



Book of James

Chapter 4

*Theme: Emptiness
and Dullness of Worldliness*

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Theme: Vacuity and Vapidity of Worldliness

How to end wars.

- At war with each other (vv. 1, 11-12);
- At war with ourselves (vv. 1-3);
- At war with God (vv. 4-10).

Barnes' Analysis of the Chapter

In the previous chapter (James 3:13-18) the apostle had contrasted the wisdom which is from above with that which is from beneath. The former is peaceable, pure, and gentle, leading to universal kindness and order; the latter earthly, sensual, and devilish. The points suggested in this chapter grow directly out of the remarks made there, and are designed to show the effect of the "wisdom which descendeth not from above," as evinced in the spirit of this world, and thus by contrast to show the value of true wisdom, or of the spirit of religion. Accordingly, the apostle illustrates the effects of the wisdom of this world, or the spirit of this world, by showing what it produces, or what they do who are under its influence. We are not to suppose that the persons to whom the apostle addressed this epistle were actually *guilty* of the things here referred to themselves, but such things had an existence in the world, and it gave more life and spirit to the discussion to represent them as existing "among them." In illustrating the subject, he refers to the following things as resulting from the spirit that is opposite to the wisdom which is from above, viz.:

- (1.) Wars and fightings, which are to be traced solely to the lusts of men, James 4:1-2;
- (2.) the neglect of prayer, showing the reason why they did not have the things which were necessary, James 4:2;
- (3.) the fact that *when* they prayed they did not obtain what they needed, because they prayed with improper motives, in order to have the means of gratifying their sensual desires, James 4:3;
- (4.) the desire of the friendship of the world, as one of the fruits of being under the influence of the wisdom which is not from above, James 4:4;
- (5.) *envy*, as another of these fruits, James 4:5. In view of these things, and of the danger to which they were exposed of acting under their influence, the apostle proceeds to give them some solemn cautions and admonitions. He tells them that God resists all who are proud, but gives grace to all who are humble, (James 4:6;) he counsels them to submit to God, (James 4:7,) to resist the devil, (James 4:7,) to draw nigh to God, (James 4:8,) to cleanse their hands and their hearts, (James 4:8,) to be afflicted and mourn over their sins, and to become serious and devout, (James 4:9,) and to humble themselves before God that he might lift them up, (James 4:10;) he commands them not to speak evil one of another, since by so doing they in fact set themselves up to be judges, and in the circumstances became judges of the law as well as of their brethren, James 4:11-12. He then rebukes the confident spirit which lays its plans for the future with no just view of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and shows them that all their plans for the future should be formed with a distinct recognition of their dependence on God for success, and even for the continuance of life, James 4:13-16. The chapter closes with an affirmation

that to him that knows how to do good and does it not, to him it is sin, (James 4:17,) implying that all he had said in the chapter might indeed be obvious, and that they would be ready to admit that these things were true, and that if they knew this, and did not do right, they must be regarded as guilty.¹

McGee Introduction: James will deal with several very important questions in this chapter: What is worldliness? How does a Christian fight the Devil? What is your life? All of these will anchor back into the subject of worldliness.

James will first answer the question: What is worldliness? I believe the average Christian in our so-called fundamental churches would give one of several answers. Some would say that worldliness is a matter of the kind of amusements you attend or indulge in: What kind of movies do you go to? Do you dance? And, do you drink? That is what they would call worldliness. May I say to you, James would not agree with them.

Others would say that it is the kind of crowd you run with, the gang you hang around with. After all, birds of a feather flock together, and if you are with a worldly crowd that engages in these things, then you are worldly. I am sorry to have to tell you, if you gave that answer in James's college, you would fail; you wouldn't pass the course.

Still others would say that worldliness is a matter of the conversation you engage in. You must learn to say "Praise the Lord" and "Hallelujah" at the right times. Worldliness is when you engage in worldly conversation. Again, that is not the answer; you have failed the course.

Someone else will answer that worldliness is the way that you dress. I have news for you: you have not passed the course.

Others may say it is a person who engages in business and the making of money to the exclusion of all else and who neglects the church; that person, they say, is a worldly individual. You still have not passed the course in James's college.

Yet another may answer that it is the person who does not go to church, but spends time on the golf course, fishing, boating, or watching his favorite team play baseball.

My friend, I do not approve of any of the things which I have mentioned here, but they just don't happen to be worldliness. Most of those sins are sins of the flesh—not of the world. If you put down any one of those as your answer to James's question, you have flunked the exam; you've failed the subject, and you've busted the course. None of those answers is correct. They may be symptoms of the disease, but nobody ever died of symptoms—they die of the disease. These are simply evidences of the real problem, which is deeper.

A brother of Henry Ward Beecher, a pastor in upper New York State, had a clock in his church that never would keep accurate time. So this man put a sign under that clock which read: "Don't blame the hands. The trouble lies deeper." This is what we need to recognize in ourselves. What we call worldliness is just the hands of the clock; the real trouble lies deeper.

William Thackeray, who was a Christian, dealt with this subject in his novel, *Vanity Fair*, in a way that probably no one else has dealt with it. His novel is about the world, and he wrote it on the background of the wars of Napoleon. He presents characters who are all filled with weaknesses and littleness, pettiness and jealousy, envy, discord and

¹ Barnes' Notes On The New Testament

strife—all of that is there. Someone once asked Thackeray, “Why don’t you have some wonderful heroes in your novels? You always present *little* people.” Thackeray replied, “I hold a mirror up to nature, and I do not find heroes among mankind. They are filled with littleness and pettiness and strife and sin.” When you get to the end of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray does a masterly thing. He says, “Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.” That is man. As Shakespeare said, he “struts and frets his hour upon the stage.” Man is filled with worldliness.

Dr. Griffith Thomas pinned it down a little closer when a person who was very much distressed came to him one day and asked, “Don’t you think that the world is becoming Christian today?” Dr. Thomas said, “No, I do not think that is true. I think the world is becoming a little churchy, but I think the church is becoming immensely worldly.”

Since World War II there has been a breakdown of the wall of separation between the church and the world. The separation that many had practiced was legalistic and, I think, unscriptural. The church was like the little Dutch boy who was keeping his thumb in the dike. Then, in the aftermath of the war, along came television, lawlessness, immorality, and juvenile delinquency; first the beatniks, then the hippies, then dope and marijuana, and the philosophy of existentialism. A tidal wave swept over the dikes of separation, and even the little Dutch boy was washed away.

There is no simple answer to the question: What is worldliness? But I am going to let James give what I think is his very definitive answer. What is worldliness? James says that worldliness is strife and envy. We need to go back to chapter 3 to pick up his thoughts. In James 3:13 we read, “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.” Faith is the major in James’ university, and all elective courses are related to faith. Works of faith bring meekness. Then we read, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle” (James 3:17). There is meekness or humility, and humility means submission.

In James 3:16 we read, “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” That is worldliness. And worldliness in the church has produced all the cults, denominations, factions, divisions, and cliques which have arisen and abound in the church today. There is a spirit of rivalry and jealousy in the church. In the previous verse, James describes this as “earthly”—that is, it is confined to the earth. It is “sensual”—that is, psychological. And then it’s “devilish” or demonic, which is something quite terrible, my friend.

What do envy and strife produce in this world? They produce “confusion and every evil work.” With this as background, we can recognize what James is saying now in chapter 4—²

This chapter deals with Christians’ struggle with their fallen natures, exacerbated by the influence of worldly wisdom in the church. This may relate to the rivalry of church leaders (teachers) of chapter 3, whose actions influence all Christians.³

²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (5:659). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³Utley, R. J. D. (2000). *Vol. Volume 11: Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude*. Study Guide Commentary Series (52). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

Chuck Smith: This chapter could be entitled how to win friends and influence people. Guard your tongue, bring your tongue under control, use it for good, use it to encourage to build up, don't use it to tear down, to destroy, to cut, to hurt. Your wisdom, let it be Godly wisdom let it be demonstrated in your manner of life, that is your life let it be pure. Let your life be peaceable, merciful. Now this fruit of righteousness that we desire is actually sown in peace and that fruit of righteousness will come. It is sown in peace of them that make peace. So seek to live in peace with each other, and that fruit of righteousness will come forth⁴.

Biblical Theology.com Introduction: There are many forms of church polity in our Christian denominations today, ranging from groups in which a dogmatic church hierarchy has total control over doctrine and practice to those where this authority resides entirely with the local congregation. Regardless of the polity model, all of these churches are managed on a daily basis by people. In some groups, those people give little or no authority to the Holy Spirit in their daily administration, and in others the leaders are very sensitive to the Holy Spirit, seeking to follow the Lord in all they do. As a consequence, many churches and church groups today give only lip-service to God, and are more characterized as social clubs than as the body of Christ. Who controls your church? Is it controlled by a board of directors? Is it controlled by a deacon or group of deacons? Is it controlled by an influential family? Is it controlled by a pastor?

Or, is it controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Chances are, your church may not be characterized by this latter attribute. Though we desire our church to be under the control of God, immersed in His will by the power of the Holy Spirit, such congregations are rare, and when found they quickly grow in number. However, that growth often brings with it changes that extinguish the flame. What is going on here? What is the sin that is so rampant in the church that has changed it into a set of social clubs with a Christian theme? The problem is certainly not new. James is writing this letter to the churches of his day, and is addressing this same problem. It has been two generations since anyone had seen Jesus, so to many the original testimonies sounded like fables. The generations of persecution and abuse at the hands of the Jews also impacted the church, and unlike the church of today, they did not have the resources of the gospel writings, or the letters of Peter, James, John and Paul. Like today, the churches were groups of people, administered by people, and that administration was rarely led of the Spirit, but by men, and such a leadership model brings with it the sins of men.⁵

⁴ Chuck Smith, Pastor, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

⁵ http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html

James 4:1

From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they not* hence, *even of* your lusts that war in your members?

These are questions 16-17 in the Book of James. The next question will be in James 4:4.

Among *Christians!* Cf. Ps 133:1.

A tragic comment:

- Lot and Abraham (Gen 13).
- Absalom and David (2 Sam 13-18).
- Disciples quarreling (Luke 9:46-48).
- Corinthians suing in court (1 Cor 6:1-8; 14:23-40).
- Galatians “devouring one another” (Gal 5:15).
- Ephesians exhorted to unity (Eph 4:1-16)

Kinds of disagreements:

- Class wars (Jam 2:1-9)
- Labor wars (5:1-)
- Church fights (1:19-20; 3:13-18)
- Personal wars (4:11-12)
- Cf. 1 Pet 4:8; Mt 18:15-19; Gal 6:1-2.

[lusts] desires: *hedone* {hay-don-ay’} ø from *handano* (to please); pleasure; desires for pleasure. From which we get hedonism, the belief that pleasure is the chief good in life.

[wars and fightings among you] About this time in Judea the Jews made many insurrections against the Romans under the pretense of defending their religion and procuring their way of life. Many factions among the Jews also fought violently, massacring and plundering one another. In some provinces Jews killed many heathens and brought destruction upon themselves. These wars were undertaken through a spirit of covetousness and zeal, trying to convert the heathen and destroy idolatry.⁶

McGee: “Wars” have to do with the wars of nations. “Fightings” have to do with little skirmishes—that little fight you had in the church—you remember?

“Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” You wanted to have your own way. “Lusts that war in your members” are actually sensual pleasures. Strife and turmoil are created by conflicts and the overweening demands of the members of the body for satisfaction.

Most Greco-Roman philosophers and many Diaspora Jews repeatedly condemned people who were ruled by their passions, and described these desires for pleasure as “waging

⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

Diaspora ***Diaspora**. The Jewish dispersion outside Palestine. The technical term “Diaspora Judaism” is thus used interchangeably with “non-Palestinian Judaism” in this commentary.

war.” Many writers like Plato, Plutarch and Philo attributed all literal wars to bodily desires. In a somewhat similar vein, Jewish people spoke of an evil impulse, which according to later rabbis dominated all 248 members of the body.⁷

Characteristically, James introduced this new section with a rhetorical question, **What causes fights and quarrels among you?** Where do “fights” (lit., “state of war,” *polemoi*) and “quarrels” (lit., individual disputes or “battles,” *machai*) come from? James answered his own question: **from your desires that battle within you.** Conflict comes out of (*ek*) inner sensual lusts or pleasures (*hēdonōn*; cf. v. 3). Hedonism, the playboy philosophy that makes pleasure mankind’s chief end, still wages battles in people’s hearts.⁸

“in your members” Our physical bodies are not evil, nor the source of evil, but they are the battle ground of evil (cf. Rom. 6:12–12). This was a major ontological difference between Greek philosophy and biblical Christianity.

