**STUDIES FROM THE EPISTLE OF JAMES – PART 7**

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

**Date:** 25-02-2024

**Scripture:** James 4:1-12

I was reading Luke’s gospel yesterday, and id was struck by this incident of Jesus. It says that Jesus was walking and a funeral procession was passing by, and they were carrying the dead body of a boy. The coffin was being followed by his mother who was a widow. Jesus had compassion, and He stopped this procession. He told the boy to get up, and He restored the boy to his mother. I was reminded that we owe allegiance, that we belong to a God who is so compassionate. In a world where we see precious little of it, a dog-eat-dog kind of race, we have a God who deals with compassion. I don’t know where you are this morning, but maybe you just need a touch of that compassion, just to know that God cares, that He knows where you are. He knows your breaking points and He will sustain you through it. the God of compassion.

We are in the fourth chapter of James, and reading the first 12 verses. I want to point out that there are 3 sections in these 12 verses:

Section A: vs. 1-4

Section B: vs. 5-6

Section C: vs. 7-12

James 4:1-12

***4****What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?****2****You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.****3****You ask and do not receive, because you ask [*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+4%3A1-12&version=NASB1995#fen-NASB1995-30341c)*]with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.****4****You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

***5****Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?****6****But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

***7****Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.****8****Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.****9****Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.****10****Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*

***11****Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.****12****There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?*

Heavenly Father, speak to us, Lord, in these moments as we yield to the leading and guidance of Your Holy Spirit. And we ask this in the name of Your Son. Amen.

We’ve been looking at our faith and asking the question: How must my faith be? What kind of faith should I have in the world that I live in? We’ve looked at various parts of James’ epistle that showed us different behaviors that must be associated with Christian and disciple living. Today, we’re going to look at how our faith must stand against worldliness, how our faith must stand against the things of this world.

**SECTION A:**

Vs. 1-4. The pull to the world is actually rooted within us. James says that when we see things that are alluring in the world, they are alluring to us because there is something within our own members that are saying that that’s what I want. And so he says, “For us to be able to stand against the pull and the allurements of the world, we have to recognize the fertile soils in us that welcome these alliances. The problems among us are rooted within us. Instead of blaming outside factors or other people when we encounter problems, we must identify the forces at work on the inside.

v.1 “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” Specifically, when we are in conflict, we must examine our own lives and admit there’s a war going on within us. What does he mean by that? He’s talking about the two natures that are constantly in conflict. The old nature which used to have dominance in our lives; now we have a new nature that has been given to us by God as ones who follow His Son. Those two natures continue to war against each other. And he says that sometimes the things of the old nature pull the things of the world into our lives. so, there’s this war between the flesh and the spirit.

I had a Sunday school teacher who used to say that we have the flesh and we have the Spirit. Or we have the things of the evil one which is the world, the flesh, and Satan, and we have the Spirit of God. Every decision that we make comes down to us, and we choose. Do we go with the Spirit of God, or do we go with the things of the world? Then the decision that we make affects our behavior. James is saying: There’s a war, and you’ve got to recognize this war.

A newspaper once sent an inquiry to several famous authors asking this question: “What’s wrong with the world today?” One author quickly responded. He said, “I am. Yours truly, G.K. Chesterton.” We just need to look in the mirror and we will see it.

In these first 4 verses, James cautions us against 4 passions that we need to examine.

1. **Unfulfilled desires**. What are they? In v. 2 he says, “You lust and do not have, so you commit murder.” That’s a hard line to write – that lusting can lead to murder. What he’s talking is of a continuum – that lust, when it starts, might be something mild, but it can end up in murder. So many people on that continuum can get hurt because we lust.

We have the episode of David and Bathsheba as an example. It started with David lusting after Bathsheba, and it ended in murder. How many in his court would have seen him call Uriah the Hittite back, try to get him drunk, to go home, and wonder what kind of a king David was. What was he doing? How many would have wondered why he sent a message to Joab, including Joab who was the commander of all his forces, to send Uriah the Hittite to the front of the battle, and then withdraw all the forces so that Uriah the Hittite would be killed? Can you imagine Joab’s state of mind? Uriah was one of the 30 bravest men that David had. Lust – but it nailed so many people along the way, until it led to the death of Uriah the Hittite. So we need to make sure that we rein in the moment we recognize that there is lust.

Envy. This is also under unfulfilled desires. “You are envious and cannot obtain. Resentment brews, and that leads to fights and quarrels.” You shall not covet or be envious. This is the last of the Ten Commandments. But if you really look at it, when you break this particular command, it affects all the other nine. Murder, lying, dishonoring of parents, adultery – all become very susceptible to being violated.

