

TRUE FAITH IS SEEN IN ITS LOYALTIES

The results of making self the priority (4:1-3)

4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

The author has already told us that wisdom from above is peaceful, gentle, and reasonable (3:17) and that earthly wisdom is characterized by ungodly zeal, factions, disorder, and every kind of evil (3:16). He now asks an introspective question to those in the church who were experiencing conflict. "Where do quarrels (i.e. "wars" or "battles") and conflicts among Christians come from?" What is the source of the fighting that takes place in the church? Is it demonic in origin?

His answer comes as a second question: Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

Conflict cannot simply be passed off as "the Devil's work." It does not come from external pressure or the ungodliness of others. Fighting within the church is the expression of our inward pleasures seeking gratification (I Pet. 2:11).

The word translated as "pleasures" is rare in the NT, but when it appears it always has negative connotations (cf. Lk. 2:14; Tit. 3:3; II Pet. 2:13). It is worldly pleasure that opposes the Spirit and the purposes of God. It is the root of our English word "hedonism." [Hedonism is a lifestyle that pursues sensual pleasure (pleasure of the senses) above everything else (cf. Lk. 8:14).] This pleasure is pictured as an army waging a military campaign within us with the objective of getting us to fulfill our ungodly desires.

Two examples of the sinful response of thwarted desires follow.

4:2a You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

Lust and envy are both intense inward desires to have something that we don't have presently. When these desires are repeatedly frustrated,

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fighting, quarrelling, and even murder can result (Matt. 5:21-22; I Jn. 3:15). If our desire for pleasure is strong enough we will stop at nothing to get it. Yet pleasure is elusive. We may feel fulfilled for the moment only to find the soul unsatisfied in the next. There are two reasons for feeling unfilled: we don't have what we want because we don't ask God for it (cf. Matt. 7:7), or, when we ask we have evil motives so we receive nothing.

4:2b You do not have because you do not ask.

4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

A satisfied life can only come from God. Attempts to be satisfied apart from Him are bound to end in frustration. Although God gives "good and perfect gifts" (1:17) they will only satisfy us if we desire them (Heb. 11:25-26).

The people James is addressing are those who do not desire God's gifts. They ask God for things in order to "spend" what they receive on their pleasures. The prodigal son illustrates this (Lk. 15:14). They saw prayer as a means of satisfying their lusts. But God does not answer that type of prayer. Just as He will not answer our prayers if we ask for something outside of His will (I Jn. 5:14), allow bad relationships to exist (I Pet. 3:7), or allow sin to reign in our hearts (Psa. 66:18), neither will He answer our prayers to fulfill worldly pleasures, for worldly-mindedness is spiritual adultery.

4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

In the OT marriage is a symbol of the covenant established between God and His people (Hos. 2:19-20; Isa. 54:4-6; Ezek. 16:7-8). It involves a commitment of faithfulness of both parties. God chose Israel, clothed and blessed her, and made her great among the nations (Eze. 16:4-14). He loved Israel and desired her love and faithfulness in return. Israel, however, did not share God's enthusiasm over their relationship and lusted after other gods (Eze. 16:15-35; Hos. 2:2, 5; 3:1). She was an adulteress (Matt. 12:39).

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In the NT Jesus replaces the Father as the Bridegroom. Many times Jesus alludes to the wedding or wedding feast in relation to Himself. Jesus called Himself the Bridegroom (Mk. 2:18-20) as did John the Baptist (Jn. 3:26-30). In Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus is the Son for whom the Father prepares a wedding feast. The church is the bride (Eph. 5:22, 31-32; Ro. 7:4; II Cor. 11:2) whose marriage supper is presented in Revelation 19:7-8. Yet we, His bride, often behave no differently than adulterous Israel and set our affections on something other than our Savior. We have abandoned our spouse in order to be friends with the world.

"World" has a number of different meanings depending on the context (see my notes on John 3:16). Here it is the world of sinful humanity that is hostile to Christ. Friendship is a companionship, a closeness, an affinity that develops between two people. To develop a friendship with the world is to hold their values and desires. Siding with those who hate the Savior can only be interpreted as hostility toward God. One cannot embrace God and the world, they are mutually exclusive (Ro. 8:5-8). By becoming the world's friend the individual takes his stand against God, and sides with the enemy (cf. Eze. 16:35-42).

4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

Not only is worldliness spiritual adultery it is also disregard for the scriptures (contrast 1:21 - see notes). No Christian would say that the Scripture is meaningless, so they should take notice when the Scripture teaches that God jealously desires the Spirit to dwell in us.

In Greek, the statement "He jealousy desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?" could mean a number of different things:

1) The spirit could be our human spirit and the object of the verb. That is, God longs earnestly for man's spirit (which God placed in us) [to be totally devoted and loyal to Him].

