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James 4

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

James 4.

INTRODUCTION: James is commonly referred to as the Proverbs of the New Testament. It practically and faithfully reminds Christians how to live and covers topics such as perseverance, true faith, controlling the tongue, submitting to God's will and having patience. James aids readers in living authentically and wisely for Christ it is one of the earliest of the New Testament writings (A.D. 40–50). It is believed to have been written by Jesus' brother James. Many have claimed that James and the apostle Paul differed on the question of faith versus works, but in reality, the spiritual fruit that James talks about is the outward evidence of inward faith. James gives us a picture of what inward Christian faith looks like practically on the outside it demonstrates the true faith of which Paul wrote. James and Paul's writings rather than being contradictory beautifully complement each other.

Topics.

- What causes quarrels and fights among you?
- You desire and do not have, so you murder.
- You have not, because you ask wrongly.
- Friendship with the world is enmity with God.
- God yearns jealously over the spirit dwelling in us.
- Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
- Judging a brother or sister is to speak evil against the law.
- We should say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter James told teachers of Scripture that they will be judged with greater strictness and said whoever is able to control what they say is able to control their whole body, but an uncontrollable tongue is a deadly poison that sets on fire a world of unrighteousness.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

JAMES 4:1-3

What causes Quarrels and Fights among You.

- **James 4:1-3:** What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ²You desire and do not have, so you murder (kill in KJV). You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel (war in KJV). You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

The words "Among you" (v1), shows that James is talking to those confessing Christ, but who appear to be very much like the brothers and sisters in the Corinthian church who Paul could not teach as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ because they were not only full of jealousy, pride, ego and strife, but also exalting and esteeming each other and in this manner behaved only in a human way (1 Cor. 3:1-4). Likewise those James is talking to are full of quarrels, fights and coveting, instead of being Godly minded they are worldly-minded, they have no

peace on the inside because though they want the salvation Christ offers, they are still controlled by the flesh (self, ego, pride and greed etc.,) and covet worldly things, i.e., wealth, material possessions, fame, importance, power and such like things. They are governed by the natural corruption we have all inherited from our earthly father Adam which manifests itself through the spirit of coveting and envying. The spirit of the world teaches us to lay up for ourselves according to our own fancies and desires in contrast the Spirit of God teaches us to be willing to do-good to all about us as we are able. These believers are clearly following the spirit of the world and not the Spirit of God.

You desire and do not have, so you murder: the Jews not only had frequent wars with the Romans, but also many fights amongst themselves. they were a very quarrelsome divided people and many of those who had accepted Christ instead of forsaking these vices were still walking in the old nature of pride, ego and coveting after worldly things to gratify-self which is outwardly manifested in quarrels, arguments and strife. Since they have no security of obtaining what they covet after and cannot obtain it by peaceful means they seek it by contention and strife, but whoever seeks to gain anything by strife, fights or war seek it in an unjust manner and therefore cannot depend on any help or blessing from God.

**ALL WARS MIGHT HAVE BEEN AVOIDED IF MEN HAD BEEN
CONTENT WITH WHAT THEY HAD AND NOT COVETED
AFTER WHAT WAS IN THE POSSESSION OF OTHERS.**

NOTE: it is not wrong for Christians to seek after a better lifestyle if it is done by honest and honourable means and not at the expense of oppressing others or forsaking the will and ways of God.

You murder and kill: the words "You murder" (kill in KJV) gives us an idea of what type of believers James is writing to, clearly no believer who perceives the love Christ has for them could ever commit such a horrendous crime. It appears these are religious men who profess to believe in Christ, but their religion is all about gaining power control and the admiration and exaltation of others by being a leader of a religious empire. Much like the chief priest's, Pharisees and scribes who plotted the murder of James brother the Lord Jesus Christ. The things they do not have refer to all those things that appeal to pride ego and greed, i.e., the craving for opulent homes, ownership of greater areas of lands, territory, fame, riches, wealth, luxurious indulgences and magnificence and grandeur of self, which leads to arguments, quarrels, contentions and strife amongst individuals and if ego, pride and greed reaches their peak they start wars on a large scale among nations and kingdoms. The general reason for these contentions is that others have what we do not have, but desire to have (the sin of coveting) and since we are not willing to content ourselves without possessing them and not willing to obtain them through honest work or we do not have the means to obtain them we resolve to gain them by argument and quarrels or by dishonest and unlawful means or by fighting and wars. The expression:

- You desire and do not have, so you murder (v2).

