

## James 26-09-13a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. If you're a visitor here this morning, please reach into the pew in front of you, fill out a visitor's card.

We'll come by and see you later. This is the 13th of September, 2026. We continue our study in the book written by Yaakov Jacob, known in English as James.

And we are in chapter four. We are going to see another Daffy Duck moment here. Those of you who love Daffy, one of my favorite lines.

If you remember the scene, they are holding up signs to each other. And he eventually says, pronoun trouble, as he affixes his beak again for the fourth or fifth time. Pronoun trouble.

We are going to see pronoun trouble this morning. At least it's trouble for us. It wasn't trouble for James' original audience.

Wasn't trouble when he wrote it, but it has caused a bit of consternation for us. I'm gonna read you an amusing example of that. But let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we will begin.

Father, how grateful we are for another opportunity to spend time together in the study of your word, in prayer and fellowship. We are grateful for the opportunity to look at this passage together, and we pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will enlighten us, help us to understand it, put it into practice, so that our lives will, to an ever-increasing extent, represent the Lord Jesus on this earth and reflect your glory. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's, first of all, read our passage. As I said, we are in chapter four, and we begin with this notion of wars and fights. We have made an emendation.

This is my suggestion. You're free to follow it or not. In verse two, where it says, you murder and covet, I think there is verb confusion here, very close-sounding words, but this, I believe, is the word for envy, which occurs, again, the very same word down in verse five.

The spirit who dwells in you yearns jealously. And this word, thoneo, P-H-T-H-O-N-E-O, means to envy, to be jealous. And it is very close to P-H-O-N-E-U-O, especially in the second person plural that we find here, which means to murder.

We have the word murder other places here in the book, but I believe it has been accidentally misheard and misinserted here. Again, if murder is going on in the congregation, preceding that with exhortations to not talk bad about each other sort of pales into insignificance. It just doesn't fit in the context.

Y'all are talking bad about each other and you shouldn't do that. You need to bridle your tongue.

And oh, by the way, don't murder each other.

It really doesn't fit. And this is a very elegant solution, especially given the recurrence of the word a few verses further down. So I'm going to read this in that way.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure? Desire to be pleased might be a better translation here because this isn't just pleasure in the sense of, I rode a merry-go-round, I had a fine meal, I drank an expensive glass of wine, I saw a wonderful play, I went to a museum, I had some sort of self-gratifying pleasure. This is anything that pleases us. And this opens up the application because there are all kinds of things that please us and we wouldn't say, well, it's a pleasure.

It's just, this pleases me. I am happy with this activity, with this situation, this circumstance, this relationship. This is why it's important to understand the translation here.

It is that which pleases us. And we can look in our lives and say, even though this seems innocuous, I don't identify it as sin, I don't identify it as a pattern that would qualify as evil, but it pleases me. And because this pleases me, I somehow end up in conflict with my fellow believers.

We think it's gotta be a sin, it's gotta be ax murdering or some terrible thing, but we can let that which appeals to us, that which gives us satisfaction, that's perfectly legitimate from a moral point of view, interrupt our relationships with one another. And you know when you hear one another that we're talking about the innermost circle of Christian love. So these wars and fights come from your desire for being pleased, that wars in your members, and this is not the members of our body, this is members of our group.

This is the body of Christ. Wars and conflicts, I don't suddenly, although there are rare cases where someone loses control of half of their body, and so their left hand will punch somebody while their right hand's trying to hug them and so on, it's rare and special. But this is not what James is talking about.

This wars and fights among us, it's wars in the members of the group. And the group can be two or more gathered together in the Lord Jesus name. If we claim to be believers, we have to be careful that what pleases us doesn't cause us to divide, to conflict, to experience disunity, disharmony, because it will cause a war, and it's the same words you had in the first line, in your members, among your people.

You lust and do not have. This is epithumia. This is, again, back to a desire that's kind of a priority.

