
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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James 4: 1-6: “God hates Pride!”

General idea: Our human nature loves to be in competition and fight, but God has a higher call for us. James takes us directly to the root cause of fights and quarrels, wars and conflict; they all come from one source, and that is the conflict that resides in our own hearts! Our desires are at war with the precepts of our Lord and the call He gives us. This is the war of good and evil of man versus God, of our sinful nature and that of the new life in Christ. These desires converge and conflict with the desires of other people and escalate into interpersonal conflict and all out war.

We lust after what we do not have, so it controls us; that which is wrong becomes our passion and quest. Then we become jealous of others, hoarding what we have and coveting what they have. We engage in fighting like wild dogs and tear at one another in conquest of the demented goals we have. In all of this, we ignore God and forsake His call and wisdom. When we do ask of Him, our motives are skewed and our passions misdirected, as we seek personal pleasures and the self, not Christ and His mission for us.

Then James tells us out right that our desires which are contrary to God's desires are *adultery*; we are cheating on Him with the mistress of our notions and evil plans. We become enemies of the very God who created us and loves us and is holding a perfect plan for us which we forsake for futility. God wants us to be His friends, not His enemies, but the choice is ours to determine, and the path is ours to undertake.

Vs. 1-3: James is addressing the oppressed poor who are in insurrection, displaying violence toward their masters. James is telling us that our selfish inclinations that bubble up from our pride are causing divisions, destroying our relationships, and giving our Lord a bad name. Our warring attitudes come from the war we have within our very own hearts and minds. We are seeking the world's wisdom and ways and not God's way. It may not be popular to seek real Christ-centered wisdom, as the world's wisdom tends to be more appealing just as it was in James' time (James 2:14-26; 3:13-18). But, what will that get you in life and in eternity?

- *What causes.* James is stating a rhetorical question to direct their attention away from their false mindsets and aligned them with God's. Such things are contrary to God; they are not from Him, but rather from our sinful nature and evil desires!

- *Wars* is *hyperbole* here (exaggeration emphases), meaning great military campaigns like the Cesar's. Here, it refers to the war of desires wavering between options, and the seeking of destructive passion and not wisdom. Plato stated that all wars are from the desires of our physical body, our lusts as well as our hearts. Jewish wisdom stated that our "evil impulses" will dominate all actions unless it is controlled.
- *Fights* are the divisions we have with one another; they cause strife and never solve the underlying problem. The root is the same: envy and evil desires. Consider this; if we choose to act in love from the precepts of 1 Corinthians 13, then fights will not occur or even be considered! Real love creates perfect peace! Imagine your life and connections at peace or having more peace because of the love you bring others!
- *Murder*, here, is *hyperbole* and rhetorical, and refers to hate and the logical ends of quarreling and fights. James' readers had not murdered anyone literally, at least not yet! But, being exposed to violent teaching will lead to violent attitudes, and then actions (James 3:13-18).
- *Desires*, refers to *hedonism*, what gets in the way of our growth in Him and His call for us. We are to desire the gifts from the Lord (1 Cor: 12) not the gifts of the world. We know our desires are off His path when they do not align with His love, grace, and teachings. Personal desires are usually the target toward which we shoot our lives. Honesty is crucial to seeing them. (For more info see study James 1:12-18.)
- *Covet*. James' readers desired violence, even craving it and rationalizing that it was OK. We have to be careful that we do not reason and rationalize our desires, thus making them happen. This would show we do not realize God is the One who gives wisdom and gives it liberally. The counter to coveting is to be in prayer seeking reconciliation and not division. They were seeking wealth and status to satisfy lustful desires, but such things only bring temporary relief and not meaningful or eternal outcomes (Prov. 10:24; 13:23; Phil. 4:12).
- *Cannot obtain*. We cannot take hold of God's promises when we are full of false promises or selfish desires. Nor, can we follow Him when we are full of envy, because envy blocks our gratitude toward Him for what He has given us. It may seem God gives to those who are evil and selfish, but remember, what they receive is mere straw to what you will receive for faithfulness!
- *You do not ask* indicates the neglecting of prayer and seeking our way to deal with life and conflict, not God's wisdom and call. It was Jewish custom to ask God for daily needs as well as crisis intervention; it is foolish not to do so. We are called to seek Him and His ways, and not envy (Matt. 6:11, 33; 7:7-8; John 5:30; James 1:5).

- *Amiss* is to miss the mark God has for us—like the definition of sin. God will not grant us our requests when we are filled with bad motivations or seeking what is wrong or bad for us and/or others. Nor, are we to use faith or prayer to manipulate, deceive, or conspire (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6).
- Prayer is far better than fighting, as we are seeking God. He will give us what we ask. However, if we do not receive it, then it was not meant for us and not in our best interests!

When we are only concerned with pleasing ourselves and living for the pleasures of life, we miss out on what Christ has for us. Even when we seek to please others, we tend to be only seeking to lift ourselves up. So, we need to watch our attitudes, even how and what we are praying for, to make sure they are centered on His goodness not our selfish desires. If not, we show that we are self-centered and just end up hurting others and forsaking God's feelings and call.

However, our call is clear and our path is lit. His light will keep us from tilting into temptation and into disobedience. If we really want homes that honor God and churches that teach and model His precepts, we must ask ourselves if our deepest desires and pleasures in life are devoted to pleasing Christ or pleasing ourselves. We need to take a hard look at our motivations and see how we are honoring or perhaps, dishonoring God.

Vs. 4-5: We are at war and war stands for we are right; but, in fact, we are wrong. Only God is right. We have to see where our aim in life is pointed; is it at God, His love, and His precepts or the foolishness of our whims? When we ignore His Scriptures, we forsake our loyalty and betray our loving Lord. He is faithful with us; we need to remain faithful in Him and not allow our desires to rule our hearts and minds.