Does not necessarily mean that those James is writing to are literally murdering, but rather that they have a murderous disposition, temperament and nature that is fostering a brutal and murderous spirit. It is unlikely that they were actually killing and committing murder, but there is no-doubt that they had such a covetous desire to have what was in the possession of others that it produced a malicious and corrupt heart and wickedly deceitful thoughts in the mind to attain the things they craved after.

NOTE: those who constantly criticize, demean and degrade others or who verbally abuse and dominate (i.e., bullying) others of less power could be spoken of as having a murderous spirit since they are destroying the spirit and life of those, they are verbally demeaning or abusing.

You have not, because you ask wrongly: James tells those he's writing to that they "Do not have, because they ask wrongly" (v2-3) the true way of obtaining anything which we really need is to seek it from God by prayer and then to go about using just and fair means to obtain it by honest work and industry always with a due regard for the rights of others. Those who are not ashamed to make God the minister and helper of their own cravings and pleasures and provider of luxuries to indulge on themselves show that worldly good is their god and that it is not God they serve, but pride, vanity, luxury, and worldly indulgences. Whoever wants to live in great power and plenty, in voluptuousness and prosperity dishonour God by such base, gross and excessive desires for earthly and temporal things.

NOTE: it is not wrong to provide a comfortable lifestyle for one's own family when it is achieved by honest means and with respect to others. James in these verses is teaching those he is writing to if they do not want God to resist them in prayer in regards to the management of all their worldly affairs and their success in them they should see that their hearts are right and not filled with pride and covetous desires and inclinations.

We must crucify all cravings that do not allow contentment to win the battle over coveting what we cannot have.

JAMES 4:4

Friendship with the World is Enmity with God.

- **James 4:4:** You adulterers and adulteresses people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

This verse has been grossly misunderstood by some religious teachers to mean that those who belong to the family of Christ should never have friendships with people of the world, but this is not what James is saying. Consider the following:

- How are the lost going to be saved if we do not show friendship to them?
- Many Christians live in isolation the only people they have contact with are secular men and women.
- Most Christian children go to school with secular children.
- Nearly all of us work with unsaved people.
- Many who do not know Christ have kind and generous hearts.
- Statistics show that 90% of people who come to Christ come not because of a church outreach program, but through the testimony of a friend.

Added to these are the words of Jesus:

- God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

In a natural family there is a love and bond that unites its members together in a love that no-other relationship outside that family does, but that does not mean that the members of the family have no friendship apart from those in their own household. Likewise, those in the family of Christ are united in a love with their spiritual brothers and sisters in a manner that they cannot have with those outside of Christ, but this does not mean they cannot have friendships apart from those in the body of Christ (unless they are corrupt and a bad influence). James is not saying it is wrong to have friendships with the people outside the Kingdom of God (who have good values), rather the phrase friendship with the world refers to coveting after the things of the world i.e., an opulent lifestyle, luxurious living and craving after wealth, riches and possessions to puff up pride and ego which hunger after peoples admiration, exaltation and praise.

Adulterers and adulteresses: adulterers in the context of this verse refer to men while adulteresses obviously refer to woman. The literal meaning of adulterers refers to a man or woman being sexually unfaithful to their married partner. James in this verse is telling those he is writing to that by their gross affections to the things of the world they are being unfaithful to God since it is to worldly wealth and luxury, they are setting their hearts upon and not to God.