This isn't a casual, I love to have a Kit-Kat bar every once in a while. This is, I must have X or Y or Z. And if this ends up causing conflict, I am not following the teaching that Paul gave those in Corinth. There's nothing wrong with food that has lain before an idol, but if it causes someone

else a problem, then sacrifice, stay away from it.

For the sake of my brother who doesn't understand, who may not be as far along, who has a hangup about this, why would I experience this pleasure? Some of the finest food went to the pagan temples and then was sold on the open market. I'll eat the next best steak. I'll have a secondary salad that's not quite as fresh and quite as delicious because to indulge my preference and my pleasure harms my brother.

Paul goes to great lengths talking about this in Corinthians. So James says, you have these desires and you don't possess them. This is something now that you're aspiring to.

You lust and do not have. You envy and covet and cannot obtain. You see the connection here.

I see somebody else that's doing this, why can't I? Someone in another part of the body of Christ has a different calling, a different set of gifts, a different set of circumstances, a different set of challenges, a different set of opportunities. And we can look at someone and say, well, why can't my life be like their life? Why can't my opportunities and my relationships and my situation, why can't it be like that? This is what the Bible calls envy. It's looking at someone else and wanting what they've got.

It doesn't have to be material possessions. But you notice the parallel. I pointed this out a couple of times already.

Wars and fights are two sides of the same coin in verse one. Envy and coveting are two sides of the same coin in verse two. You desire and do not have, you envy and covet and cannot obtain, you fight and war, fighting and warring.

Again, two aspects of conflict, interpersonal conflict. You do not have because you do not ask. He goes back one thought to, you do not have, you cannot obtain.

And points out that if there is something that is dissatisfaction in our circumstance, I would like things to be different than they are. I would like a better car than I've got. I would like a better spouse than I've got.

I would like a better church than I've got. I'd like a better pastor than I've got. I would like a better stack of groceries in my pantry and in my refrigerator than what I've got.

I went and visited someone else. Oh, their home was so beautiful. And the appointments and what was parked in the driveway and their clothes.

And you can look at coworkers. You can look at fellow travelers in any different area of life and say, why I would love to switch places with them. So there is this parallelism.

We are looking in the wrong place because in order to get those things, we start to churn our

elbows and knees. We start to say, well, I can make that happen. If I do this and if I do that, how did they get that? Let me go do what they did.

And someone might speak up and say, you know, that's really not the path to happiness. And we get unhappy, we get upset. Wars and fights among you, you are desiring things.

You want to be pleased, but you're going about it the wrong way. You're struggling with those in the periphery instead of asking. What did he say back in verse one? Every good giving and every perfect gift comes down from above.

So if there is something you desire like wisdom, ask of God. He gives liberally and without reproach. Go to God.

If it is good for us, he will grant it. Sometimes he just waits for us to ask so that we can be reminded that he is the source of all of the good things in our lives. And if he says no and does not provide that thing, he may provide some other good thing that is better for us.

We have to assume that God knows better what's good for us than we do. Think of children. I used to work in a grocery store and I would see my shift was after school.

And so it's getting close to supper time. Ladies are in their shopping carts trying to get their shopping done. They've got their kid in the little two hole seat and it's getting close to supper time and the children are cranky.

These are typically preschool age, small enough to fit. And they start reaching out and they grab things. They start crying.

They want the candy. They want all of this stuff that is displayed right next to the register. This is in the old days where there were ladies that punched the keys, went to cash register operator school.

And so you hear the clickety-clack and there's a line and these ladies are waiting with their child and the child wants something. And the mother is patiently saying, be patient, you can't have that. We'll be home soon and you'll have your supper.

And they're thinking supper, isn't that peas? This is candy. And they say, this is what I want. It's a desire.

It's a craving. And they get conflicted with their mother over it. Instead of trusting the mother, she knows best.

I have the discipline to wait on my mom and be of good cheer and she will strengthen my heart because I will go home and have a good nutritious meal. It's hard to understand that when you're three to five years old. But this is what God expects of us.

