

## ***This Week in the Word***

*Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.*



### **Submit to God in Love**

**Study Scripture: James 4**

**Lesson 7, January 11, 2019**

#### **Key Verse**

*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

*James 4: 8*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our Lesson today might appear to be one which list simply the reasons for war and fights among the people of God as it points to the reasons for the futility of life and what leads to an unsatisfied life. One famous Christian writer Spurgeon summarizes this aspect in two comments. The first is: **“The whole history of mankind shows the failure of evil lustings to gain their objects”**

One writer therefore adds as he examines what Spurgeon stated:

**“This is the tragic story of the life lived after worldly and fleshly desires; it never reaches the goal it gives everything for. This fundamental dissatisfaction is not because of a lack of effort.”**

Spurgeon adds however, and this is very interesting:

**“If the lusters fail, it is not because they do not set to work to gain their ends; for according to their nature they used the most practical means within their reach, and used them eagerly too”.**

Modern psychologists join into commenting on this matter by pointing out that human beings have two primary needs. The first is to be loved, and the second is the need to achieve something of significance. These they say are good desires but it seems to believers that even if that is so, the failure of human beings to control their passions, their tendency to covet others, their wrong motives

and their constant seeking for unpleasant pleasures indicate a twisting of the image of God that they have in them.

In Chapter 4 James had continued the discussion began in Chapter 2, during which he bluntly warned professing believers against anything that did not bear the fruits of good works. He had warned earlier that as believers do the ministry of God the state of our minds and the words that proceed out of our mind is of critical importance. Our inability to control our tongues tells us something about our spiritual state, and gives the reasons why we often hinder the ministry God entrusted to us. He stresses the significance of the interior warfare that goes on in us.

Believers are reminded that God is the only one that can control our tongues and our behavior and it is He to whom we should go for wisdom. When we ask for and receive the wisdom from God we will demonstrate this by our humility, peace and graciousness.

Right behavior will show the fruit of good works. Behavior that is not right is simply demonstrating unfruitful religion, faith and wisdom.

The real matter we are examining is of course the matter of unanswered prayer and the reasons for that situation. So we should first ask ourselves whether there is such a thing as unanswered prayer. The Psalmist apparently felt that at many times God was not hearing his petitions and as he contemplated this possibility he writes:

***“How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?”***

But in Psalms 116 the Psalmist also wrote:

***“I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplication”.***

So the Psalmist knows that God does answer prayer .

The average Christian face this puzzle and they often explain unanswered prayer away many times by saying that God will answer their prayers in His own way and in His fashion. They fall back on the promises of God and say that God will answer in His own time but it is sure that He will answer. Believers all know the verse in 1 John 5: 40 which states with one little limitation about our prayer and God's will:

***“And this is the confidence which we have before him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us”.***

But note that God cannot be expected to answer prayer coming from a disobedient heart for Scripture tells us that often our prayers are hindered by several sins. Psalms 66:18 warns:

***“If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear”.***

And again:

***“Behold the LORD’ hand is not so short, that it cannot save; neither is his ear so dull that he cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he does not hear”.***

We know from the experience of Joshua recorded in Joshua 7: 10-12 when he prayed down on his face asking for an explanation as to why Israel was defeated by their enemies at Ai that God does

not answer prayers that arises from the hearts that are out of fellowship with Him and are disobedient and so it is not that God does not hear but it is that he hears but He does not answer.

In our Text however the problem that James addresses with believers does not concern the issue of unscriptural prayer but with prayer that might be scriptural, that might be

- in God's will
- authored in the name of Jesus Christ
- seemingly prayed in the Holy Spirit
- prayed in faith
- prayed fervently.

But nevertheless there is disappointment. What has to be decided therefore is whether God is unrighteous in not answering the believer, or whether what is being prayed for is contrary to God's will. There may be an assumption that the petition is right and so God is either unjust or unable to answer.

James therefore has to analyse what we are doing and so encourage and direct us as to how to live at peace with God, with others and with ourselves and how to pray with the submission of a son or daughter.

He does look at the heart of the believer, the motives of the heart, the things that ought to make us happy and give us delight, blessedness, contentment.

James has already warned about the importance of avoiding strife and loving peace, (See 3:13, 17-18). Now he will deal sternly with the issue of conflict among believers.

We should not be surprised at the stern attack by James on this common malady among professing believers.

These evils James lists are common wrongdoings that exist among saints. What makes this startling is that these are common things we read about in the newspapers: Relations among Christians are obviously bad for they behave just like the 'world'.

These same kinds of bad behaviour and some even worse, are described at length in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Books of Corinthians. The Corinthian church was a tragic example of self-seeking which James is now warning us about. They lived in open sin, were guilty of sexual immorality, participated in heathen worship to eat meat sacrificed to idols, were self-indulgent even at the Lord's Supper and did many other terrible things. Christians are obviously capable of committing sins which will shock even pagans according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 5.

Conflict among believers should therefore be no surprise. We must recognize that there is no sin of which believers are incapable.

We must keep in mind that James is speaking about sin. He has been pointing out that there is a path which inevitably leads to sin. We are all well aware of the path of foolishness that leads to death, which James dealt with in chapter 1; that path is the satisfaction of the 'flesh'. In that chapter he also spoke about the path of wisdom which leads to life.

James now will give us more teaching on the source of our sins. In doing so he will look at the content of our prayers and the myth believers often have that their petitions are right.

### **THE TEXT**

**Verse 1.** Historically the Jewish people have violently opposed foreign occupation. To that end, they were continually getting into conflicts with the Romans. Jewish Christians and Jews also fought among themselves and these conflicts gave opportunity for corrupt Christians to sow ‘seeds of destruction’ among the people of God.

James addressed this very matter, and in a sense continued the discussion from the previous topics in Chapter 3 leading to the importance of the right kind of prayer. He indicated that the wars and battles that they continued to fight were not a result of religious fervor to the honour of God, or even, from a true zeal for their country but instead it resulted from their prevailing lusts. There is a root of carnality, and no walking in the Spirit of God.

Note that the word translated “*lusts*” is also elsewhere translated “*pleasures*” which is the usual meaning of the word, for it refers to the pleasures of the senses and therefore speaks of desire, appetites and lusts. He is speaking of the desire of the senses for sensual gratification, i.e. indulging the corrupt inclination of the mind. This inclination of the mind can lead to small or large conflicts or disagreement, or it can lead to the much larger military conquests which the world so often sees.

These lusts have their origins in men’s pride, malice, covetousness, ambition and thirst for revenge. For Christians, this evil bent is shrouded under a pretence of serving God. There is a root of carnality, which leads to fighting inside the believer, and this leads them to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, and so they fight with themselves and fight among themselves.

These “quarrels” (Greek **polemoi**, wars) generally refer to disputes between several individuals, while “conflicts” (Greek **machoi**, battles) emphasize tension between peoples. But it is clear that for James both types, large or small, are enemies of peace. Both are caused by “pleasures”, unsatisfied desires.

One writer comments about the implications of the words that James used to describe the source of our conflicts:

**“The satisfaction of desire, which is what pleasure is, is something people spend vast quantities of time, money, and energy to obtain. Am I spending them to satisfy my personal desires or God’s desires primarily?”**

**Our personal desires are part of our human nature, and we will never escape their pull as long as we live in our present bodies. Nevertheless they must not dominate our lives. God’s desires must do that (Matthew 6:33). Our culture glorifies the satisfaction of personal desire, and it is the primary pursuit of most people, including Christians”.**

Some of the battles they fought might have been justifiable, however, before entering the conflict they should have organized themselves and go to God first to see how to proceed. It is here that they strayed and thus allowed others to manipulate them to move away from the plan of God.

James indicates that the lust for worldly things was the main root of all the contentions that the Jews had, both with the Romans and within their community. Once one kind of contention got started, it would feed into another. The end result was that the lusts that started in the hearts of Christians would only hinder their 'walk' with God and thus the only way to come into a proper relationship with God once again, was to put to death the lusts that war within the assembly of believers.

If this is not done, James speaks of 'fights and wars', indicating that the battles between Christians are bitter and severe. Divisions in churches readily attest to this situation.

James' desire was for those who believe in God to settle their differences between them, so that they could walk together again, since the hope was that they had the same Spirit of God. He appeals to their conscience to resolve these issues. He also seems to be more bothered by the intensity of the quarrels, than by whether the viewpoint was just or not.

**Verse 2.** When it says *ye lust*, it implies that the people are setting their desires on objects. They were conspiring to obtain and secure possession(s) by use of force and whatever means available to them. They wished to have something that they did not have claim to, and so they were prepared to obtain it by force. No effort was made to obtain things by peaceful and honest means, or to be satisfied with what they already had but they were determined to obtain what they desired by force. So they will continue to envy and murder. One writer comments:

**“Verse 2 is not hard to understand. Thwarted desire leads to hostile behaviour that is described in blunt terms: you kill, you covet, you quarrel, and you fight. Desire denied grows more insistent and our actions more aggressive. Further, our natural tendency is to place blame on external circumstances or the ill will of other people, yet James insists we are guilty. The problem lies with me, not the government, not my rival, nor my failed parents, not bad luck, not the economy, not the tides of history, not the vagaries of fate”.**

These are Christians, people who are supposed to be led by the Spirit of God, and this is the manner in which they behaved. They had no respect for any individual; whether that be the government that was established in their region, or closer to home, the people they worked with, or the church to which they belonged.

Without making the judgment that they were not truly Christians then, the question remains, What was the cause of their move away from the truth of God?

James told them that they were being consumed by their lustful desires, giving away the truth for pleasures that were temporal.

James seems to indicate that God was going to bring their labours to nought, so that they might realize the futility of their behavior. He stressed that the people would continue to do whatever it took to accomplish their goal of achieving money, power, or notoriety. God however would continue to thwart their endeavours whether or not the individuals were aware, thereby leading to ever increasing frustrations in not being able to acquire what it was that they wished.

This type of behaviour should not be associated with a Christian, but it is still a reality in some congregations. The sinful desires and affections generally exclude prayer, and the working of our desires towards God. They go as far as to kill, because of the envy in their hearts and their desire to gain possessions. These desires are in fact an abomination to God. This is because believers are engrossed in the battle to obtain their desires, not listening to God or asking God if this is indeed the way He wanted them to proceed.

The comment by one writer in 1793 is quite interesting:

**“The system of wars in general, therefore has been a system of great robberies, no more honest or honorable than the purposes of the foot- pad, and more dignified only because it involves greater skill and talent. It has been said that “to kill one man makes a murderer, to kill many makes a hero”. So it may be said, that to steal a horse, or to rob a house, makes a man a thief or burglar; to fire a dwelling subject him to the punishment of arson; but to plunder kingdoms and provinces, and to cause cities, towns, and hamlets to be wrapped in flames, makes an illustrious conqueror, and gives a title to what is deemed a bright page in history.**

**The one enrolls the name among felons, and consigns the perpetrator to the dungeon or the gibbet; the other, accompanied with no more justice, and with the same spirit, sends the name down to future times as immortal.**

**Yet in the two the all-discerning eye of God may see no difference except in the magnitude of the crime, and in the extent of the injury which has been inflicted. In his way, and according to the measure of his ability, the felon who ends his life in a dungeon, or on the gibbet, is as worthy of grateful and honored remembrance as the conqueror triumphing in the spoils of desolated empires.”**

In the eyes of God, there are clearly serious and painful consequences of living merely to satisfy one’s personal desires.