2) The spirit could be our spirit and the subject of the verb. That is, our spirit (which God made to dwell in us) longs earnestly [for the world's pleasures].

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3) The Spirit could be the Holy Spirit and the subject of the verb. That is, the Holy Spirit (who God caused to dwell in us when we were saved) longs earnestly [for our total loyalty and devotion to God].

4) The Spirit could be the Holy Spirit and the object of the verb. That is, God longs earnestly for the Holy Spirit (who God caused to dwell in us when we were saved). But it is difficult to see how one member of the trinity can long for the other and what that would contribute to James' argument.

The third view is most probable (also see Acts 5:32; Ro. 8:11; Gal. 4:6; II Tim. 1:14) although #1 and #3 are almost identical in effect. The Holy Spirit was given to us and He desires for us to be faithful to God with great earnestness (see 3:14 for a brief discussion of the jealousy of God; cf. Ezek. 16:38, 42). This is consistent with Paul's statement in Gal. 5:17. God is a jealous lover. Just as a man would never conceive of sharing His wife with others, God does not share His wife with the world.

4:6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

God demands unbending loyalty but He also supplies the power to be faithful. Even when our affections turn to the world God's grace is sufficient to turn us around. He gives a greater grace (cf. my notes on Hosea 2:14-23 & Ezek. 16:60 ff. as beautiful examples of God's greater grace toward Israel). Romans 5:20b says, "Where sin abounds grace abounds even more." As antagonism toward God multiplies so the need for grace increases and the luster of grace shines even brighter. The flood of grace surpasses the flood of sin, great as that was (and is). [RWP]

In verse 6 James' supplies scripture that supports the truth he has just made. The quote is from Proverbs 3:34. In spite of man's propensity to love the world there is good news: God's still responds to the humble of heart.

Those who are proud are self-sufficient. They are on a course of worldliness, but their pride prevents them from seeing their error and turning. God will resist such people.

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The humble, on the other hand, recognize their sinfulness and turn to God for mercy. They are forgiven, reconciled, and enabled to move into the future.

The requirement of making God the priority (4:7-10)

James had pointed out the worldly-mindedness of his readers and now offers a remedy for it.

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

Submit to God: The first demand has two sides. We are ⁽¹⁾ to submit to God and ⁽²⁾ to resist the Devil.

To "submit" in Greek is formed by two words, "under" and "to place" resulting in the meaning "to place oneself under." Christians are commanded to immediately place themselves in their proper position under God. God could force submission (and someday He will - cf. Phil. 2:10, Isa. 45:24) but instead He desires willful recognition of His authority and Lordship. In verse 6 it was willful friendship with the world made people antagonists of God. This time it is their willful rejection of that friendship and subsequent alienation with God that is called for as a remedy. "One can obey God without true subordination and humility, but readiness to submit to another is a sign of true humility" (Doerksen, 101).

Resist the Devil: The flip side of the coin is to resist the Devil. Resist in Greek is literally "to stand against" indicating a definite act of resistance (cf. I Pet. 5:8). One cannot yield to Satan (submit to his demands) and submit to God at the same time. To do one action requires doing the other.

Satan is extremely powerful. Michael the archangel, the protector of Israel, is described as one of the chief princes, a leader among the angelic orders (Dan. 10:13). He will protect Israel in the Tribulation period (Dan. 12:1) and under God's authority he and his army will cast Satan from heaven (Rev. 12:7-9; Dan. 10:21). But even he dared not rebuke Satan directly (Jude 9). The believer, however, is in Christ who totally defeated the Adversary

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(Col. 2:15; Jn. 12:31; I Cor. 15:24). Based on this position, the believer needs merely to resist and Satan will flee. There is no excuse to submit to the enemy of our souls. Victory is assured.

4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Draw near to God: The fact that we need to draw near to God shows that our worldliness has estranged us from Him. The command is directed toward our will for our return to God must be wholehearted. Our willful sinful actions cause us to be separated from God and through an act of our will we are brought near again.

To "draw near" was commonly used in the OT of the priests who were the only ones qualified to approach God whose presence dwelled in the tabernacle (Lev. 10:3; 21:21-23). But it was also used of worshippers in general (Isa. 29:13; Hos. 12:6). It marks those who long to be with Him in contrast to those who desire to keep their distance.

Those who draw near to God are assured that they will not be rejected. God will draw near as they do (cf. Lk. 15:20).