We are not three to five years old and we should be able to rely on him. He knows what we need before we ask him, but Jesus still says, ask, give us this day, the food for today. So you do not have because you do not ask.

You are looking in the wrong realm. You're looking at earthly circumstances and seeking earthly solutions and it is causing conflict because this is what does not unite the body of Christ. It's what divides it.

So then in verse three, when you do ask, he just said, you do not ask. Now he's gonna say, you do ask, which is it? We're starting to get used to James style here where he is addressing in the style of Proverbs, things that are generally true, that are often applicable, especially when you look at a group. This is essential to understanding our passage this morning, which is why we're reviewing this in a bit of detail.

So you do not have because you do not ask. Then he turns right around and says, you ask. We have to fill in a few conjunctions, a few prepositions, a bit of context here.

What is he saying? In a lot of cases, you do not have because you're not looking to the Lord and asking him. When you do ask, in the cases where you do ask and you do not have, and you've got these envyings and covenants going on, notice the context is you're not patient. You haven't asked and you're patiently waiting.

You're looking at others. It's causing conflict and division. Your heart's not right.

And so when you do ask and do not receive because you ask amiss. He told us in chapter one, how to ask. Ask in faith, nothing doubting.

Don't be double-minded. Don't have half of your mind in heaven and the other half on earth. Don't be tossed about like a ship without a rudder, the waves of the sea.

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. We as believers are called to be heavenly-minded. There's no such thing as being so heavenly-minded that you're no earthly good.

If we are heavenly-minded, we are more than good on earth. We will ask correctly. We will formulate our prayers in such a way that we know God is going to answer in the affirmative.

I don't ask maybe yes, maybe no in intercession. I ask God to glorify himself in a situation, to comfort and encourage believers, to remind them of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and the word of God that they've learned in the past, the blessings, the history of God's grace and God's character throughout the scriptures. Is God going to say no to that prayer? He's going to say yes.

So we learn to not ask amiss because we want something, treating God like the genie of the lamp. If we are motivated to ask God for something because we want self-gratification, we're not

going to receive it. God is not going to help us in our sinful pattern of thinking.

Then in verse four, Adulteresses, this is such a powerful call to mind for these Jewish Christians to remember the passages of the Old Testament that we looked at a session or two back where spiritual unfaithfulness is characterized as playing the harlot. And he's talking to men and using the feminine. This ought to wake them up.

Drill sergeants do this. When they're talking to raw recruits, he lines them up and he says, okay, girls, how come your uniform is not on correctly? Where's your pack? We're going on a five mile hike with 40 pounds of gear, girls. And it is designed to remind someone of their place in the structure.

We don't go to God and tell him what he needs to give us. He's calling these Jewish brethren, Adulteresses. You are spiritually unfaithful to the extent that you operate this way.

If this shoe fits, it's a slipper for a girl. Adulteresses, adulterers and scratch it out. It is not there.

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Anytime scripture says, do you not know? It means you should know. My favorite example of this is John chapter three, where Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. And when he explains that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom.

And Nicodemus responds, must I reenter my mother's womb to be born again? And Jesus says, are you a teacher in Israel and you don't know this? And so then the quest becomes, where in the old Testament is that taught? And it's a fun exercise in determining it. And there are two really powerful passages. We've covered those in other studies.

So do you not know, if you're making friends with the world, you are making an enemy out of God. Adulteress, if you are flirting with another guy and engaging in immorality with him, you are being unfaithful to the one in whom you should rest in covenant relationship. You're breaking faith, you're breaking covenant.

And a woman who commits adultery has made an enemy of her husband. We as believers, if we cultivate the world and the things of the world and the thinking of the world and the standards of the world, we are making an enemy of God. James alludes to this previously as judging the law.

We saw this back in chapter two, speak and do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

We'll be looking at that verse again before long in connection with our study this morning. So whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. And verse four continues with the first line of verse five.

