

Introduction

1. So far in our study of James we've seen how trials cause us to grow and mature in our faith (the right and wrong way to handle trials)
2. James also gave us a proverb to help us through trials: be quick to listen (obey), slow to speak, and slow to anger
3. He covered being quick to listen in chapters 1 and 2 with a focus on becoming a doer of the word
4. He covered being slow to speak which we learned focused primarily on who was qualified to teach, but also provided a practical lesson for us on how we are to use our tongue
5. Today we start the last section—be slow to anger which will focus on the quarrels and conflicts James's readers were experiencing with one another, the wealthy's oppression of the poor, instructions for dealing with oppression, and finally instructions for those who had become spiritually weary and physically ill as a result

A. Their quarrels and conflicts were a result of their worldly desires (READ 4:1-3)

1. James asks a rhetorical question indicating that there were quarrels and conflicts among his readers (4:1a):
  - a. **"quarrels"**: this is the Greek word for war; used symbolically here
  - b. **"conflicts"**: refers to intense, severe, bitter conflict, both physical and non-physical
  - c. These weren't just minor spats, but full-fledge infighting and conflict **"among"** them
2. James identifies the source of these bitter disputes: (4:1b): **"your pleasures that wage war in your members"**:
  - a. Other translations render this as the passions that battle or wage war within you:
    - 1) The word translated pleasures or passions simply refers to those things someone longs to do or enjoys doing
    - 2) However, it's only used five times in the NT and in every occurrence it's used negatively:
      - a) Jesus used it in the parable of the sower/soils when referring to the seed that fell among thorns and was choked out by the **"worries and riches and pleasures of this life"**
      - b) Paul used it in Titus 3:3 to refer to our lives before Christ saying we were **"enslaved to various lusts and pleasures..."**

- c) Peter uses it in 2 Peter 2:13 when describing ungodly and unprincipled men saying they **"count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime"**
  - d) The Greek word is *hedone* which is where we get our word hedonism from which refers to the pursuit of pleasure or sensual self-indulgence
- b. He describes this battle or war in the next two verses (READ 4:2-3):
- 1) V. 2a: **"You lust and do not have, so you commit murder"**:
    - a) Some view murder here symbolically in the way that John used it in 1 John 3:15: **"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"**
    - b) However, James appears to refer to murder in a literal sense in 5:6: **"You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you."**
  - 2) V. 2b: **"You are envious (covet) and cannot obtain (get what you want), so you fight and quarrel"**
  - 3) V. 2c: **"You do not have because you do not ask"** – this likely refers to prayer and asking God or Jesus for what they need:
    - a) Asking God or Jesus for something is used repeatedly throughout the Bible as a synonym for prayer
    - b) Jesus used it this way throughout the Gospels:
      - Matthew 7:7: **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."**
      - Matthew 21:22: **"And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."**
      - John 14:13-14: **"Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."**
  - 4) V. 3: **"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures"** – even when they did pray, they didn't receive what they asked for because their motives were wrong and they were only trying to satisfy their sinful pleasures

B. Their quarrels and conflicts exposed their unfaithfulness to God (READ 4:4-6)

1. James didn't pull any punches and called them **"adulteresses"** (4:4): Adultery refers to being unfaithful to a spouse and James uses it here figuratively to refer to being unfaithful to God

2. Their pursuit of worldliness and satisfying their pleasures made them an enemy of God:
  - a. **“friendship with the world is hostility toward God”:**
    - 1) 1 John 2:15 says, **“Do not love the world not the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”**
    - 2) Romans 8:7 says, **“the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so”**
    - 3) Earlier in 1:27 James said that pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God includes keeping oneself unstained by the world
  - b. Therefore, their **“wishes to be a friend of the world”** made them **“an enemy of God”**
  - c. V. 5 is a challenge because there’s no consensus on the best translation of the Greek text, in part because it’s not a direct quote of an OT passage but a summary of an OT principle:
    - 1) Our English Bibles treat it four different ways:
      - a) The NASB, LSB, and ESV render it in a way that suggests God jealously desires or yearns for the Spirit (i.e. the Holy Spirit) that He has made to dwell within us
      - b) The NIV says something similar but says that it’s our spirit (lower case) that God caused to dwell within us which He jealously desires
      - c) The KJV, and NET make “spirit” the subject: “The spirit that God (lit. He) caused to live within us **has an envious yearning**” (NET)
    - 2) My personal opinion is that the NET and KJV translate James intent more accurately (and this was John MacArthur’s position):
      - a) Every other time this Greek word for envy is used in the NT it refers to sin, and it’s never used of God or the H.S.
      - b) This translation fits the context because James is addressing their longing to satisfy their worldly pleasures
      - c) In essence, after calling them adulteresses and enemies of God, he reminded them that the OT warned about the propensity of our spirits to be filled with envy
3. The antidote to the spirit’s envious longing and pursuit of worldly pleasure is God’s grace: (READ 4:6):
  - a. **“But He gives a greater grace”:** God’s grace is greater than the power of sin--Romans 6:14 says, **“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace.”**

- b. This is why the **“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”**

C. Their quarrels and conflicts could only be resolved through repentance, remorse, and humility (4:4:7-12)

1. Repentance (5 command):
  - a. **“Submit to God”** (7a) – to subject to or place oneself under the authority of; implies obedience
  - b. **“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (7b) – in 1 Peter 5:8-9 Peter describes Satan as one who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, but says we are to **“resist him, firm in your faith...”**
  - c. **“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you”** (8a) – signifies a return to God much like we see in Zechariah 1:3 and Malachi 3:7 when God told Israel to return to Him and He would return to them
  - d. **“Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded”**—cleansing the hands and purifying the heart were symbolic of repentance and holiness and indicated a turning from sin
2. Remorse (4 commands):
  - a. **“Be miserable and mourn and weep”** (9a) – over their sin
  - b. **“Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom”** (9b) – a demonstration of true remorse over their pursuit of worldly pleasures and the quarrels and conflicts it created
3. Humility (2 commands):
  - a. **“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”** (10); This is echoed by Peter in 1 Peter 5:6: **“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God; that He may exalt you at the proper time”**
  - b. **“Do not speak against one another, brethren”** (READ the rest of 4:11-12)

### Conclusion

1. At the heart of most quarrels and conflicts are selfish, worldly desires that wage war within us
2. The pursuit of these fleshly desires ultimately puts us at odds with God—makes us His enemy
3. Resolving quarrels and conflicts requires repentance, remorse, and humility