

## **THE BOOK OF JAMES - 4**

### **4:1-17 Worldliness and Its Fruit**

#### **The Challenge of Chapter Four**

We must avoid being lured into involvement in factions and divisions resulting from coveting after “things” to heap upon ourselves for our own selfish ambitions and pleasures. We must have singleness of mind and drawing nearer to God and humbling ourselves before Him, avoiding prideful dependence upon ourselves, and remembering always that our lives are a brief moment in the realm of eternity.

#### **1. Faith’s Reaction to Worldliness (1-6)**

James directly addresses his congregation concerning the factions and divisions existing between them. He corrects them for lusting and coveting after things to heap upon themselves for their own pleasure. The more the people covet, the less they obtain, which causes frustration in their lives and an unwillingness to change their attitudes. James is pointing out to his congregation that they are in a condition of total prayerlessness because they are so driven too “obtain” in their own strength without turning to God or considering others. James continues by explaining why the people in his congregation are not receiving answers to their prayers. James also addresses the subject of pride and God's strong reaction to it.

#### **A. The Condition of the Church**

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

From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts (edonon: pleasures, hedonism) that war (something figured out in advance, strategic) in our members?

James chapter 4 is a sudden change from the picture found in chapter 3 of the beauty of the wisdom that comes from above. This chapter begins with the other side of the coin, showing the life governed by the flesh and its effect on those around. The saints at Jerusalem were being governed by a spirit of worldliness. They were brethren, but were acting no differently than the world in their everyday lives. They were not showing the life of the Holy Spirit to a world who needed it. God saw their worldliness as adultery (verse 4) which made them “double-minded” (verse 8).

In verse 1, James asks his congregation to isolate the source of their fightings and wars between themselves. These “wars” were reactions and divisions that have broken down the love and trust

among them. The same problem had come to Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) and later broke out in serious moral problems for the people of the church (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). These people were in the middle of a war within themselves between the spirit and the flesh. The nature of the flesh is found in the body, in its members (Romans 6:6, 18-19, 23-24).

**Jas 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.**

Ye lust (epithumeia: have a strong desire for the good or bad, an insatiable desire for the things of life), and have not: ye kill (murder), and desire to have (covet), and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

Verse 1 tells us that what these people are lusting and coveting after are their own pleasures instead of seeking after the things of God. To seek after self-gratification without the Word or the help of the Spirit of God is a never-ending cycle.

The act of “killing” here is figurative and is the same thing Jesus talked about in Matthew 5:22, 28. The hatred in the heart becomes the murder and adultery God sees. The inward thoughts and meditations are as bad as the outward acts in the eyes of God. This is what James discussed here in verse 1 where fightings and wars were erupting in the members of the congregation.

The more the people covet, the more they cannot obtain because they are doing all of this outside of the Lord’s will. They face failure and frustration but refuse to change their attitudes. This results in fighting and warring among the members of the congregation. Instead of turning to God in their situation, they continue to strive in themselves to obtain spiritual satisfaction and possessions.

If they would come to God under the right circumstances, they would have what they are asking for and peace at the same time because the blessings of the Lord makes rich and adds no sorrow with it. “You ask not” indicates a condition of utter prayerlessness. In their desire for things, they never considered the rights of others or God’s conditions for answered prayer (Matthew 7:7).

**Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.**

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume (dapanesete) it upon your lusts.

There are many reasons for unanswered prayer, and this is a major one. Many of the people in James’s congregation were praying with a wrong motive. Christians who are out of fellowship, in unbelief, or living with unforgiveness in their hearts and homes can pray, but these prayers will not be answered.

Praying to heap the results on one's fleshly desires is also praying in vain. The Greek word for consume (dapanesete) is the same word used of the prodigal son who wasted all of his inheritance on his own lusts (Luke 15:14). Lusts crowd in on our relationship with God. God wants first a relationship with us, not just to answer our prayers.