Friend of the world, enemy of God, or do you think the scripture has spoken in vain? Scripture

teaches the adulterous passages, friendship with the world. Second Chronicles 19 two, Jehoshaphat and Ahab. If you're making a friend of Ahab, you're making an enemy of God, the prophet says.

Then you have a new thought, the beginning of a new paragraph here. And this is James talking. There are no quotation marks.

The spirit, lowercase s, the human spirit that dwells in us desires to envy. And we're back to the vocabulary of the first two verses of this chapter. James reiterates what he's already said.

You have wars and fights because of your desire for pleasure. And this is the phaneo, the envy word, P-H-T-H-O-N-E-O. The spirit who dwells in us by nature is ready to look across the fence, look at others.

We've seen this under the rubric of subjectivity. God calls us to be objective, objective truth comes from his word in the hands of his Holy Spirit, helping us to understand it, see its application. Subjectivity comes in three primary forms, eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances, eyes on things.

We're looking, we have an earthly perspective. He has just talked about this kind of supposed wisdom back up in chapter three, verse 15. This wisdom does not descend from above, it is earthly.

It is fleshly, and it is demonic. You have here, believe it or not, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Earthly is the world, sensual, this is sarkicos, this is the flesh, and the demons represent the devil.

The world, the flesh, and the devil, that's earthly wisdom. So what is the solution? If we have this spirit dwelling within us, we can't grab it by the stacking swivel and pull it out and toss it away. It desires to envy.

It wants to operate on the earthly plane. It wants to act like any godless unbeliever. Any unbeliever can act this way, think this way, yearn and crave and fight this way.

This shouldn't be us. So what is the solution? God gives greater grace. You know, in adjectives, there are comparatives and there are superlatives.

Something is greater, that's a comparative. Something is greatest, that's a superlative. This is a comparative, and it literally says, we have this spirit that desires to envy.

Thaneo, but God gives greater grace. The grace that God gives us, and we know that this is in the person of His Holy Spirit and the word of God that is alive and powerful, piercing to the very heart, exposing our thoughts and intents. Greater grace.

So we now have a choice. Are we going to choose the default, what we're born with, the earthly, the sensual, the demonic, or are we going to appeal to God's greater grace? I quote it all the time. I want to turn back one book to Hebrews chapter 10.

Sometimes it fixes us, fixes our minds when we see things visually as well as hearing them. Hebrews 10, 19 and following. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, this is the throne room of God, by a new and living way, which He consecrated for us through the veil, that is His flesh.

The veil that was torn when He was crucified. There is now a way through the veil. The veil does not block access.

The veil was torn from top to bottom. This is God's action in removing the limitation. We now have a high priest over the house of God.

Let us draw near. Let us ask. Let us approach.

Let us draw near. How? We don't want to ask amiss. We draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

What did James say in chapter one? Ask nothing doubting. Don't be disucos. Don't be double-minded, double-souled.

Draw near, full assurance of faith. Having our hearts sprinkled. When you see the word having, this is the principle of the eris participle.

One of the first things you learn in Greek is a little saying. You just burned it into your brain. The action of the eris participle precedes the action of the main verb.

And in Greek, it doesn't matter where things occur. The order isn't important. It is the grammatical structure.

So when it says, let us draw near, that's now. Let us draw near. Having done something previously.

Our hearts having previously been sprinkled. Before we come to God, if we're not going to ask amiss, what do we do? Our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience. My conscience is what tells me I'm right.

And my conscience is a lying rascal. My conscience is always telling me I'm right and I am often wrong. That conscience is not trustworthy until it has been reformed and renewed, soaked in the word of God, cleansed with the washing of water by the word, and then guided by God's Holy Spirit with that word.

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. I can sin and think that I'm absolutely right. I'm justified.

I'm vindicated. I tell myself, this is holy, righteous, and good. The Trinity of me, myself, and I is all in favor of this.

And my conscience, that rascal, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked by default. Who can know it? So, we have to have already sprinkled our hearts from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. These are metaphors talking about reflection and self-analysis to determine, am I harboring a bad wish? It's an earthly, sensual, and ultimately demonic desire.

