



Sunday School Lesson for September 28, 2003.
Released on September 26, 2003.

Study James 4:1-10, 13-17 Faith and Attitudes
Questions and answers below.

TIME: about A.D. 45
PLACE: from Jerusalem

James 4:1-17

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

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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lesson Background

An attitude has been defined as a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one's disposition. This being the case, proper attitudes are very important with regard to our Christian walk.

Already James has emphasized the importance of faith (1 :6) and actions (v. 22). Genuine faith will express itself in works (2:17) and in the proper use of the tongue (3:2). But what about our attitudes? How important are Christian attitudes? What is the relationship between our faith and our attitudes?

Too often people who profess Christian faith are guilty of having bad attitudes. A Christian woman who worked at a restaurant occasionally had to work one of the least desirable shifts. Many of the people she served during this time had just come from church meetings; yet it was not evident in their attitudes.

What kinds of attitudes do you display? Do they point others to the Saviour, or do they cause people to question the reality of your faith?

SHUN THE WORLD-Jas. 4:1-6

1. Where do "wars and fightings" (Jas. 4:1) come from?

The reference to "wars and fightings" should not be understood in the sense of mortal combat as might be waged between two nations. Rather, James had in mind those conflicts that sometimes arise among believers. Sadly, some churches are notorious for their "wars and fightings." This discredits the cause of Christ before the world and makes it more difficult to evangelize the lost.

Since this follows James's words about the tongue, "it is much more likely that the weapons of this warfare are the tongues of the

saints, and that which is killed is the spirit, peace, and souls of the saints" (Fream, A Chain of Jewels from James and Jude, College Press).

The origin of these conflicts, said James, is the "lusts that war in your members" (v.1). The word translated "lust" in James 4:2 is a Greek word and means a strong desire of any kind. Of course, these Christians were not literally killing one another, but they may have been exhibiting murderous attitudes. First John 3:15 says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

2. Bickering among church members often undermines the spirit and effectiveness of the local church. What must the local congregation teach its members in order to reduce the risk of strife within the church?

Most church quarrels start because of a lack of personal humility or a failure to see issues from God's perspective. Church leaders must teach Christians to pray for wisdom and to compare their behavior constantly with God's standards. Passages such as 1Corinthians 13; Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians 4: 2,3; and Philipians 2: 3,4 are very helpful in this regard.

The following story provides a blueprint for solving such conflicts when people are committed to resolution rather than insisting on being right. In one area of Scotland when two people disagree, they are required to go to a small island named the "Isle of Discussion." They are given an ample supply of cheese and are required to stay there until the issue is settled. Afterward they go over to another island, called the "Isle of Reconciliation," to celebrate their agreement. The area has had only one murder in over a century!

3. Why don't we have to fight to get the things we desire (v. 2)?

We know that there are both proper and improper ways of obtaining anything. James told those who were fighting and scrapping to obtain their desires that the real reason they did not have their requests was quite simple. They lacked because they were not asking.

Those things that are most important in life can be given only by God (Jas. 1:17). For any and all needs, God's people must ask Him to supply whatever is necessary (Matt. 6:8-11, 33-34; 7:7-11).

4. What are some reasons for prayers going unanswered (asking amiss) verse 2?

Even when they did ask God for things, James's readers did not receive what they wanted. Not all requests that are brought before God's throne are acceptable. True enough, God wants to answer prayer, but it must be "according to his will" (I John 5:14).

While we cannot always know with certainty God's will in every

situation, we can discern from the Scriptures the kinds of requests that are acceptable in His sight.

God has promised to meet our needs (Matt. 6:8, 25-34); so we may be asking amiss when we pray for more than God has promised. For example, those who are out of work should pray for direction concerning employment. Simply praying for a bigger paycheck, fewer hours, and more benefits may be an illegitimate request.

The word translated "amiss" comes from a word that means "wickedly" or "evilly," and could be translated "with wrong motives." With regard to any prayer, we must always examine our motives. This is true even regarding petitions that we might otherwise think are acceptable to God.

Asking amiss has its roots in selfish praying, "that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jas. 4:3). As in verse 1, the word "lusts" here means "pleasures." Do we pray to please ourselves or to please God and others? We all have personal needs with which God is concerned, and those are acceptable prayer requests. The problem arises when we are only concerned about ourselves and our needs. Prayers should be offered in view of God's larger plan for our lives and His purposes in the world.

