

James 26-09-06b

We pick up our study here in James chapter four, this is so practical in terms of keeping us on the narrow road headed for the straight gate that leads to life, because it hits us where we live. We have a fallen nature, we have a spirit in us that by nature lusteth to envy, desires jealously various things. It can be material acquisition, it can be situational advancement, it can be vindication, justification, relationship ambitions, professional ambitions, political and social attainments.

I wanna see this issue, I want this bill passed, I want this data center out of my county, I want this aluminum smelter not to be built, there are a lot of issues that we become invested in and we feel righteous in supporting, pursuing, endeavoring in these areas. And it's important for us to follow James and his argument here, we need to check and see where is this coming from? Why is this such a big deal to me? And the way to check it is against an objective standard. I can justify to myself nine ways to Sunday why this is important and needs to happen.

I can rationalize, I can fool myself, my deceitful heart is desperately wicked, who can know it? Jeremiah 17, nine, I need the light, the objective light of the glory of God as it is reflected in the scripture, thy word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path, thy word if I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. The word of God, living and powerful, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction, the word of God is our resort, it is the power of God coming into our lives in the hands of the Holy Spirit. So if I find myself with these overarching concerns, my mind keeps returning to this, I keep thinking about it, it colors my perspective on things, it distracts me, it takes up clock cycles in my mental CPU, it's a churning in my soul, it's an unsatisfied need of some kind, look at it in the light of the word of God and then pray.

You do not have resolution in these areas because you are not asking, ask and it shall be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened. Where have we seen in this context something about asking? Tightly woven argument, go back to chapter one, if any of you lacks wisdom, wisdom in handling our perspective on situations, on having or lacking something, if any of you lacks wisdom, verse five, chapter one, let him ask of God who gives liberally to anyone, to all, generously and without reproach, ask. If you're not asking or you're asking wrongly, you're asking because you're treating God like the genie of the lamp and we can fool ourselves, we can say, oh, but it has to be the word of God, it has to be the spirit of God, none of our prayers reach heaven without the ministry of the spirit and for him to be effective, there cannot be sin in the camp.

If we have iniquity in our heart and I gave you the references for these last time, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. We went through all of the passages, why is it that we might be talking to God and we don't get a response? So, you ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, you ask wrongly in order that you may spend it on your pleasures, same as the word in verse one, you can circle pleasures in verse three and circle it in verse one, it's the same

word. Adulteresses, you are playing the harlot with the world and your attachment and connection to it, which is the carnal fallen human nature.

If we buy into the world's way of looking at things, the world's way of acquiring things, the world's way of advancing and accomplishing its desires, we're worldly, we're carnal, we are fleshly, we're not availing ourselves of everything the Lord Jesus died to give us and that's just tragic. So, what a helpful message here, there's something I want, I need to first of all, check and be sure that this is in line with God's will, I want it, does God want it? Maybe I ought to submit my will to the will of God. Submit yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.

Let's appeal to his knowledge, to his wisdom, to his power and grace and wait on the Lord, be of good cheer and he will strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord. Look to him, it requires humility, that's coming up here.

So, adulteresses. Oh, here comes some Old Testament allusions. That's what God calls Israel when they're making friends in the world and making themselves the enemy of God and holding hands with others who are the enemies of God.

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity, enemyship? He's our heavenly father, why on earth would we want to be at odds with the one who has granted us salvation, who sacrificed his son on our behalf, who has such a wealth of expressions of his love and grace and faithfulness to us, why would we not just disappoint him, not just ignore him, but become an enemy, someone that has to be treated as a hostile? It completely makes no sense, but that's what happens in adultery. You have a covenant relationship, you have a union with your opposite number, your spouse, and why would you break faith, break covenant, be dishonest, be furtive and deceitful because of self-gratification? I go outside the marriage because I love the way it makes me feel. I have stimulation, I have appreciation, I have adventure, it's exciting, it's sort of dangerous and I get a thrill and the whole forbidden fruit idea kicks in and it appeals to us, it hooks into our fallen nature.

