

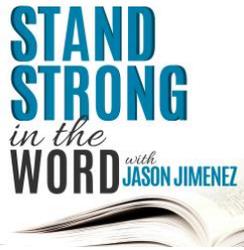
“How to Be a Lover of God and Not a Lover of the World” **James 4:1-17**

After describing the power of the tongue (3:1-12) and distinguishing between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world, James now explains the sources of evil (4:1-7), offers seven exhortations to embolden Christians (4:8-10), and reminds the early church not to neglect their duties as they seek to serve God (4:11-17).

I. The Three Sources of Evil (4:1-7)

1. The Flesh (1-3):

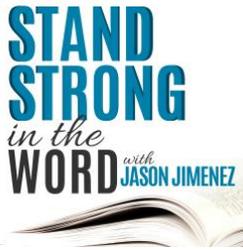
- A. ***What causes quarrels*** (series of protracted conflict) ***and what causes fights*** (non-physical/physical clashes w/ intense bitterness) ***among you? Is it not this, that your passions*** (seeking self-pleasure; hedonism) ***are at war within you?*** James’s rhetorical question is contrasted with 3:18, “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” After demonstrating how a wise person can control the tongue (3:1-12) and live at peace (3:18), James confronts the discord and disunity in the church. ***Passions are at war within you***—Referring to the sinful nature (1:10-11; 3:9-11). No doubt the stress caused by the persecution contributed to the infighting in the early church. Paul writes, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (Rom. 6:12-13).
- B. ² ***You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.*** James expounds on the damage caused by feeding your own lusts and selfish desires. ***You murder***—So consumed by evil desires can cause someone to commit murder. However, more than likely, James is using hyperbole in similar fashion to Matt. 5:21-22. ***You do not ask***—The early church was too busy fighting and lusting for the things of the world that they failed to pray to God.
- C. ³ ***You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*** Asking for wisdom (1:5) is to be done in sincere faith (1:6-8), not with wrong motives and for the wrong reasons (4:4). *The New King James Study Bible*, “Some might have protested James’ admonition (vv. 1, 2) by claiming that they had not received



an answer to their prayers (see Matt. 7:7). James responds by suggesting that they were praying for the wrong things. Instead of praying for their sinful desires, they should have been praying for God's good will for them. Often the reason God does not supply what a person desires is simply that He knows it would not benefit that person (see Phil. 4:19). God is not obliged to answer our prayers in the affirmative. He will not act in ways that are contrary to His will, even if He is besieged by fervent prayers. Anytime we seek to further our personal pleasures through prayer, we are asking *amiss* (see Matt. 6:33).” ***You ask wrongly***—Selfishness and personal gratification will never give you a life worthy of God (Pro. 30:8-9; Matt. 6:11).

2. The World (4-5):

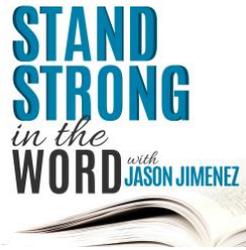
- A. ⁴ ***You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship*** (to have affection) ***with the world*** (*kosmos*) ***is enmity*** (to be an enemy; hostility) ***with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*** James uses harsh OT imagery (Isa. 54:5-6; 57:3; Ezek. 16:38) to rebuke the early church leaders for their love of the world. The Jewish readers would have understood that James was relating them to the unfaithfulness of Israel as she played the harlot (see Jer. 2:20; 3:1; Ezek. 16:26-29). ***Friendship with the world***—The closer you get to the world the more of an enemy of God you become. Showing partiality (2:1-13) and pursuing worldly riches (2:15-17) and earthly wisdom (3:14-16) will make you an enemy of God. The apostle John writes in 1 Jn. 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”
- B. ⁵ ***Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?*** It seems James blends several teachings in the Jewish Scripture into one short phrase. A common practice of OT and NT Jewish writers. It’s debated as to the proper interpretation of verse 5. However, the general takeaway seems to speak of God’s perfect and unconditional love for his people. Therefore, God is jealous over His people (see Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Ps. 79:5). Asaph writes, “For they



provoked him to anger with their high places; they moved him to jealousy with their idols” (Ps. 78:58). **Made to dwell**—*Vines Expository Bible Notes*, “A word that reflects a settled-down lifestyle, making oneself at home. The phrase “dwell on the earth” is used repeatedly in Revelation (3:10; 6:10; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14) to refer to those suffering the tribulation of the last times. A powerful prayer in Ephesians depicts Jesus dwelling in our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17). Contrast this with the reality of God’s fullness dwelling in Jesus (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Here, in James 4:5, it raises concern over the indwelling Spirit’s response when followers of Jesus persist in being friends with the world.”

