) speaks to no profit? The (Holy) Spirit which God made to dwell in us longs (for us) to (the point of) envy."

After looking at a dozen or more solutions, we believe that **Fream's** is the best one.

(6) But He gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but favors the humble."

A. God Gives Grace

- James understands that a war is underway against **evil** and that God's people can receive help to win by means of God's **grace**—His unearned favor.

B. More Scripture

- James quotes from Proverbs:
The LORD mocks the mockers but is gracious to the humble. Proverbs 3:34

The Proverb is telling us that the Lord will oppose the proud—those who see themselves as the center of life and are here just for the gratification of their own senses.

(7) So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

A. Become Humble

- The amazing thing about the entire system of grace is that God allows man to choose heaven and God's love even though man has earned the **devil's** destiny. The grace of God gives man the opportunity. The will and choice of man is the key. Man must choose to be with God, so God forces no man into heaven.

B. Resist The Devil

- We are free to **resist** God or **resist the devil** and James urges his readers to **resist the devil**.

(8) Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

A. Divided Loyalties

- When Jews went to a meal, they first were required to wash their hands to get rid of any contamination from mixing with others in the market place.

The Jews, especially the Pharisees, do not eat until they have poured water over their cupped hands, as required by their ancient traditions. Mark 7:3

James was addressing Jewish people. They would have understood the practice of **washing hands**.

- Both the **hands** (outward) and the **heart** (inward) are in the view of James. Take action!

B. Come Close To God

- We have expanded the idea of **coming close to God** in the following special section.

PLEASING THE LORD

**GOD'S APPROVAL
IS BETTER THAN
MAN'S APPLAUSE**

The Jewish rabbis have distilled 613 rules from the Books of Moses to form the backbone of their teaching of Judaism. A detailed discussion of the 613 rules can be read at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613_commandments. But mindless rule- keeping is not what God desires. Rather, He wants us to seek to please Him in all we say and do.

AMONG THE ANCIENTS

Living to please God is an ancient principle. It worked for Enoch:

It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—“he disappeared, because God took him.” For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. Hebrews 11:5

Many leaders of Israel pleased the Lord. King David is an example:

For David had done what was pleasing in the LORD's sight and had obeyed the LORD's commands throughout his life, except in the affair concerning Uriah the Hittite.

1 Kings 15:5

JESUS -THE SUPREME EXAMPLE

Jesus set an example for His disciples by using a simpler rule than the 613. His goal was to *please His Heavenly Father.*

And the One who sent Me is with Me—He has not deserted Me. For I always do what pleases Him. John 8:29

Jesus was assured of His ongoing contact with the Father in Heaven by pleasing Him. Although He was in hostile territory here on earth, our Apostle from Heaven stayed connected with the Father.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

By the time the Apostle Paul had matured in his spiritual development, he wrote:

So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please Him. 2 Corinthians 5:9

Paul also told the Ephesian Church to use this same rule:

Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Ephesians 5:10

This becomes a powerful reason for personal Bible study as well as learning in groups. How can we please the Lord unless we find out what He wants from us?

Even children are taught to obey their parents because of this rule:

Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. Colossians 3:20

Being pleasing to the Lord was also Paul's rule for preaching the gospel:

For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. 1 Thessalonians 2:4

So many leaders of the churches today measure their sermons and lessons by what will be acceptable to the listeners rather than pleasing to the Lord. The “pleasing God” rule is radical!

MAKES PRAYER EFFECTIVE

John, the close friend of Jesus, connected pleasing the Lord with answered prayer:

And we will receive from Him whatever we ask because we obey Him and do the things that please Him. 1 John 3:22

SOME RESULTING CHANGES

- Lovers of God seek to find out what the Bible says about their concerns, not what they can make the Bible say by picking out words for proof. Here is an oft-repeated requirement to commit suicide with the words coming from Scripture fragments:

“Judas . . . hanged himself.” Matthew 27:5

“. . . now go and do the same.” Luke 10:37

“Hurry and do what you're going to do.”

