

A Study of James 4

I. Outline.

1. The friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4.1-5).
2. God resists the proud (6).
3. Resist the devil; draw near to God (7-8).
4. Humble yourselves (9-10).
5. Quit judging (11-12).
6. Put God IN your plans (13-16).
7. Do that which is good (17).

II. Summary.

James seems to be preaching away in chapter four. It is commonly spoken of regarding what faithful preachers do in their sermons as: “stepping on toes.” James must have been doing that to those who originally received this epistle and he continues to do so as we read it today. He begins by talking about division among them and points to the problem of covetousness as the root of the problem. The age-old concept of independence versus dependence is clearly spoken of in this chapter. God is NOT pleased with the independent-spirited Christian! Great strength is required to resist the devil, but that is what must be done. Humility is a quality to be desired in Christians. Censorious judgment of the kind condemned in Matthew 7:1ff is also condemned here by James. Planning is not bad; however, planning without taking into account the will of the Lord is wrong. We need to remind ourselves quite often as James does here that our lives are like a vapor that appears for a little time and then is gone. When we know to do good, it is sin not to do it.

III. Chronology.

BIBLE PERIOD: The Period of the Church.

If you are not familiar with the 15 Bible Periods, please click here:

<https://maplehillchurchofchrist.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/15bibleperiods.pdf>

IV. Words/Phrases to Study

- James 4.1-6 “James did not divide his treatise into the five chapters and 108 verses it now contains. He wrote it as one extended letter. Hence, he made no open break between his discussion of sensual and superior wisdom in 3.13-18 and what he discussed in this passage. Therefore, it would be an easy transition for him to take up the evil produced from sensual wisdom as he does in this section. James was an expert in raising common-sense thought-provoking questions as he promptly began to do in this text. He questioned the origin of wars and fightings among them. It is not likely at all that he spoke of literal wars in that day among the Romans, the infidelic Jews, or the unbelieving Greeks. It is much more likely that he spoke figuratively. These wars could be the conflicts, confusions, and strifes that enveloped them when they were pursuing sensual wisdom and not superior wisdom. Such undesirables originate from the pleasurable lusts that war and rage in your bodily members” [Robert R. Taylor, Jr., *Companion*, 1990-1991, p. 28].
- James 4:1... **WARS AND FIGHTINGS AMONG YOU**—“It appears quite certain that the sacred writer has under consideration here strife, dissension, and warfare in the church, and in and between individuals... There were many bitter contentions in the world in the first century; and, the Jews, particularly, were divided into numerous warring camps, such as Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes, Zealots, and the like, each of which fought all the rest with great industry and effort. And there is ample evidence in the New Testament that converts to Christianity from Judaism often brought with them their contentious spirit and urged their views upon their brethren to the point of division (cf., Col 2:20-22)” [Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the Epistle of*

James, p. 198]. |||| “The kind of wars and fightings just mentioned is precisely that of pleasures warring against the soul's true interests ‘in your members,’ meaning not ‘between members of the church’ exclusively (though this is included), but within men themselves, individually” [James Burton Coffman’s Commentaries].

