

## 4. James 4 of a Verse by Verse Study of James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter

James 4 continues with subjects that define the very nature of the inner struggle and ultimate victory required of Christians. A true Christian must simultaneously war against unlawful desires within and create no friendships toward the world without. The Christian must submit to God and resist the devil. Finally, the Christian must not judge one another and do what is good. All the principles of James are dichotomous choices that set strict parameters in defining Christian living.

### ***The War against Unlawful Desires***

*4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Christianity—a religion of love and especially, one of love of the brethren—should not be beset with fights and quarreling. Yet fights, quarrelings, and divisions often beset the church. Such was the case of the church at Corinth where Paul chastised that church in 1 Cor 3:3, “3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?” The works of the flesh described by Paul focus attention on seven divisive sins in Gal 5:19-21:

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; **hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy**; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

God will not give us what we ask as long as we aim our gifts with the wrong motives toward fighting with the brethren. The pleasures of fighting and quarreling turn to excitement and vanity as we build ourselves up at the expense of the brethren.

### ***Friendship with the World***

*4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:*

*"God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble."*

“Adulterous people” describes Christians unfaithful to Christ. Unrighteous acts disqualify people as part of the bride of Christ as in Rev 19:6-8:

*"Hallelujah!  
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.  
7 Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory!  
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.  
8 Fine linen, bright and clean,  
was given her to wear."*

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

The dichotomy of the previous verses continues. Friendship with the world is hatred toward God, and a friend of the world is an enemy of God. The root cause of this predicament is envy. James created

the foundation for this conclusion in James 3:14-16:

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

The core principles guiding a Christian's interaction with the world comes from 1 John 2::15-17:

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

### **Submission to God**

*7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

Once again, James sets a strict dichotomy, submit to God; resist the devil. When we do resist the devil, he will flee from us. This specific command echoes the response of Jesus to the devil in Matt 4:3-4:

3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

In addition, Matthew recorded Matt 4:6-7:

6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. . . .

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Finally, in Matt 4:9-11:

9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

*Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

The remedy for these sins of envy is the same for all digression from God: obey and repent. Wash your hands, purify your hearts, grieve, mourn, and wail are commands. Changing your laughter to mourning and your joy to doom are characteristic of repentance. Paul wrote in 2 Cor 7:9-10:

9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

If we humble ourselves before the Lord, he will lift us up.

### **Judging One Another**

*11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?*

Both Peter and Paul join James in condemning slander. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:1, "2:1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." Paul concurred in Col 3:8, "8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." Slander occurs from an attitude of superiority where one would dare lift himself to pass judgment upon a fellow Christian. Only God can judge. Jesus had taught almost these exact words. Jesus said in Matt 7:1-2, "1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

### ***Doing What Is Good in an Uncertain Life***

*13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.*

We should live our lives knowing that we face eternity each moment. This life is vaporous. We must place ourselves over to the certain will of God. To say that I am going to do this or that or to say that I have this or that is boasting and such boasting is sin.

*17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

In the face of all these admonitions, there is an eternal principal at work: he who knows to do good and does not do it, sins.