



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

Lesson 8

James 4:1-10 Commentary New International Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(James 4:1) What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

James describes the ways of "this world;" the ways of people who focus on achieving and selfishly obtaining what "this world" has to offer instead of what the heavenly kingdom offers believers through faith in Jesus Christ. Unhappily, too many people in the church bring their "this world" commitment and focus with them into the church and hope to use those in the church to achieve their worldly ambitions. Sometimes even Christians find themselves falling into the trap of entering into and remaining in conflicts and disputes which cannot be resolved until one person or another ends the cravings that are at war within them and finds by the grace of God the peace that only true fellowship with Jesus can give. Those who refuse to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord remain slaves of sin and selfishness separated from God. Their evil desires and passions rule them and bring conflict into their lives that cause quarrels and fights with others and bring disruption into the church. Therefore, Christians must seek to avoid these conflicts, pray for the wisdom from above, live peaceably, and show that their works are done with gentleness born of wisdom (see James 3:17, 13).

(James 4:2) You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

James recognized that new Christians must learn how to live and do good works that are Christ-like, rather than bring into the church their former evil desires and practices. Yes, there are hypocrites in the church, but most of these so-called “hypocrites” are those who are trying to become more like Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit enables them according to the Scriptures. In most cases, those in the church who are still in love with the practices and possessions of “this world” desire what no one should practice or possess; therefore, they may murder someone or cheat or tell lies or try to assassinate someone’s character to get what they want. Some come into the church to use the church to get what they do not have. Some covet what another possesses, because there is no person or no other “thing” like the one they want. They will try anything to get what they want. What they want may be “legal,” but immoral, which can bring about disputes and conflicts among those in the church. The worldly-minded in the church do not ask another or ask God to give them what they want—perhaps knowing that neither the church nor God would approve of what they desire or give it to them. Those who do not ask have reasons for not asking; deep inside they know that God will not grant immoral and selfish requests.

(James 4:3) When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

In Luke 11:9-13, Jesus taught about prayer, saying “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” If you seek God, a stronger faith in Jesus Christ, or the wisdom from above, God will answer your prayers for these good gifts and give them to you.

God gives good gifts and only good gifts. If your passions, emotions, and selfish desires rule you instead of love for God and others, and you ask God for something that is bad, God knows that giving you what is bad would harm you and others; so, you will not receive what you want from God. For example, if you ask for a snake when you should be asking for your daily bread, a merciful God will not harm you by giving you a snake or something immoral. However, in answer to your prayer, God may discipline you with love and mercy to teach you the lessons God knows you must learn.

(James 4:4) You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

James described the effect when one or more people in the church are not obeying the commandments of Jesus: they do not love God and others in word and deed as Jesus taught and exemplified. In John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." They are not growing in grace; therefore, neither they nor those around them can enjoy peace with them. They become more adulterous spiritually—they may commit adultery physically—even in the church. Instead of loving God and others as God has commanded, they love the things of this world and themselves supremely. When they make friendship with "this world," to enjoy their immoral cravings, they become enemies of God. For example, Jesus said we cannot love both God and money. If we love ourselves, money, or anything else more than we love God, we will eventually hate God. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus preached, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." James also put the matter starkly to those inside and outside the church: if you want to be a friend of this world, then you have enmity (hatred, animosity, hostility, and antagonism) toward God. By your choices, you have declared yourself an enemy of God! As an enemy of God, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:3).

(James 4:5) Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

God made our human spirits to indwell our physical bodies: “the spirit that he has made.” As believers in Jesus Christ, God sends His Holy Spirit into us to have communion, fellowship, and friendship with us through our spirits. When we prefer friendship and fellowship with the world, so our passions can be satiated by the things and people of this world, we offend God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We are refusing to let the Word of God dwell in us richly and the Spirit of God to help us change and transform our lives into the image of Christ. Though James’ words do not quote exactly a verse from the Old Testament, they do express the spirit and overall teaching of the Old Testament. God made our spirits to dwell in us and God yearns for our spirits “the spirit that he has made” to have a right relationship with His Holy Spirit, which is possible by grace through faith in Jesus Christ that leads us into a loving relationship between God and every follower of Jesus. In the best sense, God is “jealous” when a believer in Jesus tries to be friends with the world and becomes an enemy of God.