- James 4:2... **YE HAVE NOT BECAUSE YE ASK NOT**—“There is no hint here that if they had prayed for the ability to gratify their lustful pleasures God would have given it; rather, that their willful selfishness had dried up the springs of prayer within them” [James Burton Coffman’s Commentaries].
- James 4.3... **YE ASK AND RECEIVE NOT**—“While prayer is the privilege of every child of God, we must all remember that there are definite conditions which must be met, before we have the right to expect an answer. One of those conditions is that we must be actuated by the right motive when we pray. That is the lesson here (James 5.16-18; 1 Kings 18.36-37). This last passage shows the motive Elijah had for praying regarding the rain. To spend that which they asked in their pleasures would be to spend it in the exercise of their pleasures, or as their pleasures dictated” [Leslie G. Thomas, *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1958, pp., 242-243].
- James 4:3... **YE ASK AMISS**—“not in the faith of a divine promise; nor with thankfulness for past mercies; nor with submission to the will of God; nor with a right end, to do good to others, and to make use of what might be bestowed, for the honour of God, and the interest of Christ...” [John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible]. |||| “... Those above described were possessed of an unholy ambition to gain much material goods, and went to extremely sinful ends to gain their coveted goods. Some of them actually had the temerity to ask God for that which they wanted for no other purpose than to consume it upon their own lusts—to go deeper into fleshly gratification; and of course, the Lord will hear and answer no such prayers. Those who thus ask, ask amiss. Petitions conceived and uttered in sinfulness will not be heard. All true prayers made to God are for something which will enable the petitioner to please and serve God. It is an unhallowed petition which asks for something which we intend to spend on the gratification of our own selfish, sensual, wicked, destroying lusts. We should be careful of our prayers. They show our hearts to God, and ought to reveal them to ourselves. Are we entirely unselfish in our praying? Do we pray for our own good and the good of our fellow man; or do we pray for things only that we may enjoy them in this life? The proper motive must prompt our prayers; otherwise, they will not be answered” [Guy N. Woods, *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1946, p 121].
- James 4:4... **YE ADULTERERS AND ADULTERESSES**—“‘Spiritual adultery’ is the unfaithfulness of the church, which is the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Rom. 7:1-6; Rev. 21:2; 22:17). The marriage metaphor was extensively used in the Old Testament, as in Isa. 54:5; and the new Israel of God, the church, naturally took it over. Jesus used it in John 3:29; and also in Matt. 12:39” [James Burton Coffman’s Commentaries]. |||| “The relationship that Israel had with God was frequently likened to a marriage in which Israel was the wife of God (cf., Ezekiel 16.8; Hosea 2.16, Hosea 2.19-20). Therefore, when she became unfaithful it was not uncommon for her to be portrayed as an adulterous wife (cf., Hosea 2.1-7; Ezekiel 16.15ff; Jeremiah 3.20). In the New Testament we find the relationship that the physical descendants of Abraham had with Jehovah belongs now to his spiritual seed—the church; she is the betrothed of Christ (2 Corinthians 11.2). What’s more, in keeping with Oriental custom that viewed the betrothal as the legal marriage, Paul speaks of the church as the wife of Christ (Ephesians 5.25-27). As His wife the church is expected to forsake all others giving herself to Him alone. Moreover, as Israel committed spiritual adultery when she joined herself to other gods, so it is with the spiritual seed. They are reckoned as adulteresses whenever they embrace another, which is exactly what happens when they strike up a ‘friendship with the world’” [Kieran D. Murphy, “Friendship with the World,” in *The Present Truth: Studies in 1 and 2 Peter, James and Jude*, p. 101-102].
- James 4:5... **THE SPIRIT THAT DWELLETH IN US LUSTETH TO ENVY**—“There is, perhaps, no more difficult passage in the Epistle. ... Why does the spirit, which is in us, covet with great desire? Men in the

