

James 4

Roxborough Bible Chapel

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OUTLINE

- **Verses 1-5 - Covetousness and worldliness causes conflict**
- **Verses 6-10 – God’s help and cure for covetousness and worldliness if and when there is true repentance.**
- **Verses 11-12 - Speaking evil of the brethren**
- **Verses 13-17 – Planning independently of God**

Introductory Comments

- Why is there fighting among God's people?
- Why are there so many unhappy homes and so many churches torn by division?
- Why are there such bitter feuds among Christian workers in the homeland, and conflicts among missionaries abroad?
- Let's see what James tells us in his book (chapter 4).

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Covetousness: Its Cause

4:1 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for pleasure* that war in your members?

- There *are* wars and fights among Christians.
 - Christians? – Yes
 - It arises from the strong desires within us which are constantly struggling to be satisfied – This happens when our evil nature takes control of us.
 - Lust to accumulate material possessions.
 - Drive for prestige (pride).
 - Craving for pleasure.
 - Craving for gratification of bodily appetites.
 - Pride, selfishness, yielding to Satan and our evil nature.

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Covetousness: Its Cause

4:2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

- We are never satisfied. We always want more.
 - Our lust becomes so powerful that we trample on those who would stop us from getting what we want.
 - James says, “You murder...” used in a figurative sense since we hardly ever literally kill. But the anger, jealousy, and cruelty which we show are murder in it’s infancy stage.
- We covet and cannot obtain.
 - We want to have more things and better things than others. In our attempt, we find ourselves fighting and quarreling with one another.
- Prayer is the right approach to this problem.
 - “Don't argue. Don't fight. Pray.”
 - James says, “You do not have because you do not ask.”
 - Instead of taking these things to the Lord in prayer, we usually try to get what we want by our own efforts.
 - If we want something which we do not have, we should ask God for it.
- If we do ask, and the prayer is unanswered, what then?
 - Usually, this means that our motives were not pure.
 - We did not want these possessions for the glory of God or for the good of our fellow men. We wanted them for our own selfish enjoyment. We wanted them to satisfy our natural appetites.
 - God does not promise to answer such prayers.

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Worldliness

4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- 4:4 James condemns the extreme love of material things as spiritual adultery.
 - God wants us to love Him first and foremost.
 - Covetousness is a form of idolatry.
 - We value material things above the will of God.
- Worldliness is also enmity with God.
 - The world = the system which man has built up for himself in an effort to satisfy the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (not the planet on which we live).
 - There is no room for God or His Son.
 - It may be the world of art, culture, education, science, or even religion.
 - The name of Christ is unwelcome or even forbidden, except, of course, as an empty formality.
 - To be a friend of this system is to be an enemy of God.
 - How unthinkable it is that believers should ever want to walk arm-in-arm with the world that murdered their Savior!

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Covetousness and Worldliness

4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

- James seems to be quoting from the OT; yet these words are not found anywhere in the OT, or even in the Apocryphal books.
- There are two possible explanations:
 - First of all, while the exact words are not found in the OT, James may have been quoting them as being the general teaching of the Scripture.
 - The second solution of the problem is given by the RV. There the verse is broken into two questions: "Or think ye that the Scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?" Here the thought is that in condemning the competitive, worldly spirit, the Bible is not wasting words.
- The second major difficulty in verse 5 is whether the spirit is the *Holy Spirit* (as in the NKJV) or the spirit of passionate *jealousy*.
 - If the former is meant, then the thought is that the Holy Spirit whom God caused to dwell in us does not originate the lust and jealousy which cause strife; rather He **yearns** over us with jealousy for our entire devotion to Christ.
 - If the latter is intended, then the meaning is that the spirit that dwells in us, that is, the spirit of lust and envy, is the cause of all our unfaithfulness to God.

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Covetousness and Worldliness: Its Cure

4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "GOD RESISTS THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

- **4:6 But He gives more grace.**
 - Now we learn that we are not left to deal with the lusts of the flesh in our own strength. Thank God, **He gives more grace** or strength whenever it is needed.
 - Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - Deuteronomy 33:25 ...as your days, so shall your strength be.
- He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase,
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.
 - —*Annie Johnson Flint*
- To prove that God gives grace as it is needed, James quoted Proverbs 3:34, but here there is the added thought that it is **to the humble**, not the proud, that this **grace** is promised. **God resists the proud**, but He cannot resist giving grace to the broken in spirit.
 - Proverbs 3:34 Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble.