Cleanse your hands: In order for a priest to draw near to God it was mandatory that he was spiritually clean. This was pictured by ceremonial washings (Exo. 30:19-21; Lev. 16:4). David wrote that those who have clean hands and a pure heart are the ones that may ascend the hill of the Lord (Ps. 24:3-4; cf. Isa. 1:16). This truth was also portrayed by Jesus when He washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:3-17; Doerksen, 103). According to James, both heart and hands are defiled and need cleansing. Hands are used symbolically of their outward action (or deeds) and the heart represents the inward life. They cannot be separated from each other - that which flows from the heart manifests itself in action (Mk. 7:20-23). In order to cleanse our hands we need to withdraw them from sinful action and stop reaching for contaminating pleasures.

Purify your hearts: This is also ceremonial language (Jn. 11:55), but here it has a moral meaning. It is a call for inner purification (I Pet. 1:22; I Jn. 3:3). Outward action alone is meaningless to God.

Christians are called sinners because they are not living up to God's standards. They are double-minded (literally "two-souled" δίδυμος *dipsuchos*) because the struggles in their mind lead them to different conclusions and different levels of devotion to God (cf. 1:8). The waters of their minds are muddied so they can't see clearly. They are trying to serve two masters. They need to purify their minds, commit themselves to the things of God and stop vacillating between their love of God and the world.

Three necessities for cleansing follow:

The first necessity for cleansing is to be miserable and mourn and weep.

4:9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom.

"Miserable" is the verb form of the adjective that Paul used in Romans 7:24 when he said "wretched man that I am". It expresses an inward feeling of shame and guilt over sin. As a command, it means something like realize how sinful you really are and become miserable over it.

The second necessity for cleansing is to let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom.

Mourning and weeping are natural outward manifestations of a heart that is wretched. It is grief at a level that cannot be concealed. Weeping is the resultant flow of tears.

In Matthew 5:4 Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Paul, in writing to the sinful church of Corinth, said "You are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn over the sin?" (I Cor. 5:2)

Mourning is an outward expression of deep grief. Laughter in itself isn't bad, but when it is taking the things of God lightly and enjoying the

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pleasures of sin it is wrong. Moses chose not "to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25).

Laughter looks at the world's loud gaiety which friends of the world enjoy. Their hilarity will become mourning when the realization of their folly seizes them (Prov. 10:23; Ecc. 7:6) (Hiebert, 265).

Gloom speaks of the downcast appearance of a heavy heart. It suggests dejection because of shame. It is the picture of the publican in Luke 18:13.

4:10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

The third necessity for cleansing is humility before God.

We return to the starting point in verse 6 "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

The aorist passive could be understood as a middle voice; therefore, it could either be "humble yourselves" (middle) or "allow yourself to be humbled" (by God - passive).

By using the word "Lord" James reminds the believers of their relationship to God as His servants (I Pet. 5:6; Matt. 18:4). In the presence of God men recognize and admit their worthlessness and become humble.

Jesus reminds His hearers "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk. 14:11). Self-exaltation leads to ruin, humility brings divine exaltation (Matt. 23:12; Job 5:11; Psa. 113:7-8; 147:6; Ezek. 21:26).

TRUE FAITH IS SEEN IN ITS AVOIDANCE OF PRESUMPTION

presumptuous judging

4:11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and

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judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.

4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

True humility (4:10) is the recognition of who we really are. Humble people desire to submit to God and know that if it were not for the grace of God they would be desperately lost, without hope, and excluded from the blessings of life in Christ. This humility will come out in the way we interact with others.

The verb "speak against" is literally "to speak down on" and is "critical, derogatory speech that is maliciously intended to influence others against the person being spoken against. . . It is the temper that literally calls attention to the faults of others while minimizing their virtues." (Hiebert, 267). The verb is formed from two words in Greek, "to speak" and the preposition "down" or "against." The evil lies in the preposition. The person speaking is not lying about the other person but what he is saying is uncharitable. He has a hostile intention of eroding the character of the other person away, usually in order to build himself up in the eyes of others. But this hostility wasn't one sided. The people James is addressing were speaking against one another. There was retaliation.

We will always see flaws in others but the way that we respond to those flaws is important. If we speak to someone about their character, weaknesses, or behavior our motivation, hope, and purpose should be that they grow in Christ. This is our Christian responsibility. Paul said, "if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2). However, if we speak to someone because we are angry, upset, hurt or offended by what they did then our primary concern is to resolve our own grievances not to further their growth in Christ. In such cases we need to be aware that our critical spirit, condescending attitude, or anger is as great a sin as their offense. Due to this danger the Bible is full of warnings about speaking against others (Matt. 7:1; Lk. 6:37; Ro. 14:13 for example).

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Galatians 5: 13-15 says, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another."

