

Practical Day-To-Day Christianity

[As shown in the letter written by James]

Part 4

James 4:1-3 [NIV] *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. 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.”*

Conflicts and disputes among believers are always harmful.

Too often the cause of these quarrels are sought in external circumstances, when internal lusts are the true origin.

James gets to the root cause of the problem; he asks the very basic question, what is our aim in life?

Is our aim to submit to the Will of God, or to gratify our own desires for the pleasures of this society?

The warning James is inspired to give is that, if pleasure is the policy of life, then nothing but strife, hatred and division can possibly follow.

The feverish search for pleasure will cause us to resent those who do have a pleasure full life and such resentment is bound to break out into hostility, as we aggressively grab what we want even if it causes others harm.

When we look at human society we so often see a seething mass of competitive, hatred and strife that results in stress and a lack of loving relationships.

Luke 8:14 [NIV] *“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are **choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures**, and they do not mature.”*

The message that God brought to this world through Jesus Christ, represented here by the seed, has no chance of maturing the person who allows the cares, riches and pleasures of this society to be first in their life, instead of seeking God’s Will for their life.

Titus 3:3 [NIV] *“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and **enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures**. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”*

Before we accepted the call of God and acted on the good news that Jesus Christ brought, all of us were slaves to the lusts and pleasures of life.

Titus 3:4-6 [NIV] *“But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, **he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour,**”*

Until we allow the Holy Spirit to give us a new birth and make our minds new we will soon revert to our former way of life.

The ultimate choice in life lies between pleasing ourselves or pleasing God.

Human beings will do anything, however hurtful, to eliminate a rival for wealth, prestige, power or the person they have a burning desire to possess for personal pleasure.

To serve the desire for pleasure is essentially selfish; to obey and serve the Will of God is essentially selfless.

The craving for pleasure can drive people to shameful deeds. This desire for pleasure can drive us to envy, jealousy, enmity and even to murder.

2 Samuel 11:1-5 [NIV] *“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. **One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”**”*

Here is an example of a man who desired to serve God but was overcome by the desire for physical pleasure.

2 Samuel 11:6-9 [NIV] *“So David sent this word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then **David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.”** So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. **But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house.”***

David tried several times to persuade Bathsheba’s husband to sleep with his wife so people would assume the baby be his, but this did not work.

2 Samuel 11:14-17 [NIV] *“In the morning **David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, “Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die.”** So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David’s army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.”*

This desire for personal pleasure ended in a planned murder.

2 Samuel 12:1-10 [NIV] *“**The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. “Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”** David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. **Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.”**”*

Death and destruction were the ultimate outcome of this desire for personal pleasure.

2 Samuel 12:13 [NIV] *“Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.”*

David realised what this desire for pleasure is, a sin against God’s love.

David reveals his remorse and repentance in one of the psalms that he wrote.

Psalms 51:1-12 [NIV] *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*

When we sin against God, whatever may have been the cause and outcome, we can use this psalm as a guide to our prayers to God as we seek His mercy.

Every crime and sin in this world comes from desire, which was at first only a thought in our mind but when nourished long enough, becomes in the end an action.

Because King David repented of these sins of lust and murder, God mercifully forgave him, for **no** sin is too great to be forgiven.

While God will forgive us, He does not always erase the natural consequences of our sin.

If we read the account of King David’s life after these forgiven sins it was a list of tragedies, pain and suffering for his family.

Note, that although the sin was with Bathsheba and her husband and child both died, ultimately the sin was against God, as it was rebellion against God’s way of living that is based on sacrificial love.

The example of King David’s desire for personal pleasure shows us that if we make our own desires the main object in life we separate ourselves from our fellow human beings and God our Creator and Heavenly Father.

James 4:4 [NIV] *“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”*

This reference is **not** to physical adultery but to spiritual adultery.

This concept of spiritual adultery is based on the Old Testament idea that God was the husband of Israel and Israel was His bride.

