

“Friend of the World or Friend of God”

James 4:1-10

September 25, 2022

Let's pray.

Please open your Bibles to **James 4** as we continue working through the book of James.

I have been greatly blessed by each of the messages that have been preached by the elders and the men of the church. God has blessed Trinity with many gifted capable men who have been careful and trustworthy in the teaching and preaching of His Word. I know all of you are looking forward to having Pastor Ty back soon. Praising Jesus for your continued healing and strength.

I had asked that we include **James 3:13-18** with the reading of our Scripture passage for this morning because even through there is the chapter break between **chapters 3 and 4**, if you look at the content of **James 3:13-18** and **Chapter 4:1-3**, James is pursuing a common theme in both sections and **vs. 1-3** is a continuation of **vs. 13-18**.

James, at the end of **chapter 3**, talks about worldly wisdom verses godly wisdom—wisdom from above.

James calls *earthly wisdom, unspiritual, demonic which leads to jealousy, envy, self-ambition, disorder, and every vile practice.* (**James 3:15-16**)

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (**James 3:17-18**)

Now as we enter **chapter 4**, James again addresses some practical application of living out the Christian life as one in Christ with fellow brothers and sisters.

As important as it is for the readers of **James** to know what wisdom is, it is even more so that they learn to live wisely.

Our outline this morning is:

- 1) Mixing the World with the Church
- 2) God's Grace is Greater
- 3) Nixing the World from the Church

Our main thrust from our passage this morning is this:

May you and I wholeheartedly pursue God and His wisdom, rejecting the ways of the world, humbly submitting ourselves to God, basking in His grace as He molds and shapes us more into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ, all for His glory.

So, let's dive into our passage. Right away James addresses the quarrels and fights among them.

Which brings us to our first point – 1) **Mixing the World with the Church**

James doesn't soften his tone here at all as he addresses his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Look with again at **verses 1-2a**; *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and you do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*

Look back again at **James 3:14-16** where James talks of worldly wisdom which he calls demonic and shows fruit of it – *jealous, selfish ambition, disorder.* James is telling them that this worldly wisdom has now entered the church as there are quarrels and fighting among one another in the church.

As we heard from last week from Kraig, wisdom from God produces a harvest of righteousness and is sown in peace by those who make peace. That is why James speaks to the drastic difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom. As worldly wisdom had infiltrated the church.—Brothers and sisters were quarreling and fighting with one another. The literal root meaning of the phrase “quarrels and fights” is “war”.

These are not petty small disagreements. These are intense, strong accusations and arguments against their fellow believers. – *Anything like this ever happen in our churches today?*

When James says, *Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and you do not have.*

“Desire” comes from the Greek word *hedone*, which simply means pleasure. *Hedone*, is the source of the English word *hedonism*, which means pleasure is the main goal of life. When one chooses to only pursue their own pleasure in life, the result is almost always strife, hatred, and division.

But isn't that exactly what the world teaches us today, after all, you only go around once in life, you should go it, you deserve to be happy. Pleasure should be your main goal. Even when we've had a beautiful sunny day after a couple of cloudy rainy days, I hear people regularly say, “we deserve this.” Rather than giving praise to God for the beautiful day that He has provided.

But that too is all part of the world's teaching. It's all about you.

James states in **verse 2**; *You desire and you do not have, so you murder.*

Even though James' readers are not yet killing each other, their anger and strife against one another is already prevalent among them and if it continues unchecked, the danger of actual violence against one another is very real. Both Jesus and John equate hated and anger to murder.

Jesus speaking in **Matthew 5:21-22**; *You have heard that it said to those of old, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to council; whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” Matthew 5:21-22*

And John in **1 John 3:15**; *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in them. 1 John 3:15*

James had previously addressed unchecked desires back in **James 1:14-15**; *Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown bring forth death.*

Brothers and sisters, unchecked desires are dangerous, almost always leading to discord, anger, and sin.