We crave that excitement, we crave that appreciation and attention that comes from someone outside the covenant. That's why the word adulterous is used here. Adulterous is you are straying outside your covenant, hoping for something because of your envy, your jealousy, your desire for pleasure.

Adulterous is friendship with the world, enemy of God, whoever wants to be a friend of the world, notice, wants to be a friend of the world. Preceding context, someone comes in with fine clothes, I want him to be my friend. You know, he's on the city council, he's on the county board, I can get my driveway paved if I make a friend out of him.

That's what we think of out here in the country, get pavement. Whoever makes a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God, makes himself, wants to be a friend of the world, makes

himself an enemy of God. It reminds you of the old saw, if God seems far away, who moved? We make ourselves an enemy of God when we cultivate being too much in this world.

Or do you think the scripture talks about that in vain, about spiritual adultery and about friendship with the world and enemyship with God? Do you think scripture records that and expresses it and teaches about it to no purpose? New paragraph, moving the argument forward, the spirit, lowercase s, the human spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy, delights, desires to be jealous. This is the victim mentality. This is the self-centered shifting of blame and all other kinds of psychological parsing of the world in such a way that it's always someone else's fault.

It's always a law of the universe that bad things are gonna happen to me and I want it to be different. I want this, I want that, I want the other. And our spirit naturally moves in that direction.

We are naturally self-centered. We are naturally defensive. We naturally wanna think that it's somebody else that is causing this problem.

I'm not the problem. I look at 10 problem situations and the only common element in all of them is me, but I don't see that maybe I'm the problem. Our spirit, our human spirit that dwells in us craves this looking at others, this subjective approach, eyes on people, eyes on self, eyes on things, circumstances.

This is envy and jealousy. This sponsors wars and fights. But now this is a wonderful contrast.

You remember all of these allusions that we looked at in Ezekiel, in Jeremiah, in Hosea, in the Psalms and so on. The Old Testament solution, God says, "Israel, you're acting like an adulteress. "Judgment is coming.

"I will take away your blessings, "read the blessings and curses "on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim "because of your unfaithfulness, "because you are playing the harlot with other nations. "I am going to wreak judgment upon you." That's the Old Testament solution. What is the New Testament solution? It isn't that God is ignoring spiritual compromise and trying to love God and love the world at the same time, but what is the solution that was not available in the Old Testament that is available now? He gives greater grace.

God's grace is available in a new form. God resists the proud as he has always done. Read the Song of Hannah.

Read the Magnificat, the Song of Mary, where God pulls down the proud and elevates the humble. It is a theme throughout Old Testament scripture, which is all James has to appeal to here. He says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Proverbs 3.34. We saw this in our Proverbs study.

He gives greater grace. We've got this spirit that wants to drag us into bad situations, wants us to get our eyes on people, make friends with the world, do things the world's way. God's grace is

greater.

That's why he says, God resists the proud. Those who give into their pride and their desire to get ahead in worldly ways with worldly people, he gives grace to the humble. We're going down our checklist of how to avoid this whole situation of wars and fights, conflicts, divisions, should not be so.

We are one in Christ. We have the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. Scripture, New Testament scripture especially, is replete with calls for unity, for fellowship, for encouraging one another, for operating in the one another realm, qualifying ourselves so that others who are qualified to do one another level love, we can reciprocate.

And we are in that innermost circle of love, one another's. We check our desires. And if they are not in accordance with God's word and God's will, we use our tools for cleansing.

We confess our sins. We meditate and reflect and marinate our soul in the word of God. Let it transform us by the renewing of our minds instead of conforming us to the world, Romans 12.2. 2 Timothy 2.15, 3.16 of Timothy.

So many passages that talk about the power of the word of God. Run the verses through my mind that will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusts in thee. We turn to God, we pray, and we don't pray amiss.

We ask for wisdom. We ask for grace. We ask for power over our fallen nature.

Check the nature of those desires and fix them if they are broken. If they are legitimate desires, then we can ask God, knowing that he is going to answer in the affirmative. I will craft a prayer that I know God is going to say yes.