NOTE: it is not wrong for a Christian to own much, certain Christians may have been blessed by God with a large portion of things of this world, and yet be kept in the love of God; but should they set their heart upon the world and conform to its ways rather than lose its friendship referring to the love of its luxuries, indulgences and fame they will then become an enemy to God as do all who set God aside to chase after the things of the world. James is teaching his readers to abandon their friendship with the world so that they will be always willing submit and subject themselves fully to God, His will and His Kingdom. James is not saying that it is wrong to be rich since money in the right hands can be used to support those proclaiming the Gospel and help others suffering hardships, rather he is shining a spotlight on the following two topics:

- Human nature (self, ego, pride and greed) desires riches, importance, fame and the praise and exaltation of others.
- Whoever uses God's blessings or gifts (whether they be material or spiritual) for selfish ambition and their own gain and indulgent self-gratification are bringing judgment upon themselves.

JAMES 4:5

God Yearns Jealously over the Spirit Dwelling in Us.

- **James 4:5:** Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? (English Standard Bible).

Few passages of the New Testament have given expositors more perplexity than this verse. The difficulty has arisen from the fact that no Scriptures in the Bible contain the precise words of this verse. The two most common interpretations are:

1. Based on the King James Bible, "Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" James would be saying that the Scriptures are not wrong in stating the fact that our human spirit lusts to envy. This view can be supported by the general teaching of the Old Testament which clearly shows that envy is deeply imbedded in the human heart and therefore our nature is inclined to covet and envy as the following scriptures show:

- I saw all toil and all skill in work come from a man's *envy* of his neighbor. (Ecc. 4:4).
- For wrath killeth the foolish man, and *envy* slayeth the silly one (Job 5:2).
- A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but *envy* the rottenness of the bones. (Proverbs 14:30).
- Wrath is cruel, anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before *envy*? (Proverbs 27:4).

These passages not only show that there is a strong propensity in human nature to envy and that the collective sentiment taught in the Old Testament regarding envy was not in vain since these Scriptures and many others like them clearly show that throughout Old Testament history wars, strife and worldliness stemmed from a heart full of envy and coveting of which James shines a spotlight on in this letter because envy, coveting and worldly-mindedness taint and mar the faith of Christians.

2. Based on the English standard Bible "Do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?" James would be referring to God's Spirit that dwells in us. This view can be supported by the fact that the verse is in the context of those who from envy and coveting have made themselves enemies of God by their friendship of the 'world' meaning they have set their heart and affections upon the luxuries and indulges of the world (v4) rather than upon God. So, the words, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?" would refer to God yearning over the Holy Spirit that He has made to dwell in us through our faith in Christ. Which means the verse could be read to mean that James is telling those he is writing to, that because they have set their hearts and affections on the luxuries and indulges of the world, they are grieving the Spirit God has placed in them.

God is zealous and cares for the Spirit and not only desires that the Spirit would abide in an abode of peace and love, but also desires healthy soil for the Spirit's best growth, it is in this sense that God is jealous over the Spirit meaning He is protective of it and desired the best for it. This idea can be supported by the following words of Paul:

- Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear and do not *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption, but rather let all bitterness, anger, slander and malice be put away from you and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephes. 4:29-30).

It would be foolish to argue over which of these two views James had in mind, since both are doctrinally correct and therefore both can be accepted without any division or compromise of Scripture.

JAMES 4:6-10

God gives Grace to the Humble, but Opposes the Proud.

- **James 4:6-10:** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil (diabolos), and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

The proud in their pride resist God:

- In their understanding they resist the salvation of God.
- In their hearts they resist the love and grace of God.
- In their mind their passions and will they resist the laws of God.
- In their own wisdom they resist the wisdom and providence of God.

Is it any wonder that God resists the proud?

Submit to God means:

- Submit your understanding to the salvation of God.
- Submit your hearts to the love and grace of God.
- Submit your mind, passions and will to the laws of God.
- Submit your own wisdom to the wisdom and providence of God.