Isaiah 54:5 [NIV] *“For your Maker is your husband — the LORD Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.”*

Jeremiah 3:20 [NIV] *“But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel,” declares the LORD.”*

This relationship explains why God often referred to the spiritual infidelity of Israel in terms of physical adultery.

Deuteronomy 31:16 [NIV] *“And the LORD said to Moses: “You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them.”*”

The covenant that God made with Israel was a type of marriage covenant.

Exodus 34:15-16 [NIV] *“Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.”*

To make offerings to foreign gods was likened by God to prostitution.

Hosea 9:1 [NIV] *“Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing-floor.”*

A threshing floor was a flat area often on the top of a hill to seek additional wind to separate chaff from the grain. Often men would stay overnight on the threshing floor to protect the grain harvested.

Prostitutes would take advantage of the men being away from their wives and visit these hilltop threshing floors to ply their trade.

Eventually such places became sites used to sacrifice to false gods.

This whole picture came into Christian thought in the conception of the church becoming the bride of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:7-9 [NIV] *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”*

The marriage of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, to the saints, the Christian church.

2 Corinthians 11:1-2 [NIV] *“I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”*

Paul’s desire was to prepare the church to be a pure virgin for Christ to marry.

Ephesians 5:24-32 [NIV] *“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.”*

A beautiful picture of the intimate, self-sacrificing relationship of Jesus Christ and His future bride the church.

This means that to disobey God is like breaking the marriage vow we have with Jesus Christ.

It means that all sin is a sin against the love that God has for us.

It means that our relationship with God is not a distant relationship of king and subject, nor master and slave, but is like the intimate relationship of husband and wife.

It means that sin is infidelity to love, and when we sin we break God's loving heart.

In the same way the heart of one partner in a marriage is broken when the other callously and deliberately deserts him or her.

Any young Christians are also hurt when a mature long-time Christian sins, just as children are hurt by a broken marriage.

"Friendship with the world," [James 4:4].

We have already seen that the New Testament uses the Greek word "kosmos" in the sense of a world apart from God's influence.

A society that disregards God and resents His standards as expressed in His Word, the Christian Bible.

A society that is intent on going its own way and rejects God's way of life.

John 14:6 [NIV] "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."

Most of society rejects Jesus Christ who shows us a way of life we should live, who tells us the truth as why we were created as human beings, and shows us the only way we can receive eternal life.

Romans 8:5-8 [New Jerusalem Bible] "Those who are living by their natural inclinations have their minds on the things human nature desires; those who live in the spirit have their minds on spiritual things. Human nature has nothing to look forward to but death, while the spirit looks forward to life and peace. Because the outlook of disordered human nature is opposed to God, since it does not submit to God's Law [of unconditional love], and indeed it cannot. Those who live by their natural inclinations can never be pleasing to God."

Salvation from the influence of our human nature, only comes from our allowing the Holy Spirit to work with us, in us and eventually through us, that others may come to know the way to salvation.

Romans 8:9-11 [New Jerusalem Bible] "But you however, live not by your natural inclinations but by the spirit [human spirit placed in us by God], since the spirit [Holy Spirit] of God has made a home in you. Indeed, anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ [the Holy Spirit] does not belong to Him. But when Christ is in you [by the active indwelling of the Holy Spirit] the body is dead because of sin but the spirit [human spirit placed in us by God] is alive because you have been justified [by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ]. And if the spirit [Holy Spirit] of Him [God] who raised Jesus [the Son of Man] from the dead has made His home in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through His [God's] spirit living in you."

The comments in brackets have been added to help understand exactly what is being said in this promise scripture.

As a result of the indwelling Holy Spirit or the lack of the indwelling Holy Spirit, certain things should or will occur in our lives.

Romans 8:12-13 [New Jerusalem Bible] "So then, my brothers we have no obligation to human nature to be dominated by it. If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die [eternally]; but if by the spirit [indwelling Holy Spirit] you put to death the habits originating in the body, you will have [right now] life [eternal]."

