

James 4:1-12 Introduction

- Before we start I want to make sure I'm talking to the right group of people.
- Is there anyone here **who has never** had difficulty relating with another Christian?
- No fights, no arguments, no tension?
- It's never been anything but the purest harmony as long as you can remember?
- Anyone now **who has had difficulty**?

We will relate with other believers best when we start with a friendship with God.

James 4:1-12 Outline

- I. Don't make friends with the enemy. 4:1-5
- II. Humble yourself before God. 4:6-10
- III. Don't speak evil of your brothers. 4:11-12

Don't make friends with the enemy. 4:1-5

- 4:1 Look at the previous verse, 3:18.
- James is proposing a goal of peacemaking.
- Instead we see wars and fights – probably not literal war, as it seems to be fighting between believers – but we get the point.
- Reality misses the ideal by a long way.
- We shouldn't blame circumstances; we shouldn't blame others. James wants us to mainly see the problem within ourselves.

- 4:2 See Matthew 7:7-8.
- James is writing some 20 years after Jesus first said this. Some in his congregations are now no doubt dealing, as we do, with the issue of unanswered prayer.
- God responds to prayer. The form of "ask" James uses can be read as pointing to the need for persistence – another point made by Jesus. See Luke 18:1-8.

- 4:3 this verse is the complete opposite of the "health and wealth" gospel.
- Luke Timothy Johnson describes that view:
"the gift-giving God is here manipulated as a kind of vending machine precisely for the purpose of self-gratification."

- 4:3 A life of self-gratification is not worth the awful price we have to pay for it.
- On the human level, the price is the destruction of our relationships.
- On the spiritual level the price is estrangement from God.

- 4:3 Wars and fights are not only caused by the most flagrant, the most outrageous, the most disgraceful and shameful demands.
- In each of us there is a self-centered heart.
- We have a desire to see our own needs met, to be in control and have the last say.
- This is more than enough to cause any number of conflicts.

- 4:4 (Adulterers and) adulteresses!

- In the OT, Israel was often portrayed as an adulterous wife for her repeated journeys into idolatry.
- We the church are likened to the bride of Christ. Cozying up to the world will play havoc with that relationship.
- 4:4 enemy of God On the one hand, we can take James’s rhetoric the wrong way.
- Christ accomplished our peace with God while we were still enemies, so it’s not as if our standing with God depends entirely upon us.
 - Colossians 1:20
 - Romans 5:1
 - Romans 5:10
- 4:4 On the other hand, let’s not ignore the seriousness of what James says.
- We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that we can live in close fellowship with God when our hearts are in fact far from Him.
- 4:4 Further, the terms “friendship” and “friend” meant a lot more in the ancient world than they do in present Western culture.
- When James speaks of being friends with the world, he does not mean it in the sense that some of us have virtual “friends” on Facebook – the kind we rarely, if ever, see in person.
- In the past, friendships were taken much more seriously.
- 4:4 Bloomberg and Kamell describe ancient friendship as *“a lifelong pact between people with shared values and loyalties.”*
- They go on, *“Friendship in James’s day indicated identification to and relationship with something or someone, so to be friends with the world means to identify with its standards and priorities.”*
- 4:4 A close friendship with God can’t exist while we set our hearts on the charm, glamour and lure of the world.
- In such a case, the things God loves and the things we love would just be too different.
- We would have totally conflicting priorities.
- Friendship with the world in the life of a Christian is like roadkill on the dinner table; it’s just not the place for it.
- 4:5 No OT verse or passage matches this precisely, so it should probably not be put in quotation marks – as if it were lifted verbatim from an OT source.
- D.A. Carson points out that there are a few places where a formula like “the Scripture says” can refer to a theme rather than an exact quotation.
- This is probably one of them.
- The Greek originals had no way to make that distinction, so the marks are just a good guess.
- 4:5 So, James is referring to the jealousy caused between God and His people by idolatry.
- True love must contain an element of jealousy
- One part of love longs for the ultimate good of the loved one.
- Another part desires a response as passionate and as devoted as the love given.
- In this sense, God is jealous for his people.

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Humble yourself before God. 4:6-10

- 4:6 *“What comfort there is in this verse! It tells us that God is tirelessly on our side. He never falters in respect of our needs, he always has more grace at hand for us. He is never less than sufficient, he always has more and yet more to give.”*
 - J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith*
- 4:6 But there is a catch. That grace is not dispensed automatically. We need to humble ourselves before God and request it.
 - See Prov 3:34 (James follows the Greek LXX)
 - See also 1 Peter 5:5 (so does Peter)
- 4:7-10 Now the focus shifts more pointedly to our responsibility before God.
- Grace does not instantly zap us into a holy life, unconsciously and by a will not our own.
- The power to grow in holiness is given at conversion, but our experience of that growth comes only by one painful decision and action step at a time.
- 4:7-10 Motyer puts it like this:
 - *“The benefits of grace and more grace are ours along the road of obedience and more obedience. The God who says ‘Here is my grace to receive’ says in the same breath, ‘Here are my commands to obey’.”*
- 4:7 Submission to God reveals our humility in the presence of His authority.
- It is voluntarily ordering our lives under his will, acknowledging his place as God and our place as His people.
- Submission to God is in itself an act of resisting the devil – since we can’t submit to both at the same time.
- 4:7 We may find that resisting the devil involves removing ourselves – when it is realistic – to a place where temptation will be less severe, not just trying to tough it out.
- Alternately, in some areas, we inevitably find ourselves trying to live God-pleasing lives in a Christ-rejecting world.
- 4:7 Two things James isn’t saying:
 - That resisting the devil implies battling demons over every problem we encounter.
 - That if we resist the devil our lives will be free of trouble.
 - James is saying that, as believers, we need not yield to the devil’s power, regardless of how he attempts to gain a foothold in our lives.
- 4:7 Our friend Chuck Smith reminds us:
 - *“Satan is only exercising usurped authority. He doesn’t have any real rights. His power was taken from him when Jesus triumphed at the cross.”*
- 4:7 The devil works on us through a strategy both before and after sin:

- Before: He will try to get us to think, “You can go ahead and sin, because you belong to Christ. Your sins are already forgiven.”
 - After: He will say to us, “You cannot possibly belong to Christ. Look how shamefully you have sinned.”
- 4:8 When we draw near to God, we can count on Him to reciprocate.
 - This means that fellowship with God is intentionally cultivated.
 - We might imagine that it should seem more the reverse – that we should experience God’s presence in some dramatic way and then respond to it.
 - But God did take the initiative – at the cross.
- 4:8 Thus, fellowship with God is much like holiness in life.
 - It is developed – with some effort on our part.
 - We each have daily opportunities to draw near to God.
 - If we neglect His word, His people, and time in His presence, we will find that He seems distant – and we will be the ones who have drawn away.
- 4:8 James further focuses on our actions and the inner life of our hearts.
 - We are to cleanse our hands, meaning that we need to clean up our acts now that we are Christians. We must stop our active sinning.
 - We must also purify our hearts, meaning that we do an inner housecleaning. We cultivate an inner life of devotion to Him.
- 4:8 The Holy Spirit will not do this alone.
 - It is the job of the Spirit-empowered believer.
 - We may think that we must clean up our lives and then draw near to God.
 - James puts it the other way around. It is only when we know the truth of his presence that we are ready to take on the responsibility of holiness.
- 4:9 And before we can really get down to the business of living a holy life, we must clearly see the horror of our own sin.
 - Lamentation, weeping, mourning and gloom are not over-reactions.
 - They are the reasonable responses of the person who sees that he or she is worthy of nothing but the righteous wrath of God.
- 4:10 Here is God’s goal:
 - He desires to lift us up – which means He desires to honor us.
 - While self-promotion leads to humiliation, we receive this honor by making ourselves low.
 - The way up is via the path that goes down.

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Don’t speak evil of your brothers. 4:11-12

- 4:11-12 James does not seem to care whether the speaking evil can be justified.
- His assumption seems to be that it never can.
- Coming, as this does, directly after a section on humility, we can see that James is attacking the attitude that leads to the action.

- We can always find reasons to look down on others and this leads to our evil speech.
- 4:11-12 The fact that we are brothers and sisters in Christ puts us all on the same level.
- Further, we are all “neighbors” (v.12 ESV, NLT, NIV, NASB) and so should not think of ourselves as being superior.
- We are all in this together.
- If our minds were filled with biblical attitudes we would not seek to put down anyone else.
- 4:11-12 The law requires us to “love our neighbor as ourselves.”
- Every time we adopt an attitude that is less than loving toward others, we are setting ourselves up as judges of the law.
- We are deciding that the second part of Jesus’s great commandment is somehow not applicable to us at this time.
- 4:11-12 We are all probably more arrogant than we normally realize.
- James would cure us of this sin.
- How dare we judge God’s law, first by judging others within our hearts, then by flaunting our arrogance in speaking evil of those people.

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James 4:1-12 Conclusions

- Four harmful personal traits that James has helped each of us to address:
 - Selfishness
 - Friendship with the World
 - Pride
 - Speaking Evil of Others
- Each one of these would merit a lengthy teaching on its own.

Selfishness:

- We all tend to be self-centered in certain ways and this characteristic is the source of uncountable conflicts.
- The solution James proposes in v.2 is prayer.
- We should all feel totally comfortable asking God to meet our needs and then working through what we should learn when those “needs” are not immediately met.

Friendship with the World:

- We need to admit that the world – that whole earthly system of money, power, glamour, pleasure and the like – is enticing.
- James is not saying that if something is fun it must be wrong.
- He is pointing out that God’s values tend to contradict those of the world.
- Therefore, we need to examine our affections.

Pride:

- This is a difficult one, because pride can ruin our hearts almost imperceptibly.
- One way to keep it in check is to look at the things that set us apart from others.
- What makes us who we are?

- Now let's take those very things, those gifts or traits that make us special, and set them before God.
- When we humble ourselves before Him in precisely these areas, we are allowing Him to take us as we are and make us into whatever He would like us to become.
- Where is your identity? Is it your job? Your family? Your talents or abilities?
- Let's give all of these things to Him.

Speaking evil of others:

- Here is a little exercise:
- First, think of someone who you find especially difficult – preferably a fellow believer.
- Now, think of as many good things about this person as you can.
- Spend some time this week thinking about these good qualities in this person.
- Later in the week, mention one or more of these good things to someone else.

- Again, four harmful traits that we need to each address within ourselves:
 - Selfishness
 - Friendship with the World
 - Pride
 - Speaking evil of others
- Working on all of these will go a long way to improving our relations with others and enhancing our friendship with God.
- Working on all of these will help bring an end to the state of war that James observed:

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