flesh, and motivated by fleshly inclinations, are often prone to look with envious hearts upon those who enjoy greater prosperity than they possess; and covetously to desire the possessions of others. This disposition often leads them to hate their fellows, to attempt to obtain from them, by whatever means necessary, those things upon which they have fixed their hearts. Often people are exceedingly jealous of the possessions and attainments of others, and they desire to acquire that which others have, though they have no right thereto. Whether they are successful in this effort or not, their hearts are filled with envy, jealousy, covetousness. Such seems to have been the condition characteristic of many of those to whom James wrote. This disposition led to the commission of the crimes enumerated in the earlier part of the chapter (vv., 1-4). The writer had emphasized the sinfulness of all such; had shown that the general teaching of the Scripture forbids friendship with the world, and charged that the spirit which God placed in them was exercising itself to envy. We thus regard the passage to be declarative and not interrogative; the 'spirit' (which to envy yearns) to be the human spirit, and not the Holy Spirit; the words, envy and yearns [in ASV, DRL], to be taken in their ordinary sense, and thus believe the passage to teach: "The spirit which is in you is a covetous and envious one" [Guy N. Woods, pp. 215-217]. |||| "The first four verses of James 4:1-17 deal with worldly desire that is contrary to God's working. Verse 5 continues the thought by referring to a statement which is repeated in principle several times in the Old Testament. It is the plain teaching of scripture as a whole that man driven by fleshly desire covets with a selfish desire what others have (Ecclesiastes 4:4; Proverbs 27:4). Of course, God is going to punish those exhibiting such an attitude (Genesis 6:5-7; Job 5:12-13). Fleshly desires lead one in a direction contrary to God's will, or spiritual desire. They will cause one to work those things which will result in eternal judgment (Galatians 5:16-21; Romans 8:4-8; Isaiah 63:8-16)." [Gary C. Hampton, *Practical Christianity*, An e-Sword Module].

- James 4.7 **SUBMIT YOURSELVES THEREFORE TO GOD**—"...calls for a voluntary act on the part of man, else his pride will come up against the resistance of God. Resist requires more than a mere aversion to the devil; it calls for active opposition. If a disciple will put up that kind of fight he is assured of victory over the enemy" [E.M. Zerr].
- James 4:8... Cf., Deut 4:5-8.
- James 4.9 **BE AFFLICTED AND MOURN**—"We need to weep if we are in sin. If we allow ourselves to be affected by the things mentioned by James, we are to cleanse ourselves by living a purified life by drawing nearer to God. We are to remove evil from our thoughts and minds (Philippians 4:8). We must ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:7-10). We are not to be double-minded. This is someone who goes back and forth between faithful and unfaithful. They are wishy-washy. These are serious matters, and should not be laughed about. This is a time to be serious" [T.J. Clarke, in *Bible Institute of Missouri Notes*, produced by Bradley Cobb, An e-Sword Module].
- James 4.10 **HUMBLE YOURSELVES IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD**—"Paul saw his own miserable condition without Christ and thanked God for the deliverance he found in Jesus. Others heard the words of the Lord and his apostles as they stressed the importance of repentance (Romans 7:24-25; Acts 2:37-38; Luke 13:1-5; Matthew 5:4). Repentance is the beginning of our humbling ourselves before God. It is followed by putting the old man of sin to death in baptism so that God might exalt us, or raise us up, as a new man. Such yielding to God throughout our lives will lead to the final exaltation in heaven (James 4:10; Romans 6:3-18; Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:2-11)" [Gary C. Hampton, *Practical Christianity*, An e-Sword Module]. |||| **AND HE SHALL LIFT YOU UP**—"Jesus used this same expression on various occasions (Matthew 23:12). "That He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). This exaltation doesn't mean that God will bring material wealth to all the faithful. 'When a man gets elected to a political office, a few years pass, later he is defeated. He is elevated, then cast down. A man is a hero and then he is forgotten. But God elevates to eternal rewards' [Draper p. 128]. 'The immediate attractions of the world must not be allowed to blind us to the prospect of God's far-greater compensation' [Kent p. 152]. (Romans 8:18)" [Mark Dunagan, *Commentary on James*, an e-Sword Module].