## **B. A Rebuke for the Condition of the Church**

**Jas 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.**

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world (kosmos: the world system) is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world (kosmos) is the enemy of God.

The analogy of worldliness as a type of adultery is from the Old Testament, where it is compared to idolatry (Psalm 73:27; Isaiah 54:5, 57:3-13; Jeremiah 3:20; Ezekiel 16:6-29, 23:1-49; Hosea 9:1). Idolatry is lovemaking with another god. This brings out the jealousy of God. Because God is like the husband in the relationship, the congregation becomes the wife, and therefore, the adulteresses. The feminine is appropriate for the New Testament also because the church is seen as the wife and bride of the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 5:22-32). Since the plural is used here, the majority of the congregation is in view.

The "friend" of the Lord was seen in chapter 2 with Abraham who was not only a hearer of the Word but also a doer. This person is a friend and lover of the Lord. But when a believer, espoused to the Lord, becomes a friend and lover of the world, it is spiritual adultery. The world's system (kosmos) is backed by Satan (1 John 4:4), showing that love toward the world is courting Satan himself. God will never become our enemy, but we can become His. The person who loves the world makes himself the enemy of God.

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

Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

Although "Spirit" is capitalized in the NKJV of the Bible, it is not referring to the Holy Spirit. Neither is it referring to the human spirit, but to the nature of the flesh. It is the attitude and tendency in our lives toward people when we desire to do good (Romans 7:18-21). This again brings up (from verse 4) the conflict that rages in the life of the believer whether to love the world or the Lord. Our flesh wants to be a friend of the world and our spirit desires to obey the Word and be a friend of God.

And although a portion of verse 5 is also in quotations, there is no specific Old Testament scripture that says this. However, many Scriptures imply the same thought. One specific example

is Genesis 8:21: "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. . . ." James may have been referring to this, but even more likely to the thought expressed throughout the Old Testament that "the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

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

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud (uperephanois: arrogant), but giveth grace unto the humble.

When the nature of the flesh rises up to lust after the things of the world, God gives more grace. "Where sin (nature) doth abound, grace doth much more abound" (Romans 5:10). There is no temptation that can come to us from the world, the flesh, or the devil that the Lord has not made provision and a way of escape for. Grace not only comes to us at the new birth, but also from that time on in the form of "more grace" (Romans 8:32).

The next Scripture quoted in this verse comes from Proverbs 3:34: "God resists (declares war on) the proud (arrogant). . . " Pride is an area of the flesh that comes from lust. Pride is self-sufficiency on man's part, which has always been resisted by God.

"But giveth grace to the humble." This is the "more grace" of James. The humble person realizes his weakness and insufficiency and leans on the Lord for strength. He is not afraid to receive anything from the Lord, but gives all the credit to Him. The word "proud" stresses the character rather than the identity of those whom God resists. This is the Christian who feels he is above those around him, even God; he regards himself as the standard, and everyone else falls short. God "resists" these people. The Hebrew for this word shows God in battle array, declaring war against the arrogant.

## **2. An Exhortation to the Worldly (7-12)**

James continues by explaining the benefits of submitting and drawing near to God and resisting the devil and turning from sin and doublemindedness. He warns them against judging and being critical of one another since they are all part of God's family. In addition, James explained that there is only one lawgiver and judge -- the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **A. The Call to Return to God**

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

Submit (upotasso: place under authority) yourselves therefore to God. . . .

This is a two-sided coin. One side tells us what to turn to and the other side what to turn from. Submission to God is not something God does, but something the believer does. We are responsible to submit ourselves, and then God is responsible to exalt us (Philippians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 5:6).

The strength to resist the devil comes from submission to God. Submission to God is submission to His Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit. His Word gives us the same authority and power over Satan as Jesus had in the wilderness. "It is written" is the most powerful weapon we have against the devil and his devices. This is the "sword of the Spirit," the "word (rhema: spoken word of God) of God."