(James 4:6) But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

If we find ourselves following our desires, passions, and emotions (our flesh) as James described, the promise from Scripture is “God gives more grace,” but the condition to receive more grace involves expressing true humility before God and praying for God to give us more grace—His loving power—to overcome all our temptations. We must bow before the Lord God morally and spiritually, confess our sins to God, repent (turn from) all our sins, turn to Jesus, and ask Jesus for His power to live as His friend and in friendship with all heaven; then, Jesus will give us more grace to overcome our temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we become proud, thinking we are so special that our sins will not offend or separate us from God, God will oppose or resist us and not give us what we ask if we pray. If a follower of Jesus becomes proud, God’s grace—His loving power and undeserved favor—may bring about the discipline someone needs to return to following Jesus and His commandments.

(James 4:7) Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Even in the church, some people can be so in love with “this world” and themselves that they become enemies of God and fight with God and His people. The solution to their sinful way of living is for them to submit to God, bow down before God, and give their heart to God in total allegiance to serve God in Christ supremely. Without first submitting yourself to God, without first choosing and praying to know the will of God, so you can do the will of God with the help of God, you cannot resist and overcome the devil. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, when you pray the Holy Spirit helps you pray and resist the devil and all its temptations.

In Romans 8:26-27, Paul wrote, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” As we pray and resist the devil with the help and intercession of the Holy Spirit, our war will turn *from* warring against God *to* warring against the devil and our own sinful passions. To resist the devil involves putting on the full armor of God; then, the devil will flee from us; thereby, we will have peace with God and peace within ourselves and peace with others insofar as that peace rests with us.

Practice what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:10-18, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.”

Think of these truths and practice them, for they will enable you to always live as a friend and child of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. They will help you resist the devil, who will flee from you.

(James 4:8) Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Having submitted ourselves once and for all to God in Jesus Christ, we may need to resubmit ourselves to God repeatedly and more deeply when tempted to follow our passions once again. Having submitted ourselves to God, our daily practice and often our moment-by-moment practice will become drawing near to God and God's drawing near to us as our Lord, Savior, and Friend. Whether we "feel" God is near or not, God is near because He has promised to draw near to those who draw near to Him. Our thought life often extends to our outward life; we may misuse our hands, our tongues, or other parts of our bodies to sin, so we must resolve to obey the Lord and turn from all temptations to sin. Having tried to love the world and love the Lord simultaneously (thus being double-minded), we must commit our hearts, our minds, and our wills to love God supremely, and to wisely love others as the Lord commanded—thus becoming single-minded. We can pray daily for the Holy Spirit to help us live loyal to God, and if we do so the Holy Spirit will help us. We can pray for the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts and thoughts, and He will do so. As we study the Bible each day, we will be reminded of many promises; such as, 1 John 1:6-7, "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." The Holy Spirit will work with us if we truly want to purify our hearts, for the Holy Spirit will always help us obey God.

(James 4:9) Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

James does not give people a mechanical formula to follow to be right with God. Repentance is not simply saying to God that we are sorry we have hurt His feelings. Rather, when we truly understand that we have been active

enemies of God and at war against our holy, loving, just, merciful, and gracious God, we are inwardly prompted to feel wretched, mourn, and weep—we truly grieve and feel ashamed. Previously, our laughter and joy had been from the pleasures we derived as we satisfied our passions and desires in “this world,” but at some point, by the grace of God and the influence of our loving Savior Jesus Christ, we turned to God in Christ for salvation from satisfying the passions that brought God and us so much grief. When Jesus saves us, we begin walking in holiness, truth, and love, and we cease being friends with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

(James 4:10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

The world’s way of thinking involves self-seeking and desiring “this world’s” honors. The world’s way is to be of the world and exalted in the world by the world. As Christians, we turn from selfishness and self-seeking to living humbly before our God in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, God works with us here and now and will throughout eternity; therefore, we love God and want God to live in us and with us forever. Rather than use our minds and bodies for immoral purposes, we truly want our bodies to serve as temples of the living God. Where the Holy Spirit abides, we want our hearts and minds to be a clean dwelling place. As we follow Jesus Christ, God is exalted in and through us. We do not seek the glory that belongs to God alone. We do not seek loving fellowship with God in Christ so God will exalt us, but because we want to exalt God as God deserves. We love God so much that throughout eternity we want loving fellowship with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and all who love God.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What is one cause of troubles in the church?
2. Why can coveting lead to fighting and quarrelling?
3. Why doesn’t God give us everything we ask?
4. What does a friend of the world make himself?

5. What does James tell sinners inside and outside the church to do?

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Contact: lgp@theiblf.com.