Many of the evils in human life can be traced to covetousness and envy. Where both exist the inevitable result is conflict and strife. Unsatisfied desire leads to murder and when ambition is disappointed there’s quarrelling and fighting.

**Verse 3.** This verse is one of the most important verses which relate to prayer. It tells us that we can only get satisfaction, if we ask God to grant it to us. We’re also told that there are things that we can get from God but we will only get them if we ask of God. On the other hand, we do not have what God wants to give us, because we do not ask Him for these things which are in His will.

We only ask for things which allow us to satisfy our own selfish desires. So people who profess to be believers want more money, more time, more energy, so that they can do the things that they desire but which often do not coincide with the things that God desires for them.

So clearly, James is telling us that we should ask God to give us more of what He desires. Actually, we do know what God desires for He has given us promises as well as commands in Scriptures.

Like most individuals, Christians ask God for something and if awarded, then basically run with it, instead of using it to glorify God. This is the way human beings operate, Christian or not. We ask many things of God, as we should ask of our Father. However, the question is, for what ends?

This is where we run into problems and we can see that God will not honour our requests. When we ask God for things to help us triumph over our enemies, or for endeavours to be successful, are we asking for our wants or for the will of God to be done? For instance, if we were to ask to be successful over our enemies, for what reason are we asking this? As Christians we should be seeking God's help in the requests we make of Him.

Typically we seek advantages, so that we may obtain power, wealth, and satisfy our pride, vanity, and sensuality. None of this will give God a reason to indulge us, since all we are doing is really dishonouring Him and disgracing the devotion that we have pledged to Him. The heart of the matter is that when we ask God for things, we must make sure our motives are correct. To this end, it is important to continually seek the guidance and leadership of the Holy Spirit. When we ask God for success in our undertakings, we must primarily ask with the goal of giving glory to God the Father, and to do good with what He has given to us. We must resist the urge to consume what God has given us to satiate our lusts. If we are seeking the things of this world, is it not best that God deny us of it?

We might then learn that the ends for which we desire something, does not coincide with the will of God, and then perhaps we can see that God is trying to correct us. With that self-reflection and guidance, we should change our behaviour. This is not to say that we will not ask for the very same thing, but now we will be in a more mature state spiritually, so that if God does grant us what we ask, then we can use it to glorify him. Either way, our goal should be to glorify God.

James is saying that we ask of God with the goal of satisfying our own lusts, and that is why we do not get certain things from God. God is actually protecting us, nurturing us to the point, that we should realize that such gifts will only move us further away from God. Once our ends are in line with God's and we ask with the expressed purpose of glorifying God, then our requests will be granted.

We should understand that prayer is more than just using a formula, saying the right words, believing hard enough, and that doing all this will make it happen. This approach is treating prayer as a kind of magic to manipulate God and imposing our will on God, for when we use the 'formula' prayer, God has to answer. One writer notes: **"In contrast, New Testament prayer grows out of a trusting relationship with a father whose will is supreme."**

Another expresses this very interesting opinion on this verse as follows:

**"He who seeks in anything by war seeks it in an unjust manner, and cannot depend on the divine help and blessing. The true way of obtaining anything which we really need is to seek it from God by prayer, and then to make use of just and fair means of obtaining it, by industry and honesty, and by a due regard for the rights of others. Thus sought, we shall obtain it if it would be for our good; if it is withheld, it will be because it is best for us that it should not be ours.**

**In all the wars which have been waged on the earth, whether for the settlement of disputed questions, for the adjustment of boundaries, for the vindication of violated rights, or for the permanent extension of empire, how rare has it been that the object which prompted to the war has been secured!**

**The course of events has shown that indisposed as men are to do justice, there is much more probability of obtaining the object by patient negotiation than there is by going to war”.**

**Verse 4.** An interesting note is probably appropriate at this stage. The word ‘adulterers’ does not appear in the oldest manuscripts. It is presumed that the translator added it, to ensure that it included men since it was speaking about adultery.