. . . Resist (antistete: stand in opposition to) the devil and he will flee from you.

The enemy fleeing is the end result of standing on the Word. When we resist the devil, he will not just leave, he will flee! This is the authority of the church over the tactics of Satan. Our victory over Satan is assured by the Lord's victory over him (John 14:12).

**Jas 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 (enggisate: to draw near, worship) to God, and he will draw nigh to you. . . .

The believers in James's congregation had drawn away from the Lord through carnality. Sin had overcome their lives, and they had become hypocrites. The Greek word for "draw nigh" was used of the priests in the Old Testament who were fully qualified to enter into the presence of God (Leviticus 10:3, 21:21-23) and, in a wider sense, of man's approach to God in worship (Isaiah 29:13; Hosea 12:6). The thought is of entering into communion with the Lord. This is the humble person to whom God will give grace (4:6).

The fact that God will draw nigh to this person is a type of the prodigal son after his return home. The decision to return was the son's, not the father's. Once the decision was made, the father gave more grace and ran to meet him with great rewards. As the son drew nigh to the father, the father drew nigh to the son.

. . . Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded, , ,

The next command for the carnal believers is to "cleanse their hands." This also is a type of the Old Testament priests coming into the presence of God. They had to clean themselves before entering in to the holy of holies (Exodus 30:19-21; Leviticus 16:4). The type is carried into the

New Testament describing the cleansing from the defilement of sin (2 Corinthians 7:1). James calls the believers “sinners” in this verse, indicating the relationship of carnal believers to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 3:3; Ephesians 5: 11-17). They are in essence “sinning Christians.”

They are also called “double-minded,” making it clear that James is addressing believers. The same comparison is made in 1:8 where the “double-minded (two-souled) man is unstable in all of his ways.” Many in the congregation at Jerusalem, thought they were spiritual when actually, they were carnal and no better than unbelievers. These congregational members were guilty of trying to serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

**Jas 4:9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.**

Be afflicted (talaiporesatae: to be wretched), and mourn and weep, let your laughter (gelos: loud laughter) be turned (around) to mourning, and your joy to heaviness (katepheian: gloominess, dejection).

Here, three commands are given by James to his members. It is an open reprimand and demand for repentance. “Be afflicted” means “to be wretched.” This is a recognition of their shame and sin, which must begin any process of repentance.

Then he tells them to “mourn and weep,” which is the outward expression of their inward repentance. This is not something that is done in public, but in private before the Lord. These words are often used together in the New Testament (Mark 16:10; Luke 6:25; Revelation 18:15). This is the same type of reaction Peter had to his sin when he realized what he had done by denying the Lord (Mark 14:72).

Third, the “laughter” and “joy,” which are to be turned around, are the outward façades the members have used to cover their knowledge of sin. These are to be erased and replaced with genuine emotions of repentance before true laughter and joy can return.

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

After they are restored to fellowship, a different attitude should control them. This attitude is a product of grace thinking. This is not a self-effacement and dejection but a true humility that knows that self can produce nothing and only the Lord can produce everything. Nothing is impossible with God. This again is something a person must do to himself. God cannot and will not do it for us. When we do our part of humbling ourselves, God will do his part to lift us up and exalt us (1 Peter 5:6). This principle is taught in both the Old Testament (Job 5:11; Psalm 113: 7-8, 147:6; Ezekiel 21:26) and the New Testament.

## **B. Warning Against Judging Others**

**Jas 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 one of (mekatalaleite: against) another (aggos), 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.

This is the “wars and fightings” (4:1) which were happening between believers in the church. To “speak evil one against the other” actually means, to speak down to a brother or sister. These believers were running each other down and were critical of the family of God. Whether or not the faults were genuine was not the issue; the attitude used by the person speaking was the issue. The term is also used in 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:16 for the persecution of the Christians by non-Christians.