I'll ask him for wisdom, personal wisdom. I will ask him to purge me with hyssop, to wash me and make me white as snow, to create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. It takes humility to acknowledge that I am the problem.

We have to throw ourselves at the feet of our heavenly father and acknowledge our faults. Homo logeo, confess our sins. He is faithful.

He is just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from unrighteousness. Now, if your sins are forgiven and our unrighteousness is cleansed, are we still going to have bad cravings, faulty desires? If we are washed and cleansed and we have a right spirit renewed within us, that right spirit that dwells in us is no longer going to lust to envy. It's not going to desire jealously.

It's not going to want and not obtain because we've taken it to God. Your will be done. If you want this to continue, so be it.

If somebody's got to fall on the grenade, let it be me. Paul says to the Corinthians, why not rather let yourselves be wronged? Absorb the loss and take it to God. God will compensate.

The Lord Jesus told his disciples, if you've given up something, you're going to have it a hundredfold in the kingdom. Don't look at the immediate short term and say, well, I got shortchanged. I was left holding the bag here.

Give it to God and trust him. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. Don't see the righteous go hungry or his seed begging bread.

And this is metaphorical for any sort of need. Instead of craving a solution, we can rest in God's provision. He gives more grace.

If we are proud, God is going to resist us. This puts us in the enemy of God camp. The enemies of God are proud.

The friends of God are humble. So that is what we pursue. That is what we cultivate.

Humility. So again, on our checklist, check the nature of those desires, fix them if they're broken. Secondly, in any case, take it before the Lord.

Ask him for guidance, for wisdom, for patience. Let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. All of this draws on what James has said in the first three chapters.

You can't get to chapter four without this journey through chapter one, chapter two, and chapter three. He laid it out. He talked about people in the third person.

Now he's bringing it home to personal application and group application. Therefore, verse seven, submit to God. Don't cultivate worldly ways, worldly thoughts, worldly attitudes, worldly connections.

Submit to God. Notice how the focus shifts away from these guys are the problem. I've got a war and a fight going on.

I turn my attention to God. I'm gonna ask him, and I'm not gonna ask him because I'm still looking at my brother or my sister, my sibling, you know, we're back to the household when you're nine or 10 years old and you feel like you got wronged, your toy got broken, your privacy got invaded, whatever it is, and you go to mom, not because you want a genuine adjudication, you want mom to do something to the one you feel wronged you. And so even though you're talking to mom, you're looking at the offender.

You're at school. Somebody steals your lunch. You go to the teacher.

You're talking to the teacher, but you're looking at the kid that's got your lunchbox or that punched you in the eye or whatever it might be. God says, genuine humility goes and says, here's the situation, your will be done. So submit to God, resist the devil.

Now the world, the flesh, and the devil have all been connected here. The spirit within you, that's the flesh. The world is wanting us to be its friend.

And here's the devil. The world, the flesh, and the devil, they're all in this context. If we belong to God, we don't wanna be his enemy.

The world, the flesh, and the devil are all trying to pull us in that direction. So submit to God, resist the devil. He will flee from you.

This of course is metaphorical. The devil's not in the room. And when I submit to God, he suddenly puts on his Nike sneakers and runs away.

His influence, his pull, this unwarranted coveting and jealousy and desire for things to be different, to be a certain way, to acquire something, to gain something, to advance in some fashion, to accomplish some goal or objective, it will no longer be present. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face.

We just had that beautiful song in our special music. The things of this world grow strangely dim. The things of our flesh grow strangely dim.

The things of Satan grow strangely dim in the light that floods our soul when we turn to God. Submit ourselves to God as the Lord Jesus did. Follow in his footsteps, be objective, and let the grace of God that is greater than our flesh, greater than the world, greater than Satan, let that power, that grace, and that peace dominate the situation.

This is our privilege as children of God. Resist the devil, he will flee from you. His way, his machinations, his ability to sow division.