It is just possible the “members” may refer to the body of Christ, the Church. It is uncertain whether the warning is (1) internal (fallen nature); (2) external (problem in the church); or (3) both.⁹

ESV: In contrast to those who make peace, quarrels and fights are caused by the passions or self-centered desires (“hedonism” comes from Gk. *hēdonē*, “passions”) that are causing these people to make war against each other in the church. This is extremely violent language for dissension, and some even think it should be taken literally of people killing each other (v. 2), though it is best to view this as a metaphor for the devastating effect of unrestrained hostility.

Plato **Plato**. A student of Socrates whose idealism and dualistic worldview became influential in subsequent Greek thought. He flourished in the fourth century B.C.

Plutarch **Plutarch**. A Greek biographer and moralist whose writings illustrate many of the views prevalent in the first and second centuries A.D.

Philo ***Philo**. A first-century Jewish philosopher committed to both Judaism and Greek thought; he lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and held a position of great influence and prestige in the Jewish community there.

rabbis ***Rabbi**. Jewish teacher. Sometime after A.D. 70 the term became a technical one for those ordained in the rabbinic movement, which probably consisted primarily of Pharisaic scribes. (To accommodate customary usage this commentary sometimes applies the term to Jewish teachers of the law in general, although such common usage may have technically been later; it also applies the term to the teachings of Jewish legal experts collected in rabbinic literature.)

⁷Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:1). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

lit. literal, literally

cf. *confer*, compare

v. verse

⁸Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:829). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁹Utey, R. J. D. (2000). *Vol. Volume 11: Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude*. Study Guide Commentary Series (53). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

The Jews were a very seditious people, continually warring with all their neighbors as well as within themselves. It was an inherent trait of their culture. It is evident that the conflicts wherein they were engaged in secular society was brought into the church. Certainly, there is never any conflict in our churches today. Actually, we all know that quite the opposite is true. James talks about wars and fightings within the church. These two words, *polemoi* and *machai* refer to forms of conflict that take place in a national, or corporate setting. The first refers to conflict that arises from the division of people over issues. Often when issues arise in the church, leaders divide, and by so doing, polarize the congregation into a multiple of conflicting groups. The second refers to self-destructive quarrelling between individuals or small groups. It is these forms of conflict that James sees within the church, and we often see today.

What are some of the reasons that people are so quick to ignore the still-quiet voice of the Holy Spirit and impose their own opinions on others in the church, and create disunity? James describes the source is those same conflicts that reside within the individual person or persons that are expressed in self-centered means. Certainly, the most damaging lust is the lust of self-centered pride, a power that rules the world, but is not appropriate in the body of Christ. People, driven by their own pride, will not hesitate to create a conflict in order to defend their own desires for doctrine, tradition, church practice, the type of music played, the color of the carpets, etc. There is no limit to the subjects of conflict when people turn their eyes away from God.¹⁰

James 4:2

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

The Pathology of Trouble

Root problem: selfishness. Isa 53:6. Abraham lying about Sarah. Achan taking forbidden loot.

Clarke: Ye have not, because ye ask not—Ye get no especial blessing from God as your fathers did, because ye do not pray. Worldly good is your god; ye leave no stone unturned in order to get it; and as ye ask nothing from God but to consume it upon your evil desires and propensities, your prayers are not heard.¹¹

McGee: Selfish desires, James makes it very clear, lead to war. This spirit of strife is worldliness; it is not Christian, and it is not the Christian approach. These are the things which represent the old nature. A man must be regenerated by faith in Christ and be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

What James describes here is the spirit of the world. When the spirit of the world gets into the church, you have a worldly church. My friend, do you think it is bad out on the battlefield? Did you think it was bad in Vietnam? Well, it was, but inside some churches and inside the hearts of some individuals it is just as bad. In the business world there is dog-eat-dog competition—that is worldliness. Political parties split, and one group

¹⁰ http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html

¹¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

becomes pitted against another. As capital and labor meet around the conference table, there is a battle going on. In the social world there are climbers on the social ladder who are stepping on the hands of others as they go up. In your neighborhood and mine one family does not speak to another family. Within families there are quarrels, brother against brother. Then that spirit gets into the church. *That*, my friend, is worldliness.

“Yet ye have not, because ye ask not.” Our desires should be taken to the Lord in prayer—to have them satisfied or denied or refined—and then we need to accept the answer from Him. What is the cure for worldliness? It is prayer. It is, therefore, faith in God. The apostle John put it like this, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). The answer is to trust in God absolutely, to go to Him in prayer and commit to Him that which is in your heart. When you find that there is strife and envy in your heart, talk to Him about it. Many of us go to the Lord to tell Him how good we are. And because we have been good little boys and girls who have gone to Sunday school, we think He ought to give us a lollipop or a Brownie button or something of that sort. My friend, we need to get right down to the nitty-gritty where we live. Consider these words which were written by a great saint, a mystic of the Middle Ages, Fénelon:

Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself as to others.

If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration, just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.

When I was laid aside for some time with an illness, I found that all things do work together for good. My wife and I were able to sit at home for a longer period of time than we ever had since we were married. Even on our honeymoon I candidated at a church. From that day to this we have been on the go. We found that there were some things we really needed to talk over that otherwise might have been misunderstood. We had wonderful talks, and we just laid bare our hearts to each other. It was the most joyous experience. I said to her, “Honey, this is more wonderful than our honeymoon was!” That is the kind of relationship we ought to have with God.

Having studied the Word of God and having read these words by Fénelon, I came to the conclusion that I was going to tell the Lord Jesus everything. I have talked to Him

about everything in my life that was sinful and questionable. He knows, He understands, and He's forgiven me.

The only way to take away that envy and jealousy and strife which is in your heart is to go to the Lord Jesus. You don't need to go to the psychiatrist; he'll just move your problem from one area to another. You need to get rid of that hang-up by going to the Lord Jesus, getting on *His* couch, and telling Him everything.

James says that the solution is for you and me to pray, but we often pray for selfish ends—

Diatribes often included hyperbole, or graphic, rhetorical exaggeration for effect. Most of James's readers have presumably not literally killed anyone, but they are exposed to violent teachers (3:13–18) who regard murder as a satisfactory means of attaining justice and redistribution of wealth. James counsels prayer instead. (Later he has much harsher words for the oppressors, however; cf. 5:1–6.)¹²

have not—The lust of desire does not ensure the actual possession. Hence “ye kill” (not as *Margin*, without any old authority, “envy”) to ensure possession. Not probably in the case of professing Christians of that day in a literal sense, but “kill and envy” (as the *Greek* for “desire to have” should be translated), that is, harass and oppress through envy [DRUSIUS]. Compare Zec 11:5, “slay”; *through envy, hate*, and desire to get out of your way, and so are “murderers” in God's eyes [ESTIUS]. If literal murder [ALFORD] were meant, I do not think it would occur so early in the series; nor had Christians then as yet reached so open criminality. In the Spirit's application of the passage to all ages, literal *killing* is included, flowing from the desire to possess so David and Ahab. There is a climax: “Ye desire,” the individual lust for an object; “ye kill and envy,” the feeling and action of individuals against individuals; “ye fight and war,” the action of many against many.¹³

ye have not, because ye ask not—God promises to those who pray, not to those who fight. The petition of the lustful, murderous, and contentious is not recognized by God as

Diatribes **Diatribes**. A style of teaching used in ancient philosophical schools, generally characterized by rhetorical questions and imaginary interlocutors.

hyperbole **Hyperbole**. A rhetorical exaggeration, a figure of speech often used by Jewish wisdom teachers to underline their point. The point of Jesus' hyperbolic illustrations is generally to grab the hearer's attention and force that hearer to take his point seriously.

rhetorical ***Rhetoric**. The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it, the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

¹²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:2). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

¹³Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Jas 4:2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

prayer. If ye prayed, there would be no “wars and fightings.” Thus this last clause is an answer to the question, Jam 4:1, “Whence come wars and fightings?”¹⁴

War is the fruit of illicit wants. Lust brings about murder. Covetousness results in the frustration of not obtaining the hotly pursued desires. It all leads to the “quarrels” and “fights,” that “battle” against people, mentioned in verse 1. The last part of verse 2, **You do not have, because you do not ask God**, is best taken with what follows. James did not contend that the reason lust was not gratified was because people failed to ask God to fill those desires. He simply revealed the clear source of conflict deep in covetous human hearts.¹⁵

“lust” This term means “to desire,” “to set one’s heart upon something.” That something can be good or evil. Usually in the NT the term has a negative connotation. It is possible, in context, that the things desired were not evil in themselves but became evil in the person’s willingness to obtain them by any and every means apart from God’s will.¹⁶

[kill] “Murder” here is probably to be understood metaphorically and not literally, according to the context. However, in 5:6, James is apparently condemning wealthy unbelieving Jewish landowners who had actually murdered just and nonresistant workers. Context is the key in both interpretations.

Spurgeon: Praying is better than fighting. If God will give us what we ask, why need we fight for it?

Chuck Smith: Here James is declaring that most of the problems of man come basically from man's greed, and I would have to concur with this. I think it is the failure of our society. I think it is the failure of our government. Man's greed sooner or later gets in and corrupts. How corrupting is the greed of man, how it corrupts governments, the horrible thing of greed, and it's behind the wars. It is behind the fighting. It's behind the striving. That desire to have what belongs to someone else. The fighting, the wars among us. And yet we have not because he said, because we ask not (Jam 4:2).

You know a lot of these things that we desire, if we would just ask the Lord about them, and if it is right, God will give it to us. If it is not right he won't, because you can ask and receive not because you ask amiss, just to consume it on your own lusts. You see, people misunderstand the purpose of prayer. The purpose of prayer is never to get your will done upon the earth. And yet, how often we think of prayer as just that, the agency by which I can get my whims and wishes accomplished. "Now Lord I want you to do this and I want you to do that and I've got this list of things I want you to do before Friday."

¹⁴Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Jas 4:2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:829). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
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¹⁶Utley, R. J. D. (2000). *Vol. Volume 11: Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude*. Study Guide Commentary Series (53). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

And we think of prayer as a marvelous agency by which I can get all my wishes and all my desires accomplished.

I thought of prayer in that light for years. I was always trying to make deals with God. Now you do this and I will do this. How can you lose, trying to strike a bargain with the Lord? And I used prayer, or sought to use prayer, as a means by which I could fulfill my desires. I know a lot about this verse,

ESV: This verse consists of several short statements; there was no punctuation in ancient Greek, and various translations connect the statements in different ways. The esv punctuation works well when comparing this verse to [3:13–18](#): people **desire** and **covet** (Gk. *zēloō*, cf. *zēlos*, “jealousy,” [3:14](#)), which leads to the terrible wars and infighting in the church. **You do not have, because you do not ask** is a reminder that believers should ask God for what they seek rather than fighting each other. Prayerlessness results in failure to receive many of God's blessings. James does not imply that God wills to grant sinful, selfish desires ([4:3](#)), but bringing requests before God can have a purifying influence on one's desires.

BT.com: James states that you think you can secure great pleasures and happiness by overthrowing everything that stands in the way of your eager wishes, but in the act of overthrowing you lose your labor, your direction, and destroy one another. The conflict that James is addressing is significant. The word translated “kill” refers to pre-meditated acts that result in an intended separation. Of course, murder fits this definition. However, it is unlikely that church members were murdering each other by taking their lives. However, we kill church members every day when we drive a permanent wedge of separation. In this context, death refers to permanent separation. People want their own way, they want to express their own selfish desires and motives, and will easily hurt and drive away those who oppose them. The result is a church in conflict, whether that conflict is loud and explosive, or quiet and smoldering. Then, amidst this pool of self-will the people are astonished that they are not seeing God working in their lives. They see the form of religion in their body, but none of its power. They will voice wonderfully stated prayers that simply end with an “Amen,” and the adjournment of the meeting, and all go home unchanged.

These people think that they should obtain by aggression, but God seeks us to obtain his blessings in his grace. How do we obtain things by his grace? We ask God through prayer, and receive according to His will. If our prayers are to be answered in the way of our choosing, our choices must be in His will, not our own. If you want something, consider stating the desire in the form of a prayer and see if it is consistent with what would seem to be God's will for your life, or for the situation. For example consider the prayer, “Dear God, please cause my adversary to break out in boils.” What does such a prayer imply? How would God most probably respond? It is unlikely that God shares our selfish desire for retribution against the individual. Jesus commands us to love one another and pray for those from whom we receive persecution.

James 4:3

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.

The Remedy

Even wrong *praying*. Covetousness. Selfish people are always unhappy people.

[Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts] Twelve reasons for unanswered prayer:

1. Lusts (James 4:1,2,3,5; John 8:44)
2. Murders (James 4:2)
3. Covetousness (James 4:2)
4. Fighting and war (James 4:2)
5. Asking amiss to satisfy lusts (James 4:3)
6. Adulteries (James 4:4)
7. Friendship
8. Pride (James 4:6)
9. Rebellion against God (James 4:7)
10. Backsliding and sin (James 4:8)
11. Double mindedness or doubt (James 4:8)
12. Misuse of the tongue (James 4:11-12)

This passage should never be taken by the Christian as an excuse for unanswered prayer. By so doing he automatically classes himself as lustful, murderous, covetous, adulterous, worldly, proud, sinful, and blasphemous. Is it any wonder that God does not answer the prayers of such people? Would you? No man can ask amiss if he is in Christ and asks according to the promises (John 15:7; Mark 11:22-24; Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-8). The reason Christian prayers are not answered may be unbelief.

LAN: 1-3 Conflicts and disputes among believers are always harmful. James explains that these quarrels result from evil desires battling within us—we want more possessions, more money, higher status, more recognition. When we want badly enough to fulfill these desires, we fight in order to do so. Instead of aggressively grabbing what we want, we should submit ourselves to God, ask God to help us get rid of our selfish desires, and trust him to give us what we really need.¹⁷

LAN: 2-3 James mentions the most common problems in prayer: not asking, asking for the wrong things, asking for the wrong reasons. Do you talk to God at all? When you do, what do you talk about? Do you ask only to satisfy your desires? Do you seek God's approval for what you already plan to do? Your prayers will become powerful when you allow God to change your desires so that they perfectly correspond to his will for you (1 John 3:21-22).

¹⁷ Life Application Bible Notes

McGee: Even when we do ask God for something, we ask in order that we might spend it in a very selfish way.

Some of them are supposed to say in objection, But we do “ask” (pray); compare Jam 4:2. James replies, It is not enough to ask for good things, but we must ask with a good spirit and intention. “Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* (your object of prayer) upon (literally, ‘in’) your lusts (literally, ‘pleasures’)”; not that ye may have the things you need for the service of God. Contrast Jam 1:5 with Mt 6:31, 32. If ye prayed aright, all your pro. per wants would be supplied; the improper cravings which produce “wars and fightings” would then cease. Even believers’ prayers are often best answered when their desires are most opposed.¹⁸

You pray with the wrong motive. There is a heresy current among believers which, feeding off the excessive individualism and greed rampant in popular Western ideologies, purports to give God’s approval to selfish prayer. It beckons: “You are a child of God. He is a loving Father who would deny his children nothing. Therefore you can pray for anything you want, and God will give it to you. You want a new car? a bigger house? fancy clothes? Just ‘ask, and it will be given to you’ (Lk 11:10).” Besides misusing Scripture, raising false hopes and making prayer a magic charm indistinct from witchcraft, this teaching ignores the fact that a truly loving father does not give his children whatever they ask for; fathers know better than their children what they actually need and act accordingly. The present verse refutes this selfish philosophy masquerading as biblical teaching; compare Ya’akov’s scathing condemnation of the arrogant rich at 4:13–5:6, and see Isaiah 1:15–16, quoted in v. 8 below. For a right perspective see Mt 6:19–34, especially 6:33; also Yn 16:33, 1 Ke 4:2 and 1 Yn 5:14. Ya’akov gives his own instruction about prayer at 1:5–8, 5:13–20.¹⁹

The correct way for Christians to have their legitimate needs met is by asking God. One reason a believer does not receive what he asks for is that he asks **with wrong motives** (lit., “evilly” or “amiss,” kakōs). The verb **ask** is in the middle voice, meaning, “ask for yourself.” The purpose clause that follows further clarifies, **that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.** “Spend” could be translated “squander.” “Pleasures” is again the Greek word hēdonais (cf. v. 1). God will never provide for “hedonistic squandering”!²⁰

¹⁸Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Jas 4:3). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:3). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

lit. literal, literally

cf. *confer*, compare

v. verse

²⁰Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:829). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

because you ask amiss: 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). In prayer, God does not bow to our will; instead we submit to His good will for our lives.²¹

Prayer is not an agency by which my will is to be accomplished upon the earth. The purpose of prayer is to get God's will to be accomplished upon the earth, and so many times we ask and receive not because the motive behind our asking is really that of accomplishing my will rather than God's will. And if my will is in conflict with God's will, God is not going to change His will to accommodate me, for God is not subservient to me, I am subservient to Him. And the purpose of prayer is never to change the mind of God to see things my way. It isn't to persuade a reluctant God to do things my way. The real thrust and purpose of prayer is to get God's will done. That's why many times we ask and receive not because we ask amiss. Our own desires are too much entwined into it.

ESV: you ask wrongly. Not all prayers are pleasing to God, only those consistent with his will as revealed in Scripture (cf. 1 John 5:14–15 and notes). Rather than seeking to honor God and advance his kingdom purposes, such prayers seek only to gratify self-centered **passions** (Gk. *hēdonē*, see note on v. 1) or desires. James is not saying all pleasure is wrong (cf. Gen. 1:31; Ps. 16:11; 84:1–4, 10–12; 1 Tim. 6:17), only pleasure that does not have the glory of God as the goal (1 Cor. 10:31).

James 4:4

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

These are questions 18-19 in the Book of James. The next question is in James 4:12.

Being friendly with God's enemies?

Abraham was the friend of God (James 2:23); Lot was the friend of the world. Abraham literally had to rescue him. Friendship leads to loving the world (1 John 2:15-17) and conforming to the world (Rom 12:2). And being condemned with the world (1 Cor 11:32); our souls saved, however, "yet as by fire" (1 Cor 3:11-15). Friendship with the world is compared to adultery. We are married to Christ (Rom 7:4) and ought to be faithful to Him. Cf. Jer 3:1-5; Ezek 23; Hos 1 - 2.²²

²¹ The Nelson Study Bible

²² Chuck Missler, Notes on James, khouse.org

[the friendship of the world is enmity with God] (Dake) The Christian must:

1. Be free from the cares of the world (Matthew 13:22; Luke 21:34-36)
2. Not gain the world at the expense of his soul (Matthew 16:26)
3. Not offend others as the world does (Matthew 18:7)
4. Not be of it (John 15:19; John 17:14,16)
5. Not love his life in the world (John 12:25)
6. Be delivered from the world (Galatians 1:4)
7. Be crucified to the world (Galatians 6:14)
8. Shine as a light in the world (Phil. 2:15)
9. Deny its lusts; live godly in it (Titus 2:12)
10. Be unspotted from the world (James 1:27)
11. Not be friends with the world (James 4:4)
12. Escape the pollution and corruption of the world (2 Peter 1:4; 2 Peter 2:20)
13. Not love the world, neither the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15-17)
14. Be like Christ in the world (1 John 4:17)
15. Overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5)
16. Be chosen out of it (John 15:19; John 17:6)
17. Be not conformed to it (Romans 12:2)
18. Be dead to its ways (Col. 2:20)

“Adulterers and adulteresses” is a strong metaphor for those who have been spiritually unfaithful to God and who have engaged in an affair with the “world” (that evil organized system under the rule of the devil which opposes God and His will). This unfaithfulness results in: (1) experiencing hostility from God and (2) becoming God’s enemy.

Clarke: Ye adulterers and adulteresses—The Jews, because of their covenant with God, are represented as being espoused to him; and hence their idolatry, and their iniquity in general, are represented under the notion of adultery. And although they had not since the Babylonish captivity been guilty of idolatry; according to the letter; yet what is intended by idolatry, having their hearts estranged from God, and seeking their portion in this life and out of God, is that of which the Jews were then notoriously guilty. And I rather think that it is in this sense especially that St. James uses the words. “Lo! they that are far from thee shall perish; thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.” But perhaps something more than spiritual adultery is intended. See James 4:9.

Clarke: Whosoever—will be a friend of the world—How strange it is that people professing Christianity can suppose that with a worldly spirit, worldly companions, and their lives governed by worldly maxims, they can be in the favor of God, or ever get to the kingdom of heaven! When the world gets into the Church, the Church becomes a painted sepulchre; its spiritual vitality being extinct.

LAN: 3-4 There is nothing wrong with wanting a pleasurable life. God gives us good gifts that he wants us to enjoy (James 1:17; Ephes. 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:4-5). But having friendship with the world involves seeking pleasure at others’ expense or at the expense of obeying God. Pleasure that keeps us from pleasing God is sinful; pleasure from God’s rich bounty is good.

McGee: Because we are willing to compromise with the world in order to attain our goals, James calls us “adulterers and adulteresses.” This is the way of the world: take by force what you want; by hook or by crook lay hold of it; be envious and jealous of other folk, and cause strife. That is worldliness.

“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” I have never joined any of the clubs or lodges such as the Lions, the Moose, the Elks, or the Rotary Club. I have been asked to join, but I do not join them. I’ll tell you the reason. I have enough trouble with worldliness in the church; I do not need to join a worldly organization.

In the Old Testament, Israel was often called an adulteress for claiming to serve God while pursuing idols (e.g., Hos 1–3). Those who claimed to be God’s friends (Jas 2:23) but were really moral clients of the world (friendship often applied to patron-client relationships)—that is, they shared the world’s values (3:13–18)—were really unfaithful to God.²³

The oldest manuscripts omit “adulterers and,” and read simply, “Ye adulteresses.” God is the rightful husband; the men of the world are regarded collectively as one *adulteress*, and individually as *adulteresses*.

Unfaithful wives. In the *Tanakh* Israel’s unfaithfulness to God her *Baal* (the Hebrew word means both “lord” and “husband”) is often expressed in terms of adultery and whoredom; see Ezekiel 23; Hosea 1–2, 9:1. Yeshua means the same thing when he calls his generation “wicked and adulterous” (Mt 12:39, 16:4); compare Rv 2:22. On the rest of the verse, the best commentary is 1 Yn 2:15–17; compare also Ga 1:4, and what is said about **the world** in Yochanan 14–17.²⁴

“adulteresses” This is a feminine form. This could refer to (1) literal adultery, (2) but it is probably an OT metaphor for spiritual adultery (Examples: Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:20; Hos. 9:1; Matt. 12:39; 16:4). The KJV adds “and adulterers” because the translators understood the term literally, but this is not found in the most ancient uncial manuscripts (א*, A, B) or the Vulgate (Latin), Peshitta (Syriac), or Coptic (Egyptian) versions. It is

Old Testament ***Old Testament.** The common modern term for the Hebrew Bible (including Aramaic portions) as defined by the Jewish and Protestant Christian canons; Jewish readers generally call this the Tenach.

clients ***Client.** A person socially dependent on a patron in Roman society.

patron ***Patron.** The social superior in the Roman patron-client relationship, who granted favors to and acted as political sponsor for his clients, or social dependents. The obligations in the relationship were viewed as reciprocal; clients were to grant the patrons honor as their benefactors.

²³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:4). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

²⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

OT Old Testament

KJV King James Version

found in a later corrected copy of Siniaticus (Ⲛ^c) and many later Greek manuscripts (mostly minuscules).²⁵

Chuck Smith: This is speaking in a spiritual sense not physical in this particular passage. There are other passages that speak about in a physical sense but this happens to be spiritual because it is dealing with the love that is in your heart, the love for the world and the worldly things. You have been joined to Christ as His bride. Your chief love is to be directed towards Him. He is the one to whom you have been joined in marriage and if you begin to love something other than Him, more than Him, than you have committed spiritual adultery in your heart.

As God in the Old Testament was constantly accusing the people of Israel of adultery when they began to worship the other gods, so God speaks here against your love for the world.

ESV: Adulterous people recalls OT prophets who used this language to describe Israel's unfaithfulness to God (e.g., Jer. 2:20; 3:6–10; Hos. 1:2). Such people have chosen **friendship with the world** by imitating worldly ways of thinking and worldly activities, making them enemies **of God**. It will always be impossible to satisfy the expectations of unbelievers, whose hearts are set on this world (1 John 2:15–16; 5:19), and at the same time please God (Gal. 1:10; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 John 3:13). Cf. also Matt. 6:24; James often alludes to the teaching of Jesus (see chart last page), which is not surprising if he was Jesus' earthly brother.

BT.com: How do you suppose the word "adulterer" applies to these people? Jewish tradition and writings often used the metaphor of marriage to describe the relationship between God and the nation of Israel. When Israel would turn from God, they would be referred to as adulterers by the prophets. Even the New Testament describes the church as the "Bride of Christ". TO turn from God to another is a form of adultery. Adultery in this context can be described as serving one other than the One who deserves true allegiance. Who is the mistress in this example, the one who is turning people away from their first love? James describes it as friendship with the world.

These are some pretty harsh words which should cause us to examine our relationship with the world. Our relationship with the ungodly world is so intimate that it is difficult or impossible to see the line between them. Instead of running our churches according the Holy Spirit's lead, we run them using a worldly business model, instituting secular forms of authority in its members. When we do this, our churches quickly become a business who's primary purpose is meeting the social desires of its members.

Some churches do not place much emphasis on either Lordship, or the Bible, and are not much different from the world. Others are so careful to avoid the world that they are cloistered and often set up hedge laws to protect them from defilement. The churches at both ends of this spectrum are doing little to promote the Kingdom of God in the world. There are probably three ways to relate to the world, and we have a choice of which one we will seek:

²⁵Utley, R. J. D. (2000). *Vol. Volume 11: Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude*. Study Guide Commentary Series (54). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

Be of it. You may or may not be a Christian. The world contains those things in which you find security and pleasure, and you are satisfied to live with these. For you, church is simply a social enterprise within which you find friends and a shallow form of peace. You attend once a week out of obligation or tradition, and during the services you are watching the clock in anticipation of returning to your true home.

Be on the fence. You have a foot in both the world and in God's kingdom, a spiritual schizophrenic. You are a Christian who has not completely left the world. There are areas in your life and experience that are still causing you to turn your focus away from God. You must be continually reminded to look back to God because the things of the world easily distract you. You avoid criticism for your church affiliation by keeping it a secret from your co-workers and worldly friends.

You are God's missionary to the world. Your excursions into the world are on God's mission with the Holy Spirit accompanying you as your supporter and paraclete. You are able to step outside of the Christian subculture and be a useful tool for God's witness in the world.

Which of these characterizes your spiritual walk? Most likely, none of the three are accurate, yet your experience is characterized by a little bit of each. However, it is the third model that should be the spontaneous result of our faith. If we fall short of that model, we would be well to confess the sin that is keeping us from God's will, repent, and seek Him.

James 4:5

Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

The old nature (Not the body). Grieving the Holy Spirit. Rom 8:6, 7.

[The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy] There is no exact scripture quoted by James here. He must refer to the basic thought of several passages, as Genesis 6:5; Genesis 8:21; Numbers 11:29; Proverbs 21:10. That the spirit of man is designed to lust to envy, or that the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Christian lusts to envy, is contrary to all teaching of Scripture.

This verse may mean that because of our fallen nature, we have a tendency toward envy. James is not quoting a specific verse or passage—he is summing up a teaching of Scripture. See Romans 6:6-8 and Galatians 5:17-21 for more on the human tendency toward envy and discontent.

McGee: Are we trying to kid ourselves that we are nice, sweet, little folk who have no envy and jealousy in our hearts? I heard a woman say one time, “I have a very wonderful husband. He is not jealous of me.” I want you to know that something is wrong if a husband is not jealous of his wife. If he loves her, he will be jealous of her. God says that He is jealous of His children. But what about jealousy in the wrong sense—jealousy when we do not get elected to a committee or do not receive recognition in the church that we feel we deserve? And what about the strife we cause with these tongues of ours?

James says that the solution to the problem is to go to the Lord Jesus and tell Him about our problem, tell Him everything.

Here James may refer to the evil impulse that, according to Jewish tradition, God made to dwell in people; on this reading, he is saying, “This human spirit jealously longs,” as in 4:1–3. Less likely, he could mean that one’s spirit or soul longs and ought to long—but for God (Ps 42:1–2; 63:1; 84:2).

A third possibility is that he may be citing a proverbial maxim based on such texts as Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 32:21 and Joel 2:18, summarizing the sense of Scripture thus: “God is jealous over the spirit he gave us” and will tolerate no competition for its affection (4:4). (Like Jewish writers, New Testament authors sometimes midrashically meshed various texts together.) This view seems to fit the context somewhat better than other views, given that Scripture did not speak this “in vain” (4:5); but the “greater grace” of 4:6 could support the first view above.²⁶

This is one of the most difficult verses to translate in the entire letter. A very literal translation would be, “Or think you that vainly the Scripture says to envy yearns the spirit which was made to dwell in you, but He gives great grace.” Is the “spirit” the Holy Spirit or the human spirit? Is the spirit to be taken as the subject of the verb “yearns” or as its object? Is “envy” to be seen as “unrighteous desire” or as “righteous jealousy”? Numerous translations are possible: (a) “The Spirit who indwells you jealously yearns [for you] and He gives more grace.” (b) “He [God] yearns jealously for the Holy Spirit which indwells you and He gives more grace.” (c) “The [human] spirit which indwells you yearns to envy, but He [God] gives more grace.” The NIV favors the latter idea: **Or do you think . . . that the spirit He caused to live in us tends toward envy**, but “He gives us more grace?” (v. 6)

Not only is the translation of the sentence a problem, but also the apparent indication that it is a part of Scripture poses difficulties. James’ question, typically rhetorical, “or do you think Scripture says without reason” (*kenōs*, lit., “vainly”), introduces the section. The ambiguous sentence that follows is not a direct quotation of any passage in Scripture. Rather than assume that James quoted some other sacred book, or some unknown Greek translation of the Old Testament, or that he simply referred to the general sense of Scripture, it seems more reasonable to assume that he focused on the quotation in verse 6,

New Testament ***New Testament**. The common modern term for the early Christian literature finally declared canonical by the church and accepted by nearly all Christians today.
midrashically **Midrash**. Jewish commentary or exposition on Scripture. The forms varied considerably but often included reading a text in the light of other texts, with careful attention to all nuances of details supposedly filled with divine significance. Because such methods of reading Scripture were common, early Christians could employ them in relating their message to other ancient Jewish Bible readers.

²⁶Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:5). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

NIV New International Version

v. verse

lit. literal, literally

a statement clearly taken from Proverbs 3:34: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (also quoted in 1 Peter 5:5).²⁷

The precise O.T. text James has in mind is unclear, as is the correct translation. NKJV translators understand “the Spirit” to be the Holy Spirit and not the human spirit (contra KJV). This judgment is probably correct, and it should be noted that if this is the proper translation/interpretation, it is the only reference to the Holy Spirit in this epistle. The verse then is best understood as saying that the Holy Spirit, who indwells believers, intensely desires their loyalty, love, and faithfulness. As for the O.T. text James is citing, there are two possibilities: (1) he has in mind a text like Ex 20:5, or (2) he has no particular scripture in view, so that rather this verse conveys a theme concerning God and His people which runs throughout the O.T.²⁸

Chuck Smith: Now surely the spirit of God doesn't lead us to envy, it doesn't desire to envy. The scriptures do not speak in vain. The love of the world, the things of the world is spiritual adultery. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For he that hath the love of the world in his heart, hath not the love of the Father. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are of the world and are not of God" (1 John 2:15-16). Coupled, "know ye not that friendship with world is enmity with God." If you're going to be a friend of the world, if your going to be doing the worldly things, engrossed in worldly things, caught up in worldly things, your heart is in the worldly things. You're putting yourself in the position of being an enemy of God.

ESV: He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us. God created mankind with a “spirit,” and he deeply desires that our spirits worship him (cf. John 4:23–24). Some interpreters believe the verse speaks of human jealousy (“The spirit that he has made to live in us envies intensely”). But the idea of divine jealousy fits the context best, since the surrounding verses (James 4:4, 6, 7, 8) deal with man's relationship with God. **Scripture says.** See further the note on 3:14 regarding references to a “jealous God.”

James 4:6

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

He introduced pride; his chief weapon. 1 Tim 3:6. “Neither give place to the devil” - Eph 4:27.

²⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:830). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁸ Believer's Study Bible

[giveth grace unto the humble] Quoted from Proverbs 3:34. James cites Proverbs 3:34 almost exactly as it appeared in the common form of the Septuagint. This idea became common in Jewish wisdom texts. Humility included appropriate submission, in this case to God's sovereign plan for a person's life (4:7, 10).

LAN: 4-6 The cure for evil desires is humility (see Proverbs 16:18-19; 1 Peter 5:5-6). Pride makes us self-centered and leads us to conclude that we deserve all we can see, touch, or imagine. It creates greedy appetites for far more than we need. We can be released from our self-centered desires by humbling ourselves before God, realizing that all we really need is his approval. When the Holy Spirit fills us, we see that this world's seductive attractions are only cheap substitutes for what God has to offer.

McGee: I have said this again and again: God is overloaded with grace. You and I just don't know how gracious He is. He has an abundance of grace. *Grace* has been defined as unmerited favor, but I call it love in action. God didn't save us by love. He gave His Son, and it is by His grace that we are saved. He has so much of it. You may say, "Oh, I am so wrong on the inside, so sinful." Go to Him and tell Him you are wrong on the inside, and ask Him for grace to overcome it. He will give you grace. He is the living Christ, interceding at God's right hand for you.

Now some may doubt the surplus of His grace. May I say to you, all the medicine in the world cannot cure the sick; the remedy *must be taken*. Likewise, God has the grace, my friend; lay hold of it! It is possible for a man to die of thirst with a pure spring of water right before him. He has to drink of it; he has to appropriate it before it can save his life. You don't blame soap and water for the fact that there are dirty people in the world, do you? There is plenty of soap and water to clean you up, my friend.

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." This is the kind of container that the grace of God must be carried in; it must be carried in an humble individual.

JNTC: Do you suppose the *Tanakh* speaks in vain when it says that there is a spirit in us which longs to envy? Yechiel Lichtenstein writes,

"The commentators have had great difficulty with this reference to the Tanakh. What verse is it? What does it mean? Who is the subject of it? Some say it speaks about God. Others say it speaks about the Holy Spirit. But according to all commentators, it is not found in Scripture. In my opinion, the spirit it refers to is not God's but Satan's, as in Ep 6:12. The evil spirit is the evil impulse (yetzer hara.) in us. Ya'akov refers to it in v. 7: 'Take a stand against the Adversary, and he will flee from you.' Jews today still call Satan der ruach [Yiddish for "the spirit"]; Lichtenstein was writing around 1900]. I believe Ya'akov is referring to [Genesis 4:7](#), where God says to Cain, 'Sin lies at the door, and his desire shall be toward you, but you are to rule over him.' This is understood by all to be speaking

Septuagint ***Septuagint**. The Greek version of the Old Testament widely circulated in the New Testament period. (It is commonly abbreviated LXX because of the tradition that seventy scholars were responsible for it.) Although various recensions, or versions, of the Septuagint existed, this commentary refers to the most widely accepted standardized form (for the sake of avoiding technical questions beyond its scope).

about Satan, who is the evil impulse in man; for example, in the Talmud (Bava Batra 16a), 'He is Satan, the evil impulse.' The evil impulse is used by satanic angels to cause man to sin.” (Commentary to the New Testament, *ad loc.*)

As Lichtenstein indicated, a different sense is possible for the Greek text of vv. 5–6a: “Or do you suppose that the *Tanakh* speaks in vain when it says that the Spirit, whom God has caused to live in us, longs for us even to the point of jealousy? And he gives greater grace.” But this fits the context less well. Rather, I agree with Lichtenstein: **There is a spirit in us which longs to envy** and thus inclines us to fight each other (vv. 1–2); because that spirit absorbs the worldly (v. 4), demonic (Satanic) wisdom which fosters bitter jealousy and envy (3:14–16). **The *Tanakh* speaks** directly of that spirit, the *yetzer ra*. at Genesis 6:5, 8:21 (see Section D of Ro 5:12–21N). **But the grace he, God, gives** to overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit in us **is greater** than Satan’s spirit inclining us to jealousy and quarrels; for “he who is in you,” the Holy Spirit, “is greater than he who is in the world,” Satan (1 Yn 4:4).²⁹

Whatever questions remain unresolved about verse 5, there is no question about the clear truth of verse 6. **God opposes the proud.** The word “opposes,” or “resists,” is *antitassetai*, a military term meaning “to battle against.” **To the humble, however, God gives grace.** Whether a believer is called to resist his human spirit which tends toward envy or to rejoice in the Holy Spirit who jealously yearns for each believer’s edification, the call is to shun pride and to submit humbly to God’s authority. The cure for conflict is a humble spirit which is rewarded by God’s unmerited favor. James continued by showing in verses 7–12 how humility is related to peaceful justice.³⁰

Holy Scripture, Authoritative—James’ quotation of the Old Testament shows that he regarded the Old Testament as God’s authoritative Word. He cited it to support the authority of his own inspired word. He did not quote any text word for word. Rather, he stated the meaning of several Old Testament texts much as disciples do today in conversation. He may have interrupted his thought before citing the Greek translation of Pr 3:34 in v. 6.

ESV: God’s **grace** will be extended to those who are **humble** before him; cf. Prov. 3:34 (cf. also James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5). **God opposes** means he resists and sends judgment, for the **proud** have chosen the praise and the methods of the world and are acting as God’s enemies (James 4:4).

²⁹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:5). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

³⁰Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983–c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:830). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The next 3 verses give three instructions.

7-10 These verses contain 10 of the 54 imperatives in James. Combining straightforward and picturesque terms, James beautifully describes the characteristics of genuine repentance. They are these: (1) submission to God, (2) resistance of the devil, (3) drawing near to God, (4) cleansing of hands, (5) purifying the heart, (6) lamentation, (7) mourning, (8) weeping, (9) turning, (10) humbling oneself in the sight of the Lord. The beautiful conclusion to this repentance is the divine raising up that comes from God and not ourselves.³¹

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

[**Submit**] = military term: get into your proper rank.

[**Submit yourselves therefore to God ...**]

Ten Commands for Backsliders: (Dake)

1. Submit yourselves to God (James 4:7)
2. Resist the devil (James 4:7)
3. Draw nigh to God (James 4:8)
4. Cleanse your hands, you sinners (James 4:8)
5. Purify your hearts, you doubters (James 4:8)
6. Be afflicted, mourn, and weep (James 4:9)
7. Let your laughter be turned to mourning (James 4:9)
8. Let your joy be turned to heaviness (James 4:9)
9. Humble yourself before God (James 4:10)
10. Speak not evil of one another (James 4:11)

[**he will flee from you**] (Dake) Four promises to backsliders:

1. God gives more grace to the humble
2. The devil will flee from you
3. God will draw nigh to you
4. God shall lift you up

There are not many unconditional promises or covenants in Scripture. One should obey the ten commands of the note above to receive the promises.

Clarke: Resist the devil—He cannot conquer you if you continue to resist. Strong as he is, God never permits him to conquer the man who continues to resist him; he cannot force the human will. He who, in the terrible name of JESUS, opposes even the devil himself, is sure to have a speedy and glorious conquest. He flees from that name, and from his conquering blood.

³¹ Believer's Study Bible

LAN: Although God and the devil are at war, we don't have to wait until the end to see who will win. God has *already* defeated Satan (Rev. 12:10-12), and when Christ returns, the devil and all he stands for will be eliminated forever (Rev. 20:10-15). Satan is here now, however, and he is trying to win us over to his evil cause. With the Holy Spirit's power, we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us.

LAN: 7-10 How can you come near to God? James gives five ways: (1) *Submit to God* (James 4:7). Yield to his authority and will, commit your life to him and his control, and be willing to follow him. (2) *Resist the devil* (James 4:7). Don't allow Satan to entice and tempt you. (3) *Wash your hands. . . and purify your hearts* (that is, lead a pure life) (James 4:8). Be cleansed from sin, replacing your desire to sin with your desire to experience God's purity. (4) *Grieve and mourn and wail* in sincere sorrow for your sins (James 4:9). Don't be afraid to express deep heartfelt sorrow for what you have done. (5) *Humble yourself before the Lord*, and he will lift you up (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

McGee: When you go to a doctor for medical care, you submit yourself to him. One time when I was sick, the doctor gave me half a dozen prescriptions. The man might have been trying to poison me, but I had faith in him and took his pills. They helped me because I submitted to him. "Submit yourselves therefore to God."

"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." You may ask, "How am I going to resist the Devil?" James is going to be very practical. He has just said that we need a little more grace—He "giveth grace unto the humble." In other words, you are not going to be able to resist the Devil in your own strength. You and I are surrounded by evil influences. Temptation, as we have seen, is on every hand. God supplies His grace as needed, and His supply never runs out. "This is yours," God says. "You are to lay hold of it."

Ancient magical texts spoke of demons' fleeing before incantations, but the idea here is moral, not magical. One must choose between the values of God and those of the world (4:4), between God's wisdom and that which is demonic (3:15, 17). The point is that a person who lives by God's values (in this case, his way of peace) is no part of Satan's kingdom (in contrast to the religious-sounding revolutionaries).³²

Take a stand against the Adversary, Satan (see Mt 4:1N), who "stalks about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Ke 5:8–9). Although he is "the god of this world" (2C 4:4), Yeshua has overcome the world (Yn 16:33). Therefore, if you use Scripture properly (2 Ti 2:15, Mt 4:1–11) and employ the other means of spiritual warfare that are available (2C 10:3–5, Ep 6:10–18), **he will flee from you**. The verse carries the same message as Genesis 4:7 (see vv. 5–6 above).³³

Satan's **Satan**. Originally "the satan," "the adversary" (as in the Hebrew text of Job), but used as the devil's name by the end of Israel's exile (2 Chronicles, Zechariah) and standard by the New Testament period, although many Jewish people also called him by other names. In contrast to some modern theologians, the first readers of the New Testament would have viewed him as a literal, personal evil spiritual being.

³²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:7). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

³³Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:7). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

In verses 7-9 a whole series of commands (10 aorist imperatives) are given which, if followed, contribute to harmony and holiness. James called for commitment (v. 7), cleansing (v. 8), and contrition (v. 9).

Like a magnet, the call for commitment has both positive and negative poles: **submit . . . to God and resist the devil.** "Submit" is a military term "to be subordinated" or "to render obedience." "Resist" (antistēte) means "take a stand against." Take a stand against the devil, **and he will flee.**³⁴

Chuck Smith: Now it is the Devil that seeks to entice us to find fulfillment in the world by lying to us and telling us that we can find all the contentment, and joy and happiness that we desire if we will just turn from God's path and walk after our own desires of the flesh. Satan's appeal is so strong because he appeals to that, which I am interested in, my flesh, the desires of my flesh. And he is basically saying, "Hey, go for it. You'll find that fulfillment, you'll find that excitement, you'll find what you're looking for, just go for it. Go for the flesh." And God is saying, "No, that's death. If you really want life, spiritual life, then seek after the Spirit, and the things that are of the Spirit. Walk after the Spirit." There is a warfare between your flesh and your spirit. And Satan is there to encourage you to go after the Spirit and the Lord is there to encourage...I mean he is there to encourage you to go after the flesh and the Lord is there to encourage you to go after the Spirit. So submit yourself to God, and resist the Devil, and he will flee from you (Jam 4:7).

I like that. I think that many times our problem is just that we really aren't standing up for right. We're not really resisting, as we should, the Devil. I think that there are important keys in life and in this spiritual life and this warfare that we are in. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against these principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6:12). And I think the first thing is the recognition that they do exist. And I think that we need to recognize the source of the attack against us. Many times we can't deal with it because we don't recognize that is a spiritual battle and I'm really involved a battle against this force of evil, this spirit of evil, Satan himself or one of his emissaries. Once I recognize the source of my problem, then I can begin to deal with it. But so many times we are told to pass it off. "Well I'm just irritable today. I'm just miserable. I'm just ready to chew up anybody that gets in my way. Out of sorts, didn't get enough sleep last night. But you know." But we don't recognize that this is a real spiritual conquest. This whole thing that I feel, this heaviness and all is actually a satanic source, a power that is trying to defeat me.

Now if I failed to recognize it I can just go on in this miserable way all day long. But if I recognize that "hey this isn't of God, this isn't of God's Spirit, this isn't how God would want me to be, this is an attack of Satan against me." Recognizing it, I deal with it by resisting it. Resisting the Devil and he will flee.

And then the third "R" is rejoicing. So recognize, resist and then rejoice in the victory we have in Jesus Christ, over every principality and power that might come against us. I don't have to be irritable. I don't have to be cranky. I can resist the Devil, that mood, that

v. verse

³⁴Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:830). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

spirit that he is trying to bring me under. And I can rejoice for I have the full victory in Jesus Christ, and it's amazing how it can change the whole atmosphere around you.

James 4:8

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded.

[purify] = make chaste.

[Cleanse your hands] Cleansing the hands was a symbol of innocence and purity (Matthew 27:24).

[purify] Greek: hagnizo (GSN-48), to make pure (James 4:8; John 11:55; Acts 21:24,26; Acts 24:18; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:3). Here it means to separate from the world and consecrate to God, renouncing all sin.

[double minded] Double-mindedness refers to doubting God (James 1:6-8).

Clarke: Draw nigh to God—Approach HIM, in the name of Jesus, by faith and prayer, and he will draw nigh to you—he will meet you at your coming. When a soul sets out to seek God, God sets out to meet that soul; so that while we are drawing near to him, he is drawing near to us. The delicacy and beauty of these expressions are, I think, but seldom noted.

Clarke: Cleanse your hands, ye sinners—This I think to be the beginning of a new address, and to different persons; and should have formed the commencement of a new verse. Let your whole conduct be changed; cease to do evil learn to do well. Washing or cleansing the hands was a token of innocence and purity.

McGee: God comes to the door of your heart; He will not come any farther. He knocks, and you have to let Him in. That is the only way He is going to get in, my friend.

It is said that one time Martin Luther threw an inkwell at the Devil. Somebody might say that was a crazy thing to do, but it is not if you are resisting the Devil. James tells us that the way to resist the Devil is to draw near to God. The Devil will flee from you, because he doesn't like God as company. The Devil will not get to you unless you get too far away from God. A wolf never attacks a sheep as long as it is with the rest of the sheep and with the shepherd. And the closer the sheep is to the shepherd, the safer it is. Our problem is that we get too far from God.

Old Testament texts exhorted priests and people in general to “draw near to God.” Purification was also necessary for priests (Ex 30:19), but the image here is not specifically priestly; those responsible for bloodshed, even if only as representatives of a

Old Testament ***Old Testament**. The common modern term for the Hebrew Bible (including Aramaic portions) as defined by the Jewish and Protestant Christian canons; Jewish readers generally call this the Tenach.

corporately guilty group, were to wash their hands (Deut 21:6; cf. Jas 4:2). “Purification” often came to be used in an inward, moral sense (e.g., Jer 4:14).

Using ideas like “sinners,” James employs not only the harsh diatribe rhetoric that Greco-Roman writers used against imaginary opponents when demolishing their positions; he also uses the rhetoric of Old Testament prophets. “Double-minded” again alludes to the general ancient contempt for hypocrisy: one must act from either God’s peaceful wisdom or the devil’s hateful wisdom (3:13–18; 4:4).³⁵

JNTC: Come close to God, and he will come close to you, as in Zechariah 1:3 (“ ‘Turn to me,’ says *Adonai* of Hosts, ‘and I will turn to you.’ ”), Malachi 3:7, 2 Chronicles 15:2. Here the initiative for reconciliation is ours; elsewhere Scripture places it in God’s hands, as at Lamentations 5:21 (“Turn us to you, *Adonai*, and we will be turned.”) and Ep 2:4–10. Yochanan 3:16 expresses both sides equally: “God ... gave ... , so that everyone who trusts”; similarly MJ 10:20, 22 (“He [*Yeshua*] inaugurated it Therefore, let us approach”) and Ro 3:22 (“a righteousness that comes from God ... to all who continue trusting”).

Clean your hands ... purify your hearts. Compare Isaiah 1:15–16: “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even when you make many prayers, I will not hear—for your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.”

Also Psalm 24:4(3):

*“Who shall ascend into the mountain of Adonai?
Who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”*³⁶

On the other hand draw **near to God and He will come near** in response. To draw near to God, however, demands His cleansing. **Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.** Both “wash” and “purify” are verbs that refer to ceremonial cleansing, a figure that spoke eloquently to Jewish converts. The need for cleansing is clear from the way James addressed his readers, “you sinners” and “you double-minded” (*dipsychoi*; cf. 1:8).³⁷

“He will draw near to you” This is not a works-righteousness emphasis, but a promise that God responds to faith (cf. Ps. 145:18).

rhetoric ***Rhetoric.** The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it, the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

³⁵Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:8). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

³⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:8). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

cf. *confer*, compare

³⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:830). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Chuck Smith: You see here I am, in the midst of the battle here. Resist the Devil, he'll flee, but on the other hand draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. I love that. All I have to do is just start drawing near to the Lord.

It's so important it's how we program our minds. It's so important what we're feeding into our minds. And God help us in this corrupt age in which we are living. With all of the technology that has brought into our homes such filth. The television has been a purveyor of such evil. It can be good; television itself I mean it's a thing. It's not evil in itself, but it has the capacity to bring evil into your mind into your life, and it also has the capacity to bring good but it's how you control it, where your dial is turned. But I think of the evil that we will program into our minds as we sit there and watch the TV. And it's terrible. No wonder we're having all of these marital problems and immorality just flooding our nation. It's being planted into the minds of people day after day as they watch TV.

Murders, thievery, adultery, the whole thing, it's all there. And Paul when he made the list there in Romans of these horrible things that people were doing, he said not only do they do them but they take pleasure in those that do. And how is it that a person takes pleasure in watching someone snuff someone out you know. We see these TV and on movies. People pay to see that kind of filth. Pay to pollute your mind.

And then we get caught up in the law of nature "whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). I'm sowing to the flesh and I begin to reap of the flesh, envying, striving, seditions, murder. How well if we would just get good inspiring music and play it in our homes. What a difference it makes. What a difference it creates within the atmosphere you see we're sowing now to the Spirit. If in the morning as your children are getting ready for school they come in for breakfast there's praise music on or maybe one of the kids albums on. You're planting into their minds and into their hearts the things of the Spirit. God knows when they get to school they're going to get all kinds of crud thrown at them. We need to counterbalance it within the home. And rather than allowing them to listen to a lot of this junk music with filthy lyrics. That we would actively encourage them by ourselves playing and listening to inspiring music. Again whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap. And if you have that kind of atmosphere, sowing to the Spirit you're going to reap the Spirit.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you double-minded (Jam 4:8).

You know, that's the problem. David said, "Lord, unite my heart to serve thee" (Psalm 86:11). The divided heart that's the problem of so many people. Yes, I want to serve the Lord. Yes, I want to follow Him. Yes, I want to spend eternity with Him, and yet there is another side of me that wants to go after the flesh and indulge the flesh.

James 4:9

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.

(No laughing matter...)

[Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep] This is true repentance which always brings the mercy of God if done in time—now (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 9:27).

[laughter] (Dake) Ten types of sin and pleasure:

1. Wars and fightings (James 4:1-2)
2. Lusts of sin (James 4:1-5; Ephes. 2:1-3)
3. Murders and killings (James 4:2)
4. Desires—covetousness (James 4:2)
5. Adulteries and other sex sins (James 4:4)
6. Friendships with worldly men (James 4:4)
7. Envy and jealousies (James 4:5)
8. Pride and haughtiness (James 4:6-10)
9. Laughter prompted by sin (James 4:9)
10. Joy founded on sin (James 4:9)

Clarke: Be afflicted, and mourn—Without true and deep repentance ye cannot expect the mercy of God.

McGee: There are certain conditions which call for mourning and not for joy. Sin is never to be treated lightly. When I hear a Christian make light of sin, I have a sneaking notion that, on the side, when nobody is looking, he is indulging in sin. You are not to treat sin lightly, my friend; you are to *mourn* over your sins. The problem today is that Christians are not mourning over their sins.

We have several outstanding evangelists and some great evangelistic meetings in our day, but why is it that there is no revival in the church? I think James is giving us something to think about in what he says here. I remember asking this same question of Dr. John Brown, who was one of the great evangelists in the past. As we sat on his front porch in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, I asked him why, even in that day, evangelism was not reviving the church as it had when he was active in the ministry. He told me about the meetings which he had held in my present hometown of Pasadena, California, where he had a tent set up on a big vacant lot at the corner of Washington and Holliston. He said this to me, “Dr. McGee, I preached six weeks to the Christians before I ever attempted to give an altar call for the unsaved—and revival came to the churches.” When I came as pastor to a church in Pasadena, I could still see the effects of Dr. Brown’s meetings in that church. Why? For the very simple reason that sin had been dealt with in the lives of believers. Too often we refuse to deal with it. We need to mourn over our sins.

Be afflicted—literally, “Endure misery,” that is, mourn over your wretchedness through sin. *Repent with deep sorrow* instead of your present laughter. A blessed *mourning*. Contrast Is 22:12, 13; Lu 6:25. James does not add here, as in Jam 5:1, “howl,” where he foretells the *doom of the impenitent* at the coming destruction of Jerusalem.³⁸

“Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning”

These are four AORIST IMPERATIVES (the first three are AORIST ACTIVE and the last one AORIST PASSIVE). Collectively they refer to the need for spiritual mourning

³⁸Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Jas 4:9). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

over sin like Matt. 5:3–9. This is a Hebraic way of referring to a repentant attitude and lifestyle. This sorrow must be balanced with the joy of 1:2 and 5:13. Somehow Christianity is both!³⁹

Lament and mourn and weep: When a believer who has fallen into sin responds to God’s call for repentance, he or she should place laughter and joy aside to reflect on the sin with genuine sorrow (2 Cor. 7:9, 10). In this verse, **laughter** seems to refer to the loud revelry of pleasure-loving people. They immerse themselves in a celebration of their sins in an effort to forget God’s judgment. A Christian should never laugh at sin. However, Christian sorrow leads to repentance; repentance leads to forgiveness; and forgiveness leads to true joy over one’s reconciliation with God (see Ps. 32:1; 126:2; Prov. 15:13).⁴⁰

Spurgeon: Voluntarily sorrow for sin, or you will have to suffer for it eternally. Mourn at the cross, or you will weep before the throne.

ESV: **Cleanse** and **purify** are OT terms for ritual purity (e.g., the priests at the bronze basin, Ex. 30:18) and ethical purity. **Laughter** shows how casually James’s readers were treating their sin. The only proper reaction to God’s impending judgment is to **be wretched and mourn and weep**, as is seen often in the OT (e.g., Isa. 15:2; 22:4; Jer. 6:26).

James 4:10

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

God hates pride (Prov 6:16-17).

“A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.” Ps 51:17.

[shall lift you up] Mourners and penitents used to lie on the ground and roll themselves in the dust. When forgiven, penitents arose from the earth and clothed themselves in clean and better garments.

Humbling ourselves means recognizing that our worth comes from God alone. To be humble involves working with his power according to his guidance, not with our own independent effort. Although we do not deserve God’s favor, he reaches out to us in love and gives us worth and dignity, despite our human shortcomings.

McGee: “*He shall lift you up.*” This is our problem today: We think *we* are smart. We think *we* are strong. We think *we* have ability. We think *we* are good. God says that there is no good within us. There is nothing in us that attracts Him, that is, in the way of goodness; it is just our great need that draws Him to us. If we are willing to humble ourselves and get down where He can lift us up, He will lift us up.

³⁹ Utley, R. J. D. (2000). *Vol. Volume 11: Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude*. Study Guide Commentary Series (57). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

⁴⁰ The Nelson Study Bible

I observed a lifeguard once as he hit a drowning fellow with his fist and knocked him out. The lifeguard explained that the drowning man was struggling and that he could not help him until he gave up. I think sometimes God gives us the fist so that we just give up and let Him take over.

Old Testament texts often connected mourning and self-humiliation with repentance (Lev 23:29; 26:41), especially when confronted by divine judgment (2 Kings 22:11; Joel 1:13–14; 2:12–13). The exaltation of the humble was also a teaching of the prophets. The key is humility. **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.** The way up is down. The lowly one becomes the lifted one. There is a marked advantage to humility—eventually it brings honor.⁴¹

Returning to the theme emphasized in v. 6, it is the **humble** whom God will **exalt** (cf. Matt. 23:12 par.; Luke 1:52; 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pet. 5:6). But as long as people exalt themselves, God will not exalt them.

James 4:11

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

Brothers, do not slander one another.

Why is it that Christians always form firing squads in circles? There are more newsletters, web pages, “exposé” books, written against the brethren *by other brethren*... It is a commonly discussed mystery by secular and Jewish observers: Christians seem to spend so much time nitpicking—and libeling and slandering—each other it’s a tragedy...

Speak not evil—literally, “Speak not against” one another.

[**Speak**] Greek: *katalaleo* (GSN-2635), to speak against; backbite; rail at; slander (James 4:11; 1 Peter 2:12; 1 Peter 3:16). This refers to slandering among the different factions of Jews and the Jews against their brethren who had accepted Christ.

Clarke: Speaketh evil of the law—The law condemns all evil speaking and detraction. He who is guilty of these, and allows himself in these vices, in effect judges and condemns the law; i.e. he considers it unworthy to be kept, and that it is no sin to break it.

repentance **Repentance**. In the New Testament, this term does not merely mean “change of mind” (as some have gathered from the Greek term); it reflects the Old Testament and Jewish concept of “turning around” or “turning away” from sin. Jewish people were to repent whenever they sinned; the New Testament uses the term especially for the once-for-all turning a Gentile would undergo when converting to Judaism or any sinner would undergo when becoming a follower of Jesus.

⁴¹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:831). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Clarke: Thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge—Thou rejectest the law of God, and settest up thy own mischievous conduct as a rule of life; or, by allowing this evil speaking and detraction, dost intimate that the law that condemns them is improper, imperfect, or unjust.

James returns to the specific worldly behavior his readers are following: violent speech (3:1–12). (He either addresses social stratification within the Christian community or, more likely, uses “brothers” in its more common Jewish sense of “fellow Jews.” Jewish revolutionaries had already begun killing aristocrats, and inflammatory rhetoric was certainly even more common.) His general principle was standard Old Testament and Jewish wisdom opposing slander, which many of his readers may not have been considering in this context. The law declared God’s love for Israel and commanded his people to love one another (2:8); to slander a fellow Jew was thus to disrespect the law.⁴²

ESV: James restates the basic problem behind the issues discussed in 3:1–4:10: the misuse of the tongue to **speak evil** or to slander others. Speaking ill of others is the result of all the arrogant boasting (3:5), jealousy (vv. 14, 16), self-centered desires (4:1, 3), and pride (v. 6) that James is warning against. Such slanderous conduct is decried in both the OT (Lev. 19:16; Ps. 50:20; Jer. 6:28) and NT (Rom. 1:30; 2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Pet. 2:1).

judges the law. The “law” likely refers to these OT laws against slander, particularly Lev. 19:16, which leads to 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” which James calls “the royal law” (James 2:8). Yet it also includes in a broader sense Jesus’ kingdom laws regarding love for neighbor (Matt. 22:39) and for one another (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17). Those who inappropriately judge others (Matt. 7:1–5; Rom. 2:1; 1 Cor. 4:5) break God’s law and show contempt for God.

BT.com: James is considered to have a very practical message. He must have seen the practices of his day and, as a result, had a grave concern for the people’s lack of acknowledgment of God in their lives. In these verses James is identifying a people who have left God out of their lives, even though they might profess otherwise. James is still exposing the actions of those who have a false religion, a false faith, and a false sense of Christian authority. These actions may be the normal manner of the lost; we as His children must guard against the same actions.

James exposes that those individuals to whom he is writing are attacking each other in word as well as in deed. Note in the previous verses how James identified that they were warring with each other even unto death. Here he identifies that they are slandering each

rhetoric ***Rhetoric.** The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it, the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

law ***Law.** “Torah” (the Hebrew word behind the Greek word translated “law”) means literally “instruction” and “teaching,” not just regulations. It was also used as a title for the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch, the books of Moses) and sometimes for the whole Old Testament. This commentary uses the translation “law” because it is familiar to readers of most translations, even though the English term’s semantic range is much narrower than the Jewish concept.

⁴²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:11). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

other. What is slander? *Katalaleo*: refers to speech that is stated with the clear intent of hurting or causing injury to another.

I find that, as an elder in a denomination that utilizes congregational polity, I am criticized for virtually every decision I make. Regardless of the simplicity or severity of the decision someone will either directly, or indirectly through another individual, desire a verbal defense of the decision. People will express a desire that I do something in a particular way, and upon acceding to their request, someone else will complain that the action was taken. Why do people do this? It is little surprise that the average tenure for a pastor in a modern New Testament church is less than three years.

Church members who act this way are generally making comparative judgments that are outside of the arena of their true authority. We squelch the expression of the gifts of others when, by judging those expressions, place ourselves in authority over them, an authority that is reserved for the Holy Spirit. What has this got to do with the law, the law of liberty? Judgment is reserved solely for God. He is the only authority who has pure wisdom and knows the heart sufficiently to judge us. Those who judge and slander one another are placing themselves above those of whom they speak and judge, and are usurping this position that is reserved for God alone.

When we leave God out of the manner in which we speak (or think) of others, His nature of agape love is replaced by our nature of self-centered pride, spitefulness and vengeance. Our lips should be guided by kindness, truth and love.

James 4:12

There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

[who art thou that judgest another? ...For what is your life?]

These are Questions 20-21 in the Book of James. The next question in in James 5:13.

Pharaoh was troubled by a series of bad dreams. Through the wisdom of God, they used the warnings of impending famines to prepare themselves. The safest place in the world is right where God want you.

“The counsel of the Lord standeth forever; the thoughts of His heart to all generations.”
Psalm 33:11.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future and a hope.” Jer 29:11.

[lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy] God is the one lawgiver and judge who is able to save or destroy. Man has no right to usurp this authority (James 4:11-12).

Clarke: The man who breaks the law, and teaches others so to do, thus in effect set himself up as a lawgiver and judge. But there is only one such lawgiver and judge—God Almighty, who is able to save all those who obey him, and able to destroy all those who trample under feet his testimonies.

Clarke: Who art thou that judgest another?—Who art thou who dares to usurp the office and prerogative of the supreme Judge? But what is that law of which St. James speaks? and who is this lawgiver and judge? Most critics think that the law mentioned here is the same as that which he elsewhere calls the royal law and the law of liberty, thereby meaning the Gospel; and that Christ is the person who is called the lawgiver and judge. This, however, is not clear to me. I believe James means the Jewish law; and by the lawgiver and judge, God Almighty, as acknowledged by the Jewish people. I find, or think I find, from the closest examination of this epistle, but few references to Jesus Christ or his Gospel. His Jewish creed, forms, and maxims, this writer keeps constantly in view; and it is proper he should, considering the persons to whom he wrote. Some of them were, doubtless, Christians; some of them certainly no Christians; and some of them half Christians and half Jews. The two latter descriptions are those most frequently addressed.

McGee: If you judge your brother, you disobey the law, which is putting yourself above the law and treating it with contempt. In other words, who do you think you are? When you begin to talk like that, you are moving into the position of God. There are two types of people today who seek to take the position of God. One is the sinner who says, “I’m good enough to be saved. Lord, I don’t need your salvation. You just move over, and I am going to move up and sit beside you. I am my own savior.” But, my friend, God says in His Word that He is the only Savior. Then there is the other fellow who sits in judgment on everyone else. He doesn’t judge himself, but he judges everyone else. James is saying that judgment is God’s business. Jesus said, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). There are many Christians who, in effect, say to the Lord Jesus, “You move over. I’m going to help You. We are going to have a Supreme Court, and I am going to be one of the judges.” We have a lot of believers like that today; boy, what a Supreme Court the church could furnish Him! James says that we are to judge ourselves and to go to Him in humility.

That God alone was the true judge was a common Jewish and New Testament teaching. In Jewish teaching, earthly courts proceeded only on his authority, and those who ruled in them had to judge by the law. Investigations had to be conducted thoroughly, with a minimum of two witnesses; acting as a false witness, slandering someone to a court without genuine firsthand information, was punishable according to the judgment the falsely accused person would have received if convicted.⁴³

JNTC: Stop speaking against each other! See vv. 1–2. One who **speaks against or judges a brother** is arrogating to himself the position of a **judge**, that is, of God, who has **the power to deliver and to destroy**. Yechiel Lichtenstein writes, in his *Commentary to the New Testament (ad loc.)*,

New Testament ***New Testament**. The common modern term for the early Christian literature finally declared canonical by the church and accepted by nearly all Christians today.

⁴³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:12). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

“The most important part of the *Torah* is, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (above, 2:8). In saying this, the *Torah* does not distinguish the righteous neighbor from the wicked one The Lord taught that the neighbor could be a Samaritan,” that is, someone who is usually the object of adverse prejudgment (Lk 10:37&N). Compare Mt 7:1–5; Ro 2:1–3, 12–16; 14:4, 10–12.

If you judge *Torah*, you are not a doer of what *Torah* says. This is essentially the same point as at 2:10–11&N.

Giver of *Torah*, Greek *nomothetēs*, related to the word “*nenomothetētai*” in the phrase, “this covenant [the New Covenant] has been given as *Torah*,” at MJ 8:6b&N.⁴⁴

Only One is above the Law. He alone has the right to modify or overrule it. God is the **one Lawgiver and Judge**. “Lawgiver” is a compound noun used only here in the New Testament (*nomothetēs*, from *nomos*, “law,” and *tithēmi*, “to set, place, constitute, or lay down”). God not only authored the Law; He also administrates the Law. He serves as both the executive and judicial branches of the divine government. God is King; He institutes and declares His Law. God is Judge; He upholds and enforces His Law. He is **the One who is able to save and destroy**. There is one Author of the Law, one Judge over the Law, and but one Savior from the Law’s condemnation. This reminder of a truth well known by James’ Jewish readers was also a rebuke to their haughty attitudes and judgmental actions. **But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?** is another of James’ typical penetrating rhetorical questions. A humble attitude and just actions are essential for spiritual growth. James then went on to show how these qualities of life militate against empty boasting.⁴⁵

There is one Lawgiver: The New Testament teaches us not to judge (see Matt. 7:1), for God is the ultimate Judge and the One who will take vengeance on those who practice evil (Rom. 12:9; Heb. 10:30). Yet the Scriptures also exhort the church to exercise judgment over its members (see 1 Cor. 6:2–5). This type of judgment is corporate discipline exercised in accordance with biblical truths and the pattern in Matt. 18:15–20.⁴⁶

ESV: When a person begins to “judge the law,” he is usurping the place of the **one lawgiver and judge**. God alone gave the law, and he alone is judge of all (Ps. 9:19; Isa. 2:4; Joel 3:12). **to save and to destroy**. Possibly an implicit message to the divisive boasters, warning them of future judgment.

So forego that condemnation or judgment on another. You’re not a judge of the Law. We’re to be the doers of the Law, obedient to the Law.

⁴⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:11). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

⁴⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:831). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴⁶The Nelson Study Bible

13–17 The Pride of the Rich

Having counseled the oppressed, James quickly turns to the oppressors, denouncing their self-satisfied forgetfulness of God. Most of the wealth in the Roman Empire was accumulated by one of two means: the landed gentry, of high social class, made their wealth from land-based revenues such as tenant farmers and crops; the merchant class gathered great wealth without the corresponding social status. James addresses both merchants (4:13–17) and the landed aristocracy (5:1–6).⁴⁷

James 4:13

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

We make plans; but they need to be tempered by the realization that only God knows the future.

we will go ... make a profit: The problem here is not the plan or the concept of planning; it is leaving God out of the plan (v. 15).

[Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain] This refers to traveling merchants, going from city to city displaying their wares in the bazaars (Genesis 37:25).

Clarke: To-day, or to-morrow, we will go—This presumption on a precarious life is here well reproved; and the ancient Jewish rabbins have some things on the subject which probably St. James had in view. In Debarim Rabba, sec. 9, fol. 261, 1, we have the following little story; “Our rabbins tell us a story which happened in the days of Rabbi Simeon, the son of Chelpatha. He was present at the circumcision of a child, and stayed with its father to the entertainment. The father brought out wine for his guests that was seven years old, saying, With this wine will I continue for a long time to celebrate the birth of my new-born son. They continued supper till midnight. At that time Rabbi Simeon arose and went out, that he might return to the city in which he dwelt. On the way he saw the angel of death walking up and down. He said to him, Who art thou? He answered, I am the messenger of God. The rabbin said, Why wanderest thou about thus? He answered, I slay those persons who say, We will do this, or that, and think not how soon death may overpower them: that man with whom thou hast supped, and who said to his guests, With this wine will I continue for a long time to celebrate the birth of my new-born son, behold the end of his life is at hand, for he shall die within thirty days.” By this parable they teach the necessity of considering the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and that God is particularly displeased with those ...

“Who, counting on long years of pleasure here,
Are quite unfurnished for a world to come.”

⁴⁷Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (James 4:13). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

LAN: 13-16 It is good to have goals, but goals will disappoint us if we leave God out of them. There is no point in making plans as though God does not exist, because the future is in his hands. What would you like to be doing ten years from now? One year from now? Tomorrow? How will you react if God steps in and rearranges your plans? Plan ahead, but hold your plans loosely. Put God’s desires at the center of your planning; he will never disappoint you.

McGee: Here is something else Christians do—we like to make big plans for the future. It has taken me a long time in life to learn just to play it by ear. Normally I accept speaking engagements quite some time ahead of schedule, but in periods of serious illness I have been forced to cancel some engagements. I have hated to cancel them, but the Lord has brought this passage of Scripture to my mind: “Come now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and hold a Bible conference. We will have a wonderful time there, and we believe it is the Lord’s will.” That is not exactly what James said, but that is how the Lord has said it to me.

Spurgeon: To count on life as if we had a lease of it is madness. If it be wrong to boast of tomorrow, what folly must it be to be plotting and planning for a great while to come? It is our duty and privilege to live by the day.

ESV: trade and make a profit. On the surface this sounds like good business sense, but it masks a secular worldview that ignores God. These people are probably Christians belonging to the wealthy merchant class, whereas the rich people mentioned in 5:1–6 are probably not believers (cf. 2:6–7).

13–17

The Pride of the Rich

Having counseled the oppressed, James quickly turns to the oppressors, denouncing their self-satisfied forgetfulness of God. Most of the wealth in the Roman Empire was accumulated by one of two means: the landed gentry, of high social class, made their wealth from land-based revenues such as tenant farmers and crops; the merchant class gathered great wealth without the corresponding social status. James addresses both merchants (4:13–17) and the landed aristocracy (5:1–6).

4:13. Many philosophers (especially Stoics) and Jewish sages liked to warn their hearers that they had no control over the future. “Go now” (5:1) was a fairly common way of proceeding with an argument (e.g., Athenaeus), addressing an imaginary opponent (e.g., Cicero, Epictetus) or prefacing harsh words in satire (Horace, Juvenal).

Stoics **Stoicism.** The most popular form of Greek philosophy in Paul’s day. Although most people were not Stoics, many Stoic ideas were widely disseminated. For more detail, see comment on Acts 17:18.

Cicero **Cicero.** A famous Roman orator and statesman who wrote on a variety of subjects and flourished in the first century B.C.

Epictetus **Epictetus.** A first-century Stoic philosopher, originally a slave.

The primary markets for manufactured goods were towns and cities; projecting commitments and profits was also a normal business practice. Traders were not always wealthy, but here they are at least *seeking* wealth. The sin here is arrogant presumption—feeling secure enough to leave God out of one’s calculations (4:16; cf., e.g., Jer 12:1; Amos 6:1).⁴⁸

James’ attack was direct. **Now listen** is literally, “Go now.” It is the same construction found in 5:1, a colloquial phrase used only by James in the New Testament. The interjection both goads the reader and gains his undivided attention. The offender attacked by James is a fairly typical businessman who makes his plans apart from God. He is self-assertive in his travel plans: **we will go to this or that city**; self-confident in his time schedule, **spend a year there**; and self-centered in his trade relationships, **carry on business and make money**. “Carry on business” is from a compound verb (*emporeusometha*, from *en*, “in,” and *poreuomai*, “to go”) from which the English word “emporium” has come. It is related to the noun (*emporos*) which could be translated “merchant,” “trader,” “drummer,” or “one who goes in and gets the trade.” A vivid picture of the Jewish merchant James tried to correct is a go-getter salesman out drumming up business for the bottom-line objective: “Make money!”⁴⁹

James 4:14

Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

The foolishness of ignoring the will of God:

[1] The Brevity of life.

Job 7:6 - My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope.”

Job 7:9 - “As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no *more*.”

Job 8:9 - “(For we *are but of* yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth *are* a shadow:)”

Job 9:25 - “Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good.”

[Their “post” was probably faster than ours!]

