

Theme: Humble Loyalty to God

James 4:1–12

¹ Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires* for pleasure that war in your members?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.³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.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.⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom.¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

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

Consider

4:1–2a. From where does conflict (“wars and fights”) come? What kinds of desires drive conflict? Give a few examples of this kind of conflict.

Reread James 3:13–18. In contrast to the source of conflict, what is a source of peace and what does it look like (17–18)?

4:2b–3. James gives two reasons that you lack the things that you desire:

- Because you don’t _____.
- Because you ask _____.¹⁷

What motivation drives bad requests?

4:4. How does this verse define worldliness?

Why do you think God calls those who desire friendship with the world “adulterers and adulteresses?” In what way does the sin of adultery parallel the treachery of worldliness?¹⁸

4:5. Why do you think James speaks about God’s jealousy for us right after verse 4? What is God’s opinion of split loyalties (see Deuteronomy 5:9; Joshua 24:19–20)?

Note: Jealousy refers to a desire for what is rightfully yours. We belong to God, so it is right for him to be jealous for us. Jealousy in this context does not carry the negative connotation of wanting something that belongs to someone else.

4:6. Contrast the way God treats the proud person and the humble person.

4:7. What should our attitude be toward God? How does His gift of grace (4:6) motivate us to submit to Him? Contrast this with the attitude we should have toward the devil.

What might it look like to “resist the devil”?¹⁹ What promise does God give those who resist the devil?

4:8. What promise does God give to those who draw near to Him?

How do you “cleanse” and “purify” the sin in your heart? What role does confession play for the believer who wants to draw close to God (See 1 John 1:7–9)?

4:9–10. What attitude should believers take when facing the reality of their sin? Why do you think God encourages us to mourn?

What happens when we humble ourselves before God?

4:11–12. How does James say we should speak to other believers about their sin? Contrast this attitude about the faults of others with the attitude we ought to have when helping others (see Galatians 6:1).

Ask Yourself

Where do I normally place the blame for conflicts in my life?

¹⁷ The word translated “amiss” in the NKJV (*kakōs*) can also be translated “wrongly” or even “wickedly.”

¹⁸ In Isaiah 1:21, the prophet calls wicked Jerusalem a “harlot,” but notice the hope God gives in 1:18–20!

¹⁹ See Matthew 4:1–11 for how Jesus dealt with temptation from the devil.

James references our passions, desires, or pleasures several times in these verses. What are the desires of my heart? How are my heart's desires influencing my feelings and actions for good or for evil?

How is pride connected to worldliness and humility connected to godliness?

What do I love so much that I am willing to sin to get it?

What should I do if my desires are disordered or inappropriate? How do I know if I'm asking "amiss?"

What is my attitude towards the world and worldly things? Would I be considered a friend of the world or a friend of God?

List some ways God has shown abundant grace in my life or in the lives of those around me.

Do I treat my sin with the seriousness it deserves? Do I deal with my sin regularly? When was the last time I confessed sin to God?

Do I take God's place in judgment against others? Or do I allow the Holy Spirit to convict of sin?

Cross References

Isaiah 1:18–21

¹⁸ "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land;

²⁰ But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

²¹ How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; Righteousness lodged in it, But now murderers.

Deuteronomy 5:9

You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.

Joshua 24:19–20

¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He *is* a holy God. He *is* a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."

1 John 1:7–9

⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Galatians 6:1

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of life.

Galatians 5:16–17

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Proverbs 3:34

Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble.

Psalms 34:18

The LORD *is* near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Psalms 51:17

The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.

Matthew 7:1–5

¹ "Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."