Prayer Study #488
JAMES CHAPTER FOUR
First Love Ministries, Inc., of Perry, Georgia USA

James 4 Amplified Bible (AMP)

Things to Avoid

Worldliness and Human Pleasure or God's Will?

4 *What leads to [the unending] quarrels and conflicts among you? Do they not come from your [hedonistic] desires that wage war in your [bodily] members [fighting for control over you]?* ***2*** *You are jealous and covet [what others have] and your lust goes unfulfilled; so you murder. You are envious and cannot obtain [the object of your envy]; so you fight and battle. You do not have because you do not ask [it of God].* ***3*** *You ask [God for something] and do not receive it, because you ask with wrong motives [out of selfishness or with an unrighteous agenda], so that [when you get what you want] you may spend it on your [hedonistic] desires.*

In this chapter James is dealing with some heavy themes. Are we going to satisfy our own lust and desire for worldly pleasure or are we going to do God's will? The irony is that we will never satisfy our lusts and will never walk in peace and joy and contentment apart

from following Jesus. Hedonism is the prevailing doctrine in much of America today. It is basically seeking pleasure-either through entertainent, sexual gratification, position and power, and love of money-and seeing that pleasure search as the chief purpose of life. As a Christian, our chief purpose of life is to love and serve Jesus, to make disciples, and to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to the earth. Following pleasure for pleasure's sake leads to jealousy, covetness, divisions, warfare.

We do not receive from God because we do not ask of God or because what we ask selfish requests to fulfill our own lust and pleasure. Our desire should be rooted in serving Jesus, not in a desire for money or glory or pleasure.

Barclay writes this concerning these first verses in James 4: "The craving for pleasure in the end shuts the door of prayer. If our prayers are simply for the things which will gratify our desires, they are essentially selfish-and, therefore, it is not possible for God to answer them. The true end of prayer is to say to God: 'Your will be done.' …In this life, we have to choose whether to make our main object our own desires or the will of God."

Adulteresses

4 *You adulteresses [disloyal sinners—flirting with the world and breaking your vow to God]!*

Do you not know that being the world's friend [that is, loving the things of the world] is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ***5*** *Or do you think that the Scripture says to no purpose that the [human] spirit which He has made to dwell in us lusts with envy?* ***6*** *But He gives us more and more grace [through the power of the Holy Spirit to defy sin and live an obedient life that reflects both our faith and our gratitude for our salvation]. Therefore, it says, "God is opposed to the proud and haughty, but [continually] gives [the gift of] grace to the humble [who turn away from self-righteousness]."* ***7*** *So submit to [the authority of] God. Resist the devil [stand firm against him] and he will flee from you.*

The context in which *adulteresses* is used in verse 4 is spiritual, not physical. The idea, which all the Jews would have understood (and this book was written to Jewish Christians) is that Yahweh is the husband of Israel and Israel is the bride of Yahweh. Isaiah 54:5 says, *"Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name,"* and Jeremiah 3:20 tells us, *"Instead as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the Lord."*

Barclay writes, "This form of expression may offend some delicate modern ears, but the

picture of Israel as the bride of God and of God as the husband of Israel has something very precious in it. It means that to disobey God is like breaking the marriage vow. It means that all sin is sin against love. It means that our relationship to God is not like the distant relationship of king and subject or master and slave, but like the intimate relationship of husband and wife. It means that when we sin we break God's heart, as the heart of one partner in a marriage may be broken by the desertion of the other."

When James is writing that love of the world is enmity with God, he is putting down the creation of God. He is saying that the world or *kosmos* separated or apart from God is worldliness. Worldliness is when we dedicate our lives to obtaining material possessions. The best way to explain this is found in the words of Jesus: ***No one can serve two masters*** (Matthew 6:24). We can become so dominated by material possessions that the world becomes our master. Or we may use material possessions to serve others and have God as our Master.

Verse 5 is not really a recognizable quote from scripture. Either James was quoting a lost book, which he regarded as scripture, or perhaps more probably, he is summing up in one sentence what the entire scripture says.

A good way to translate this verse would be: *The Spirit which God has made to dwell with us jealously yearns for the full devotion of our hearts.* God is saying He is a jealous lover who will not tolerate a rival.