James continues in **verse 2**; *You do not have, because you do ask.* In other words, instead of praying, they are lusting, scheming, and fighting with one another. They had taken God out of the picture, and by doing so, they had demonstrated a lack of regard for His presence and His power to help them and remember, *this is the church we are talking about.* James is telling them they lacked godly wisdom because they refused to ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach as James had told them earlier in **James 1:5**.

It is because of their reliance of self and lack of total dependence upon God, they did not have what they truly needed, God Himself. Essentially their desires are misplaced. – Their desires are centered on self and the pleasure of self. They were not desiring God, the only One who can give them peace and joy regardless of their circumstances.

James then goes on to address their motives when they pray.

Look again with me at **verse 3**; *You ask and you do not receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* Almost as bad as not asking is asking wrongly. Later in our passage, James tells them when we pray, we must submit to God and His will in our prayers. (**vs.4-7**) The wrong motives James is referring to is their desire to spend what they received only on their own pleasures and desires. James is attempting to expose their selfish and self-centeredness in their requests to God in prayer.

How about you and me, do we ever fall into this same trap? Are your and my desires sometimes misplaced?

Maybe we're not praying asking for God to help us win the lottery so we can get that new car or bigger house or whatever else it is we are desiring, but do we ever bargain with God in our prayers?

James isn't writing only to the early Christians here, I don't know about you, but I find his words to be very convicting to me as I consider some of my misplaced desires on self-centered pleasures. James is calling his readers out because they were asking for things and money that they intended to use for pleasure and they were oblivious to the needs of other brothers and sisters.

James had stated earlier in **James 2:15-16** when speaking about faith without works is dead; ***If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?***

It all comes back to *hedonism*, which again means pleasure is the main goal of life.

So, is James saying that Christians are never to passionately desire pleasure? Of course not! God is the giver of all good things and that includes the things that you and I find enjoyment and pleasure in.

Kent Hughes says it this way; *"The Christian life is not a life of negation, but of affirmation and enjoyment. In fact, in a way Christians ought to be the biggest pleasure seekers in the universe."*
(James – Faith That Works by R. Kent Hughes – pg.170)

Hughes then goes on to give three reasons for this:

- 1) *"We must understand that God is the author of all pleasure."*
- 2) *"Man is naturally made to seek pleasure."*
- 3) *"God wants us to immerse ourselves in His pleasure by immersing ourselves in Him."*
(James – Faith That Works by R. Kent Hughes – pg.170-171)

John Piper puts it this way: *"The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever."*
(James – Faith That Works by R. Kent Hughes – pg.170-171)

So how do you and I get our motive right in prayer? James helps answer this a little later in our passage this morning.

But some questions we might ask ourselves are:

- 1) *Is my prayer seeking my glory or God's glory?*
- 2) *Is my prayer seeking my will or God's will?*
- 3) *Is my prayer seeking the passions and wisdom of this world or the passions and wisdom of God?*

As James continues to address his readers, his tone is not softening at all, look with me at **verse 4**.
You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Notice, James is now calling them ***You adulterous people!*** Connor told us a few weeks ago when preaching on **James 2:1-13**; that James refers to "My brothers" (also meaning sisters) 15 times throughout his letter. But here in **verse 4** James is now calling them ***You adulterous people!*** James is describing their spiritual unfaithfulness and attempting to shock them into seeing their true spiritual condition. The noun translated *"adulterous people"* is feminine, meaning "adulteresses".

In **Jeremiah 31:32**; God calls Himself the husband of the people of God and in **Ephesians 5**; the church is called the bride of Christ. Therefore, when James is calling them adulteresses, he is using a figure of speech to describe their spiritual unfaithfulness. James is telling them, you claim to worship God, but you are trying to combine your worship for God with your worship for self and desires for pleasure. They were like an adulterous wife who wants her husband and her home, but she also wants her lover. We know that doesn't work and will devastate a marriage. They were giving their worship to idols of pleasure, materialism, money while claiming to be worshipping God who is worthy and deserves all our worship.

