

James 26-09-02b

We're in James chapter four, and we are noting that the cause of divisions isn't the other person. Generally, wars and fights are sourced in our desire to obtain what we want. And the further along we are as believers, the more skilled we should be at defusing conflict and avoiding dissension and disunity.

We who are strong should bear with those who are weak. We have to step back, go to God in prayer, ask for guidance, and insight. Is this really so important that I've got to hold a hard line? Can I yield on this point? Can I give in to this other person? I know it's immature.

I know that it's not grounded in knowledge of the word and so on. Paul talks about this again in Corinthians, where the issue of eating meat offered to idols. Food offered to idols.

Meat is the old King James thing for whatever it might have been. It could have been a salad. It could have been any kind of a grain offering or whatever.

But it briefly sat in a pagan temple in front of a rock shaped like an idol, and then they brought it back out and sold it. And you buy this and you can serve it and eat it at home. Well, there are people who on principle think, well, this is defiled, corrupt, and tainted.

It's been associated with idolatry and pagan practice. I don't want it anywhere near my house. Other people say, it's food.

Because the rock is nothing and the temple is nothing and the beliefs of these people are completely ridiculous, unfounded, and untrue, the fact that this food traveled in a certain direction before it got in front of me is immaterial. A mature believer isn't going to be worried about that path. But somebody that maybe is younger in the faith is trying to implement spiritual truth in their life.

Well, don't discourage them. If they're doing it for spiritual and moral reasons as they see it, encourage them. They're at a certain point where these things make a difference.

So Paul says, we who are strong should bear with those who are weak. But it is important because there are other times when we do not compromise for the sake of harmony. We don't go along to get along when the issue is central.

If it is the Lord Jesus Christ, if it is the basics of salvation, if it is the truth of the word of God, if this is some sort of ecumenicalism where we're supposed to compromise with people who have weird and strange views or don't believe in God or the Lord Jesus at all, that's in a different realm. Those are essentials. And we lose our testimony and we lose our witness if we say, no big deal.

There are things that are a big deal. And we ask God for wisdom to know when to stick and to stand and to stay and to brook no compromise. And when we flex and we yield and we let

someone have their way, it is not of great consequence.

And I will forego my investment and my desire to see a better and more perfect way because this is what's really important. The priority here is maintaining contact and fellowship so that this person can eventually grow and say, you know, I've come to realize like you that this really isn't as important as I thought it was. That is what is in view.

This is so practical. James is giving us examples of how to practice our faith, show our faith by our works. Our works should not be done out of jealousy, envy, self-centeredness, prosecuting wars and fights to get our way and to satisfy our personal desires.

These things are not faith. Our actions, our priorities, our attitudes, our words, and our works should be sourced in faith. Faith that is internal, not my selfish desires that are also internal.

So it is a choice and we're going to see this coming up as we proceed. You do not have because you do not ask. What does that mean? Even when you ask, you're not really asking.

You ask and you do not have because you ask amiss. Asking amiss is really the same as not asking at all. Your request is not in the right format.

All you've got to do is start working with government forms and find out that, well, your procedure was wrong. You submitted the wrong form at the wrong time in the wrong way. You aren't qualified for that.

You're qualified for this. There are conditions. So what are the reasons why we might ask and not receive? James 4, verse 3. What are the reasons? How can we summarize the reasons for unanswered prayer? Requests not granted or honored by God.

First of all, we've seen it right here in this letter. James 1, 6 and 7. I'm going to give you a series of passages here. If you're taking notes, write these down.

Reasons for unanswered prayer. Ungranted requests. James 1, 6 and 7. This is a request for wisdom.

You've got to ask in faith. No doubting. Ask in confidence.

In order to ask confidently, you have to know that your request is in line with God's will. If I pray that God will glorify himself as my loved one is sick or in the hospital or otherwise afflicted, I can say, oh God, please make Uncle Joe well. Or I can say, Lord, please glorify yourself in the life of Uncle Joe, who is a believer.