The seriousness of this sin is seen in its relation to the law. The Christian is not under the law of Moses, but all men are accountable for the *principles* found there, for the law expresses the nature and will of God (also see II Tim. 3:16-17). Anything that is contrary to the law *in principle* is sin. Jesus summed up the Law in Matthew 22:37-40 by saying, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." This summarizes the heart of God (cf. Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5; Mk. 12:30-31; Gal. 5:14). James has already alluded to this same principle of the law which finds its deepest expression in the gospel. The gospel, he says is the law of liberty (1:25), the royal law that loves one's neighbor as himself (2:8).

The one who speaks evil against another person does not love them. By ignoring the law of love he is actually judging the law for he treats it as if it were incorrect and not worth following. In essence he places himself above the law and usurps the position of the Lawgiver who gave it. "To seek to change or abrogate the law is to seek to take the place of God" (Doerksen, 108).

Such arrogance needs to face the solemn reality: "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy." (4:12)

There is only One Judge and it's a grave sin to assume that you are in that position. God alone has the prerogative to save or destroy (Matt. 10:28; Mk. 12:9; Matt. 1:21; 18:11; I Cor. 1:21).

But who are you who judge your neighbor?

[presumptuous planning](#)

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4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

There are no connective words that help us define the relationship of this verse to what has just preceded, so verse 14 and following could be either a new point of instruction or simply give further illustration of worldly-mindedness. Worldliness can be defined as a friendship with the world but it can also be seen in an attitude of self-sufficiency.

The people James is now addressing are those that believe they are able to plan their future. They decide the date of their departure for business, where they will go, how long they will be there, and even the profit they expect to make.

"We shall. . ." expresses the confidence with which they believe that their plans will be completed. They assume that the events of the whole year are under their control. Based on past successes they are confident that they have whatever is necessary to accomplish all that they desire. We can assume that they also viewed their own abilities as the source of their success, not the grace of God.

This same attitude is reflected in the parable in Luke 12:16-21.

4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

These people are presumptuous on two counts; First, they think that they know what will happen tomorrow. Secondly, they are disregarding the uncertainty of human life.

Proverbs 27:1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." It is pride that assumes that we have control over our own destiny. It is foolishness to think that every day will be the same.

Those who know God are to trust in His care and providence. Jesus said, "Do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself.

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Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt. 6:33-34). Recognition that we do not know what tomorrow holds should not cause us to be anxious for Jesus promises that God knows our needs and will supply them (Matt. 6:25 ff.).

Secondly, their presumption is seen in that they assume that their life will last through the year which is something that they have no control over.

The Bible repeatedly speaks of the brevity of life.

Psalm 102:11: *My days are like a lengthened shadow; And I wither away like grass.*

Job 7:7: "Remember that my life is but *breath*, My eye will not again see good.

Job 7:9: "When a *cloud* vanishes, it is gone, So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.

Psa. 103:15-16: *As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more; And its place acknowledges it no longer.*

A vapor is like a puff of smoke or steam that can be seen for a while but is gone in an instant. "How foolish therefore to ignore the unchanging plans of God and then proudly plan for their life that is as fleeting as a wisp of vapor!" (Hiebert, 277)

4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that."

In contrast to verse 13, verse 15 forms the proper attitude. It is not assumed that the believer will know what the Lord's will is for the following day but that whatever His will is the believer will joyfully accept it above his own plans. "If the Lord wills" leaves life in God's hands.

At times it may be good to give verbal testimony of our submission to God by saying "If the lord wills," however, this is not intended to be a

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formula that should be recited before every plan. Rather it expresses an attitude that should accompany our plan making. It should be recognized that both our plans and our lives are dependant upon God.

It should also be noticed that this verse does not forbid planning. "We should do this or that" indicates we have a plan. But that plan is approached with the knowledge that all is dependent upon God.

presumptuous attitude

4:16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

Instead of boasting in God these professing believers boast in their prideful assumptions. They brag about what they will do though their plans do not include God. Such boasting is evil.

4:17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Verse 17 forms the conclusion for this section and a bridge for what follows. The believer should know that God plans our days (Proverbs 16:3, 9) and that boasting in what we will accomplish is evil (Isa. 56:12; Lk. 12: 47; Matt. 25:1-13).

TRUE FAITH IS SEEN IN ITS REACTION TO INJUSTICE

Another manifestation of worldliness comes to the forefront in verses 1-6, namely, the love of riches and the subsequent oppression of the poor. However, James' primary concern is not the attitude of the rich but the response of the believer that suffers under oppression. In both cases the one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin (4:17).

the oppression and cruelty of the rich

The OT is filled with denunciations of social injustice (Isa. 10:1-4; Amos 4:1-3; 8:4-10; Mic. 2:1-5; Mal. 3:1-5). James, like the prophets of old,

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condemns the actions of the rich and announces the judgment that they will receive.