It's a part of the world system. It's the way the world would act. I've got to identify it and then sprinkle.

This is the sprinkling of blood that sanctifies. He's been talking about this in the first many chapters of Hebrews. Nothing is sanctified without blood.

The people were sprinkled. The covenant was sprinkled. Everything in the tabernacle and the priests and their garments were sprinkled with blood.

This sanctified them and dedicated them to God. So, my heart has to have already been sprinkled if I am not going to ask amiss, if I'm not going to be going to God, thinking I'm right, and asking and praying, and all I want to do is satisfy my own desire because I'm too blind to see myself. I need an outside reference.

I need the objective truth, not the subjective standard where my conscience excuses me all the time. Paul talks about that in Romans, talking about the Jews and the Gentiles, and the Gentiles don't have the law, but everybody, their conscience, either accuses or excuses them, but you can't trust that. You need the word of God.

He makes that case extensively. So, what are we talking about here? I want to put James into practice in my life. These people didn't wake up in the morning twisting the ends of their mustaches, saying, I'm going to go create a conflict.

I'm going to have an earthly, sensual, and demonic desire. I'm going to split my group, split my family, split from fellow believers. I'm going to cause all kinds of problems because you know what? I've got a desire and it's evil, and I'm just going to indulge it.

I don't care. Nobody thinks that way. We justify, we rationalize, we vindicate.

We are so sure we're right. You can't trust conscience. It has to be sprinkled.

It has to be sanctified. It has to be renewed, transformed by the renewing of our minds, Paul says

in Romans. So draw near because ultimately this is going to end in a request.

You're familiar with this passage. You know where this is going. These are the conditions.

How do you not ask amiss? Hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water. Why do you wash your body? It's defiled. It has accumulated something that needs to be washed off.

This is confession of sin. To cleanse us from all unrighteousness, God has to hear us come before him in humility and acknowledgement that we need his grace. We need the grace that is greater than all our sin.

The greater grace that overcomes the natural tendency to want what I want. Bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful.

We do this with a different perspective. What's the difference between I'm going to God and I'm gonna ask for resolution, for solution, for something that he will provide in this situation. What is the difference in that? And what's spoken of here? That looks at the present.

That looks at the now. I've got a problem right now. Oh Lord, fix it.

What is this talking about? Hold fast the confession of hope. Hope always looks to the future. This is a wonderful perspective fixer.

I am so caught up in the immediate and in the now. I'm not thinking of the big picture. This is something God has allowed into my life.

James chapter one, no temptation has befallen you. When you find yourself in trial, remember God is in his heaven. Ask for wisdom.

Don't treat it like a story problem. And you're so worried about the people on the train from Chicago meeting the people on the train from New York. And you're all in a fluster and we need to call somebody.

These trains are gonna meet and collide. And you forget this is a story problem. This is an exercise to develop our skills, to remember our heavenly father and his greater grace.

The situation before us is not as important as the fulfillment of our hope. We are given the opportunity to redeem the time, to lay a treasure in heaven, to prepare ourselves for service and function now and in the ages to come. This particular episode, this circumstance, this situation is designed by God to be viewed through our spiritual glasses.

That's why it has occurred. It isn't a happenstance. It's not the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

It's not the failures of people and I've got to find somebody to blame and shame. This is of God and it has a purpose. And the purpose ties into our hope.

So, as you know, I think Paul wrote Hebrews and I think he is telling us here, let us hold fast the confession of hope. He doesn't say just hold fast your hope. It's the confession of hope.

We talk a lot about 1 John 1, 9 and confessing our sins. I would submit that with 1 John 1, 9, we should put Hebrews 10, 23, confess our hope. Lord, I know that this isn't just a situation with nothing but earthly ramifications.

I know that this is something that is a part of my spiritual growth, my spiritual function, my opportunities to reflect your glory and the glory of the Savior. And we confess our hope. There's nothing better for us than saying out loud, I am headed for glory.