But God is very clear in the 1st Commandment, *"You shall have no other god before Me."* (**Exodus 20:3**)

And Jesus tells us **Matthew 6:24**; *You cannot serve God and money.*

James continues in **verse 4**; *Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?*

God and the world are on complete opposite ends of the spectrum. The world tells us we are to be flexible, to be accommodating and tolerant of sin. The world says, it's all about you. It's o.k. to step on others to get what is rightfully yours. Only the strong survive.

The world operates under the control its leader, Satan, and functions in evil, wickedness, lies, and deceit and is opposed to God and all His values. To be friends with the world means to adopt its values and desires. God and His Word are 180° opposite of the message of the world and as followers of Jesus Christ, we are to ***deny ourselves and take up our cross daily***, and ***we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.***

This is definitely **NOT** the message we hear from the world. James says loving the world will make you and I an enemy of God. Instead, we are to be in the world impacting it all for the glory of God, but we are **NOT** to be **OF** the world. Your and my ***"citizenship is in heaven"***(**Phil. 20-21**). We called ***"sojourners and exiles."*** (**1 Peter 2:11**)

Before God led you and I to saving faith in Christ, we were enemies of God. Now He calls us friend, and we are to live our lives in such a way that reflects we are a friend of God and an enemy of the world and its desires and passions. James goes on in **verse 5**; ***Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?***

Douglas Moo states *"this verse is one of the challenging verses in all the New Testament to interpret."* One the reasons this passage has been difficult to interpret is the word ***"spirit"***. The question among scholars is: *Is James referring to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit?* Moo states, that various translations of the Bible have interpreted this verse two different ways. Some *"interpreting the verse as a reference of the jealousy of God"*, while others *"take the verse to refer to the envious longings of human beings."*

Moo goes on say when James says; ***"He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?*** – *If James is referring to God's jealousy for His people - Spirit would mean Holy Spirit. On the other hand if James is referring to the human tendency to be envious, he quotes the CSB translation which states, "the spirit He made to dwell in us envies intensely."*

Douglas Moo states in his commentary that he believes the best interpretation is in favor of the *"divine jealousy"*. He says; *"if God is the subject of "desire", then this desire must obviously be a positive yearning...and must mean "jealousy" rather than "envy".* (The Letter of James, Second Edition by Douglas J. Moo – pg. 236- 237).

Let me also read this quote from Kent Hughes in his commentary on James on the word ***"spirit"*** in **verse 5**; *"I am convinced that the text refers to the Holy Spirit's jealousy over us because it best fits the argument of the context and because it touches on that grand truth so indispensable to the New Testament theology—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Understanding that the Holy Spirit's jealousy for us is what is meant here opens a heart-changing truth to us: even when we sin by seeking our pleasures in friendship with the world, we are greatly loved, for jealousy is an essential element of true love. We are the brides of Christ, and the Holy Spirit does want us to go somewhere else "have our needs met." The Holy Spirit's true love for us evokes a proper intolerance of straying affection...This jealous Spirit is inside of us. When we sin, He is pained...To realize that the awesome holy God who transcends the universe and is wholly other and self-contained is at the same time personally and passionately jealous for our affection—this realization ought to stop any of our "affairs" with the world and cause us to prostrate our souls adoringly before Him."* (James – Faith That Works by R. Kent Hughes – pg. 177-78)

If we agree with Moo and Hughes' interpretation that it's God's jealousy that James is referring to here, which is where I land, Scripture is clear throughout God's Word of God's jealousy for His people.

Some examples we see are in the giving of the Ten Commandments in **Exodus 20:5**, God says they should not bow down to any idols ***for I the Lord God am a jealous God.***

In **Exodus 34:14**; Scripture is clear that His people are not to worship other gods, *for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*

Zechariah 8:2; *Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.* – “Zion” referring to Jerusalem.

James is telling his readers and us God is a jealous God who our worship to be given solely to Him.