You know, they talk about the first sin being Eve eating the fruit, but Satan also succeeded in dividing Eve from Adam. And in order to heal that breach, Adam sinned. Two wrongs don't make a right.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. This is such an important concept. Reformed theology, Calvinists say, God is gonna draw you, and if you're elect, it's an effectual calling.

When God calls, he's pulling a string that you can't break. When God calls, you are going to answer because it is effectual grace. It's hard to believe if you've looked at the word of God for any length of time, that people would think God acts this way.

And it's just a misunderstanding of scripture. And if you study long enough, you see how this just

doesn't make any sense. That whom he foreknew, he foreloved, and whom he foreloved, he called.

And when he calls, it's irresistible. It is irresistible grace. Tulip, total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement.

Jesus only died for some. Irresistible grace. It's not irresistible grace.

What does James say here? You draw near to God, then he will draw near to you. Calvinist reformed theologians say, God is not at the behest. He's not gonna react and respond based on what people do.

We are mere peons and we don't control what God does by our decisions. God is sovereign. He does what he wants, and we are completely at the mercy of his inscrutable will.

And we shouldn't ask why he doesn't save everybody. Just be glad he saved some in his, in his sovereign calling that is effectual and irresistible. That's not what James says.

James says, if you want God to be near, you draw near to him. It depends on your choice. You draw near to God, and he will then draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded, double-minded. Tightly woven argument here.

Have you seen this word before? Where did we see double-minded before? This is di-sucos, P-S-U-C-H-O-S, sucos. This is the word for soul. Di means two, a dipole antenna.

If you're a ham radio guy, a dipole has two wings, two arms, two poles, dipole, di-sucos, two-souled. Where have we seen this? Flip a page or two back to James 1, eight. The man who doubts when he goes to God and asks is asking amiss, right? Ask in faith, verse six, nothing doubting.

He who doubts, wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. Let not that person suppose he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a di-sucos man.

Two-souled. I understand some of these people that can't figure out what gender they are call themselves two-spirit. That's not good.

The Bible says if you're two-spirited, two-souled, you're unstable in all your ways. You can't have one part of you worshiping mammon or worshiping the world or making friends with the world. You know, Jesus said you can't serve God and mammon, God and the currency of the world.

You're double-minded. By the way, these are the only two verses in the entire New Testament that use this word. It's not even found in the Septuagint of the Old Testament.

You've got to go to Clement and some later church fathers who picked up this word from James and will use it in their writings. But only two places, you are two-souled. You're split.

House divided against itself cannot stand, President Lincoln said. And he's right. Our house, our soul can't stand if it's split in two directions.

Why will you waver between two opinions? Choose you this day whom you will serve, Joshua says. As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. You've got to make a choice.

You can't be one foot heading for the kingdom and the other foot walking down into the world. So purify your heart. If you find yourself pulled in two directions, you're trying to be a faithful believer and trying to walk in the ways of the Lord, trying to do the narrow road, straight gate, but you keep getting pulled by desires in other areas.

What is the solution? Heart purification. Create in me a clean heart, oh God. It is by request.

Psalms 51, 1 John 1.9, 1 John 1.7. Purify the heart. The problem is in the heart. You purify your heart, wash your hands, confess your sins.

It takes humility to acknowledge that we are wrong. We get an accusation, we get a criticism. First thing we do is, wait a minute, no.

It's something else, it's not me. It takes humility to look at ourselves in the light of the word of God, come before the Father and say, try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me.

Again, I'm in Psalm 51. Search me, oh God, know my heart. Test me, try me, examine me.

See if there is a wicked way. And if there is, cleanse me, purge me, renew me. It takes humility.

This is asking rightly, not asking amiss. Asking amiss is saying, make that person different. Make this situation different.

Give me this thing that I lack. I need this promotion, I need more money. I need a situation fixed.

It's asking amiss. We're interested in our purposes and our desires instead of God's. It takes humility.

Submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God. So submit to God, draw near to God. Cleanse your hands, purify your hearts.

If sin is involved, you've got to identify it and confess it. If thoughts and intents of the heart are involved, we've got to purify our heart. Washing of water by the word.