- James 4:11... **JUDGETH THE LAW**—“Therefore, James’ words in this verse refer to the law of Christ in its entirety, and to the specific instance of certain Christians having broken it by their speaking against and judging one another, the specific part of that great law of Christ which they had violated being Matthew 7:1ff” [James Burton Coffman’s Commentaries].
- James 4.12 **WHO ART THOU THAT JUDGEST ANOTHER**—“James, like the Lord, is not speaking of all judgment. Those who rush to Jesus’ words ‘**judge not that ye be not judged**’ misunderstand what the Lord was saying. He was speaking of the harsh and injurious judgment that does not look at both sides of the situation. We are not to judge another in harsh and unfair ways, but we do render righteous judgment (John 7:24). We need to make sure we know what the right and proper thing is before we judge others” [T.J. Clarke].
- James 4:13... Cf., Job 7:6-10. **GO TO NOW**—“Go to is from *AGE*, a Greek word that Thayer defines, ‘Come! come now!’ It is a pointed expression made to someone, calling attention to foolish presumptions. The things mentioned are not necessarily wrong in themselves, but the folly is in taking it for granted that nothing can prevent it.” [E.M. Zerr, Commentary, 1952, An e-Sword Module]. Sort of like V.E. Howard used to do while preaching on The International Gospel Hour, always pausing to say: “**Are you listening?**”
- James 4:15... Cf., Acts 18:21; 21:14; 1 Corinthians 4:19; 16:7; Hebrews 6:3. **IF THE LORD WILL**—“We do not know what awaits us even a few minutes ahead on life’s road, so we should not make plans as if we controlled our own future. The wise man said, ‘**Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth**’ (Proverbs 27:1). What kind of life do we have here on earth? By simple observation, we know it is not permanent. ‘**And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment**’ (Hebrews 9:27). James says our life is a vapor, or mist, or puff of smoke. Like the morning fog, it may seem to be permanent. Yet, it appears one minute and disappears the next (James 4:14)” [Gary C. Hampton].
- James 4.16 **ALL SUCH REJOICING IS EVIL**—“James rebuked those of his readers who were living with this God-neglecting attitude. They derived joy from feeling that they controlled their own destiny. Here is the picture of the ‘self-made man’ taking credit for what God has given him. Boasting of this kind is unrealistic. It betrays an attitude that puts man in God’s place. For this reason it is evil. In these verses James presented four arguments that show the foolishness of ignoring God’s will: (1) the complexity of life (James 4:13), (2) the uncertainty of life (James 4:14), (3) the brevity of life (James 4:14), and (4) the frailty of man (James 4:16). [Note: Wiersbe, pp. 130-33.]” [Thomas Constable, *Dr. Constable’s Bible Study Notes*, 2012, An e-Sword Module].
- James 4:17... **TO HIM IT IS SIN**—“He who recognizes life’s transient and fleeting character, but refuses to acknowledge the hand of God in the affairs of men, and who may even boast of his sufficiency and independence, but who will not do that which is right, is guilty of sin. ... Whether James’ statement ... is to be regarded as an allusion to Paul’s affirmation in Romans 14:13, ..., it is very true that the statements, taken together, establish the fact that (a) a knowledge of what is right creates the obligation to discharge the duty involved in it; and (b) doubt regarding the propriety of an act necessitates abstinence from it” [Guy N. Woods, pp. 252-53].

V. Lessons & Applications.

1. James 4.2 ...**BECAUSE YE ASK NOT**. One big problem in living the Christian life is that we often fail to present our petitions to the Lord in prayer. Then the other major problem is seen in the next verse—we often pray “not in faith,” i.e., not according to the Lord’s will. How important it should be for us to concentrate more on proper prayer!
2. James 4.6 ...**GIVETH GRACE TO THE HUMBLE**. Surely we can learn from God’s past dealing with mankind the value of humility. This principle has ALWAYS been true!
3. James 4.7 **RESIST THE DEVIL...** It requires a great amount of strength to resist the devil! We must follow the example of our Lord (1 Pet 2:21 + Mt 4:1-11).

