



War & Peace

James 4:1-10



The Problem

❑ James has written about true wisdom, which results in peace and righteousness (3:13-18). However, James' readers are apparently experiencing disorder and every kind of evil (3:16). So James asks, "What is the source of wars and fights among you?" (James 4:1a, HCSB)

❑ Read James 4:1-3. James answers his first question with a second (and rhetorical) question: "Don't they come from the cravings¹ that are at war within you?" (4:1b, HCSB). The implied answer is "yes." James continues in verse 2, which may be translated as follows:

📖 "You desire but do not have, so you kill.² You covet³ but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God." (4:2, NIV)

1. Based on verses 1-2, how would you describe the problem? Why are they experiencing conflict and disorder rather than peace and righteousness?⁴

❑ James writes, "You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (2:2b-3, NIV).

2. What is wrong with their wanting and asking? What corrections are needed? (Consider James 1:5, 17-18)



Personal Reflection

- Consider the quarrels, conflicts and fights in *your* life. How many of them are caused by your own pride or self-centered desires?
- Do you "ask God?" What do you ask for? *Why* do you ask God for these things?

❑ Read James 4:4-5. James addresses his readers (or at least some of them) as "adulteresses" because of their unfaithfulness to God.⁵ Their unfaithfulness to God is characterized by their "friendship with the world" (4:4).⁶

¹ 'cravings' – 'desires' (NIV); 'passions' (ESV) – translated from Greek *hēdonē*, from which we get the word 'hedonism.' In this context, *hēdonē* denotes sinful, self-indulgent desire.

² 'kill' – 'murder' (HCSB, ESV) – some scholars believe this means actual murder, or perhaps the hypothetical eventuality of murder; but many believe it's figurative for hate (see 1 John 3:15; Matthew 5:21-22).

³ 'covet' – in this context, to desire something that belongs to another; to desire something (whether possessions or position) that is not rightfully yours; to envy.

⁴ Self-centered desires cause quarrels and fights. The first three verses of chapter 4 are a continuation of the last part of chapter 3, which talks about selfish ambition and envy. Verse 2 says, 'you covet,' which is related to 'envy.' And when the self-centered person does not get what he wants, he may become angry and hateful; resulting in quarrels, fighting, division, hurting others, neglecting the needs of others, and neglecting God Himself.

⁵ When God's people are unfaithful to Him, it is like a wife (or husband) committing adultery (Jeremiah 3:19-20; Matthew 12:39). God's 'jealousy' (4:5) refers to his pure and righteous zeal for protecting what is rightfully His and precious to Him. This contrasts with sinful envy or coveting (4:2) – selfishly yearning for what is *not* rightfully ours.

⁶ 'the world' – in this context, the fallen world and everything in it, including the system of humanity with all its ideas, attitudes, values, and behaviors that are opposed to God.

3. Why is “friendship with the world” equated with “hostility toward God?”
Why are “friends of the world” considered “enemies of God?”⁷



The Solution

- ☐ God’s does not tolerate unfaithfulness. His demands are great. However, there is good news.
4. Read James 4:6. What is the good news? To whom does it apply, and not apply?⁸

The Required Response

- ☐ Since “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble,” a particular response is required. Read James 4:7-10. In verses 7-10, James gives 10 imperatives (commands).
5. List these imperatives. What do they mean? How do we apply them?

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|------|---|-------|
| (1) | | v.7 |
| (2) | 9 | v. 7 |
| (3) | | v. 8 |
| (4) | 10 | v. 8 |
| (5) | 11 | v. 8 |
| (6) | Be miserable ¹² | v. 9 |
| (7) | mourn | v. 9 |
| (8) | weep | v. 9 |
| (9) | Change your laughter to sorrow and your joy to sorrow ¹³ | v. 9 |
| (10) | | v. 10 |



Reflection/Application

- When others look at your life, do they see “friendship with the world” or devotion to God?
- Reflect on questions 4 and 5 above. What is needed in your life? What do you need to do?
- If you have questions or struggles, or need encouragement, talk to a mature Christian friend.

⁷ Since ‘the world’ is opposed to God, *we* oppose God when we align ourselves with the world. As Christians, we should go into the world and extend love and friendship to worldly people, but we shouldn’t allow ‘the world’ to influence us to be worldly. Jesus said his disciples are *in* the world but are not *of* the world (John 17:11-19). Rather than hostility toward God, we need peace with God, which is realized only through faith in Jesus Christ.

⁸ God graciously helps those who are humble – that is, those who know they need His direction, and know that God is the only One who can help. This is good news for the humble, but it’s *not* good news for the proud – that is, those who pursue their own interests, neglecting or denying their need for God’s direction and help.

⁹ ‘resist’ – stand against. Real spiritual forces oppose us. See 1 Peter 5:8-9 and Ephesians 6:10-18.

¹⁰ ‘Cleanse your hands’ refers to a change in outward behavior (forsaking sinful behavior) by God’s grace.

¹¹ ‘Purify you hearts’ refers to a change in attitude by God’s grace. Don’t be double-minded, but instead ‘Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind’ (Matthew 22:37).

¹² When we realize our sin against God, we should feel sorrow, leading to repentance – turning away from sin to God. ‘Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret’ (2 Corinthians 7:10a, NIV).

¹³ It’s good to be joyful. The Bible says, ‘Rejoice *in the Lord* always. I will say it again: Rejoice!’ (Phil. 4:4, *italics added*). But if we laugh in a prideful, self-satisfied way, with a casual attitude toward sin, it’s bad (Luke 6:25b).