Then also, people who wage war among themselves are often very unhappy. When there’s conflict, you can’t be happy because you’re always waiting. If you’re coveting or lusting most of the time, then you’re constantly waiting for something significant or something that will give you a break or a windfall that will alter your lives. You can never see the blessings. One will only complain about what one hasn’t received. Consequently, there’s always disagreements and quarrels.

If unsatisfied desires lead to resentment, then the key to avoiding conflict is contentment; to be content with what God has given to each one of us.

1. **Prayerlessness:** v. 2 says, “You don’t have because you don’t ask.” James makes a very simple statement in the latter part of v. 2, that we don’t have the things that we want because we haven’t asked. Which raises the question: Why don’t we ask? What prevents us from asking God, the God who’s omnipotent who has everything, Creator? What precents us from asking Him?

May I offer a couple of reasons:

* Pride and a sense of self-reliance. We don’t like to ask for help, mistakenly thinking that it’s a sign of weakness. How wrong we are, to think that we are weak in asking our Heavenly Father for things. Or we think: this is my situation, and I can fix it.
* Our idea of God is that He is not big enough to handle this particular problem. It’s too complicated, too big for Him.

So therefore, we don’t ask and we don’t get.

1. **Asking with wrong motives:** In v.3 he says, “You don’t receive also because you ask with wrong motives to spend it on your own passions.” The motive in asking God is wrong. The word ‘spend’ here has the whole idea of squandering and wasting. It’s akin to the prodigal son who took his inheritance and then went out and squandered in riotous living. And the word ‘passion’ really is the word for hedonism, which is the pursuit of pleasure or sensual self-indulgence at all cost. That everything I want I ask for myself. And so I ask for myself and for the things that I want and my desires. And basically, James is saying that the motive is wrong because we’re asking selfishly, and it shows that I’m trying to use God for my own purposes rather than seeking Him for His purposes.

Psalm 66:18 says *“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”*

That’s why, as we pray, we need to be careful of motives, we need to see what’s underlying, whether we are asking in accordance with God’s will for us.

1. **Friendship with the world:** “Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God and an adulteress.” That’s a harsh line, that we can be an enemy of God and committing adultery. Why is James saying that? He’s picking up a common image from the Old Testament that depicts God as husband and Israel as His wife.

Isaiah 54:5 says, *“For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name.”*

And then, speaking through the prophets, God accuses the people of committing adultery, spiritual adultery. In the book of Hosea, He instructs the prophet to marry a prostitute to demonstrate God’s faithfulness to us, even when we are unfaithful to Him.

In the New Testament, Ephesians, Paul has this picture of Christ as the bridegroom and the church as His bride. And when confronting unbelief, Jesus called out religious leaders in Matthew 12:39, and He said, “an evil and adulterous generation.”

I like the way the Living Bible puts this. It says, “You are like an unfaithful wife who loves her husband’s enemies. Don’t you realize that making friends with God’s enemies (that is the evil pleasures of this world) makes you an enemy of God?” I repeat: If your aim is to enjoy the evil pleasures of the unsaved world, you cannot also be a friend of God.

Romans 8:7 “The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God.”

Tozer, the wonderful writer of many, many beautiful books, says, “A whole new generation of Christians have come up believing that it is possible to accept Christ without forsaking the world.” Jesus said, “You can’t serve two masters.”

What is the world? We’ve been throwing that word around. “We have to be in the world, but not of the world” is something that we hear often. The world means the world systems that are in play. The philosophies that are underlying decision-making in governments, in families, in communities. It also has to do with social constructs that are in place today. What does society demand of you? What are you aligning with that has to do with the social construct that’s been put in place?

The question of identity is what we deal with today. Who am I? Gender? All of these are things of the world. Take life. the beginning of life and the end of life. Both are being threatened. Life that belongs to God is now trying to be determined by humanity. Then the sexual promiscuity that we see all around us. The things of the world that are so against the things of God that God says that when you engage with any of these things, it’s like committing adultery.

So we look at these four verses, and we can ask a couple of questions of ourselves.

* Do we have uncontrolled lusts that need to be bridled?
* Are we guilty of not asking for God’s help? Are we trying to be the man or the woman saying, “I’ve got it"?
* Are we praying with wrong motives?
* Are we seeking to find satisfaction apart from Christ?
* Do we find ourselves turning to the pleasure of the world instead of allowing God to satisfy us?

Just let these questions sink in. Even as we look at these things and realize that these are harsh words, there’s a beautiful little bridge that God puts in the middle when He talks about Himself.

**SECTION B:** 4:5-6

Unless we admit that we have a problem, we won’t be in a place to receive God’s promises.