4. James 4.7-10 **SUBMIT YOURSELVES THEREFORE TO God. RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU.** “When it is said that God *resisteth* the proud, the idea is based on military strategy, and it is as if he had said, God sets Himself in array against the proud. Pride calls out the armies of God, and it is no wonder that the Bible says that pride goeth before destruction (Proverbs 16.18). But the word for RESIST in this verse is a different word. The meaning here is to withstand (Galatians 2.11; 2 Timothy 3.8; 1 Peter 5.9). Inasmuch as God and the devil are diametrically opposed to each other, it is utterly impossible to have fellowship with both at the same time. It appears that the point of emphasis here is the curbing of the proud spirit. The choice must be made between God and the proud will, a will which is inspired by the devil. When one subjects himself unto God, he arrays himself under God, that is, he becomes obedient to him and subordinates his will to that of God. God Himself arrays Himself against the proud, while the humble arrays himself UNDER God. This will make certain the strength necessary to resist the devil (1 Peter 5.6-10)” [Leslie G. Thomas, *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1958, pp., 243-44].
5. James 4.11 **SPEAK NOT EVIL ONE OF ANOTHER, BRETHREN...** How important are these words! We must not be involved in the sort of censorious judgment which Jesus condemns in Matthew 7:1ff. This does not preclude all judging, however, in the same context Jesus warns that we must examine fruit (Mt 7:15-20).
6. James 4.14 **...YE KNOW NOT WHAT SHALL BE ON THE MORROW...** Especially in our day of humanistic thinking (man is the measure of all things), we need to be reminded constantly about our own HUMANITY!
7. James 4.13-15 “The thoughtful Christian will readily recognize that our times are in the hands of the Lord (cf., Psalm 31.14-15), and it is therefore fitting that he should say, **IF THE LORD WILL I SHALL DO THIS OR THAT.** Anyone who reads the writings of James and Paul cannot fail to have this idea impressed upon his mind (cf., Acts 18.20-21; 1 Corinthians 4.19). The Latin equivalent to IF THE LORD WILL is DEO VOLENTE, and the latter is often abbreviated, in present-day usage, as D. V. It is, of course, possible for the Lord’s people to employ the phrase IF THE LORD WILL without giving due consideration to its actual significance, and that would not be beneficial to the user; but any informed child of God ought to train himself to make a practice of recognizing the sovereignty of God, and His overruling providence, at all times; or, which is the same thing, this attitude toward God should underlie and control our every thought, purpose, and plan. The dominant guiding principle of our life should be, **NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE or WHAT SHALL I DO, LORD?**” [Leslie G. Thomas, *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1972, pp., 282-83].
8. James 4.13-15 When we properly understand the brevity of life it will be A CATALYST. “On one occasion, Jesus told His disciples—John 9.4 **I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.** It seems from a very early age that Jesus knew that He had only a short time to get the Father’s will done. Do you recall how He told His mother at the age of twelve that He had to be about His Father’s business (Luke 2.49)? He knew that the dark night of suffering and death was coming. He was able to cry from the cross, **‘It is finished’** because He had been a good steward of the time that God had given Him (John 19.30). As the brevity of life was a catalyst in the life of our Lord, it should be a catalyst in our lives. It will help us to be good stewards of our time (1 Peter 4.10), as Jesus was of His. Those who recognize the brevity of life know the importance of using every second. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote—Ephesians 5.16-17 **‘Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.’** Those who are wise, and know what the will of the Lord is, buy up every opportunity that they have to get themselves and others ready for that appointment to come (Colossians 4.5; Hebrews 9.27). We may never have another opportunity to save them or ourselves. In contrast, those who are foolish do not make wise use of their time. Consider the parable that Jesus told about the five wise and five