When we fully humble ourselves in repentance before God, submit to him in single-mindedness and live a life that honours Christ God will grant to us more grace and in that grace draw nearer to us and not only turn our gloom into joy, but exalt us in glory. Before honour is humility, the highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you: the words, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (v7) is in the context of James explaining to his readers that there are passions in the human heart that are at war with each other i.e., the spirit of the flesh (pride) warring against the Spirit of God (humbleness). James goes to great lengths to highlight that it is the craving passions of envy and coveting that cause quarrels, strife, contention, murder, fights and wars and shines a spotlight on the truth that these all arise from the human heart. Peter warned those following Christ to:

- Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

James in this letter says:

- Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (Jas. 4:7).

The LORD in the King James Bible said to Cain:

- If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him (Gen. 4:7).

In the English Standard Bible, the same verse is stated this way:

- If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Peter describes the devil as a roaring lion prowling and seeking someone to devour and the LORD pictures sin as a creature who desires to feed on humans hiding behind a door waiting for its victim to enter into the room so it can take hold of them, thus the Old Testament picture of sin is the same as the New Testament picture of the devil therefore resisting the devil and resisting sin are the same thing. When the devil and sin are personified, they can both be seen as the same creature because they both have the same desire, the same character and the same motivation which is to lead a person away from Christ and into ungodly behaviour. The devil in the context of this chapter is the spirit and mind of the flesh (self, ego, pride and greed etc.,) personified as everything that is opposed to God and his will especially envy, coveting and worldly mindedness. Since humbleness and submitting ourselves to God is what the devil (self, ego, pride and greed etc.,) wars against all brothers and sisters in Christ should do all they can to resist their deceptive temptations and enticing appeal.

To resist the devil means to resist:

- Pride, arrogance, conceit egotism and the feeling of superiority.
- Feeling of self-importance and living for self-gratification.
- Laziness, idleness and provocations to anger.
- Anything that is contrary to the will of God or would bring a bad testimony to Christ.

If we yield to temptations, the devil will continually follow us. James is teaching his readers that there are three ways to overcome all the temptations of the devil (self, ego, pride and greed etc.).

1. Submit to God, his will and his ways.
2. Deny coveting, envy and worldly mindedness.
3. Resist the craving for riches, importance and fame.

For further information on the devil see the title:

- Devil in, Satan and his Family (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Doubled mindedness: doubled mindedness is envying and coveting for riches, importance and fame and at the same time desiring to follow God, the spirit behind the desire for riches, importance and fame is pride and greed, both of these are the spirit of the devil not the Spirit of Christ, pride is the enemy to humility and humility is the Spirit of Christ therefore pride and humbleness will always be at war with each other.

NOTE: James is not saying being rich is wrong (in the right hands money can do a lot of good), but that when money is used for selfish ambition and to make one feel important or famous then it becomes wrong. James is teaching that humbleness is the path to God and it is the humble that Christ will exalt and who will inherit the earth when the Lord returns.

JAMES 4:11-12

Judging a Brother or Sister is to Speak Evil against the Law.

- **James 4:11-12:** Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹²There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour?

James is saying do not say a brother or sister is separated from Christ or will not be accepted by God (see v12 for the context), because if we say a brother or sister will not be accepted by God we in effect judge that brother or sister to eternal death and to judge a family member of the Lord Jesus Christ in this manner accepted is to set oneself up as a judge of the law and only God has this right and this power. When we talk about another believer being saved or not saved we are speaking evil of the law because we are not only saying that Christ will not accept that brother or sister who believes in him, but also that the law is condemning them to eternal death and not one of us can do this because we are not judges of what the law will determine for any brother or sister in Christ. The reason not one of us is able to judge another's eternal standing in Christ is because God's grace and God's mercy in Christ overrides the judgment of the law and therefore no-one can judge a family member of Christ by the law because the law is not only under God's mercy and grace but under the blood of Christ this is why James states that it is an evil against the law for any of us to judge the eternal standing of another brother or sister in Christ. James is telling his readers that there is only one lawgiver and one judge who, is able to save and to destroy so whoever is in Christ should forget about setting themselves up as judges of the law and rather concentrate on being a doer of it. Besides this unless any of us can stand before the perfect Holiness of God free from all defects and every blemish of sin and without the Royal Crown and bloodstained robes of Christ righteousness who are we to judge our neighbour? (v12).

