

Week Four: Read James Chapter 4:1-17

I. Does Not Befriend the World (4:1–6)

A. The Source of Wars and Fights (4:1–3)

- Where do wars and fights among you come from?
- They come from your desires for pleasure that wage war in your members.
- You lust and do not have; you murder and covet and cannot obtain; you fight and wage war.
- You do not have because you do not ask.
- You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, to spend it on your pleasures.

B. Friendship with the World Is Enmity with God (4:4–6)

- You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
- Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
- Do you suppose the Scripture speaks in vain?
- God yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us.
- But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

II. Draws Near to God (4:7–17)

A. By Submitting to God’s Authority (4:7–12)

- Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
- Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.
- Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
- Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
- Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.
- Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.
- The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.
- But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.
- There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, He who is able to save and to destroy.
- But who are you to judge your neighbor?

B. By Submitting to God's Will (4:13–17)

- Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” —
- Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.
- Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”
- As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.
- So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

4:1–3 When James asks, “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” one can only imagine the finger-pointing and accusations if his recipients had been allowed to respond. It’s not other people or unjust situations that are causing a quarrel; it’s evil desires in our own hearts. We must look first within ourselves for the cause of the strife around us. A covetous heart inevitably demonstrates itself through quarreling and fighting (v. 2). What does James mean, though, by accusing the community of killing because of unfulfilled desires (v. 2)? Actual murder does not fit the context. Perhaps James is drawing on the language of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, where hateful speech and actions are associated with murder ([Mt 5:21–22](#); cf. [1Jn 3:15](#)).

4:4–10 James denounces some of his recipients as “adulterous people.” In the Old Testament, Israel was the metaphorical wife of the God of Israel, and when she was unfaithful, she was called an “adulteress” ([Isa 54:5](#); [Jer 2:2](#); [Eze 16:32](#); cf. [Rev 21:9](#)). In choosing this language, James continues to affirm his addressees (or some among them) as the people of God—but a people needing firm correction for having violated their most sacrosanct and intimate relationship. In accusing these early believers of “friendship with the world” ([Jas 4:4](#)), James means that some among the congregation are adopting sinful values and locking hands with the world in its active rebellion against God. God demands loyalty from his people ([Dt 6:24](#); [Jos 24:15](#); [Heb 12:29](#)). Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other” ([Mt 6:24](#)). God’s holy jealousy for our unwavering loyalty is a righteous but overwhelming demand that can only be met by the gracious God who will answer the prayer, “Grant what you command” (Augustine, *Confessions*). In whatever way we have dabbled in the world’s wicked values or behavior, we should humbly admit our sins and come to our gracious Father, the only one who can rescue us from both our own deceitful hearts and our devilish foe. The intensity of the repentance described in [James 4:8–10](#) challenges our superficial and perfunctory repentance. Have we truly seen the implications of our disobedience, and if we have, why have we not humbled ourselves in sorrow before God?

4:11–12 James points out one particular way some Christians have adopted the world’s wicked values: they are judging and speaking slanderously about others. He may be reflecting on [Leviticus 19:16a](#) (“Do not go about spreading slander among your people”), as many themes in his letter correspond with the instructions of [Leviticus 19](#). The law of God instructs us to love our neighbors ([Lev 19:18](#)), not to stand in judgment of them or malign them. Thus, when we

judge our neighbors or speak evil of them, we are the ones breaking God's law. God alone is both giver of the law and judge of human hearts ([Jas 4:12](#)). How foolish and disrespectful of us to arrogate that status to ourselves!

[4:13–17](#) James rebukes human presumption in planning. Humans so easily forget that each day of life (and any abilities or gifts associated with life) are from God and may be withdrawn by the Creator at any moment. James says bluntly, “You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (v. [14](#); cf. [Mt 6:27](#)). Such a truth should not make us fearful, since we serve a *loving* heavenly Father ([Mt 7:9–11](#)). Instead, realizing our contingency and frailty should make us humble, conscious of our moment-by-moment dependence on God. Sometimes this dependence should be expressed explicitly by voicing the qualification, “If it is the Lord’s will . . .” ([Jas 4:15](#)). But even if that qualification is not on our lips, it must be on our hearts.