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Covetousness and Worldliness: Its Cure

4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

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.

4:9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom.

4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

- James has thus been pointing out the sins of the saints (covetousness, worldliness, etc.)
- If the Spirit of God has convicted you of these sins in your life and you have been humbled by God's grace shown to us, then we should be asking, "What shall we do?"
- In verses 7-10, we find six steps to be followed when there is true repentance.
 - Submit to God.
 - Resist the devil.
 - Draw near to God.
 - Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
 - Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
 - Humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord.
- If the Lord is convicting us of our sinfulness and we have a repentant heart, be careful that the devil does not distract us from carrying through with these 6 steps (Resist the devil is #2 above) so that the Spirit of God is not quenched.

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Speaking Evil of the Brethren

4:11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

4:12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

- The next sin James deals with is speaking evil against a brother.
 - Three questions we should answer before indulging in criticism of others
 - What good does it do your brother?
 - What good does it do yourself?
 - What glory for God is in it?
- The “royal law of love” says that we should love our neighbor as ourselves.
 - Matthew 22:36-40
 - 36 "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 This is *the* first and great commandment. 39 And *the* second *is* like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
 - To speak evil against a brother, or to judge his motives, is the same as speaking against this law and condemning it as worthless.
- To break a law deliberately is to treat it with disrespect and contempt. It is the same as saying that the law is not good, and not worthy of obedience. “He who refuses obedience virtually says it ought not to be law.”
- Now this puts the one who speaks evil of a brother in the strange position of being a judge rather than one who is to be judged. He sets himself up as being superior to the law rather than subject to it.
- But only God is superior to the law; He is the One who gave it and the One who judges by it. Who then has the audacity to usurp the *place* of *God* and judge another?

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Planning Independently of God

4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";

4:14 whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

- **4:13** The next sin which James denounces is self-confident, boastful planning in independence of God (vv. 13-16).
 - He pictures a businessman who has a complete plan laid out for the future. Notice the details. He thought about:
 - the time (**today or tomorrow**)
 - the personnel (**we**)
 - the place (**such and such a city**)
 - the duration (**spend a year there**)
 - the activity (**buy and sell**)
 - the anticipated result (**make a profit**).
 - What is missing in this picture? – God!
 - Note for instance, the "I wills" of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:13-14: "For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'"
- **4:14** It is wrong to plan as if **tomorrow** were certain. We do not know what tomorrow holds. Our lives are as frail and unpredictable as a "puff of smoke"

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Planning Independently of God

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

4:16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

- God should be consulted in all our plans, and they should be made in His will.
- We should live and speak in the realization that our destinies are in His control.
- We should say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."
 - We find the Apostle Paul saying in Acts 18:21, "I will return again to you, God willing"
 - He also wrote in I Corinthians 4:19, "I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills."
 - Sometimes Christians employ the letters "D.V." to express this sense of dependence on God. These letters are the initials of two Latin words, *Deo volente* meaning *God willing*.
- But now you boast in your arrogance, writes James.
 - They had boastful plans for the future, confident that nothing would interfere with their time schedule, masters of their own fate.
 - All such boasting is evil because it leaves God out.

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Planning Independently of God

4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

- In this context, **to do good** is to take God into every aspect of our lives.
 - Living moment by moment dependence on Him.
 - If we know we should do this, yet fail to do it, we are clearly sinning.
 - In any area of life, the opportunity **to do good** makes us responsible to do it.
 - If we know what is right, we are under obligation to live up to that light.
 - Failure **to do so is sin** against God, against our neighbors, and against ourselves.

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Summary and Conclusions

- Summary
 - Covetousness, worldliness and conflict
 - Its cause and cure
 - Evil-speaking
 - Planning without consulting the Lord.
- Challenge Questions:
 - Am I continually anxious to get more or am I content with what I have?
 - Am I envious of those who have more than I?
 - Do I pray before purchasing?
 - When God speaks to me, do I submit or resist?
 - Do I speak against my brothers?
 - Do I make plans without consulting the Lord?