Read the scriptures. Reflect on memory verses. Reflect on recent Bible studies.

Get that notebook and dust it off and read it and pray over it. Pray it up to heaven and ask God for this greater grace. Grace greater than all my sin.

Grace greater than my cravings and the spirit that lusteth the envy that is within me. Take it to God. Nothing's more powerful than God.

There's nothing he can't do. He gives grace to those who humble themselves under his mighty hand. And in due time, he will exalt the humble.

He will grant grace to the humble. Such a powerful message here. Lament and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. This is laughter and joy that is the search for stimulation, for distraction. I want a circumstance to make me feel better.

I want a vacation. I want some sort of, you know, show me a really great movie. Take me on a great amusement park ride.

Change my venue. Change my situation. I want something to take my mind off this problem.

I'll throw myself into a hobby. I'll throw myself into a different relationship. I'll in some way, shape or form, I'm going to sublimate.

I'm going to distract myself from this festering problem. Instead, acknowledge the problem. This is godly sorrow.

There is such a thing as godly sorrow. It's not required for forgiveness, but it is required for recovery. We have to lament and mourn and weep when we discover that we have met the enemy and it is us.

We have identified the problem in the light of God's word. Under the comfort and encouragement of the Holy Spirit, we have seen things in a fresh divine light. Oh, all this time I thought it was that, but it's me.

I am the common denominator of this problem and others like it. It's my mistake. It's my fault.

It takes humility to be willing to consider that possibility. It takes even more humility to recognize that it's not just a possibility, it's a fact. I am the one that messed that up.

That was my bad. And as a result, I'm not happy. I sorrow over that.

I've gone down a bad road and inevitably we end up affecting those around us. This is very often in the realm of relationships. Lament and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Stop trying to distract yourself with earthly pleasure, with worldly satisfaction. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he

will lift you up.

This is the solution. This is the greater grace. This is God drawing near to us.

He can put his divine arm around our shoulder. He can give us the wisdom that we ask for. He can give us the grace to be overcomers in these tough situations.

And nothing's harder than when we realize at some point that this is of my own making. It's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror because I get better looking each day.

To know me is to love me. I must be a heck of a man. Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, but I'm doing the best that I can.

You'll remember that song from the 70s. Hard to be humble, but humility is required to experience God's greater grace, to have the cleansing, to be freed from the pull of our fallen nature and the deceptive heart that tells us we're right. There is a way that seems right to a man, but it is death, death to divine good, death to laying hold of righteousness by faith, death to relationships, death to progress, death to the wisdom of God, death to laying up treasure in heaven and reflecting the glory of the Lord Jesus now and in the ages to come.

There is a way that seems right to a man. From an earthly perspective, we need divine wisdom. We need to pray these things before the Lord.

There is a way, James spells it out here. You gotta remember, the spirit that dwells in us is untrustworthy. It's got bad desires.

It makes bad arguments. The heart is deceitful. If we don't pray, we don't ask, or we ask amiss, the Lord will not hear us.

I want to be humble. I want to submit. I want to put this before the Lord and tell him as the Lord Jesus did, not my will, but thine be done.

If I'm the problem, show me, heal me, purge me, enable me with your greater grace to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. So that leads us now after humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift you up. Our real goal is to be lifted up, to be on the higher ground, head on the upward way, gain new heights every day, still praying, plant my feet on higher ground.

And that leads us to verse 11, where we'll pick up next time. Do not speak evil of one another, brothers. Do not speak evil.

The speaking evil comes from thinking evil, from believing evil, from imputing evil, attributing evil, deciding that the evil is in the other person's court. Humility says, I need to be sure I'm not living in a glass house here before I start throwing rocks. That's what we'll pick up next time.

Plenty to chew on here in this first half of chapter four. And on that, we will close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the powerful, effective, practical insight that it gives us. And in the hands of your Holy Spirit, it can truly change us. We pray that the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts in an effective way that we will be able to see clearly, not through the warped perspective of our own soul, not to be double-souled, but to see ourselves as you see us, avail ourselves of your grace, and be, as a result, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.