To run down a fellow believer is to set yourself above the law. The fulfillment of the law was found in Leviticus 19:18: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” James called this the “royal law” (2:8). Maligning a fellow member of the body of Christ is the opposite of love, and therefore infringes into God’s territory of judging and revenge (Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30). James wants them to know how deep their sin has gone in the eyes of God. They have put themselves on God’s level and are actually judging the Word God has put into the forming of the law. God has asked them to obey the law by loving their brothers and sisters, but instead they have made themselves judges of the law by disobeying it.

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

There is one lawgiver, who is able (dunamao: capable) to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

The Greek says, “Only one is the lawgiver and judge.” This phrase tells of the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus as the giver and executor over the law. The law is a demonstration of the sovereignty of God. He gives the law, executes it, and He alone has the power to bestow life and death. This puts man in a vulnerable position when he tries to play God. By judging another believer, he does just that. James asks a solemn question, “Who are you to judge another believer?”

## **3. A Rebuke Against Self-Sufficiency (13-17)**

James begins the chapter by addressing businessmen who are making their own plans based upon the economy rather than being led by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. He wants his

congregation to understand that their lives on this earth are but a “vapor.” James exhorts this segment of his congregation to turn from their dependency upon themselves back to dependency upon God.

#### **A. The Attitude of Self-Sufficiency**

**Jas 4:13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:**

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 now turns his attention to another segment of the congregation who has become worldly in their thinking: businessmen. The same double-mindedness and double standards have crept into the thinking of those of the congregation who make their living by buying and selling. Their dependence has come to rest on the economy of the nation instead of the Lord. They buy and sell based on economic forecast instead of the Holy Spirit and the values of the Word of God. They have also reached a point where they feel immune to the situations of the world and have become judges of the law. They approach a day or even a year of business with their own plans intact and never ask God in prayer what should be done.

Yet God is as interested in their businesses as He is in the church. Through the business conducted by these men, the finances come in to maintain the work of the church, which is the saving of souls and healing of lives. James wants them to know that tomorrow is not a guarantee but a privilege. Their lives will be very short, and all of their business dealings will come to an abrupt end. James is not condemning business practices (1:16-18) but the wrong motive of independence and arrogance behind them. The total disregard of God’s will is wrong no matter in what area of life we find ourselves.

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

The uncertainty of tomorrow is emphasized in this verse (Psalm 27:1; Matthew 6:34). Our present life is a vapor compared to the passing of time. A puff of steam is here only momentarily and then gone forever. Our life is the same. We may live here eighty or one hundred years, but it is still a short time in comparison to eternity. When we understand life from God’s viewpoint, we will be much more sensitive to His will in every decision we face.

#### **B. An Admonition for the Proper Attitude**

**Jas 4:15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.**

For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we will live (continue), and do this, or that.

Our attitude should be to hear from the Lord first before we blindly pursue our own plans. We should pray before any decision and be led by the Lord, because He can use our business for His eternal plans instead of our temporal ones. "If it is the will of the Lord, we will both continue and do this or that."

### **C. The Evil Result of Self-Sufficiency**

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

But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

Arrogance again, had come into the minds of the businessmen, and their rejoicing over their achievements is evil in the sight of God.

**Jas 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.**

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

These men had attended the local church for many years and know what is right and wrong but are not practicing it. This makes it a sin. Their attitude is not only alienating them from the Lord but also from unbelievers they meet each day.

The disciples in John 4 also have their minds on the business of the day instead of these souls, which needed to be saved in Samaria. Jesus warned them to "lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).

### **Chapter Summary**

James's focus is on the worldliness he sees creeping into his congregation. He strongly warns his people against being used as instruments of division through pride and judgment toward one another. He then exhorts them to have a humble heart before God and to draw near to Him. Finally, he reproveth his people, especially the businessmen of his congregation, not to depend upon their own judgment and ability because any ability they have has been given to them by God. Their natural lives on earth are so brief compared to the everlasting life they will have throughout eternity.