So, let’s continue with **verses 6-10** of our passage this morning, and we see James now provides answers to the harsh questions and the cutting language he used in the first 4 verses of **James 4**.

This brings to our Second Point – 2) **God’s Grace is Greater**

Look again at **verse 6**; *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

James quotes **Proverbs 3:34** here as he offers hope to those desiring friendship with God. God, in His grace, gives His people the necessary help to resist the appeal of the world and remain steadfast to Him. As one of God’s children, we must be dependent on God’s grace in order to live in a manner that brings honor and glory Him. And that’s what James is telling us. – *He (God) gives more grace.* – In other words, greater grace. God demands that His children remain steadfast to Him and requires that they would resist the appeal of the evil world, while at the same time giving the grace needed for His children to meet His demands.

It reminds of a sermon illustration Pastor Ty used while I was blessed to serve here at Trinity. Pastor Ty during one of his sermons was talking about the abundance of God’s grace and how it never stops flowing. He used the Mississippi River down by Wabasha to illustrate this. – I won’t be able to quote Ty verbatim or be as eloquent, but it went something like this: If you were to go over to Wabasha and stand in the Mississippi River, you will note that the river never stops flowing. As you standing in the river, it flows and flows and flows. That is how God’s grace is for us as His children. – God’s grace flows and flows and flows and flows and never stops.

I love that illustration! – I’ve used several times in my ministry as I’ve talked about God’s never-ending grace.

That why Paul could write ...*where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.* **Romans 5:20**

Paul immediately follows in **Romans 6**; *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* **Romans 6:1-2**

Both James and Paul understood that it is God’s never-ending grace that never stops flowing that allows us as His children to live lives in such a way that show others that we are friends of God and not friends of the world and God is One who gets all the glory and honor. God always supplies more than enough grace regardless of circumstance or need.

That is why the writer of **Hebrews** tells us; *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* **Hebrews 4:16**

Yet, there appears to be way for God’s grace to not flow. – *“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

Douglas Moo in his commentary states it way; *“God’s gift of sustaining grace is enjoyed only by those willing to admit their need and accept the gift. The proud, on the other hand, meet only resistance from God.”* (The Letter of James – Second Edition by Douglas Moo – pg. 241)

“Opposes” is a military term. – Pride allows one to think they can do it on their own. – They don’t need God or anyone else for that matter. – Pride doesn’t look in a mirror for self-examination or reflection. God’s Word is clear, He not only will have nothing to do with the proud, we’re told He *opposes* them. Being opposed by God is not a good place to be. – In fact, it’s a frightening place to be.

“but (God) gives grace to the humble.”

By God’s unmerited favor, the humble in Christ are in position to enjoy fellowship and a relationship with Him.

The humble in Christ have unlimited access to God in prayer, daily fellowship with Christ, wisdom and guidance by the Holy Spirit, and a recognition of how much God loves them. The humble have the power of knowing God is for them and that nothing that comes against them can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (**Romans 8:39**)

The humble walk and rest in God's peace that surpasses all understanding. (**Philippians 4:7**)

The humble count it all joy when they face trials of many kinds. (**James 1:2**)

So how do we find and stay in God's never-ending overflowing grace?

James gives clear guidance for us in **verses 7-10** of our passage today; ***Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.***

This Brings us to our 3rd Point – 3) **Nixing the World from the Church**

Let us briefly take these one at time,

First, ***Submit yourselves therefore to God.*** – Submission is the surrender of ones' will to God. Jesus, when praying in Gethsemane modeled submission perfectly as He called to God, ***“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”*** **Matthew 26:39**

When you and I submit to God, we recognize both His friendship and His authority. – We enter the relationship with God, not as equals, but as believing obedient servants. – Submission to God means that all we are and all we have is entirely offered to God. We cannot submit in our own strength, but only by drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit who resides in all believers. – So even the ability to submit comes through God's grace.

