

An In-Depth Study of the Letter of James

[Part 6]

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.**”*

James is asking us a very basic question about human relationships.

Why do humans quarrel and fight one another?

When we look at human society today or read about previous generations we see too often a seething mass of competitive hatred and strife.

James presents us with a very simple but also very true answer to this question of human strife.

It all depends on our aim in life.

Is our aim in life to submit to the Will of God and in so doing find peace of mind?

John 14:27 [NIV] *“Peace I leave with you; **my peace I give you.** I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

Jesus Christ offered peace of mind, something this world’s society can never offer.

How were we to receive this peace of mind and a lack of inter-human strife?

John 14:26 [NIV] *“But the Counsellor, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you all things** and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

Through our indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our human spirit.

What is our part in obtaining this peaceful life?

Luke 11:11-13 [NIV] *“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**”*

We have to ask God to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

Acts 5:32 [NIV] *“We are witnesses of these things, and so is **the Holy Spirit**, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

We obey what the Holy Spirit guides us to think and do.

Galatians 5:24-26 [NIV] *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.** Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”*

Walk behind the Holy Spirit as He leads us in a new life, one devoted to serving our Creator God by serving other human beings.

Galatians 5:22-23 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

Note that one of the “fruits” of this union with the Holy Spirit is “*peace*.”

This is exactly what James is telling us to do when he refers to our not asking God for what we need.

James then tells us why we still quarrel and fight among ourselves even if we have a loose relationship with God.

We accept there must be a God and that humans can receive blessings in answer to prayers made to Him.

Yet these prayers are **not** answered. Why?

We are asking with the wrong selfish motive in mind.

We have still remained in this world’s culture dominated by personal pleasures.

As far as our thoughts and desires are concerned they centre on what happens to us in this life.

Such an attitude of mind is totally alien to a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:1-5 [NIV] *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:”*

Only with this non-selfish attitude of mind and motivation will God begin to answer our prayers.

John 14:12-14 [NIV] *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. **And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.**”*

This is what Jesus Christ meant when He told His disciples to pray “*in my name*.”

Our prayers should be focussed on bringing benefits to other humans in need, that will in the end cause them to glorify God by seeking to have a relationship with Him.

If personal pleasure is the aim in life, then strife, hatred and division will follow.

The New Testament is very clear that an overpowering desire for pleasure that this world can offer, will always be a threatening danger to our spiritual growth.

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.**”*

Cares, riches and pleasures in this life will combine to choke out of our life the gospel message depicted by the seed being sown.

No spiritual germination and growth will make void our chance for being given eternal life at this time by being part of the “*firstfruits*.”

Titus 3:3-8 [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. 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, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.** This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

For a true Christian this focus on personal pleasures is a thing of the past.

The ultimate choice in this human life lies between pleasing oneself and pleasing our Creator God.

We seek to please our Creator God in a world where a human’s first aim is to please themselves.

A world that with this prevalent aim and motivation has become a battleground of savagery and division.

The true aim of our prayers to our Creator God should be “*Thy will be done*” [Matthew 6:9-10] **not** “*my desires be satisfied.*”

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.**”

The reference to adultery is **not** that of physical adultery but “*spiritual adultery.*”

This is based on the conception that is found in both Old and New Testaments that God is the husband of His people and they are 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.**”

The Creator of Israel as His special people, depicted as bride to God their husband.

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.”

Again God refers to Israel as His wife unfaithful to her Husband the Creator God.

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.**”

Again spiritual infidelity is expressed 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.”**”

God forewarned Moses that the day would come when the people he was leading would “*prostitute themselves to foreign gods*” and break the marriage covenant he had made with them.

This same conception of the Christian church being the bride of Christ reflects the relationship the Creator God had with Israel.

One reason Jesus Christ had to die on the cross was to end this marriage relationship with Israel, for He was the God who entered into that marriage contract. [1 Corinthians 10:1-4]

Matthew 16:4 [NIV] *“A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.”*

Jesus Christ referred to His generation of human beings as adulterous.

Mark 8:38 [NIV] *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in **this adulterous and sinful generation**, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*

Again adultery and sin are linked.

The ultimate picture of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the true Christian church is one of a marriage relationship.

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 aim was to prepare the church at Corinth to be virginally pure ready to be married to Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:24-28 [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.”*

Physical marriage is presented as a training ground for the eventual marriage of the Church to Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:7-8 [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.**)”*

It is at Christ’s return to rule this earth that the marriage will take place between Jesus Christ [the Lamb of God] and the resurrected “*firstfruits*” of the Christian church.