foolish virgins (Matthew 25.1-13). ... What was the chief difference between the wise and the foolish virgins? The difference was primarily in the way that the women made use of the time that they had been given. The wise virgins used their time to purchase sufficient oil for their lamps while the foolish did not. The foolish thought that there was plenty of time. Perhaps, you are reminded as well of Felix who trembled at Paul’s preaching, but still sent Paul away intending to call for him when he had a ‘convenient season’ (Acts 24.25). As far as we know, such a season never came for him. Like the foolish virgins and the foolish farmer, he banked on time that he did not have. Perhaps, you are doing the same. If you are putting off obeying the gospel or being restored, let the brevity of life be a catalyst to making that decision right now (Hebrews 3.7, 13, 15; 2 Corinthians 6.2). You simply might not have another opportunity. Realizing that our lives are ‘soon cut off, and we fly away,’ we must ask God to ‘teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom’ (Psalm 90.10, 12; cf., Psalm 39.4-5). The brevity of life will serve as a catalyst to get us to act carefully and with much wisdom. ...” [Wade Webster, in *Wisdom from Above—Studies in James*, Editor: Greg R. Elliott, 2004, Cold Harbor Road Church of Christ, pp., 116-121].

VI. Questions.

True or False

- 01. _____ The double minded are instructed to purify their hearts.
- 02. _____ This chapter teaches that some of these Christians were not praying.
- 03. _____ For man to rejoice in his boastings is evil.
- 04. _____ God resists the humble person.
- 05. _____ In certain instances, laughter should be turned to mourning.

Multiple Choice (Select the BEST Answer)

- 06. _____ James tells us there is one lawgiver who is able to save and to: (a) multiply; (b) destroy; (c) forgive.
- 07. _____ The source of fighting among brethren is: (a) lusts; (b) enemies; (c) outsiders.
- 08. _____ It would be good if every Christian would realize that our lives are like a: (a) walnut; (b) flight; (c) vapor.
- 09. _____ What will happen if we draw nigh to God: (a) He will draw nigh to us; (b) He will cause us to leave; (c) He will help us.
- 10. _____ James identifies how some of the Jewish Christians asked AMIS as: (a) to punish others; (b) to praise their neighbors; (c) to consume it upon their own lusts.

Fill in the Blanks

- 11. “Ye ought to say, _____ the Lord _____, we shall _____, and do this or that.”
- 12. If we resist the devil he will _____ from us.
- 13. God does this to the proud: _____.
- 14. There is one lawgiver who is able to _____ and to _____.
- 15. “Therefore, to him that _____ to do good, and doeth it _____, to him it is _____.”

Each Question is worth 7 Points

My Score is: _____

Answers will be found on next week’s handout

ANSWERS to James 3 Questions... **01**—False (8); **02**—True (17); **03**—True (3-5); **04**—True (12); **05**—True (9); **06**—a (15); **07**—b (3); **08**—c (10); **09**—b (13); **10**—d (16); **11**—masters (1); **12**—great, fire (5); **13**—tongue, tame, poison (8); **14**—pure (17); **15**—small (3).

VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle. The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. –DRL

L O R D D A L O G H F O D
 L A S T L J O G L A A G E
 O R H O P E V R O C T R A
 R G R A S S E A R C H E D
 B L O O D U E C Y O E V O
 E H O L Y S S E W R R E O
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 S I N Y Y O E C H R I S T
 O T H O U G H C A L L P Y

ANOTHER	BECAUSE	BROTHER	COME	DRAW
EVEN	EVIL	FIGHT	GIVETH	GRACE
HENCE	HUMBLE	JUDGE	JUDGETH	KNOW
LORD	LUST	MORROW	MOURN	NIGH
REJOICE	SAITH	SPEAKETH	SUCH	THERE
THEREFORE	WORLD			

IX. EXTRA CREDIT FOR “SUPER” Bible Students...

Will you please consider answering these three SIMPLE questions based on the Bible text of this chapter? I will try to make use of your answers. Bring them with you next week. Tear out this last sheet from the Study Guide and be prepared to put it in a basket. I think it will be a great help to all of those in the class if you will do so. Thank you in advance for your marvelous cooperation!

W O R D: What word would you like to know more about in this chapter?

W O N D E R: I wonder what this phrase, verse, or series of verses means...

W I S H: I wish myself—or others whom I know or even don’t know—would understand this fact, principle, or concept from this chapter...