Give him peace and confidence. May his testimony radiate to those who are near him, his caregivers, his doctors, his nurses, the staff that comes in and empties the trash and says hello. May your glory be reflected in his life in this situation in such a way that your plans and purposes

are accomplished.

His life bears fruit. Give him the confidence of the presence of your Holy Spirit. Recall to his mind the word of God that he's learned across the years of his life.

Every single one of those prayers, I know that's the will of God. I can pray that in confidence, nothing doubting. Is God not going to glorify himself in that situation and in those ways? There's no way.

Formulate prayers that you know God is going to say yes to. Pray with confidence, nothing doubting. I have no doubt that God is going to glorify himself.

Let not that doubtful man suppose he's going to receive anything from the Lord, James 1.7. So praying in faith, nothing doubting, and praying for something you know God wants. Does God want us to be unwise, babes that can only drink milk and aren't ready for solid food? No. If I ask for wisdom and God promises to give it generously and without rebuke, then praying for it, stand back and wait for the wisdom to come, because it's coming.

James 1.6 and 7. So doubting. I can doubt my prayers if I haven't formulated them well, and I'm not really sure they're God's will. So there's a lot in that.

Deuteronomy 1.45. This is Israel's history in the wilderness. The Lord said, Tell them, Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you, lest you be defeated before your enemies. I spoke to you, yet you would not listen.

You rebelled against the command of the Lord and presumptuously went up into the mountain. And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah. Look on a map.

That's a ridiculously long way. Then you returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you. Why? You wanted something that he told you you shouldn't have and don't need, and you presumptuously went after it anyway.

So when you went back and wept to the Lord, surprise, surprise, he didn't listen and he would not hear you. And you remained in Kedesh many days according to the days that you spent there. Think how long you were stalled out because you wanted to go in a way that wasn't in accordance with God's will.

And when you went to him, he wouldn't hear you. That's no surprise. But that is a reason.

Disobedience. Third, 1 Samuel 14, 27. Saul, King Saul asked counsel of God, shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he did not answer him that day.

Look at the context. Once again, Saul is looking for battle advice for his own purposes. He's not interested in the glory of God.

He's wanting to know if he does this, will God do that? Same thing in 1 Samuel 28, verse 6. Saul inquired of the Lord. The Lord did not answer him either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets. He tried all these different ways.

Look at the context. Saul is out of line. He is not exercising his kingly authority to please God and to fulfill his commission as the first anointed king of Israel.

He's got his own agenda. And so God does not hear or answer his prayers, no matter how he formulates them. Psalm 66, verse 18.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. I haven't cleansed my heart. I haven't let the word of God get in and expose the thoughts and intents of my heart.

And I haven't confessed the sinful attitudes that I harbor there. I regard iniquity. I don't see it and confess it and expunge it.

I regard it. You know, regard, if you hold someone in regard, it means you value that. And so there is some iniquity.

And I think this is necessary. It's desirable. It has some feature of advantage.

And so I'm regarding iniquity in my heart instead of being shocked and dismayed and praying Psalm 51. Created me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Get the iniquity out.

We confess our sins. He is faithful and just. He forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness, all iniquity.

If I regard it, if I'm hanging onto it, God's not going to hear my prayers. Proverbs 128. You look for a little bit of context there.

Because I called and you refused, verse 24, I stretched out my hand and no one regarded. You're regarding iniquity. You're not regarding God's outstretched hand.

Because you disdained all my counsel and would have none of my rebuke, I will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm and your destruction comes like a whirlwind. When distress and anguish come upon you, then they will call on me, but I will not answer.

They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me because they hated knowledge and they did

not choose the fear of the Lord. You establish a pattern and then go to God in a panic. You're not going to get an answer.

Your request will not be heard. That's Proverbs 128 with context. Proverbs 21, 13, whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, this is coming up in James.

He's setting the stage and laying the foundation for the rich and how they treat the poor. Those who have versus those who have not. Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.