Revelation 21:9 [NIV] *“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, **“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”**”*

The bride of the Lamb revealed, dwelling in the new Jerusalem created in heaven and now down on earth. [**Revelation 21:1-5**]

Revelation 22:17 [NIV] *“**The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”** And let him who hears say, **“Come!”** Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”*

It is Jesus Christ and His bride who together invite to drink of the water that gives us knowledge of how to receive from the Creator God eternal life, the Christian Bible.

This means that to disobey God is like the breaking of a marriage vow, we are to enter into with the Creator God.

This means that all sin is sin against love, that binds our future marriage to Jesus Christ.

This means that our relationship with Jesus Christ is ultimately **not** to be that of king and subject, or master and slave, but that intimate relationship of husband and wife.

Sin is infidelity, for it is against the One we are betrothed to marry, Jesus Christ.

“Friendship with the world” – we have already seen in this study of the letter of James that the world, the Greek word *“kosmos”* refers mainly to the world that is without the knowledge of or a relationship with the Creator God.

James is **not** making this hard statement out of hatred and contempt for the world, but out of love for those whom God is calling out of this world to become the *“firstfruits”* of His spiritual creation.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

God loves the humans in the world but **not** the rebellion they have towards that unconditional love.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

We are **not** to conform to that rebellious nature towards our Creator God that the vast majority of humans express.

Two other New Testament passages illustrate what James is saying.

Romans 8:5-8 [NIV] *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”*

If we insist on assessing everything by human standards, that is those whose interests are purely human interests, we are at variance with the Creator God.

2 Timothy 4:10 [NIV] *“for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.”*

Demas lost sight of what was being offered him by becoming and remaining a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The pull of this world’s culture of personal pleasure was too great for Demas to resist.

If material things are what we dedicate our life to we cannot dedicate our life to Jesus Christ.

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.”*

If we love money and what it can buy in physical possessions then we cannot also love our Creator God.

There are two attitudes we can have towards riches and possessions.

We can be so dedicated to them, so immersed in them, that they become our master.

Or we can use these riches and possessions to serve other human beings and so please our Creator God.

John 15:13-15 [NIV] *“Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does*

not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Riches and possessions then become our servant and we the master, and also a friend of Jesus Christ.

In this way we can help prepare our fellow humans and ourselves to receive the gift of eternal life.

We either use this world or are used by this world.

James 4:5 [NIV] *"Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?"*

There are two possible meanings expressed in this verse, that are compatible with each other.

If the spirit referred to is the human spirit that He has given to all humans that gives us intellect [**Job 32:8**], God jealously yearns for the full devotion of this intellect and the ability it gives us to choose Him as our guide or the god of this world, Satan.

If the spirit referred to is the Holy Spirit that God has given us to dwell in us and produce His own character in us, God again jealously yearns for us to follow His lead.

God throughout scripture presents Himself as a jealous lover of humanity, who will not tolerate any rival and will not share the human heart with any other love.

Exodus 20:4-5 [NIV] *"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,"*

We are commanded not to worship idols, for that detracts us from the Creator God who has such love for us, longing to bring us to a position where He can offer us the gift of eternal life.

Exodus 34:14 [NIV] *"Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."*

The Creator God does **not** want to share us with other non-gods.

2 Corinthians 11:2 [NIV] *"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 reflects on the jealousy that the Creator God has for all whom He has created and sustains.

Remember that words in both Hebrew and Greek that are translated "jealousy" also mean zeal or solicitude.

The two Greek words used in this verse translated "jealous" is "zēlōs" – a great zeal for our welfare, and "jealousy" is "ēpiphthēō" – to dote upon, intensely grave possession, long for.

James 4:6 [NIV] *"But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

A person **cannot** receive grace from God **until** they realise that they need grace and cry out to God to receive it from Him.

James quotes **Proverbs 3:34** which is also quoted by Peter in **1 Peter 5:5**.

What then is this pride that God opposes and will then not extend His grace?

The Greek word is “*hupēřēphanos*” meaning to consider yourselves to be above other people and to treat others with contempt.

Such pride shuts us off from our Creator God for three reasons:

- a) Such a person does **not** know their own need of God. They are very self-sufficient in their attitude to life.
- b) Such a person cherishes their supposed independence, **not** feeling beholden to any other person including God.
- c) Such a person does **not** recognise their own sins.