Matthew 6:24 [NIV] *“No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”*

Jesus contrasted heavenly values with earthly values when He explained that our first loyalty should be to those things that do not fade, cannot be stolen or used up, and never wear out. **We should not be so fascinated with our possessions that they possess us.**

This may mean that we have to do some cutting back if our possessions are becoming too important to us.

James 4:5-6 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Anyone who chooses the world for a friend is constituted an enemy of God. Can you not see the point of the saying in scripture, ‘The longing of the Spirit He sent to dwell in us is a jealous longing?’ But He has given us an even greater grace, as scripture says God opposes the proud but He accords His favour to the humble.”*

Many scriptures indicate God as a jealous god, the great love He has for us is portrayed but the sacrificial love that a husband has for his wife, not wanting the wife to share that intimate love with any other man.

When God places His Holy Spirit in us it makes us desire what He desires, and we humbly submit to His Will.

When the Holy Spirit fills our life, we see that this world’s seductive attractions are only cheap substitutes for what God has to offer.

The question inevitably comes into our mind, if God is such a jealous lover, how can anyone give the devotion which God demands?

James answers this by confirming that God will give to us all the grace we need to fulfil our role, for it is only grace that can enable us to respond to this love of God.

But remember we cannot receive grace from God until we realise our need for grace and call out to God for grace with humble pleading.

Why is it that pride cuts us off from the grace of God?

The Greek word translated “pride” is “*huperephanos*” that means showing oneself above others, a sense of arrogance or disdain.

Such an attitude does three major things to us:

1 **We do not know our real need**, we so admire ourselves and what we have accomplished in life that we feel very self-sufficient.

Revelation 3:17 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“You say to yourself, I am rich, I have made a fortune and have everything I want, never realising that you are wretchedly and pitifully poor, blind and naked.”*

These people, who were part of the Christian church in Laodicea, were totally blind to their spiritual condition.

2 **We cherish our believed independence.**

Romans 14:7-8 [NIV] *“For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”*

Our original birth, our present life, and our future life are all in the hands of God.

Nor are we independent of other people.

3 Pride blinds us to our own sins, and therefore we cannot receive help or forgiveness.

1 John 1:9-10 [NIV] *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”*

It takes humility on our part to confess our sins, but they will only be forgiven after confessing them.

The fact it says “sins” means we have to be specific not general in our confession.

James 4:7-8 [NIV] *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”*

This humility is **not** a cringing attitude of mind, for a Christian knows two things:

1 If we take a resolute stand against the devil, the devil is ultimately a coward.

1 John 4:4 [NIV] *“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because **the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.**”*

The Holy Spirit in us is far greater than the spirit in the world, that is Satan.

2 We all as spirit-filled Christians have direct access to God’s throne in prayer.

Hebrews 4:14-16 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Because of these two facts the humility we have as Christians also gives us courage to face anything that may happen to us in life.

There are also two things we need to do ourselves:

“Wash your hands”

What is James saying by this statement?

Originally it denoted nothing more than the ceremonial, the washing with water before approaching God in worship.

But this ceremonial washing gradually became more than outward washing.

Psalms 26:6 [NIV] *“I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O LORD,”*

Refers to moral purity.

Isaiah 1:16 [NIV] *“wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong,”*

A washing equated with ceasing to do evil.

1 Timothy 2:8 [NIV] *“I want men everywhere to **lift up holy hands** in prayer, without anger or disputing.”*

Holy hands, not just washed in a ritual ceremony.

Matthew 5:8 [NIV] *“Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they will see God.”*

We have to be clean inwardly for God to reveal Himself to us.

“*Double minded*” – literally two spirited, **the human spirit** that drives our humanity and the Holy Spirit that leads us to God. We cannot mix the two as one leads us only to death and the other, **the Holy Spirit**, is our path to eternal life.