5. When James spoke of adultery, what did he likely have in mind (v. 4)?

Since James was writing to Christians scattered around the region, he was probably not addressing actual "adulterers and adulteresses." Of course, adultery and fornication are clearly condemned in the Bible (Exod. 20:14; I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21).

In all likelihood, James was using adultery as a symbol for spiritual unfaithfulness, for it is connected with "the friendship of the world" (Jas. 4:4). Similarly, the Hebrew prophets saw Israel's apostasy from the true God as spiritual infidelity (Jer. 3:8-9; Ezek. 20:30; Hos. 1:2; 4:12; 9:1).

Christians are to live holy lives. Being friendly with the world puts us in a position of being enemies to God. On the other hand, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

6. What is the result of becoming too friendly with the world?

Most modern Christians do not realize how friendly we are with the world. Too often we read the same literature, enjoy the same entertainment, and frequent the same places as unbelievers. In some cases this poses no problem, but it has the potential of damaging our Christian witness or adversely influencing us to become more like the world and less like Christ. Of course, more followers of Christ understand that certain activities are wrong, but while we avoid wrong activities, we must also avoid wrong attitudes, for such attitudes reveal that we are friends with the world!

"The 'friendship of the world' is the love of that world; of the maxims which govern it, the principles which reign there, the ends that are sought, the amusements and gratifications which

characterize it as distinguished from the church of God" (Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Baker).

7. What are some of the problems in attempting to understand verse 5?

In verse 5 we face two difficulties. First, the original Greek sentence structure is such that it could be translated various ways in English. Second, there is no place in the Old Testament where we can find the Scripture quote "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy."

Let's break down this verse from the beginning. "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain" expects a negative reply. Could we imagine God's Word going forth without purpose, direction, or power? Since the quote in the second part of this verse (The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy) cannot be found the Old Testament, it appears that James was either paraphrasing or giving the general sense of what is said in several Old Testament passages (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Zech 8:2).

In the original, the word to "envy" (Gr phthomos) receives prominence by its position. This expression when taken adverbially, speaks of divine jealousy, a familiar doctrine to these Jews (Ex 20:5; 34:14; Zech 8:2). "Dwelleth" (Gr katoikeo) differs from the word which signifies a temporary dwelling. The Holy Spirit's indwelling in the believer is not only for a brief time, but He, as it were, makes His residence within us (1 Corinthians 3:16). Verse 5 in our lesson seems to be saying that the Holy Spirit in us "lusteth" (longs) for our full devotion. We think of lust as an inappropriate desire, but as stated previously, the word means any strong longing. God longs so ardently for us that He actually is jealous over (or envies) us.

This explains why the charge of spiritual adultery was made in the previous verse. Its counterpart, spiritual faithfulness, measures the believer's love for the Lord. Friendship with the world exposes the shallowness of one's spirituality.

SUBMIT TO GOD-Jas. 4:7-10

8. What happens when we resist the devil (vs. 7, 8a)?

Humbling ourselves before the Lord is one of many ways we submit to God and His will for our lives. Another way we show our submission to God is to resist the devil and the temptations he brings our way. Earlier, James emphasized our own culpability in allowing temptation to lead us into sin (1:13-15). Now he stressed the active role we must play in resisting the one who is behind enticements to sin (I Pet. 5:8-9).

Far too many Christians fail to realize that we are in a spiritual war with Satan (Eph. 6:10-17). He will bring to bear upon us anything that might weaken our faith or cause us to yield to temptation. For some, the temptation might be drugs or alcohol. For

others, it might be discouragement when facing illness or trouble. There is certainly no lack of weaponry in Satan's arsenal to be used against us, and his temptations often come when we are most vulnerable.

But the good news is that if we actively resist Satan, he will flee from us. When Christ resisted him in the wilderness, the devil "departed from him for a season" (Luke 4:13). As happened with the Son of God, we can be sure that Satan will return. If, however, we have been successful in resisting Satan, we will be stronger because of the experience. Like Jesus, we must draw upon the resources of God's Word to ward off the fiery darts Satan hurls against us (Eph. 6:16).

As we resist the devil, we must simultaneously draw near to God (James 4: 8). As we get closer to Him, He will get closer to us. As Paul told the Athenians, He is "not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27).

