

James
Chapter Four
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Test VIII. The Test of Worldly Indulgence (4:1-12)

James starts off now not saying “if you have quarrels...”, but “what is the source of quarrels...” Quarrels and conflicts among people is a part of the natural consequence of the fall. Certainly some of the quarrels and conflicts are due to our honestly wanting to understand and properly apply the Word of God and we can each make mistakes so we need to carefully listen to each other. Also some of the quarrels and conflicts are due to our selfish ambition as noted previously. The Greek word for quarrels relates to general prolonged combat and is often translated as “war”. The Greek word for conflicts refers to a specific fight. So “quarrels” refer to large scale war and “conflicts” refer to isolated battles.

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

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

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

James 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.

James 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"?

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

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

James 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.

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

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

James makes it very clear that the root cause of our problems with each other is our desire to remain friends with the world in one way or another. The source is our pleasures that wage war with our members. Of course our members are the many components of our physical being. We can remember the teaching of Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans that we discussed previously (Rom 7: 14-8:1). As we have discussed many times, such a war will be going on within ourselves until we are totally sanctified and glorified. I am never saying that we should be fatalistic about the situation but view

the wars and fights as symptoms of the deeper problem (the cause) and keep letting ourselves be drawn back to reckoning ourselves dead to sin:

Rom 6:11 “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Rom 6:13 “and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

Rom 8:10 “And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.”

The King James version renders the word “reckon” in Rom 6:11 rather than “consider” and, being Southern, I kinda prefer the word reckon. When we understand more fully that we are dead to sin then we certainly should not be presenting ourselves to sin. The rest of our life here will be spent more fully understanding what dead to sin and alive to righteousness means in our daily walk.

Lusting for anything is contrary to the spirit of righteousness and the result will be murder, either as a physical occurrence or as a mental attitude as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ in His sermon on the mount.

Envy is also contrary to the spirit of righteousness and the result will be fighting and quarreling.

Not presenting our needs before the Lord is also contrary to the life of righteousness and can result in our not obtaining our real needs. Presenting our needs to the Lord should be a cleansing process whereby we examine our requests to see if our understanding of our needs is in line with our life as children of God. When we properly present such needs we will often realize that such are really not a need and we can cancel that request. Many items that we initially think are needs are really a result of envy or lusting and should be immediately eliminated. God is not going to give us our perceived needs that are contrary to the life of a child of God and the sooner we realize that we ask amiss the better will be our mental attitude toward God and the other people of the world.

When he says in verse 4 that the people are adulterous people and trying to be friends with the world James is talking to pretenders. One cannot be a friend to the world and a friend to God. A pastor once said (probably many more than one!) that a big problem in his congregation was that half of the church board were Christians and the other half were not Christians.

How can there be people in a Christian congregation who are not Christians? The answer is really very simple as given in a parable of Jesus (Luke 8 and Matthew 13).

Luke 8:4 "And when a great multitude were coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable:

Luke 8:5 "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up.

Luke 8:6 "And other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.

Luke 8:7 "And other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it out.

Luke 8:8 "And other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus then explained the parable to His disciples who had not yet been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The seed is the Word of God so wherever the Word of God is spread there will always be people of the four types He mentioned:

1. Some of the people will not hear the Word with any type of discerning ear and it will be as though a leaf was blown by the wind.
2. Some of the people will initially hear the Word and even hear it joyfully, but then persecutions arise and they leave It behind.
3. Some will hear the Word but then the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the Word.
4. Some will hear the Word and It will bring forth fruit in their walk in the world and they remain permanently.

So we must always be aware of the probability that some members of a Christian congregation are not really children of God. James points out that there are three sources of the conflict with God exemplified by some people: hostility toward God, disregard for Scripture, and pride. John also clearly points out the danger of trying to be friends with God and the world:

1John 2:15 "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

1John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever."

The word "world" here refers to the spiritual reality of the man-centered system of the world. Humanism is the religion that has man as its center of philosophy. We are called out of the world in the sense that its philosophy does not drive our actions.

2Cor 6:14 "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2Cor 6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

2Cor 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

2Cor 6:17 "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you.

2Cor 6:18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

2Cor 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

I know from my experience and from that of many people that I have heard confess from their experiences that most people brought up in a church are not truly worshiping God in the "church services". Instead we are doing what is recorded in the book of Isaiah:

Isaiah 29:13 "Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,"

Even among those people who regularly attend "church services" many are certainly there only in body and they are just doing what they have been taught to do and what they have seen others do. I remember once during a crusade that a young girl of 12 or so came forward after the message and emotionally told me that she was giving her life to Christ. Then a few years later this same young woman came forward after a regular service and told the congregation that she was now really giving her life to Christ. She said that before she was just doing what she knew her parents wanted her to do but she really did not have a change of life.

How many of our young people are just doing what they know that their parents want them to do? How many of the middle age people are just "in church" for the friendship and perhaps the music? How many of the older people are "in church" because that is what they have always done and yet there has never been any real change in the direction of their devotion?