I am headed for the kingdom of the Son. I am headed for the kingdom of the Father. One day soon, this will all be behind me.

Sin, my fallen nature, the world, the demonic pressures will be gone. This is my opportunity to push against resistance and strengthen my faith, strengthen my relationship with my Father in heaven and with my Savior, the Lord Jesus, and with my fellow believers. Strengthen relationship, not cause division.

And there is a time to separate, and James is gonna get to that. But here, we look to ourselves first. I've got to look at my conscience and get that thing sprinkled.

I've got to let the word of God cut to the quick. That's really kind of funny if you're remembering the old King James, because it says the word of God is quick and powerful, and quick means alive. And when we say cut to the quick, we're talking about cut to the living part of the flesh that's got nerves, but it's alive.

So the word of God has to get in and fix our conscience. That's first. If we're not gonna ask amiss that we may consume it on our personal desires.

Secondly, we confess our sins. We throw ourselves on the greater grace of God to cleanse us, to restore us, to give us proper perspective. Then we confess our hope.

Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. Let him ask in faith, nothing doubting, no wavering, not being tossed by the winds. These words that people speak, these actions that they perpetrate that disrespect me, that hurt my feelings, that cause me trouble.

I am holding fast my hope. And my hope is for the world to come where these things are in the past. And that when I was tested, I looked to my father.

I appealed to his greater grace. Hold fast the confession of hope without wavering. Why? He who promised is faithful.

People may be unfaithful. People will let us down. We will be unfaithful and we will let people down.

We have a corrupt conscience and we think we're right and we are just as wrong as we can be. But our conscience won't tell us because our heart is deceitful. But the word of God and the spirit of God will tell us.

And we can be unfaithful. People can be unfaithful. Situations can be fluid and we think it's gonna be one way and it turns out horribly a different way.

But God is faithful. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. And God the Father is faithful to the promises that are built on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ and our dwelling in him, our being found in him.

So once we have squared ourself away, this is such a wonderful formula to avoid the kind of wars and fights that James is talking about. Because once we have looked to ourselves and got ourselves squared away, my desires have been quenched and suppressed. My conscience is now sprinkled.

My body is washed. I've acknowledged my own failures and God has cleansed me with the washing of water by the word and by his grace. I am now looking to my hope.

I look ahead. I'm looking to the future. I'm not trapped in circumstances and being subjective with eyes on things.

My hope and my confidence is that the promises of God will all be fulfilled because he is faithful. The fulfillment of those promises doesn't rest on me, doesn't rest on others. It rests on God and God is absolutely faithful.

Then in verse 24, now we can consider one another. So we consider one another in order to stir up strife, conflict, division, wars, fights. Is that what it says? Now that I've got my heart right and I have put myself in the context of God's plans and purposes for now and in the ages to come, now I consider one another.

And what is the nature of that consideration? It is an expression of love and the opportunity to do good works. What has James talked about? You get the idea that James and Paul must've had a conversation because in reality, they have learned these things from a common source, which is the Lord Jesus and God's Holy Spirit. It is the same truth.

Now, when we interact with one another, it is love and good works. I will show you my faith by my works, James says. My faith, my hope, my love, that triple play of Christian virtues, that threefold

manifestation of God's work in us and through us, faith, hope, and love.

Consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, healing, not division, peace, not wars and fights, contentment with what God has given me, not envy and jealousy over what somebody else may have in their experience. Love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. This is the opposite of wars and fights.

We assemble and we do it in love and the opportunity to share in good works. The greater grace of God creates this environment and fuels our hope that this is accomplishing something both now and in the ages to come. So when you think of James, flip back a few pages to Hebrews chapter 10, because what is the ultimate? We are able to draw near, hold fast our confession, and be blessed with grace to help in time of need.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll resume in James chapter four and move forward. We have two sections that begin with, come now, come now, you.

And there's the second person plural. Who is he talking to? We have pronoun trouble that James does not. We'll see it when we come back.