To draw near to God requires that we be cleansed of evil deeds and evil hearts (I John 1:9). True worship can be accomplished only when we are right with God (Acts 8:22) and right with one another (Matt. 5:23-24; I John 4:19-21).

9. What did James call upon his readers to do to express sorrow for sin (vs. 9, 10)?

Humility before the Lord can be expressed in a number of ways. Here James stressed the importance of genuine repentance, seen in weeping and mourning over one's sins (Matt. 5:4). Certainly James was not promoting some kind of feel-good religion that only stresses the positive aspects of following Christ. Rather, he instructed us not to come proudly before the Lord; or to hold our heads high and demand His cleansing. Instead, we are to come with a broken spirit and a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). Then the Lord will purify hearts and lift up those ready to serve Him (this promise is clear).

First, we will be lifted up from the depths of sin and despair. Ultimately, we will be lifted up to heavenly glory in the age to come.

SEEK GOD'S WILL-Jas. 4:11-17

10. How can Christians come to understand just how serious is the sin of being judgmental (vs. 11, 12)?

Christians continually need to be reminded that God is the only eternal lawgiver and therefore the only judge of eternal destinies. We need to be warned repeatedly that a judgmental person is taking over God's position and role and that God will not tolerate such arrogance.

Positive alternatives are always helpful. Believers need to know that, instead of becoming judges, their work is to tell about and demonstrate the mercy they have received from God. Even so, God has given Christians a judging, or discerning, role (Matthew 7:15-20).

We can describe and analyze. We do that for the purposes of responding to needs, proposing solutions, and avoiding sin.

11. The Bible teaches the virtue of being an industrious self-starter (e.g., Proverbs 10:4). On the other hand, James seems to be saying that a person's planning for tomorrow may be fruitless, since God is in control of what happens in the future. What should the church teach in order to clarify this seeming contradiction (James 4: 13,14)?

The Lord spoke approvingly of advance planning in Luke 14:28–31. Paul planned his journeys (Romans 15:23-29). In the passage at hand, James is not attacking the idea of planning ahead. Rather, he is highlighting the problem of pride and arrogance. Our sense of invincibility leads to a boastful spirit as we assume we are in control, rather than God. This was the mistake made by the man in Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21). The rich man's plans quickly evaporated when his life ended without warning.

Our lives, says James, are like a vapor. Such a mist is seen only briefly; then it is gone. When we are young, we believe that we have plenty of time to accomplish all that we want to do. As we age, we discover that life moves along rather quickly. We realize that much has been left undone and that time is running out. Would that more discovered this truth sooner!

12. How should Christians approach God's will and the future (vs. 15, 16)?

Since we do not know what is ahead, it is wise to put everything into God's hands and trust Him with the future. While many do not use the expression "Lord willing" as was once customary, we would do well to revive this practice. To use such language reminds us that everything is contingent upon God's will (Acts 18:21; I Cor. 4:19; 16:7).

Whether we voice the actual words or not, we need to conduct ourselves under the acknowledgment that God's divine purposes are being worked out in our lives. Whatever happens, we can be confident that the Sovereign of the universe is in control. This does not mean that we should take a nonchalant, whatever-will-be-will-be attitude toward life. In this very chapter of James 4 we are told of our responsibility to pray (v. 2), to submit to God (v. 7), to resist the devil, to purify our hearts (v. 8), and to do good (v. 17).

Since the Lord's will must be considered in all decisions and situations, any tendency to boast about the future is evil.

13. What is meant by a sin of omission? Give some examples (v. 17).

Disobeying God's commands are one thing; failing to do good is another. True, "sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4),

but what about the many good things we sometimes leave undone? To fail to do what is right and good is also sin in God's sight.

*Excerpts from "The KJV Parallel Bible Commentary."

CONCLUSION

In this week's lesson we have seen that our Father will indeed bless the one who relies on Him for their needs. The humble look to Him for daily strength. The best plans are those that are made in consultation with the Lord of the universe, for He knows the beginning from the end. He also knows what is truly best for us.

PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You for the wisdom You have given to James and that he has passed on to us. Please give us increasing wisdom to grasp more of Your truth. Give us the strength to control our desires and attitudes, and grant us the courage to do what is right. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly" (Proverbs 3:34).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week we will explore another attribute of true Christians. We will see how God has called us to be a special people for Him who are characterized by purity and holiness. Study 1 Peter 1: 1-2:10. Study 1 Peter 1: 1-2:10.

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