He says in v.5-6 “Or do you think that the scripture speaks to no purpose? He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us. But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”

God has placed within us His Holy Spirit to watch over us with tender jealousy, as the Living Bible puts it. god the Father has placed His Holy Spirit in believers, and He longs for us to communicate with Him. We have the Spirit of God living in our hearts. The Spirit of God understands the mind of God as we see in Ephesians, and therefore, conversation needs to happen. God wants that communication between Him and His children. Then he says on Romans 8:16, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”, children who must talk to their Heavenly Father.

In the next verse (v.6) he says that humility, not pride, is the prerequisite to availing of God’s strength. Pride was, and is, Satan’s great sin, and it is one of his chief weapons against us. God wants us to be humble. Satan wants us to be proud. God wants us to depend on His grace, but Satan wants us to depend on ourselves. “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” In other words, God equates the friendship with the world and all its traits with pride. Friendship with the world is equivalent to pride.

So how do we fight that so that we can avail of this grace that is given to the humble? How do we go after humility? How can I become humble. You’ve often heard me say this line that puts humility in perspective. “Humility is a strange attribute; just when you think you have it, you’ve lost it.” So, what can we do? The opposite of humility is pride. So, we go after pride, and pride is easily recognizable. Go after things that make us proud, or recognize some of the characteristics of pride.

Andrew Murray once stated, “Pride is the beginning of every sin.” Thomas Watson said, “It is a spiritual drunkenness. It flies up like wine into the brain and intoxicates it. it is idolatry; a proud man is a self-worshiper.” And the Bible states, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

So we need to look at our own lives and see if there is any pride in me. I found a list of 12 signs that show that we could be having pride in us. As I read it, I would like to caution you. Don’t listen to these traits and think this is exactly what you see in your spouse. No! It is for you to look within and see if you find it in your life.

1. **Arrogance** – believing that we are superior or better than others in various aspects.
2. **Self-centeredness** – focusing excessively on our achievements, desires, and needs, and making that the end all.
3. **Boasting** – frequently talking about your accomplishments, possessions, or even family with the intention of seeking validation or admiration. You talk much more than you listen.
4. **Unwillingness to apologize** – refusing to admit mistakes or ask for forgiveness when wrong has been done. An unwillingness to ask for forgiveness or apologize.
5. **A judgmental attitude** – we quickly find fault with others’ personal lives or the way they are doing things, and at the same time, criticize and condemn others without showing any empathy or understanding of their situation or circumstances.
6. **A reluctance to serve** – we don’t want to serve others. Instead we always expect others to help you and your family. It is ‘serve us’ instead of ‘service’. And then, you’re offended if you’re asked to do something that’s “beneath your status”.
7. **Envy** – you’re resentful or jealous of other people’s successes, positions or abilities.
8. **Refusing advice** – you reject counsel or guidance from others because of a belief that your ideas are always superior. In other words, you do have a spirit, but not a teachable spirit.
9. **Seeking recognition** – you seek attention, praise, or recognition for your actions and deeds.
10. **Defensiveness** – when confronted with constructive criticism or feedback, you become defensive; can’t take constructive criticism.
11. **Ingratitude** – you take God’s blessings for granted and fail to acknowledge or express gratitude to those who support and bless you. You often have a victim mentality.
12. **Spiritual pride** – you feel spiritually superior to others. You sometimes consider yourself more righteous or holy than others.

At some point we all wander down this path. The key is to recognize that this path is not a good one, and then to quickly back away from it, ask God for forgiveness, and then get closer to Him. The problem comes when we stay in any one of these areas. So, a good question for us is whether there are any of these 12 traits that I can see myself continually in. Then, there’s a problem.

How do we then move on? How do we move away from the worldliness? How do we make sure that we avail of God’s strength and His grace?

**SECTION C:** vs. 7-12

James deals with these questions in this last section. He gives us prescriptions that we can do that will help us on this journey.

What are those prescriptions?

* Submit therefore to God. We are called to put ourselves, as it were, in a rank under God. Hudson Taylor once said, “God uses men and women who are weak and feeble enough to lean on Him.” So submit to God.
* Resist the devil. The bible says “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Paul says in Ephesians 6:11 “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” And this prescription involves a promise – when we fight, Satan will take flight. Keep this in mind. We are called to flee temptation, but we’re called to fight the devil – to stand firm against him, having the whole armor of God.
* Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Psalm 73:28 “But for me, it is good to be near to God.”

J. Oswald Chambers says, “Both scripture and experience teach that it is we, not God, who determine the degree of intimacy with Him. We are at this moment as close to God as we really choose to be.” We decide the intimacy that we want. God always extends full intimacy. We decide actually how intimate we want to get with God.

* Cleanse your hands. Is there some activity or behavior or habit that needs to stop? Something that you are doing that is going down a wrong path?

2 Corinthians 7:1 says, “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” We need to treat our body as the temple of God, which is what it is. And if it indeed is where God resides, then beloved, what kind of a temple are we offering Him? Cleanse your hands, he says.

