

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JAS. 4:1 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.

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow 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 vapour, 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 rejoice 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.

NOTES

Humility Before God

Lesson Text: James 4:1-10, 13-17

Related Scriptures: Isaiah 57:13-21;
Luke 12:13-21; 14:7-11; 18:9-14; 1 Peter 5:5-7

TIME: about A.D. 45

PLACE: from Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

Lesson Exposition

SHUN THE WORLD—Jas. 4:1-6

Wars and fightings (Jas. 4:1-2). Some churches are notorious for fighting, gossip, and backstabbing. That discredits the cause of Christ and makes it more difficult to evangelize.

These conflicts come from the desire to please *self*. When believers refuse to relinquish conflicting desires, it often results in fights.

James told those fighting that they lacked because they were not asking. Good things can be given only by God (Jas. 1:17). God's people must ask Him to supply their needs.

Asking amiss (Jas. 4:3). Even when they asked God, James's readers did not always receive what they wanted. God answers prayer, but it must be "according to his will" (1 John 5:14). If we ask for something that would not honor God and bring us joy, He will not give it to us (cf. John 14:13; 16:24).

We must always examine our motives. Asking amiss has its roots in selfish praying. Do we pray to please ourselves or to please God? We all have needs, and those are acceptable prayer requests. The problem arises when we are *only* concerned about ourselves.

Friendship with the world (Jas. 4:4). James described spiritual unfaithfulness as adultery. Similarly, the prophets saw Israel's apostasy as spiritual infidelity (cf. Hos. 1:2; 4:12).

Christians are to live holy lives. Being friends with the world makes us enemies of God. On the other hand, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Grace to the humble (Jas. 4:5-6). In verse 5, we face two difficulties. First, the underlying Greek can refer to the Holy Spirit or to the spirit. Second, there seems to be no place in the Old Testament where we can find the statement quoted here.

We might assume that James was giving the gist of an Old Testament passage or perhaps was anticipating the quote from Proverbs 3:34 cited in James 4:6. Regardless, clearly God gives greater grace to the humble. We must humble ourselves before the Almighty, for He opposes the proud (Prov. 16:5; 18:12).

SUBMIT TO GOD—Jas. 4:7-10

Resist the devil (Jas. 4:7-8). One way we show our submission to God is to resist the devil. Earlier, James empha-

sized our culpability in allowing temptation to lead us into sin (1:13-15). Now he stressed resisting the one behind our many enticements to sin (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

If we resist Satan, he will flee from us. We can be sure that Satan will return, but if we have been successful in resisting Satan, we will be stronger the next time. We must draw upon God's Word to ward off the fiery darts Satan hurls against us (Eph. 6:16).

As we resist the devil, we must draw near to God (Jas. 4:8). He is "not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). To draw near to God requires that we be cleansed of evil (1 John 1:9).

Humble yourselves (Jas. 4:9-10). James stressed the importance of genuine repentance, seen in weeping and mourning over one's sins (Matt. 5:4). James was not promoting feel-good religion. Nor was he promoting endless remorse. Rather, he instructed us to let our laughter be turned into mourning. True sorrow leads to repentance, (2 Cor. 7:9), which leads to forgiveness.

Those who humble themselves in God's sight will be lifted up, first from the depths of sin and despair. Ultimately, Christians will be lifted up to heavenly glory.

SEEK GOD'S WILL—Jas. 4:13-17

The sin of presumption (Jas. 4:13-14). We tend to trust in ourselves for the future. We may have big plans. The future, however, is not in our hands. While theoretically realizing that no one knows the future, we may still assume that we control our lives. This was the mistake made by the man in Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21).

Submission to the Lord's will (Jas. 4:15-17). Since we do not know what is ahead, it is wise to trust God with the future. While not many use the expression "Lord willing," we would do well to revive this practice. Such language re-

minds us that everything depends on God (cf. Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19).

Whether we voice the words or not, we need to acknowledge God's divine purposes are being worked out. Whatever happens, the Sovereign of the universe is in control. This does not mean that we should take a nonchalant attitude. We are encouraged to pray (vs. 2), to submit to God (vs. 7), to resist the devil, to purify our hearts (vs. 8), and to do good (vs. 17).

Since God is in control of the world, not us, any tendency to boast about the future is evil.

True, "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), but to fail to do what is right is also sin in God's sight.

—John Owston

QUESTIONS

1. Where do "wars and fightings" (Jas. 4:1) come from?
2. What are some reasons for prayers going unanswered?
3. When James spoke of adultery, what did he likely have in mind (vs. 4)?
4. What is the result of becoming too friendly with the world?
5. What are some of the problems in attempting to understand verse 5?
6. What happens when we resist the devil?
7. What did James call upon his readers to do to express sorrow for sin?
8. What is a potential danger in making plans for the future?
9. How should Christians approach God's will and the future?
10. What is meant by a sin of omission? Give some examples.

—John Owston

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Fights among Christians come from selfish desires (Jas. 4:1).
2. God blesses those who ask selflessly (vss. 2-3).
3. Christians must choose between loving God or loving the world; it cannot be both (vss. 4-5).
4. Humble submission to God is necessary to resist the devil (vss. 6-8).
5. God exalts those who are humble enough to repent of sin (vss. 9-10).
6. Our plans are not something to boast about but something to submit to God's will (vss. 13-17).

—Darrell W. McKay

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How is it possible for people of faith to descend to the depths described here (Jas. 4:1-5)? If we are stuck in a cycle of quarreling, how do we break it?
2. What does it look like to be a friend of the world (vs. 4)?
3. What scriptural example from the Gospels can be cited for standing up to Satan (vs. 7)? What do we learn from this example about how we resist the devil?
4. What does it look like to humble ourselves before God (vs. 10)?
5. Why is it so difficult to be humble? Why do we seek to exalt self through pride instead of leaving the exalting with God (Jas. 4:10; cf. Luke 14:10-11)?
6. What value is there, if any, in literally saying "Lord willing" out loud when speaking about our plans for the future (Jas. 4:13-15)?

—Darrell W. McKay

Golden Text Illuminated

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

This verse warns us that pride can cause God to oppose us. We tend not to think of pride as a serious sin. It's the sort of "respectable" sin that we easily dismiss and tolerate in small doses.

Why does God oppose pride so much? Here are two possible explanations to consider: first, understand that every gift and talent you have comes from God as a gift! Whenever we are proud, we are ungrateful.

Consider also this second explanation: God gives us grace upon grace in infinite, inexhaustible abundance. If we are humble and ask Him for grace, He will freely shower it upon us. But if we are proud and think we do not need His help, He may simply not give it to us, so that we do indeed fall.

What does humility look like? There are many forms it can take. Verses 7-12 provide us with some examples of humility before God. We will seek to obey His commands. We will trust that He knows what is best for our lives and try to live the way He commands.

Humility is not our natural inclination. We sinfully tend to think that we are in control of our lives, not God (Jas. 4:13-16). When we fail to account for God and act as if we were in charge—not Him—we are acting pridefully. We need to consciously and intentionally humble ourselves before God (cf. 1 Pet. 5:5). When we ask for God's grace, He is happy to pour it out upon us. If we arrogantly think we do not need His help, He may not give it to us.

—Tom Greene