Do unto others as you would have God do unto you is a paraphrase of that idea. Proverbs 28, verse 9, one who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. If you're not interested in hearing from God, God is not interested in hearing from you.

Another paraphrase there, Proverbs 28, verse 9. This self-interested maltreatment of others is summarized in Isaiah 1, 15. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. This is God speaking.

You spread out your hands in prayer. I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear your hands.

These hands that you're spreading out are full of blood. You have violently mistreated those around you. And remember, there's another verse that says, cleanse your hands, you sinners.

You're holding out bloody hands. Do you really think God is going to see or hear? Mistreating others, don't expect to be well-treated by God, Isaiah 1, 15. Isaiah 59, verse 2, this is one of our memory verses, you'll recognize it.

But your iniquities are separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear. Unconfessed sin, continued practice of sin when we know better, Isaiah 59, 2. Micah 3, verse 4, got to start a little earlier in the context. Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and you rulers of the house of Israel, is it not for you to know justice, you who hate good and love evil? You're the antithesis of what you're supposed to be as a leader of the people.

You hate good and love evil. You strip the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones. You eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin from them, break their bones and chop them in pieces like meat for the pot, like flesh in the cauldron.

Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not hear them. He will even hide his face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds. This isn't just a one-time sin.

This is the practice and the pattern of sin. And instead of sin, it is called evil. And instead of a deed, it is deeds.

Goes on to talk about the prophets who make my people stray and chant peace while they chew with their teeth, who prepare war against him, who puts nothing into their mouths. It's a parallel to our James passage. That's Micah chapter 3, verse 4 specifically, verse 4 with context.

Zechariah 7, 13. Therefore it happened that just as he, the Lord, proclaimed and they would not hear, don't want to listen to the word of the Lord. It's difficult.

We do this twice a week and it's not always easy. Set aside time on a weeknight. Get up and be ready on a Sunday morning.

How big a priority is it to hear the word of the Lord or by whatever means we get it? To read it, to listen to it, to grab a podcast, to listen to an archive lesson or whatever. But we need to prioritize the hearing of the word of the Lord from whatever source. There are many wonderful sources of good, solid biblical teaching.

Explicating, expositing, expounding, explaining the word of God. But he proclaimed and they would not hear. So they called out and I would not listen, says the Lord of hosts.

It's got to be a two-way conversation. Sometimes God does not respond positively to a request because he knows what is best for us. This is a slightly different reason when we feel like God is not hearing.

So in 2 Corinthians 12, 8 and 9, this is Paul's thorn in the flesh. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. God did not honor that request.

He did not remove the thorn in the flesh. Why? He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. For my strength is made perfect.

Another version of telio, telios, perfect, complete, mature. My strength is matured, brought to perfection and completion in weakness. You think, isn't the strength of God perfect already? We see its fullness and its purpose and the accomplishment of its objective in us.

That's the idea. My grace is sufficient for you. I'm not delivering you out of this problem.

I'm going to sustain it, sustain you through it. And my strength is going to be fully realized in you. My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, most gladly, Paul says, I will rather boast in my infirmities. This is arriving at a level of maturity that it takes time to attain. We're not there when we're in the milk phase.

We're not there when we're in the youngster phase or the intermediate phase. Even the apostle Paul had to struggle with this and reach the point where he could say, most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities. That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

I'm going to look at this as not a weakness that plagues me and limits me and torments me and causes me pain. I'm going to look at the commensurate strength and power of God that are present with me because of his promise. My grace is sufficient.

My grace is going to fill this situation. And my strength is going to be made perfect in this infirmity, in this weakness. Paul says, I'm looking at this as I've got an empty glass that doesn't have the water of physical strength in it.

It's going to be filled to the top with God's grace and God's presence. I'm going to view it and I'm going to gladly boast in it. Look at what I've got in terms of a deficit that God is filling with his strength and with his grace.