James 4:9-10 [NIV] *“Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”*

“*Grieve, mourn and wail.*” James is referring to the first step in a Christian life, being convicted of our sin and the remorse we feel and the change of direction we take in life.

This includes a deep meaningful sorrow for what we have done and what we were.

“*Change your laughter to mourning and your joy [happiness] to gloom.*”

To understand what is being said in this statement we need to know the difference between happiness and godly joy.

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,”*

Joy is a fruit of being in the presence of God and is **not** dependant on physical circumstances, and as it is of the Spirit, it is eternal.

Happiness is in the physical realm and is dependent on circumstances therefore is temporary.

Philippians 4:11 [NIV] *“I am not saying this because I am in need, for **I have learned to be content** whatever the circumstances.”*

Contentment and the peace of mind that comes with it are something we learn by being in God’s presence.

1 Timothy 6:6 [NIV] *“But godliness with **contentment is great gain.**”*

Contentment is a great blessing. Why?

1 Timothy 6:7-10 [NIV] *“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. **People who want to get rich fall into temptation** and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*

Money does **not** bring happiness and certainly **not** inner joy for the desire for more can lead us away from a relationship with our Creator God.

“*Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.*”

Humbling ourselves means recognising that our true worth is what God does in and through us, inspite of our shortcomings.

Only when we realise our own ignorance can we be prompted to ask God for guidance.

Only when we realise our own sins will we realise our need of a Saviour and forgiveness from God.

In life there is one basic sin that is the basis of all other sins, that is the sin of forgetting that we are the creation of the Creator God.

James 4:11-12 [NIV] *“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. **There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbour?**”*

When we fail to love we are breaking the law of God, **not** expressing His nature which is all based on sacrificial love.

1 John 4:8 [NIV] *“Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**”*

The Greek word is “*agapé*” – a spontaneous love irrespective of the rights or response of the person receiving that love.

A sacrificial love where the selfish desires are sacrificed in order to show this love to others.

We need to examine our actions in the light of such love.

Do we build people up or put them down?

When we have the opportunity to criticise someone, remember God’s Law of love and say something good about them instead.

Saying something beneficial to others will cure our finding fault and increase our ability to obey God’s Law of love.

Only God knows all the circumstances that cause people to respond the way they do, [**Psalms 139:1-16**].

When we judge other people we are infringing the prerogative of God, who is the only one who knows what is in the mind of a person.

Right judgement belongs to God and God alone, for it is God alone who is able to save or destroy.

Only God has the power to resurrect a person back to life from the dead into a time when they can learn to love like God, free from the deadly influence of Satan.

James 4:13-16 [NIV] *“Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, **you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.** What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.”*

Jews were the great traders of the ancient world, and in many ways the ancient world gave them every opportunity to make a fortune.

Humans can plan for the future, but really the future of every person is in the hands and will of God their Creator and sustainer.

Proverbs 27:1 [NIV] *“**Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.**”*

This is true for every human being.

Luke 12:16-21 [NIV] *“And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”“ “But **God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.”***

The uncertainty of life is not a cause either for fear or inaction, but it is a reason for realising and accepting our complete dependence on our Creator God.

James 4:17 [NIV] *“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.”*

With such uncertainty of tomorrow it is wise to take every opportunity that today brings us to do good for we may not have a chance tomorrow.

The Greek word translated “sin” is “*hamartia*” meaning “*to miss the mark aimed for*” or “*to wander from the right path.*”

We tend to think that sin is only doing wrong, but James reminds us that it is also sinful not to do what is right.

It is a sin to lie, but it can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it.

It is a sin to speak evil of someone, but it is also a sin to avoid them when we know they need our friendship.

We should always be willing to help others as the Holy Spirit guides us or prompts us to render a service even if it involves a sacrifice on our part.

James 1:27 [NIV] *“**Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.**”*

True religion involves seeking to keep our lives pure but also be willing to give practical help when needed.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, **to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.**”*

True worship involves sacrifice on our part of time and substance to help others in need physically but also spiritually.