We count our *years* at each birthday but God tells us to number our *days* (Psalm 90:12).⁵⁰

[It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away] This is practically what James said of the rich man in James 1:10-11.

Juvenal **Juvenal**. A Roman satirist of the late first through early second century A.D. He is especially known for his invective against women, foreigners and freedmen who were encroaching on rights and privileges once reserved for aristocratic Roman males.

⁴⁸Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:13). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

⁴⁹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:831). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵⁰Chuck Missler, Notes on James, khouse.org

Life is short no matter how many years we live. Don't be deceived into thinking that you have lots of remaining time to live for Christ, to enjoy your loved ones, or to do what you know you should. Live for God today! Then, no matter when your life ends, you will have fulfilled God's plan for you.

McGee: James says that we do not know what tomorrow holds. "For what is your life?" He says it is just a vapor, a fog. "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." We have a lot of fog here on the West Coast. You can be driving along the coast on a marvelous day when the ocean is as blue as indigo and the sky almost as blue as the ocean, but if you stop at a motel for the night, you may find in the morning that everything is shrouded by fog. Life is like a mist on a mountainside—uncertain, transient, and temporary.

Human life lived apart from and without God is the most colossal failure in God's universe. Everything else serves a long and useful purpose. The sun in the sky is prodigal of its energy—we use very little of it. The moon also serves a purpose; many of you fellows got married because of that moon up there. It is the poet who said, "Only man is vile." Human life apart from God is out of joint, dislocated, a colossal failure. One of the reasons is the brevity of this life. We are allotted only three score and ten years; if we get any more, they are filled with aches and pains. Oh, the brevity of human life! Many of us never learn to really live down here upon this earth.

Here James offers common Jewish and Stoic wisdom to which few readers would theoretically object, although many were undoubtedly not heeding it.⁵¹

To the selfish hustlers James simply stated, **Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.** Man's plans are always tentative. His plans are not his own. Time is not his own. In fact, life is not his own. James then fired another of his famous questions: **What is your life?** The answer is **a mist** ("vapor, a puff of steam"). Believers need this godly perspective on their earthly sojourn. Among other things, it blasts boasting right out of the selfish, proud quagmire from which it emerged.⁵²

James 4:15

For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

Our lives are in the hand of God.

This should be the *constant attitude* of the heart (Rom 1:10; 15:32; 1 Cor 4:19; 16:7). The will of God is a living relationship between God and the believer. It is a growing experience.

⁵¹Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 4:14). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

⁵²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:831). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Colossians 1:9 - "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be **filled** with the knowledge of his **will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;**"

He wants us to *understand* His will:

Ephesians 5:17 - "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*."

We must also *prove* God's Will:

Romans 12:2 - "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

The Greek verb means "to prove by experience." By working at it. You prove by experience what the will of God is.

People who keep asking, "How do I determine God's will for my life?" are announcing that they have never really tried to do God's will.

John 7:17; Mt 11:29.

The secret of a happy life is to delight in duty. Work is kind of prayer when you're home.

"They statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" - Psalm 119:54

When God cannot rule, He overrules. His chastening is evidence of His love.

[2] The Complexities of life.

[3] The Uncertainties of life. Pro v27:1 - "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Luke 12:16-21.

Thomas à Kempis, "Man proposes but God disposes."

Solomon: "The lot is cast into the lap: but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

Pro 16:33.

[The new field of mathematics known as *Chaos Theory* is based on the realization that there is no actual randomness in the universe.]

[4] The Frailty of man.⁵³

Chuck Smith: So that exhortation, by James to us, to take into consideration, God's will in all of our planning, to make that a contingency to every plan. It isn't that you should've planned the future, but you should always have the contingency of the Lord's will, if it's the Lord's will. Because I don't know what tomorrow holds. I don't know whether or not I will even be here tomorrow, but if the Lord wills this is what I desire, this is what I plan to do. If the Lord doesn't will it, than I don't want to do it, but that should always be a contingency to every plan I make. I need to realize that my life is short. It's just a vapor that appears for a short moment and then vanishes. I'm here for just a short time, that I need to spend the time that I'm here in something that is worth while, in something that will last eternally. Too much of our life, too much of our effort, too much of our time is spent on things that are not eternal, things that are going to pass away.

Too many people spend their life eating cotton candy. It maybe sweet, but there is no substance. It dissolves it's gone. Those things that you do, things of the flesh, things for the flesh, they are dissolved. They are gone. They're wasted. I have so many times come to the end of the day and thought what a wasted day. Usually it's New Years Day after I've watched all the football games, and you finally get to the Rose Bowl and the Big Ten

⁵³ Chuck Missler, Notes on James, khouse.org

won, and I think, "oh what a wasted day." You know you use up a lot of emotion and everything else, but all I did was sit around all day long eat and watch the game. And there was a lot of things that needed to be done out in the yard. I could have spent the time more profitably. We waste too much time. We need to spend our time more profitably, in things that profit for eternity.

James 4:16

But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

Caveats: This can all be easily misapplied, or used as a “cop-out” from responsibility. “Planning” is simply the analysis of the futurity of today’s decisions. The Scriptural application of spiritual truths is not a flight from prudence. Prov 22:3 (& 27:12). “For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” - Luke 4:28.
What we do need to do is to seek the Lord’s will in all that we undertake.

[boastings] Boastings here consist of bragging on buying and selling from city to city and what one will do here and there. One should always say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15). This would demonstrate personal faith in God and His providence instead of one's own abilities. All such boasting is of evil intent.

Man cannot boast; if he does, it is sin.

JNTC: 13–16 Planning is an important ingredient of today’s managerial society, but it is easy for planners to forget that they stand only as God permits—not only their plans, but they themselves. Hence, **“If Adonai wants it to happen, we will live” to do this or that.** If we don’t live, what good will the plans do?—as in Yeshua’s story about the rich man who built new barns (Lk 12:16–21). “Don’t boast about tomorrow, because you don’t know what today may bring forth!” (Proverbs 27:1) For more on **boasting**, see 1C 1:31&N.⁵⁴

To make sure his readers understood, James reiterated that to **boast and brag . . . is evil.** Self-centered bragging must be replaced by God-honoring trust. The cure for boasting is belief.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:13). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

⁵⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:832). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

James 4:17

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

Possibly the same inaction or action would not be a sin to someone else as it would be for you. It is sin to doubt whether an action is right and yet go ahead and do it; it is also a sin to know what is right and yet not do it (see Rom. 14:23). This is a stern warning against sins of omission (see Luke 16:19–31 for an example of neglecting to do what is right).

2 Peter 2:21. “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”

[**sin**] Greek: *hamartia* (GSN-266), missing the mark. Translated sin 172 times (James 4:16; Matthew 1:21; etc.) sinful (Romans 8:3); and offence (2 Cor. 11:7).

We tend to think that *doing* wrong is sin. But James tells us that sin is also *not* doing right. (These two kinds of sin are sometimes called sins of commission and sins of omission.) It is a sin to lie; it can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it. It is a sin to speak evil of someone; it is also a sin to avoid him or her when you know he or she needs your friendship. We should be willing to help as the Holy Spirit guides us. If God has directed you to do a kind act, to render a service, or to restore a relationship, do it. You will experience a renewed and refreshed vitality to your Christian faith.

McGee: There are a great many people today who are sinning and don't know it. If you know to do good in certain cases—if you know that you should do a certain thing or help a certain cause—and you do not do it, *that* is sin.

Our lives are brief, and we should not spend our time in strife and envy and jealousy. It spoils a life. We need to come to Christ, put our lives down before Him, and really start living. He has said, “... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). He wants to give you a life that is a life indeed. Are you living that life today?⁵⁶

“If God wills” was a conventional Greek expression but fit Jewish piety well; it appears elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 18:21; 1 Cor 16:7). Also a conventional or common expression in other religions. Allah achbar - - 1. Transliteration of the common Arabic phrase, "ربكأ لالا" meaning "God is Great"; 2. An expression of faith and lov...

It is likely that chapter 4's concluding sentence, **Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins**, is related not only to the matter of boasting but also to all the advice given thus far in the epistle. “Then” (lit., “therefore,” *oun*) supports this

⁵⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (5:664). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

New Testament ***New Testament**. The common modern term for the early Christian literature finally declared canonical by the church and accepted by nearly all Christians today.

lit. literal, literally

contention. James' readers could not plead ignorance. The letter abounds with exhortations to do good. To fail to comply is clearly sin.

To attain spiritual maturity a believer must do the good he now knows. He must stand confidently on God's Word even in trials and temptations. He must compassionately serve his brethren without prejudicial favoritism but with practical faith. He must speak carefully with a controlled tongue and wise, cultivated thought. He must submit in contrition to his all-powerful Father, Law-giver, and Judge with a humble spirit, just action, and a trusting heart. He must be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, speak as God wants him to speak, and sense what God wants him to sense.⁵⁷

Spurgeon: Lest any should say, "We know all this, for we are fully persuaded that unless God lets us live we can do nothing," James adds, "Do you know so well? then you are all the more bound to do well, for knowledge involves responsibility."

JNTC: **Anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it is committing a sin** of omission far more serious than the sin of those who are uninformed—as is clear from Lk 12:47–48, 2 Ke 2:21. Romans 14:23 makes a related yet distinct point, likewise 1C 8:13. In this specific situation the sin is to announce plans as if we could control all the circumstances, failing to acknowledge that God is in charge and our plans depend on his will.⁵⁸

In other words, sin isn't just something that I do that I shouldn't, sin is also something that I don't do that I should. Oh, I know I ought to do it, oh, I know I ought to go over there and help him out, but I don't. To him that knows to do good and doesn't do it, that's sin. The sin of omission, the failure to do that which I ought to do.

⁵⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:832). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵⁸Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:17). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Why do people deliberately disobey God?
Here's one example:

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of circumstance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged the punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
 I am the captain of my soul.
 - William Ernest Henley

My Captain

Out of the light that dazzles me,
 Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
I thank the God I know to be
 For Christ the conqueror of my soul.
Since His the sway of circumstance,
 I would not wince nor cry aloud.
Under that rule which men call chance
 My head with joy is humbly bowed.
Beyond this place of sin and tears
 That life with Him! And His the aid,
Despite the menace of the years
 Keeps, and shall keep me, unafraid.
I have no fear, though strait the gate,
 He cleared from punishment the scroll.
Christ is the Master of my fate,
 Christ is the Captain of my soul.
 - Dorothea Day

This passage of scripture addresses some very difficult and sensitive issues, issues that warrant our attention. Do we experience conflict within the body of Christ? Is our church not accomplishing the ministry to which God has ordained his Church? It is

evident that the church in James' day also fell short of God's purpose, and James wrote to them to expose their pride, their party spirit (divisiveness), and the practice of practical atheism (ignoring God) in the church. As we read James' words, let us look to our own hearts and see if there is something to be learned here. If we have allowed ourselves to fall into the error or errors that James exposes here, let us confess those sins before God and seek His forgiveness as we also seek the power of the Holy Spirit to change our motives from those which are self-centered to those which are God-centered. Only then will we fully understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and experience the true joy and peace that He offers.

Echoes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in James

James	Teaching	Matthew
<u>1:2</u>	joy amid trials	<u>5:10–12</u>
<u>1:4</u>	exhortation to be perfect	<u>5:48</u>
<u>1:5</u>	asking God for good things	<u>7:7–11</u>
<u>1:17</u>	God the giver of good	<u>7:11</u>
<u>1:20</u>	against anger	<u>5:22</u>
<u>1:22</u>	hearers and doers of the word	<u>7:24–27</u>
<u>2:5</u>	poor inherit the kingdom	<u>5:3, 5</u>
<u>2:10</u>	keeping the whole law	<u>5:19</u>
<u>2:13</u>	merciful receive mercy	<u>5:7</u>
<u>3:12</u>	know them by their fruits	<u>7:16</u>
<u>3:18</u>	blessings of peacemakers	<u>5:9</u>
<u>4:2–3</u>	ask and you will receive	<u>7:7–8</u>
<u>4:4</u>	serving God vs. friendship with the world	<u>6:24</u>
<u>4:9–10</u>	consolation for mourners	<u>5:4</u>
<u>4:11–12</u>	against judging others	<u>7:1–5</u>
<u>4:13–14</u>	living for today	<u>6:34</u>
<u>5:2–5</u>	moth and rust spoiling earthly treasures	<u>6:19</u>
<u>5:10</u>	prophets as examples and patterns	<u>5:12</u>
<u>5:12</u>	against oaths	<u>5:33–37</u>