When a person is really born again a change occurs that is massive. No longer do they have an allegiance to the world and its spiritual guidelines. After that event the people want to serve God because they know what He has done for them and that they now love Him more than anything or anyone in the world. In verses five through ten James tells us what we must do to show we have had a true born again experience.

We should:

1. Submit to God

Matt 10:39 "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."

Luke 14:27 “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Luke 14:33 “So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”

2. Resist the devil (to stand against or to oppose)

Eph 6:10 “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.

Eph 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Eph 6:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Eph 6:14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

Eph 6:15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Eph 6:16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.

Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Eph 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,”

3. Draw near to God

Psalms 73:28 “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works.”

Psalms 145:18 “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.

Psalms 145:19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.

Psalms 145:20 The Lord keeps all who love Him; But all the wicked, He will destroy.”

Jer 29:13 “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Jer 29:14 'And I will be found by you,' declares the Lord,' and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the Lord,' and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'”

Heb 4:16 “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

*Heb 10:19 "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,
Heb 10:20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,
Heb 10:21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
Heb 10:22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*

4. Cleanse our hands

This phrase has a Jewish origin as depicted in the following:

Exodus 30:18 "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it.

Exodus 30:19 "And Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it;

Exodus 30:20 when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, that they may not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the Lord.

Exodus 30:21 "So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they may not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations."

The meaning is that the priests have to cleanse their hands before entering the presence of the Lord. How about an application to us? We Christians are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and He is our High Priest. But we still have minute-by-minute sins by thought, word, and deed and we must clear our mind of our selfish thoughts before coming to the Lord in prayer.

1John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

James does say "Cleanse your hands you sinners" so is he referring to non-Christians or to Christians who still remain sinners before the world? I am not sure but I also do not think that it makes any difference. Certainly a non-Christian cannot have his prayers heard by God:

Psalm 66:18 "If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;"

Isaiah 59:2 "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear."

John 9:31 "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him."

So if James is referring to non-Christians then they have to be born again before they can come before the Lord. If he is referring to Christians who have unrepented sins in their lives then they also have to be cleansed before coming to the Lord.

1Cor 11:27 "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

1Cor 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1Cor 11:29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.

1Cor 11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

So in whatever category one presides he must cleanse himself before coming in the presence of the Lord.

5. Purify our hearts

Let's look at the audience now before commenting. He says "purify your hearts you double minded". Here I have to conclude that he is indeed talking to non-Christians for one cannot be a friend of the world and of God:

James 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."

We also see that here James says that we are to purify our hearts and there is no cleansing of the heart without the born-again experience in which we experience the wonderful double imputation of having our sins put onto the account of Jesus and the righteous of Jesus put into our account. We are clearly told by Jesus that an unrepentant heart is the source of the evil in the world:

Matt 15:18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Matt 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."

6. Be miserable

How does this command fit in with prosperity theology? Such a question could lead us into a long discussion, but suffice it to say at this point that the Bible does not teach prosperity theology. But being miserable does not apply to people who are in dire physical circumstances. This command refers to one who can understand how miserable and helpless he is before the almighty, holy God. Such a feeling came to all of us when we realized that we were sinners and that God is holy. We realized that we had no hope of ever being allowed in His presence because of our sin and that there was no way for us to make payment for our sin. If I could take all of the righteousness of my entire life and

try to balance it with just the sins that I commit on any minute of any day the balance would dip quickly toward sin. When I then realize that I have no hope I am miserable until I realize the plan of redemption that God has provided for me.

7. Mourn and weep

Here I have to quote from the Sermon on the Mount:

Matt 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

The meaning is the same as what I said above. As the realization of my horrid state of being before God begins to sink into my consciousness I can only mourn and weep for my lost state before the wrath of God. But then the understanding that the great plan of redemption from God comes into my understanding as I am born again and I indeed am comforted with the great comfort of The Comforter.

8. Turn our laughter into mourning

The laughter and glee that I experienced in my worldly actions before my understanding of my sinfulness and God's absolute holiness are quickly quenched and I mourn as discussed above.

9. Turn our joy into gloom

Similarly I began to understand that all the joy that I thought that I experienced in the world was just temporary and of no lasting value. We see the same picture when the devastation of the Lord is visited upon Israel:

Isaiah 24:1 "Behold, the Lord lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface, and scatters its inhabitants.

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Isaiah 24:11 There is an outcry in the streets concerning the wine; All joy turns to gloom. The gaiety of the earth is banished."

Real joy only comes from a heart that has been regenerated and rests in the comfort of the Lord.

10. Humble ourselves in the presence of the Lord.

The more we understand the holiness of God and the sinfulness of ourselves the more humble we become and the more grateful we become for what God has done for us.

God will then:

1. Draw near to us

It is incomprehensible to me that God would want to draw near to me and indeed I am correct in that understanding. It is only because of all the above that God will indeed draw near to us and adopt us as His children.

*Eph 1:5 "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,
Eph 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."*

1 John 3:1 "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."

The concept of God adopting us as His children has been so awesome to me for a long time that I did write a paper on the topic that is available online:

<http://livingtheology.com/Adoption.htm>

If you have further interest in this topic I do recommend that you read that article.