This takes maturity. It takes a lot of the word of God, a lot of mature perspective, a lot of faith, a lot of confidence, a lot of prayer. Asking amiss, what is the opposite? When we ask, not amiss, but we ask properly and ask rightly.

1 Kings 3, 11 and 12, this is Solomon. God says, ask what you will and I'll grant it. Solomon says, give me wisdom to fulfill the office that you have assigned for me.

I'm king after my father, David. There's been contenders. There's been a lot of struggle getting here.

Now that I'm here, God says, ask whatever you want, I'll grant it. Solomon says, give me wisdom to rule this people. God said to him, because you have asked this thing and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice.

I'm going to give you the wisdom and I'm going to add all of these other things you didn't ask for. Notice the preponderance of yourself. You didn't ask for yourself.

You asked for the people, how to rule well, how to glorify God. All these other things will be added unto you. I've done according to your words.

I've given you a wise and understanding heart so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. 1 Kings 3, 11 and 12. When you get to 1 Kings chapter 19, remember Elijah, he went a day's journey into the wilderness, came and sat down under a broom tree, and he prayed that he might die and said, it is enough now, Lord, take my life for I am no better than my father's.

Well, this is a silly request and God's not going to honor it because it's asking amiss. Psalm 84, 11. The Lord God is a sun, S-U-N, and a shield.

The Lord will give grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Concentrate on a godly walk.

Ephesians chapter four, walk circumspectly. Redeeming the time. No good thing will he withhold.

You can look at Psalm 106, 15 in its context. The Israelites were redeemed from the hand of the enemies. The waters covered their enemies.

There was not one of them left. Then they believed his words and they sang his praise. This is the Red Sea incident.

They soon forgot his works. They did not wait for his counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness and tested God in the desert. And he gave them their request.

Remember the quail? But sent leanness into their soul. When they envied Moses in the camp and Aaron, the saint of the Lord, the earth opened and swallowed Dathan and covered the faction of Abiram. A fire was kindled in their company.

The flame burned up the wicked. They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped the mold and image. This entire Psalm rehearses the history of Israel in the wilderness.

When was it that God met their needs, made provision, honored their requests? When were their requests honored and it was actually a bad thing? It would have been better had their request not been granted. That's Psalm 106. All of these pertain to asking and miss.

So when we exercise the privilege that we have because of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, his torn flesh, a new and living way that grants us access to the very throne of God, Hebrews chapter 10, we need to be prepared. We need to think carefully about what we ask for, how we ask and why we ask. Not to satisfy some personal objective, but to see God's will and God's purpose accomplished.

So you ask and do not receive verse three because you ask and miss that you may spend it on your pleasures. This is the same word that you see in verse one. The wars and fights come from the pleasure.

Notice desires for is in italics. It's the same word. You're conflicting with other people and you're going to God asking for things out of this same source.

Can circle the word pleasure in both cases. Then in verse four, it says adulterers and adulteresses. Adulterers and adulteresses.

In the best texts, adulterers and is not there. And some translations have adulterers, but it's feminine. James is really insulting them in a healthy and spiritual way here.

He says, you adulteresses. These are men who are supposed to know how to lead and how to be fathers and husbands and leaders in the church and so on. And he calls them adulteresses.

You pansies, you wayward girls, you unfaithful wives is the best paraphrase here. You unfaithful women, adulteresses. Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God, makes himself.

It says whoever therefore wants to be, I alluded to this earlier. This is a choice. The word here that is translated wants to be, this is bulamai.

We get the word volition from this. Bulamai, volumai, volare, it comes across in Latin and comes down to us as volitive, volition. It's a choice.

Whoever chooses to be a friend of the world. So it's important to understand it's not just wants. You get the idea that, well, I just have this insatiable desire.

I can't really control it. This is a choice. This is a volitional choice.

You can choose the world or you can choose God. You wanna be a friend of the world? You're choosing to be an enemy of God. Now, this is the most important thing I'm gonna give you tonight.