Second, ***Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*** “Resist” is a military or war term which means to stand against. *So how do you & I resist the devil?* Jesus provided for a great example for us when He was confronted by the devil after spending 40 days in the wilderness. We need go to God's Word and stand on Its truth and promises just as Christ did. God's Word is clear in **Ephesians 6** as we are instructed to put on the whole armor of God in preparation for going to battle as we resist the devil.

The promise we see here is when we put on the full armor of God and ***resist the devil, he will flee from you.*** We must hold fast to the truth found in **1 John 4:4b**; ***For He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.***

Third, we see next promise in **verse 8**; ***Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.***

As we draw near to God, we have the promise that ***God will draw near to us.*** James is continuing the theme of “*action is needed on our part*” to ***resist the devil.*** Just as we are the ones to put on the full armor of God, we are the one who needs to initiate movement. We need to ***draw near to God.*** And when we make the first move toward God, ***He draws near to you.***

Like the prodigal son when he realized that his father's servants were being treated better than he was as he wallowed with the pigs, he made a decision and decided to return home. Listen to this account in **Luke 15:20**, ***And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.***

This is a picture of what it looks like when we draw near to God, He runs toward us with arms wide open and embraces us and loves on us. But it starts with you and I making the first movement towards Him.

James 4th point, ***Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, your double-minded.*** (vs. **8b**)

James is exhorting his readers and you and I to examine ourselves and clean up our act. – ***Cleanse your hands.*** – Wash – Be purified.

James is also encouraging us to recognize and confess our sins, repent and seek the forgiveness already provided by Jesus through His death on the cross.

Stop being *doubled-minded*, where you are seeking both God and the things of this world. James spoke to being double-minded earlier in **James 1:8** saying the double-minded man is *unstable in all his ways*.

He continues in **verses 9-10**; *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.* The terms James is using here, *wretched, mourn, weep* speak to a heart that is drawing near to God.

As we draw near to God, we recognize our total depravity and sin, there is a deep sense of sadness. Now, some have misinterpreted this verse to say the Christian life should be a life of gloom and doom. But that's not what James is saying at all, instead our sin should grieve us as much as it grieves God. It was your sin and my sin that put Jesus on that cross. – He suffered and died for you and me and our sin. When James says; *Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom*, James is coming down hard on the Christian who does not take their sin seriously. – Christians who are insensitive or indifferent to their sin because they are enjoying basking in that sin so much.

This is a deep call for repentance. – Turning from laughter to mourning and joy to gloom is being sorrowful and deeply grieving our sin.

Jesus says in **Matthew 5:4**; *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4*

In other words, God's grace will flood over their souls and turn their mourning into joy.

One must die to themselves and their sin in order to be made alive in Christ. (**Romans 6:11**)

Verse 10; *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.* James again comes back to address the need of being humble. *Humble yourselves before the Lord* means to acknowledge our sin and our desperate dependence upon God, and our need to submit to His will for our lives. *Humble yourselves before the Lord*, means we are taking on the attitude of Jesus and brings us more into the likeness of Christ.

Let me close with **Philippians 2:3-11**

Brothers and sisters, as Christ humbled Himself and was exalted by the Father, you and I have that same promise. - *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.* – Humility before God always results in God lifting you up.

So, as we close this morning, where are you today – Are you a friend of the world and an enemy of God or Are you a friend of God which means you are an enemy of the world? Many people in the world are unsatisfied with the way they are living and are looking to the world for acceptance, satisfaction, and happiness. No matter how hard or how long they look, they will never find it.

There is only one place where one can find life and full satisfaction and that is found only in Jesus Christ. Humbly submit yourself to Christ and you will find that He and only He will give you true joy, and true peace and contentment as He exalts you all for His glory.

Brothers & Sisters-

May you and I wholeheartedly pursue God and His wisdom, rejecting the ways of the world, humbly submitting ourselves to God, basking in His grace as He molds and shapes us more into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ, all for His glory.

Draw near to Him, and He will draw near to You.

Christ opened His arms and was nailed to the cross so that you and I who were once enemies of God could now be seated at His table and be called friend. – Jesus, Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Let's pray.