In Christianity, the condition of being set free of sin is not the absence of it, but through honest and heart-felt repentance toward God.

JAMES 4:13-16

We should say, "If the Lord Wills, we will Live and Do this or That."

- **James 4:13-16:** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" ¹⁴yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

James has just finished rebuking those who in their pride and arrogance set themselves up as judges of the law who based on their own notions and their own opinions judge other brothers and sisters in Christ whose behaviour did not conform to their standards to be destined to God's judgment of eternal destruction (v12). Now James is asking them will they also arrogantly make audacious future plans with the presumption and conceit that they have control of their life as though God did not. This is about presumptuous confidence in forming plans stretching into the future, without any proper sense of the uncertainty of life, and without any dependence on God for it. They boast without any proper sense of the uncertainty of life, and without any dependence on God for it, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city." The fault in this is that they arrogantly and confidently determine on these matters of future plans, as though every moment of their life did not depend on God, rather they dogmatically and dictatorially act as if their life was in their own hands and their own power. God has wisely left us in the dark concerning future events, and even concerning the duration of life itself. None of us can say for certain what the future will bring, we may know what we intend to do and plan to achieve, but a thousand things may happen to prevent us since we are not even sure of life itself. We are always to depend on the will of God knowing that our times are not in our own hands. The frailty, shortness, and uncertainty of life, should prevent the vanity and presumptuous confidence of making future plans without any sense of our powerlessness in controlling our life which appears for a little time and then vanishes away as a vapour. If we rejoice in God and trust that our times are in his hand and that all events are at his disposal our statements would be:

- If the Lord will, we shall do this or that.

This kind of rejoicing is good, but it should be noted this is not simply a cliché to attach to the end of a prayer or an affirmation to pin to our goals, but a deeply rooted attitude of mind, heart and life. We are all to depend upon almighty God for our life, our breath, and all other things. It is about having a constant sense of dependence on the will of God for life, and our future plans and goals. Our heads may be filled with plans for ourselves, our families, our friends; but providence often throws our plans into confusion. This fact shines a brilliant spotlight upon the truth that the reason everything we plan to do should be done with a submissive dependence on the will of God. Our life appears but for a little time, and then vanishes away; but there is a life that will continue in the other world; and, since this mortal life is so uncertain, it should always be our goal to prepare and lay up in store for the eternal glory to come. James in these verses puts mortal life into perspective by clearly showing that in regards to future events no-one can be absolutely sure what tomorrow will bring therefore we are all to live with the attitude, "If the Lord wills." Two gross sins before God have been highlighted in these verses:

- 1 Boasting of what we might do in the future without any sense of God.
- 2 Judging the eternal state of another family member of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since not one of us can be certain about our own mortal life why
would we even consider judging the eternal state
of another brother or sister's life?

JAMES 4:17

Knowing Good and Not Doing It.

- **James 4:17:** So, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

This verse is in the context of believers being rebuked for judging the eternal state of another brother or sister in Christ and of presumptuously boasting of the great profits they will make in the future without having

any sense of God. If a brother or sister in Christ is unaware that by acting in the manner, they are is an offense to God then it will not be counted to them as sin, but whoever knows that it is wrong to:

- Judge the salvation of another brother or sister.
- Make future plans and boast of the great things they will achieve without any sense of God or dependence upon him.

Will be judged as sinners, Jesus said:

- If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains (John 9:41)

Those who do not do the good that they know should be done will be judged accordingly. Here is wisdom, let us take care that our conscience is rightly informed and then that it be faithfully followed.

NOTE: knowing the right thing to do and not doing it is not limited to judging the eternal standing of those in Christ or boasting of what we will accomplish in the future without any sense of God, but by extension can apply to:

- Religious rites, works, ceremonies customs and traditions.
- Not helping the poor or less fortunate when we are able.
- Whatever is against the law of love, justice and honesty.
- Anything that would offend God or bring a bad testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.