We define *grace* as *unmerited favor.* J. Vernon McGee calls it *love in action.* God did not save us by love, although He gave Jesus because of His love for us, but He saved us by grace. The "container" that carries it must be a humble vessel.

We do not really have the strength to resist the devil. We must resist him by the grace of God. As Jodi Zammit taught us in her Orphan Spirit teaching, in our weakness we are made strong. Paul boast of his weakness in 2nd Corinthians 12:9: And He [Jesus] said unto me, ***"My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."*** *Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."*
When we resist the devil by walking in the Spirit, he will flee.

Godly Sorrow

8 *Come close to God [with a contrite heart]*

and He will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; and purify your [unfaithful] hearts, you double-minded [people]. ***9*** *Be miserable and grieve and weep [over your sin]. Let your [foolish] laughter be turned to mourning and your [reckless] joy to gloom.* ***10*** *Humble yourselves [with an attitude of repentance and insignificance] in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you [He will lift you up, He will give you purpose].*
The best way to resist the devil is to draw nigh to God. The Lord stands at the door of your heart. He will not come farther unless you invite him in. No one can open that door except for you. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, ***"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me."*** When you draw near to God, Satan will flee because he cannot stand to be in the presence of God. He will not be able to get to you, unless you get too far from God. A wolf attacks a sheep only when the sheep separates himself from the rest of the flock and from the Shepherd.

James demands both outer and inner cleansing, both clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:4). Clean hands, however, denote moral purity. We are to lift up holy hands to God in prayer (1st Timothy 2:8). We also must

cleanse our hearts. (Psalm 73:13) for only the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

We are not to treat sin lightly. We are to mourn over it. The Christian life is one of joy, but we must guard against striving for a life of lavish luxury. Here James is describing the beginnings of the Christian life. We must realize with sorrow the terribleness of our sin. But this leads us to the wonderful joy of knowing our sins are forgiven.

J. Vernon McGee writes, concerning James 4:10: *"'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."

The Sin of Judging Others

11 *Believers, do not speak against or slander one another. He who speaks [self-righteously] against a brother or judges his brother [hypocritically], speaks against the Law and judges the Law. If you judge the Law, you are not a doer of the Law but a judge of it.* ***12*** *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the*

One who is able to save and to destroy [the one God who has the absolute power of life and death]; but who are you to [hypocritically or self-righteously] pass judgment on your neighbor?

The word used here for slander *katalalein.* It means to slander someone when they are not there to mount a defense. It is not our place to pass judgment on another. God is the only judge. We are not to take that place.

J. Vernon McGee tells of two types of people who try to take God's place. First, there is the one who thinks he is good enough to be saved without following God's plan for salvation. This type person thinks that he will go to heaven on his own merits and sit besides God on His throne.

The second type, the type being referenced in this passage is the person that refuses to judge himself but judges everyone else. The church is full of this latter type. James is saying here that we are to judge ourselves, not others, and we are to go to Jesus in humility.

Mistaken Confidence

13 *Come now [and pay attention to this], you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and carry on our business and make a profit."* ***14****]Yet you do not know [the least thing about what may happen in your life tomorrow. [What*

is secure in your life?] You are merely a vapor [like a puff of smoke or a wisp of steam from a cooking pot] that is visible for a little while and then vanishes [into thin air]. ***15*** *Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and we will do this or that."* ***16*** *But as it is, you boast [vainly] in your pretension and arrogance. All such boasting is evil.* ***17*** *So any person who knows what is right to do but does not do it, to him it is sin.*

The Jewish people understood this passage quickly. This was an age when new cities were being formed. Often the founders of these cities would offer citizenship freely to the Jews because the Jews had and still have a worldwide reputation as great businessmen. Where the Jews went, trade and money followed.

James is simply telling us that we do not really know what a day will bring or what tomorrow holds. In the light of eternity, no matter how long we live on this earth, it is just like a vapor soon gone. Our lives are in the hands of God. We must trust God and not boast in ourselves for boasting is sin.

Sin is not only the commission of an act. It can also be a sin of omission where we know to do good in our service to the Lord but do not do it.