* Purify your hearts. We must also engage in inward purification because, as we read, we are double-minded and distracted.

A good example of this is found in David’s prayer in Psalm 51:7, 10

***7*** *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;*

*Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

***10****Create in me a clean heart, O God,*

*And renew a right spirit within me.*

I just want to say this as we move to the end. There is so much of information that James is giving us. And it’s good information. Spend some time through this day, reading through this passage, and allow it to mine and plough through your life. And see what it brings us so that you can then draw near to God in intimacy.

Then he says a surprising thing in v. 9. “Be miserable and mourn and weep…” and we think: Wait a minute. Didn’t Jesus say ‘I came that you may have life and have it in abundance’? What is this about mourning? Turn my mourning into dancing? He’s talking into how we need to treat our sin. He said we must see our wretchedness and weep about it. That’s how we need to see our sin. “Then let laughter and joy be turned to mourning and gloom.” Instead of focusing on laughter, God calls us to lament over our sins. That’s how seriously God takes our sins. And if we know that God takes our sins so seriously, then when we do sin and repent, there must be such strong lament. How could I have gone there? Asking the question. Promising never to go there.

If you read Lamentations, it’s all about that. It’s the children of Israel seeing the destruction that has happened in Jerusalem. It’s actually 5 dirges, 5 poems on death that have been put together, all saying: “For 40 years we heard Jeremiah the prophet tell us to be careful. We didn’t listen. We are paying for it.” Look at their lament. “The joy of our hearts has ceased, our dancing has been turned to mourned, the crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us for we have sinned. That’s how we need to look at our sins.

Then he says next, “Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord.” before the Lord we stand before the Lord in humility. It’s the picture of standing before and facing God.

Isaiah 66:2 says, and this is God speaking, “But this is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word. A humble and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” That’s how heavy our sins are, the things that we do that are against God’s will and principles.

Then he ends this by saying, “Don’t speak against one another out of judgment.” To judge means to sift out and analyze evidence. Also, it’s something that happens in the present continuous tense. It’s continuously happening, that we look at things, judge, analyze.

There’s a little poem which is a kind of a satire on fellowship in churches, where it says:

Believe as I believe – no more, no less;

That I am right (and no one else) confess.

Feel as I feel, think only as I think;

Eat what I eat, and drink but what I drink.

Look as I look, do always as I do;

And then – and only then – I’ll fellowship with you.

Sometimes that’s what happens. Let God be the judge. When we stand in judgment of others, we’re really standing in the place of the ultimate judge. Look at the last part of v.11 – “But if you judge the law, you’re not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge…” When we judge others, we’re actually claiming to have a better standard of judgment than God does. Remember this truth. He is God, and we are not.

DeWitt Talmage once remarked, “Without exception, the people who have the greatest number of faults are themselves the most merciless in their criticism of others.” Isn’t that true? We have so many faults within us, then we are merciless in the way we criticize others.

I’m going to end with this story.

There was this guy who was explaining to his co-workers about how he was driving to work. He said, “I noticed a woman driving 65 miles per hour with her face up next to her rear-view mirror, putting on her eyeliner. I was shocked that she would do something like this. She scared me so much that I dropped my electric razor which knocked the donut out of my other hand. In all the confusion of trying to straighten out the car, using my knees to steer, it knocked my cell phone away from my ear, which caused it to fall into the coffee between my legs – all because of that crazy woman driver.” How we like to criticize when the fault lies here within us.

Romans 12:1 Paul points out the absurdity of judging others because we tend to do the same thing. He says, “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself because you, the judge, practice the very same thing.”

A lot of food for thought in these 12 verses. We need to look at it and ask ourselves: does the faith I have stand against the pull and the allurements of the world? Are there things in me that provide good soil for those things to land? And if so, do I need to do something about it? Are we involving God in the process? Are we availing of His strength and His grace in our lives?

I’m going to leave you with that this morning. While preparing this passage, I thought about the line “When you point your finger at someone, you have three more fingers pointing back at you.” I had a dozen pointing back at me. This is an ouch kind of a sermon, or Bible passage. But this is what we need to engage with. If you had to look at our behavior in our world and say: we need to be different, we need to be salt, we need to be light, we need to be like a city on a hill. Then all that James has spoken about, we need to take and think about it, ask the hard questions and then come out and say, “Lord, I want to draw as close as I can to you. I want to stay near to the flame because then I’m constantly being refined and purified.”

Heavenly Father, we pray that even as we have looked at Your Word, that we would allow the word to search our hearts, that Your Spirit would shine upon us and show us those things that we need to deal with. And Abba, continue to stir up the waters of our life and bring up all the muck that is in there to the top, and offer ourselves to you for cleansing. In Your name we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen.