

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

DECEMBER 31ST 2022 - JANUARY 1ST, 2023 // BOOK OF JAMES

THE CAUSE OF ALL WARS (JAMES 4:1-5)

Chapters 1-2 of James' letter speak of spiritual maturity being endurance, obedience, consistency, and real faith lived out through our works.

- Chapter 3 talks about our need to let the Holy Spirit control our tongues.
- Now in chapter 4, James will turn to the topic of our desires ("passions," vs. 1), our will, and the attitudes that so often drive our behaviors.

As Christians, we are to submit to God's will for our lives, but we often are tempted to follow our own will, desires, and passions.

- Our fleshly, worldly, and selfish mindsets often are the cause behind much of the conflict we get into.
- Our pride and self-centeredness often affect our relationship with others and God.
- James will explain in chapter 4 that this is a recipe for a fruitless and miserable life.

What are the reasons for the fights, wars, and conflicts that Christians engage in (vs. 1-3)?

- Even within the early Church, fighting and conflict were evidently already an issue.
- Wars, fights, and conflicts come not from external forces, but from an internal war.
- The war that often wages in our hearts is the war between our desire to obey God and our desire to follow our fleshly passions (vs. 1).

We "desire and do not have," and that covetousness leads us to conflict (vs. 2).

- That desire for things like money, reputation, success, or status can lead us to do things like fight, say hurtful words, and even murder in order to gain them.
- Even as Christians, these sinful desires are still inside of each of us—but they belong to our old way of life.

The reason these destructive desires run our lives as Christians is because we're not seeking God for our needs ("...you do not have because you do not ask," vs. 2b).

- We often don't bring what's in our hearts before the Lord to have Him give us His desires and what it is we really need (Ps. 37:4).
- We live spiritually emaciated lives so often because we just don't pray.

Sometimes the issue with our lives being run by our destructive desires isn't that we're not praying; it's that we're praying selfishly and with wrong motives (vs. 3).

- The purpose of prayer is not to get God to give us things that help us pursue our own selfish pleasures.
- Why would any good Father give His child a gift that would lead them further into destruction?

James then rebukes Christians who are guilty of compromise and covetousness (vs. 4-5).

- So often, the reason that we're self-centered and led by our own selfish desires is simply because we're worldly.
- This "friendship with the world" is an act of defiance and rebellion against God.
- When we're friends with the world, we're enemies to God!

The world has mindsets, philosophies, and beliefs that are the exact opposite of God's will.

- When we love the things of this world more than God, we're also spiritual adulterers (vs. 4a).
- The Bible describes the act of turning from God and toward the things of this world as an act of unfaithfulness and betrayal—like adultery (Isa. 57:3; Mt. 12:39).

"...THE SPIRIT...ENVIES INTENSELY..." (VS. 5)

When you were born again, God gave you His Holy Spirit that brought you out of death into eternal life.

- James says that this Spirit inside of you earnestly desires and longs for our undivided attention, love, and allegiance to the Lord.
- God refuses to share our commitment with any other "god." He wants all of us.

PRIDE VS. HUMILITY (JAMES 4:6-12)

The solution for strife is offered in this section: be humble and get right with God (vs. 6-10).

- The same Holy Spirit convicting us of our compromise, worldliness, and spiritual adultery will also give us the grace to serve God as we should (vs. 6a).
- Even if a sold-out, exclusive commitment to God seems impossible, God is the one who supplies us with the grace in order to do it.

Those who are humble understand and practice total dependence on God every day as they live out their commitment to Christ: and God supplies them grace!

- But those who are proud turn their hearts away from God to follow other pursuits, other "gods," and themselves.
- God resists the proud by "opposing" them. Life gets really hard when GOD is opposing you.

If we're living in pride and engaging in strife, we're to humbly get right with God.

- "Submit to God" calls us to bring our will under His control. We're only able to submit to the Lord when we recognize that He is greater and worthy of more honor than we are (vs. 7a).
- "Resist the devil" means that we refuse to surrender to the impulse of the satanic temptation/attack to sin.

If we obey these commandments, we're promised that the devil will flee from us (vs. 7b).

- Jesus modeled this perfectly when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness.
- "Draw near" involves approaching God humbly through prayer, adoration, and worship.
- The world tells us to "try harder" to get to God, but God tells us to "come closer."

"Cleanse your hands" is a picture of spiritual cleansing. We cleanse our hands when we stop using them for evil.

- "Purify your hearts" is a call to be of single-minded devotion, commitment, and love of God above all other loves in our life (vs. 8).
- If we're living in sin, there is to be a sense of regret, heartache, and brokenness for that sin (vs. 9).

A profound expression of humility is brokenness over sin. Arrogance and pride are shown through a casual or apathetic approach to sin.

- When we choose to humble ourselves, God will exalt us (vs. 10).
- But when we choose to exalt ourselves, God will humble us (Matt. 23:12).
- Humbling ourselves and getting right with God WILL result in us getting right with other people.

Another solution for strife is offered by James: get right with other people (vs. 11-12).

- When we're right with other people, that will show up in the way we talk about them.
- We're not called to "criticize," "defame," or "judge" other believers.
- When we do so, we put ourselves in the same place as the law, in effect, judging the law.

There is one standard for judgment, and it's not our standard: it's God's. We're not the lawgiver; God is.

- There is one judge, who is able to save and to destroy, and that's God, not us.

"WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR?"

When we have proper humility before God and others, it's just not in us to arrogantly criticize, judge, and condemn our brother or sister.

LIKE A VAPOR (JAMES 4:13-17)

There is great danger in living in a way that assumes we don't need God (vs. 13-16).

- That attitude is often reflected in how we make our life plans (vs. 13).
- We're not God, and when we plan our lives as if we control the future and have unlimited authority over all factors affecting our life, that's living as a "functional atheist."

We know a whole lot less than we sometimes lead on, and we're a lot weaker than we're willing to admit (remember New Year's 2020??).

- We don't even know what tomorrow will bring or what things will happen in our life (vs. 14)!
- Tomorrow might bring a catastrophe or a blessing, and we have no idea which one it might be.

Every one of us in this room is just a phone call away from a disaster or tragedy.

- Even though we don't know what tomorrow holds, so many of us in our arrogance act as if we're secure and we don't need to seek God out in our planning.
- James compares life to a "vapor." It's short, uncertain, and is gone quicker than any of us ever want to admit or even think about.

Our mindset and the attitude of our hearts should be that we seek to build our plans around God's will, not our own will (vs. 15).

- We're to seek the will of God in all of our plans, not just plan something and then ask God to bless what we've already planned retroactively.
- When we boast about all we're going to accomplish in our strength, that's arrogance, and this kind of boasting is "evil" (vs. 16).

Vs. 17 states a specific principle applied to presumptuous planning about the future, but also one that can serve as a general principle to all areas of our lives.

- It's a sin to know what is right and fail to do it.
- When we know that we're supposed to be seeking God's will and plans for our lives instead of our own, and yet we don't do it, that's a sin.

We should always be planning our lives in full commitment to the will and purposes of God.

- What He wants for us is better than what we want for ourselves.
- The source of our conflicts (vs. 1-3), our worldliness (vs. 4), our pride/arrogance (vs. 6), our tendency to insult and slander others (vs. 11), and our "functional atheism" (vs. 13-14) is simply us following our own will over God's.

Mature faith is believing that God's plans for your life are better than your own plans for your life.

- Mature believers don't grow more arrogant and independent of God: they grow humbler and MORE dependent on Him.
- God wants His children to live a life that is committed to following His will.

WHAT'S GOD'S WILL FOR US IN 2023?

- To be Saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9)
- To be Spirit-filled (Ephesians 5:17-18)
- To be Sanctified (holy, pure) (1 Thess. 4:3-7)
- To be Submissive and Do Good (1 Pt. 2:13-15)
- How can I seek the will of God for me, specifically in 2023?

HOW CAN I SEEK THE WILL OF GOD?

- Break off your adulterous affair with the world (vs. 4-5).
- Cleanse your hands, purify your heart (vs. 8).
- Mourn and be broken over your sin (vs. 9).
- Stop being critical, judgmental, and slanderous towards others (vs. 11-12).
- Stop being arrogant and assuming you don't need God as you make your plans (vs. 13-16).
- Draw near to Him in prayer, bringing Him your needs in humility and honesty (vs. 2, 8).
- Obey what you already know to be His Word (vs. 7-8, 17).
- Be humble and dependent on Him for the "greater grace" (vs. 6).
- Commit all of your plans to Him: He knows and sees more than you do (vs. 14-15)!