And we're gonna close with it. We'll talk a little more about it next time. Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Or do you think that the scripture says in vain, the spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously. That verse five is one of the most vexed verses in the entire New Testament. Nobody can figure out what's going on there because do you think the scriptures say in vain? There is no scripture, anything like the spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously.

Do you notice that there's not a footnote and a reference down below for this? The spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously. There is no Old Testament reference. And this would be Old Testament.

Entire oil tankers full of ink have been spilled, trying to figure out why is he quoting some lost piece of the Old Testament? Is it Pseudepigrapha or is it the Apocrypha or some lost enunciation of Moses? Or where did this come from? I am going to fix this for you very quickly. The quotation marks are in the wrong place. The quote is, or the allusion to Old Testament scripture is what we just covered.

Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think the scripture says this in vain? It is talking about what he just said, not what he is about to say. Because there is no scripture.

Septuagint, you can play with the Greek all day long. It's nothing even close. Is it Spirit capital S, Spirit small s? Nobody knows.

It is talking about whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself the enemy of God. And this is a paraphrase, but 2 Chronicles 19.2 in the Septuagint uses the same vocabulary. It's in a slightly different form.

But 2 Chronicles 19.2, do you make friendship with one who is at enmity with the Lord? The world and the Lord are opposite. And so in Greek, I could read this to you, but it's basically philiazes, the word philias or philos, like Philadelphia, you know, brotherly love or friendship with your brother, enmity, goodwill, philos. If you're a philosopher, you have philos for sophos.

You have a liking for wisdom. You love wisdom. Well, if you make friendship with one who is an enemy, misoumeno, an enemy of the Lord, is that your friend? Philos is very close to philia to cosmo, extra to theu, friendship of the world, philia of the cosmo is enemyship extra with the Lord.

So if you ever run across this, it's better to just read this as James wrote it. Do you think scripture, and there's many other illustrations of this in the Old Testament that aren't quite as close in the Greek, but several places in scripture, there is this idea that God's friends are my friends and are honored by me. God's enemies should be my enemies and avoided by me.

This, again, irons out the text so that we can concentrate on the point. If our desire is worldly and reflects the world's attitudes, I want to win an argument and be thought of as wise. I want to show myself more knowledgeable about the facts.

And well, I know you thought this about this court case or this disaster or this foreign policy or this political situation. And, you know, you're arguing this, but let me tell you, you know, there was a poll or there was a study or here's some facts you didn't know. And you want to cover yourself in glory by being the most knowledgeable person in the room and suck all the air out of the room over it.

You're a friend of the world. Any unbeliever can do that kind of thing. Are you looking for edification? Are you looking to build up fellow believers? Are you going to be long suffering toward those who maybe don't know as much of the word of God and are concerned about things that aren't really a concern? Be flexible, yield, go along to get along on non-essentials, maintain unity.

How is somebody going to grow if there's not somebody around who can, when the time is right, gently explain. Friendship of the world is enmity with God, acting like the world, obsessing over what the world obsesses over, fretting and strutting and shaking our fist at the TV over what the world struts and frets, stresses out over and shakes their fist at the TV. You become an enemy of God.

We are supposed to be different. That's what's going on here. Then he's going to go on to talk about the spirit that dwells in us, but it's not a quote.

James is going to tell us something new and that's what we're going to pick up next time. But there's plenty to chew on here. How do we treat our fellow believers? If there is division and it is because we are being selfish, self-centered, that's our problem.

This comes from selfish desire and we need to expunge it. Plenty to work on there. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this powerful corruption and rebuke and instruction in righteousness from the pen of your apostle James. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will help us to see the pertinence and application. Give us the discernment.

We do ask for the wisdom to know when to stand and when to yield, when to be flexible and when to be inflexible, what is essential and what is non-essential. We pray that in our interactions with those in our midst, we will be an influence for good and blessing and we'll cultivate and share the fruit of the Spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.