2. Cause Satan to flee from us

Although I do not think that Satan has to bother with me much because I get myself in too much trouble without his help, it is so very comforting to know that because of all of the above that Satan will indeed flee from us. But do remember that Satan is not afraid of us, rather it is Jesus before whom he trembles and flees.

3. Exalt us

Peter tells us the same concept as James does:

1 Peter 5:6 "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,"

If I have as a person motive to serve God so that He will exalt me then I am in a world of trouble. My purpose in life is to give glory to God but He does promise to exalt me in His time and I know that such an exaltation will also give glory to God so for that purpose I also look forward to the exalting by God.

The above 10 actions always remind me of the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus in which he explains that it is only when we mourn, weep, and are miserable for our spiritual state that we will be blessed. When we truly understand that God alone is righteous and all of our actions are sin then we can turn to Jesus as our Lord and Savior and understand that through the work of Jesus we can be at peace with God. Our joy at our human

accomplishments that are totally of our own become seen by us as wood, hay, and stubble so that there is no joy in our human accomplishments.

Such realizations and actions on our part occur because God has caused us to be born again and has given us faith to allow us to be people to whom God can draw near and exalt. Because of what God has done He can exalt us. Because of what God has done now Satan will flee from us. But always remember that Satan flees because of Jesus and not because of anything innate in us alone.

James 4:11 “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.

James 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?”

One who is totally into worldly indulgence will be the kind of person who thinks that he is able to judge someone else by his standards. This type of person will see himself as set up as the standard for others to follow. The perfect example of such a person is the Pharisee that we see revealed in the Scripture as they attempted to even judge Jesus.

Speaking against someone is slandering someone. Gossip is usually a very destructive force and usually occurs when the slanderer is trying to unduly lift up him to others by putting down someone else.

But for those children of God who pass this eighth test, one outcome will be that we pass on the judgment to God. Only God can be the perfect Judge for only God can see the heart of a person. Every time someone was healed by Jesus it was because Jesus could see in the heart of the person that the Father had caused the person to be given faith.

Matt 9:22 “But Jesus turning and seeing her said, “Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.” And at once the woman was made well.”

Mark 10:52 “And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.”

Luke 17:19 “And He said to him, “Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well.””

Luke 18:42 “And Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.”

We also see that at least one of the Apostles had been given the ability to see when God had given faith to someone:

Acts 14:9 “This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well,”

The only Judge is the One Who gave the Law and that is God. We are law breakers, not law givers.

Test IX. The Test of Dependence (4:13-17)

James 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.”

James 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.

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

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

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

Anyone can verbalize verse fifteen but all true children of God know that when we say something like verse fifteen we really do understand that each day is a gift of God. We should make plans but we should always know that the Sovereign God may have other plans for us and we should always be ready to go to our Plan B (God is always in Plan A). We need to always remember our mortality also in that we may be called home at any moment. Verse 17 tells us that now that we know that we need to always make our plans contingent upon the will of God, if we do not do such then we have indeed sinned. When we do not consider that God may not want us to do our plans then we indeed are arrogant for we have gotten “carried away” with our importance. We remember that James is trying to help us to understand whether or not we are really children of God. A certain mark of someone who is a Christian is that he always wants to do the will of God. A certain mark of someone who is not a Christian is that he does not consider the will of God in his daily work. So certainly verse 17 is a warning to either the Christian who has lost his/her focus or to the person who thinks he is a Christian but in fact he is not.

Jesus told a parable illustrating the same point about ignoring the will of God in what we do:

Luke 12:16 “And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a certain rich man was very productive.

Luke 12:17 “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’

Luke 12:18 “And he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

Luke 12:19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”’

Luke 12:20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’

Luke 12:21 “So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”’

It is not a sin to plan and it is not a sin to be rich. It is a sin to not include God in our plans for when we do we are pretending to be omniscient and omnipotent. Only God is omniscient and omnipotent and we must not pretend to be God. Knowing that God our

Father is sovereign and causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His will is such a soothing, comforting thought that it should be a pleasure to acknowledge His absolute control and to desire to live a life obeying Him.

God alone controls our living and our dying:

Deut 32:39 "See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal; And there is no one who can deliver from My hand."

Job 12:9 "Who among all these does not know That the hand of the Lord has done this, Job 12:10 In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?"

Psa 39:4 "Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the extent of my days, Let me know how transient I am.

Psa 39:5 "Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Thy sight, Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah."

Psa 104:29 "Thou dost hide Thy face, they are dismayed; Thou dost take away their spirit, they expire, And return to their dust."

Heb 9:27 "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,"

Acts 17:26 "and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation,"

Isn't Acts 17:26 particularly humbling? God made Adam. From Adam He made Eve. And from Adam and Eve He created every person who has ever lived and He also predetermined the time in which everyone would live and where they would live! Have you praised God today for predetermining that you would live now and here?

I pray that all of us would better live every day knowing that God is sovereign and having our wills better in line with His will.

Amen!

References

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