- *Adulterers:* This means spiritual betrayal. In the OT, it meant being called to serve God in a covenant with Him, then rebelling in disobedience with idols (Jer. 31:32; Hos. chaps 1-3; James 2:23). This means adultery, betraying God by the mistress of our malevolent desires and loving the world rather than God. It also means claiming to be friends with God and then being disobedient with His principles. We are giving our love away cheaply and to the wrong place or person! Don't give the world love that is meant for Christ!
- *Enmity with God* means to be unfaithful, spiteful, and immoral. It is to share the world's values, rejecting Him and His truth. We are at *enmity* with God when we are being rigid, inflexible to others, and seeking to squash His work in other's lives as well as ours (Eph. 4:30).
- *Makes himself* indicates our self-directed motivations that are contrary to God's, and are, as the Jewish wisdom stated, "evil impulses."

- *Scriptures says* refers to not a specific passage, but the veracity of God's Word as to the consequences of sin (Gen. 6:3; 8:21; Ex. 20:5; Deut. 4:24; Isa 55:1; Gal. 6:1).
- *In vain* means that we allow our evil impulses to override the principles of God's Word (1 Pet. 1:7).
- *Yearns jealously*. God calls us to seek Him and to desire His ways; thus, we ought to and should long for God and His wisdom and truth, and not the ways of the world (Psalm 42:1-2; 63:1; 84:2). Also, in this context, it refers to the jealousy of God; He is a jealous God and will not tolerate any competition (Ex. 20:5; Duet. 32:21; Joel 2:18).
- *Humble*. This passage quotes Proverbs 3:34, and is referring to submitting to the sovereignty of God. God's plan for our life is far better than any desire—evil or good—we could ever have; thus, it is logical and beneficial to be humble in Him (1 Pet. 5:5)!

Our desires can be overwhelming at times, and the world seems to fuel them more and more. But, we still have faith. God will increase our faith when we develop more dependence on Him and less dependence upon ourselves. To get to this, we must abandon ourselves to Christ as LORD, and never hesitate with worldly reasoning and logic, bow to our emotions, or hide in our own thinking and rationalizations. Our drive must be to see Christ's *supremacy* so we follow Him and lift Him up as LORD and supreme in our lives (Col 1:18)! Reaching this point will be when our interests are surrendered to His; His interests will be mine (Romans 1:1; Gal. 1:5; 2:20-21). We will not even want our own pleasure because it is more gratifying to serve Him (John 15:13; 1 Cor. 9:22; 2 Cor. 12:15)!

If a new person comes to visit your church, what would they observe? Would they see your church as an example of how to love and care for one another or how to bicker and fight with one another? What about your home, your family? Is it one that quarrels or one that loves? What glorifies our Lord and leads to a better life for us: conflict and violence or love and peace?

Ask yourself this: *what brings about the quarrels warring at you and your church or home?* Then commit a way, His way, to dissolve the fight and replace it with His love so it overflows to those around you! Why is it so hard to get along with other people who are also in Christ, whom He loves, whom He has called and saved and empowered, too? The answer is what is motivating our hearts and directing our passions! The choice, His way or our way, will determine how every relationship and encounter we have in life will be affected! The result is we will seek God's wisdom and live our lives in love, bringing growth and reconciliation.

It is good for a car to be *on* a road; that same car should not be *under* or *in* the road. If so, it is useless. The church is called to be salt in the world, to be in

the world as His influencers (Matt. 5:13-16). However, the church is not called to have the world in it or to be influenced by it! We can overcome; we have the ultimate tool, the Holy Spirit, within us. Let us live as we should, and seek to please God, forsaking our warring ways. God gives us the strength! He stands up with us and gives us the ability to win the war of the flesh so our sinful nature is subdued and we are victorious in Him. It all comes down to pride; will it belong to His pride or will we dwell in our pride? Pride in Him is amity, like a kinship of lions. Pride without Him is making the lion our enemy; pride lifts us up to think we are a god and do not need the one true God as our Lord. We must allow His grace to penetrate our envy and desires so we are poured out to Him and not to ourselves or the world. He will make us more than conquerors, but we have to seek Him and allow Him to do so (Rom. 8)!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there a sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Why do you suppose it is so difficult for God's people to get along? Consider all the fights and divisions and denominations throughout church history to the conflict in your church right now.
2. Have you ever considered that when your desires are bad, you are cheating on Him? Literally, it is adultery against God by the mistress of our malevolent desires!

3. Why do you suppose our human nature loves to be in competition and conflict? What can you do to seek God's higher call and prevent and solve the fights, quarrels, wars, and conflict?
4. Do you think that using a rhetorical question to get their attention worked for James? What needs to happen to get you away from false mindsets and be aligned with God's?
5. How have you seen conflicts in the church that seem like the logistics and tactics of military campaigns?
6. Do you think most Christians are deliberately seeking destructive passion and not wisdom when they fight in church? Why, or why not?
7. What desires and passions have you had trouble with that get in the way of our growth in Him?
8. How does neglecting prayer and seeking our own way of dealing with life and conflict get us ahead in life and with God's good graces? Then, why do so many people do it?
9. How do bad motivations or seeking what is wrong or bad for us and others cause a bad reputation to the church?
10. What causes quarrels in you and your church or home? What can you do to commit to a way to stop them before they escalate?
11. How can you take a hard look at your life's motivations and see how you may be honoring or perhaps dishonoring God?
12. Our desires can be overwhelming at times, and the world seems to fuel them more and more. So, what can you and your church do?

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What the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted. Proverbs 10:24