

James 4:1-10  
Becoming a Friend of God

**Introduction:** This is the second half of the center of the book. It emphasizes the practical demonstration of a lack of the wisdom referred to in 3:13-18.

**1) I need to understand what causes a lack of peace—4:1-6**

- a) The **reality** of a lack of peace in the congregation (cf. 3:18)—4:1
  - i) Rhetorical question: <sup>1</sup> *What causes* (larger, extended) *quarrels* [po,lemoj] *and what causes* (small, occasional) *fight* [mach,] *among you?*
    - (1) These are the opposite of the peace referred to in 3:18.
    - (2) Cf. with the teaching of 3:14-16.
    - (3) Alec Motyer writes: “James chooses the vocabulary of war to express controversies and quarrels, animosities and bad feeling among Christians, not because there is no other way of saying it, but because there is no other way of expressing the horror of it.” He goes on to say: “James’ language sounds so extravagant, so exaggerated in our ears, that we feel we must positively refuse to see our small-time disagreements and occasional squabbles as meriting such a description. But if we take this line we only show how imperfectly our thoughts have been brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”
  - ii) Answer (in the form of a question): *Is it not this, that your passions* [h`donh,] *are at war* [strateu,w] (cf. 1 Pet. 2:11) *within you?*
    - (1) These are MY passions, MY desires, from inside ME!
    - (2) As Dave Powlinson reminds us: you are not fighting because the other person is a blockhead; because your hormones are raging; because a demon of anger took up residence; because humans have an aggression gene hardwired in by our evolutionary history; because your father used to react in the same way; because core needs are not being met; or because you woke up on the wrong side of the bed and had a bad day at work. (*Good and Angry*, 128)
    - (3) They certainly do not arise from a passion for truth or godly wisdom. (Peter Davids)
  - iii) If frustration is the lordship of my desires, then frustrated desire is what is breeding the intense strife that is convulsing the community. (D. Moo)
- b) Understand the **motives** behind this lack of peace—4:2-3
  - i) My idolatry/coveting explained—4:2ab
    - (1) <sup>2</sup> *You desire* [evpique,w] *and do not have*,
      - (a) *so you murder* [foneu,w]. (Possibly hatred, as in Matt. 5:21-22)
      - (2) *You covet* [zhlo,w] *and cannot obtain* [evpitugca,nw],
        - (a) *so you fight* [ma,comai] *and quarrel* [poleme,w].
      - (3) We say “**My** will be done! **My** kingdom come!” Pretending to be God.
    - ii) My independence /self-reliance and self-gratification demonstrated —4:2c-3
      - (1) Prayerlessness: *You do not have*,

- (a) *because you do not ask* [aivte,w].
- (2) Improper prayer: <sup>3</sup> *You ask* [aivte,w] *and do not receive,*
  - (a) *because you ask* [aivte,w] *wrongly* [kakw/j], *to spend/squander it* [dapana,w] *on your passions* [h`donh,].
    - (i) Just like the prodigal son in Luke 15:14.
    - (b) God does not listen positively to prayers with evil motives. (P. Davids) (cf. Ps. 145:18)
    - (c) There is no such thing as an unanswered prayer.
- c) Understand the **need for grace** to establish peace—4:4-6
  - i) Spiritual infidelity identified: <sup>4</sup> *You adulterous people* [moicali,j]! (cf. “my brothers” 4:11)
    - (1) This was a common theme in the OT: Jer. 3:20
  - ii) Question # 1, about comprehension:
    - (1) Question: *Do you not know* [oi;da] *that friendship* [fili,a] *with the world is enmity* [e;cqra] *with God?*
    - (2) Response: **Therefore** *whoever wishes* [bou,lomai] *to be a friend* [fi,loj] *of the world makes himself an enemy* [e;cqroj] *of God.*
      - (a) Cf. with Abraham being the friend of God (2:23).
      - (b) The consequence is worse than ending up empty-handed; a rebellious Christian who has an illegitimate relationship with the world is at enmity with God! (J. Ron Blue)
      - (c) The world is the arena in which Christ’s lordship is not recognized. (A. Motyer)
    - (3) When believers behave in a worldly manner, they demonstrate that, at that point, their allegiance is to the world rather than to God. (D. Moo)
  - iii) Question # 2, a declaration about assumptions:
    - (1) Question: <sup>5</sup> *Or do you suppose* [doke,w] *it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?*
      - (a) Probably not a quote but a paraphrase or summary of Ex. 20:5.
      - (b) God longs to have our unadulterated focus. It is His right.
    - (2) Response: <sup>6</sup> *But he gives more/greater? grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes* [avntita,ssw] *the proud but gives grace to the humble* [tapeino,j].” (Prov. 3:34, LXX)
      - (a) Grace is greater than our sinful impulses and inabilities. Whatever pleasures the world offers, God’s grace is greater.
      - (b) This quotation looks backward to 4:1-5 and forward to 4:7-10.

## 2) I need to obey the urgent commands that will lead to peace—4:7-10

- a) **Submission:** <sup>7</sup> **Submit yourselves** [u`pota,ssw] **therefore** to God.
- b) **Repentance,** movement: **Resist** [avnqi,sthmi] *the devil, and he will flee from you.* <sup>8</sup> **Draw near** [evggi,zw] to God, and he will draw near [evggi,zw] to you.
  - i) The divided congregation needs healing, and only God can do this.

- c) **Purity** of actions and attitudes: *Cleanse* [kaqari,zw] *your hands, you sinners* [a`martwlo,j], and *purify* [a`gni,zw] *your hearts, you double-minded* [di,yucoj].
- d) **Inward repentance:** <sup>9</sup> *Be wretched* [talaipwre,w] and *mourn* [penqe,w] and *weep* [klai,w]. *Let your laughter be turned* [metatre,pw] *to mourning* [pe,nqoj] and (let) *your joy* (be turned) *to gloom* [kath,feia].
  - i) There are different kinds of laughter: the laughter of ridicule and mocking; the laughter of humor; and the laughter of happiness and joy.
  - ii) Do we grieve over our sin?
- e) **Submission:** <sup>10</sup> *Humble yourselves* [tapeino,w] (cf. 4:6) *before the Lord, and he will exalt* [u`yo,w] *you*.
  - i) The specific form of humbling is that of repentance for the sin of transferring affections from God to pleasures of the world. (Donald Burdick)

### 3) Things to remember:

- a) The human price (of attempting to live a self-oriented life as a believer) is the destruction of relationships; the spiritual price is a breach with God. (A. Motyer)
- b) Do I really understand the cause of a lack of peace in a congregation?
- c) Am I really willing to obey God's commands that will lead to peace?