3. The Devil (6-7):

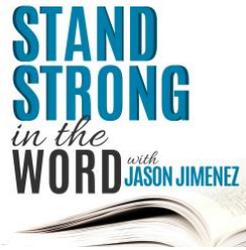
- A. ⁶ **But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes** (resists) **the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** James now quotes from Pro. 3:34, “but to the humble he [God] gives favor (grace).” The fact that God gives more grace in the midst of sin demonstrates that He’s love is far greater than the power and effects of sin. Paul writes, “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20-21). **God opposes the proud**—Peter writes, “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Pet. 5:5).
- B. ⁷ **Submit** (to line up under) **yourselves therefore to God. Resist** (take your stand against) **the devil, and he will flee from you.** James will list ten exhortations for the Christian to live by as he or she experiences the grace of God (v. 7-10). In verses 7-10, the verbs used in the exhortations are in the aorist tense. Which means, the Christian is to immediately respond to these truths and settle them in his or her life once and for all. **Submit yourselves**—The first exhortation is to willingly submit to God and obediently follow his will for your life. Submission to God is an act confirming your loyalty is not to the world. **Resist the devil**—The second exhortation is not to give into the entrapments of Satan. Being under the protection of God prevents Satan from getting to Christians and causing them to stumble. Peter writes, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt



you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet. 5:6-9).

II. Eight Exhortations That Will Grow Your Love for God (4:8-10)

- ⁸ ***Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*** After identifying the three sources of evil and confronting the church’s corruption, in verses 8-10, James presents seven exhortations to the church as a mighty call to repentance. ***Draw near to God***—The third exhortation is to draw close to God. It often refers to coming before God in worship. ***Cleanse your hands***—In explaining the fourth exhortation, pure conduct, James relates it to priests washing their hands before they started their duties in the tabernacle (Ex. 30:17-21). ***Purify your hearts***—The fifth exhortation is keeping your thoughts and motives pure. Ps. 24:4, “He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” ***Double-minded***—The same terminology is used in 1:8 when describing a Christian who lacks sincere faith and consumed by the things of the world.
- ⁹ ***Be wretched*** (grieved; miserable) ***and mourn*** (passionate grief) ***and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*** Again, James uses OT imagery from the prophets (Joel 2:12) to describe exhortations, sixth (grief), seventh (mourn), and eighth (weep). A Christian who truly repents of their sin will be sorrowful, regretful, and will make restitution for the damage caused by their sin. ***Turn to mourning and your joy to gloom***—James isn’t implying Christians are to remain in a gloomy state. In his ninth exhortation, James is telling the scattered church to put away a scornful attitude (“laughter”) and repent of their sinful behavior to God (see Lk. 6:24-26). *The IVP New Testament Series*, “The third couplet describes deep and acute sorrow—not merely regret over mistakes but actual grieving, mourning and wailing over one’s sin. The three verbs, in order, make vivid impressions: *talaiporeo*, a state of being miserable or wretched; *pentheo*, the great sadness of mourning; and *klaio*, a vehement or bitter weeping. Again James is calling for what Jesus prescribed in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:4, using a participle of the verb *pentheo*). The

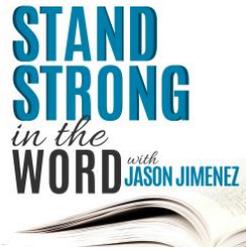


seriousness of sin is unmistakable here, and Christians today who lack that sense of seriousness about sin are weakened and corrupted.”

3. ¹⁰ **Humble** (lowliness of mind; humility) **yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt** (to be lifted up above all heights) **you**. The tenth exhortation is to humble yourself before God and obey him. In Pro. 3:33-35, Solomon writes, “The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor. The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace.” In this short section of his letter, James forces the early church to make their choice: Will it be the world or God? Will it be fighting or forgiving? Will it be wickedness or repentance? In the end, the pleasures of the world lead to destruction but the one who recognizes his or her need for God will be restored.
 - A. Col. 3:12, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...”
 - B. 1 Pet. 5:5, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.””

III. Three Relationships to Get Right on Earth (4:11-12)

1. ¹¹ **Do not speak evil** (slander) **against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges** (condemns) **his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge**. In verses 11 and 12, James addresses three interconnected relationships that make up our lives: (1) our relationship to others, (2) our relationship to the law, and (3) our relationship to God. **Do not speak against one another, brothers**—The first relationship mentioned by James is with each other. He uses such terms like “one another,” “brothers,” and “neighbor.” James returns to the subject of “speech” to continue warning the church of the consequences and duplicity of slander (1:19-20, 26; 3:1-12; 5:9). To slander, means to attack a person’s character or to defame their reputation. When Christians slander others, they are, essentially, advancing the work of the Devil—whose name in Greek means “Slanderer.” **Judges his brother**—In Matt. 7:1-5, Jesus taught his disciples to refrain from judging others when you are in greater sin. That’s precisely what James is conveying here as well. Christians are not to speak falsely or judge others hypocritically. However, there are many passages in the Bible that exhort Christians to judge appropriately and righteously (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 4:14; 6:2-5; Tit. 1:13; 2:15; 3:10). Paul speaks to Christians taking

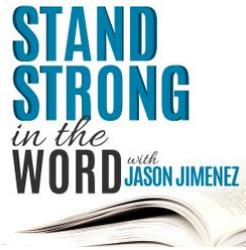


fellow believers to court in 1 Cor. 6:2-5, “Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! ⁴ So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers...” ***But if you judge the law***—The second relationship is to the law. James calls out leaders who placed themselves above others, and yet, were neglecting to follow the royal law (see Mk. 12:28-34).