They are so occupied with what they believe is their person goodness, they never realise that such a proud attitude is in itself a sin against a holy righteous Creator God.

Thus blinding themselves to their real relationship with God. [see **Isaiah 64:6**]

James 4:7 [NIV] “*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*”

The humility for which James pleads is **not** a cringing attitude of mind but courageous.

Such a humble person knows –

If we take a resolute stand against the devil he will ultimately show what a coward he is.

1 Peter 5:8-9 [NIV] “*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **Resist him, standing firm in the faith**, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*”

Resisting Satan by standing firm in the promises that God has made through Jesus Christ will overcome his attack on us.

This vulnerability of Satan is shown in the great example of Jesus when attacked by Satan. [read **Matthew 4:1-11**]

We resist and stand firm against the attacks of Satan by being clad in the spiritual armour that God provides for every Christian, [**Ephesians 6:13**].

James 4:8 [NIV] “*Come near to God and he will come near to you. **Wash your hands**, you sinners, and purify your hearts, **you double-minded.***”

One of the greatest privileges every Christian has is direct access to God the Father through our High Priest Jesus Christ the Son of God but also the physical Son of Man.

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.***”

Every Christian knows that as we approach God the Father through Jesus Christ, He is also seeking to come into our lives in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

This is how our humility can give us dauntless courage to face whatever trial or problem we have to face in our lives.

There are, as James reminds us, certain conditions to our experiencing this intimate relationship with our Creator God.

“Wash your hands” – originally this denoted nothing more than ceremonial cleansing [read **Exodus 30:19-21; Leviticus 16:4**] practised by orthodox Jews [**Mark 7:3**] but it became to be seen as to mean moral purity.

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

Innocent of immorality.

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

Holy hands would be hands not polluted with sin.

James links this washing of our hands with having a pure heart and not being double-minded.

The Greek word translated *“double minded”* is *“dipsuchōs”* literally means two-spirited, allowing ourselves to be influenced by Holy Spirit but also by the powerful spirit Satan.

James 4:9 [King James] *“Be **afflicted**, and **mourn**, and **weep**: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.”*

We must **not** read into this passage that which James did not mean.

James is **not** denying the joy of the Christian life, joy is one of the *“fruits”* of the Holy Spirit. [**Galatians 5:22**]

What James is describing is the beginning of the Christian life, that demands three things.

a) **Affliction** – the Greek word used is *“talaipōrēō”* meaning voluntary abstinence, **not** to make luxury and comfort the standards by which we judge life.

Philippians 4:12 [NIV] *“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. **I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**”*

Paul, after his conversion, had learnt how to be content in whatever situation he found himself in.

The many trials Paul faced, he could have avoided if he had given up the task God had given to him.

b) **Mourn** – James is describing the first step in a Christian life, when we are confronted with our sins by God.

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 [NIV] *“**Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.**”*

A godly sorrow that leads us to make all the necessary changes in our lives.

Matthew 5:4 [NIV] *“**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**”*

This is why Jesus Christ tells His disciples that mourning is a blessing.

James is demanding that these self-satisfied, easy-going, luxury-living, complacent hearers should confront themselves with their sins and be ashamed, grief-stricken and afraid.

Only then could they reach out for God's grace and then move on to the joy of forgiveness.

c) **Weep** – up to the time of conversion most people are self-centred and selfish, **unaware of the tears, sorrows and grief in other human beings.**

They needed the armour of their own pleasures and comfort to be pierced, so that they can develop a new sensitiveness to the needs of other human beings, as well as their own “*spiritual*” needs.

Ezekiel 9:4 [King James] *“And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.”*

God put a mark of personal protection on all who were sighing and weeping for all sins in the world that were bringing pain and suffering to so many.

Luke 13:34 [NIV] *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”*

Jesus wept over the very people who were going to cry out for His crucifixion.

John 11:35 [NIV] *“Jesus wept.”*

When we read this expression of emotion in Jesus Christ in context we find it was because of their lack of belief in the promises He had made.

We too as Christians need to weep for all the pain and suffering in this world, praying for the soon-coming of Jesus Christ to bring about a new world where love is the motivation within all humans not selfishness and hatred.

Revelation 21:1-4 [NIV] *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. **There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**”*

Revelation 22:7, 12-15 [NIV] *“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” ... “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. **“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.** Outside are the dogs, those who practise magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practises falsehood.”*