Instead of forcing meanings into the Scriptures, we need to use them to determine what God has really said. This requires research and study.

- Instead of searching for the outer boundaries of right living, the disciple looks inward to find out which of several choices would be the most pleasing to the Lord. More than 65 years ago, a believer asked this writer if going to such-and-such an event was “too worldly.” She was under strong social pressure to attend and participate. She was asking the wrong question. She should have been seeking to determine what was pleasing to God instead of searching for outer boundaries.
- Instead of treating the Bible as a book of authorizations and seeking an authorization for each and every act of worship, use the same Bible to learn what is pleasing to God. Sometimes there is even a choice between better and best.

The synagogue system is without any authorization in Scripture, but our Lord attended regularly and spoke when invited. Some of His followers would have stayed away because the synagogue was not authorized. Jesus chose what was the most pleasing to the Father.

- As we look toward pleasing the Lord, it is much easier to accept others with the same mission. This allows us to better grasp commands like:

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. (Romans 14:1)

This was written to immersed believers at Rome who were experiencing a difference in understanding.

Now, back to the Book of James:

(9) Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. (10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up in honor.

A. Sorrow Is Needed

- James is pleading for sobriety in place of frivolousness. Sin isn't funny and should not be laughed at. Jesus had taught:

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4

B. Honor Is Coming

- Getting serious about sin now has great rewards in the future. This promise matches the one in Peter:

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honor. 1 Peter 5:6

(11) Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

A. Don't Speak Evil Of Others

- William Barclay uses his language skills on this passage:

The word James uses for to speak harshly of, or, to slander is *katalalein*. Usually this verb means to slander someone when he is not there to defend himself. This sin slander is condemned all through the Bible. It is the Psalmist's accusation against the wicked man: "You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son" (Psalms 50:20). The Psalmist hears God saying, "Him who slanders his neighbour secretly I will destroy" (Psalms 101:5). Paul

lists it among the sins which are characteristic of the unredeemed evil of the pagan world (Romans 1:30); and it is one of the sins which he fears to find in the warring Church of Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:20). It is significant to note that in both these passages slander comes in immediate connection with gossip. *Katalalia* is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential tidbits of information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves.

B. Our Job is to Obey The Law

- If a man breaks a **law** knowingly, he sets himself above the **law**. That is to say, he has made himself a **judge of the law**. But a man's duty is not to **judge the law**, but to **obey** it. So the man who speaks evil of his neighbour has appointed himself a judge of the law and taken to himself the right to break it, and therefore stands condemned.
- The discussion about **judging** is about condemning. Believers must still be fruit inspectors.

Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholiness. Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

Matthew 7:6

Any kind of decisions that we reach about another person must be fair, not hypocritical.

For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. Matthew 7:2

(12) God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

A. God Is The Judge

- He created the universe, set its foundational laws in order and gave mankind rules to live by. He saves those who obey Him and will destroy those who don't.

B. We Do Not Have The Right to Be A Judge

- Since **God alone** is the **Judge**, we have no business **judging** and so claiming to have the same **power** as **God**.

(13) Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." (14) How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone.

A. A Fictional Debate

- The opponent in this debate asserts that he is in charge of his own future and will do what is best for himself.

B. We Are Temporary

- This plan lacks something. Life is so transitory, so temporary and short-lived.

(15) What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." (16) Otherwise you are boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.

A. What Should Be Said

- Planning without factoring in the will of the Lord is **evil**.

B. Avoid Boasting

- Bragging should not be in the thought pattern or speech of the believer, because it omits the greatest factor of all: the will of **the Lord**.

(17) Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

A. Think Back

- The debater has heard this simple truth in the past (**Remember**). Maybe he has even behaved correctly previously. He must always include the will of God, even in what he says.

B. The Sin Of Taking No Action

- Forget, ignore, omit, miss, let slide, slip up. These are each ways to **sin** regarding including the will of God in planning.