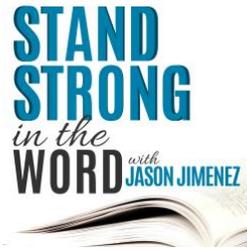
2. ¹² ***There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*** The third relationship is to God. God, not man, is the Ultimate Lawgiver (Isa. 33:22), and he alone will judge the world with equity (Ps. 75). *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, “James insists that we are to be doers under the law, which is contradicted when we try to be judges over the law. The “law” (nomos) could refer to the Old Testament command in Leviticus 19:16, which prohibits slander, and to Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” which James quoted in 2:8. Given James’s reverence for the teachings of Jesus as the royal law of the kingdom, it is likely that he also has in mind Jesus’ specific command against judging in Matthew 7:1 and Jesus’ own quoting of Leviticus 19:18. James’s point is that if we accept God’s mercy through Christ, we place ourselves under Christ’s law, which commands mercy. If we then judge others instead of being merciful toward their faults, we are rejecting that law and so setting ourselves up as judges over the law. This contradicts our proper stance as recipients of grace—we are to be doers under the law.”

- A. In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds fellow believers that we are answerable to God and will stand before him one day and give an account of how we served him on earth: “For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” ¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (14:9-12).

IV. Planning Your Future the Right Way (4:13-17)



1. ¹³ ***Come now*** (“Now listen”), ***you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”***—By all appearances (4:13-17), James is speaking to the wealthy landowners and merchants within the Christian community who boasted of their profits and power. In 5:1-6, James will go into greater detail rebuking the greedy rich. ***Trade and make a profit***—James isn’t saying it’s wrong to plan ahead. He’s saying it’s wrong to exclude God when making plans for the future. Moreover, James calls out the desire to make money at any cost. Such greed blinds a person from listening to God and caring for those around them. *Theology of Work Commentary*, “James’s words should make Christians more aware of the need to continually reassess, adapt, and adjust. Our plans should be flexible and our execution responsive to changing conditions. In one sense, this is simply good business practice. Yet in a deeper sense, it is a spiritual matter, for we need to respond not only to market conditions but also to God’s leading in our work. This brings us back to James’s exhortation to listen with deep attention. Christian leadership consists not in forcing others to comply with our plans and actions, but in adapting ourselves to God’s word and God’s unfolding guidance in our lives.”
 - A. ¹⁴ ***yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*** James is referencing Pro. 27:1, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day will bring.” Only God, who is omniscient, knows the future. ***What is your life***—Not only is the future uncertain by life itself is uncertain. ***Mist that appears***—This is a phrase describing the transitory nature of life in the OT: “breath” (Job 7:7, 16); “cloud” (Job 7:9); “handbreadths” “mere breath” “shadow” (Ps. 39:5-6); “evening shadow” (Ps. 102:11). Hosea 13:3, “Therefore they shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes early away, like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window.”
 - B. Motyer, “We receive another day neither by natural necessity, nor by mechanical law, nor by right, nor by courtesy of nature, but only by the covenanted mercies of God.”
 - C. John Wesley, “Realizing the future is uncertain not only teaches us trust in God, it helps us to properly value the present. To be obsessed with future plans may work our failure to appreciate present blessings or our evasion of present duties.”
2. ¹⁵ ***Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”*** After reproving the wealthy merchants for disowning God, James turns their attention to the will of God. Matthew Henry writes, “We are taught to



keep up a constant sense of our dependence on the will of God for life, and all the actions and enjoyments of it." Christians are to have a humble reliance on God and to live their lives in accordance to God's will.

3. **16 As it is, you boast** (brag; vainglory) **in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. You boast in your arrogance**—In the Greek, the object of the boasting is “in” their arrogance. They weren’t just bragging about their successes. They were boasting in their self-sufficiency. Thus, their bragging was evil and dishonorable to God. An example of a person who boasted in his self-sufficiency is the rich ruler in Lk. 12:13-21. Moses, on the other hand, is a good example of someone who did not boast in his riches or position of power. Heb. 11:24-26, “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”
4. **17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.** James ends this section warning the church not to ignore what he has said to them. **right thing to do and fails to do it**—The Greek verb, *poieo*, has a double use “to do and not to do.” James is playing off his previous comments in 1:22-25, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” In 2:15-16, James also pointed out if you fail to help someone in need it is a sin (2:15-16). **For him it is sin**—Sin is not only actively committing acts forbidden by God (sins of “commission”) but sin is also not committing to doing something God calls you to do (sins of “omission”). The rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), one of Jesus’s most memorable teachings, is an example of sins of omission.
 - A. Pro. 3:27-28, Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it”—when you have it with you.