The real issue here is really, whom we will love; whether we love God or whether we love the world. The world entices us to love ourselves and to seek our pleasures first of all. The pleasures of God take second place. If we accept the philosophy of the world we are unfaithful brides.

God is the rightful ‘husband’ and the men of the world are regarded collectively as one adulterer and individually as adulteresses (God is the “husband” and we are His “wife”).

James makes use of the term adultery to illustrate the kind of unacceptable relationship when a spouse is unfaithful to the marriage bond. The best sense of how the relationship between us and God is to be and how it should not be, is best seen in the dealings of God with Israel when they turned their backs on Him, seeking after other nations (Jer. 3:8-9, Eze. 16:32, Hosea 3:1). James equates the cause that prompt adultery, as basically covetousness which is idolatry.

To understand the idea of enmity to God, the husband wife relationship is vital to understand what we are doing wrong. It is the forsaking of Him to whom we are devoted and espoused, to cleave to other things. This is where the minds of the people are, not towards God in any sense, and thus this is enmity to God, for quite simply put, you cannot serve two masters, you will love one and despise the other.

To God there is nothing extraordinarily wrong with wanting or having some of life’s goods. Yet when people set their heart on the world and place their happiness in it and their entire focus in life revolves around the temporal, then it is here that they lose God’s friendship, so as to maintain their friendship with the world. They chose and thus have rebelled against God, their Creator, Master and Provider and can now only be counted as the enemies of God.

The friendship of the world is the love of the world. Love of the rules that govern the world, the principles which predominate there, the entertainment and amusements and satisfactions to be enjoyed. It involves setting one’s heart and conforming to everything that is accepted by the world and seeking after them with the same kind of spirit and vigor with which the world pursues its goals.

The system of the world is in fact hostile to God and seeks to fight Him at every turn. It does not obey the laws of God, accepts that He owns the world and does not seek to honor Him. Clearly then, to love the world is to accept and put ourselves in a position that is against God.

James can logically conclude that “*whoever*” it may be, whether a person is in the church or out of the church; for being a member of the church makes no difference; that person who is a friend of the world is against God. It appears that it is just as easy to be a ‘friend of the world’ when inside the church as when out of the church.

In addition it must be noted that the phrase “*whosoever will*” is a word which implies “purpose, intention, design” and so the idea here is that there is a deliberate purpose, a strong desire, to seek and secure the ‘friendship of the world’. So one writer comments on this word or phrase as follows: **“It refers to that strong desire which often exists, even among professing Christians, to secure the friendship of the world; to copy its fashions and vanities; to enjoy its pleasures; and to share its pastimes and its friendships.**

**Wherever there is a manifested purpose to find our chosen friends and associates there are rather that among Christians; wherever there is a greater desire to enjoy the smiles and approbation of the world than there is to enjoy the approbation of God and the blessings of a good conscience; and wherever there is more conscious pain because we have failed to win the applause of the world, or have offended its votaries, and have sunk ourselves in its estimation, than there is because we have neglected our duty to our Savior, and have lost the enjoyment of religion, there is the clearest proof that the hearts wills or desires to be the “friend of the world”.**

It is important for believers to understand that this is a powerful declaration, that no matter what our profession, those who are by characteristics a friend of the world, cannot be a true Christian.

Ever professing Christian should seriously and earnestly examine themselves as to whether or not they mainly seek their friends outside the Christian faith, prefer the amusements and entertainments of the world, follow after the same extravagances and luxuries as the people the world do, and conform their life to fit everything that the world prefers, as opposed to a way of life which produces spiritual mindedness.

If a professing Christian sees that they have these characteristics of the world, they should remember that the great God who searches the hearts cannot be deceived. God will judge on that Great Day of Judgment and determine whether that person belong to the group that is a friend of the world and opposed to God, or belongs to the group that is considered to be the friend of God.

This is the source of *wars and fightings*. If friendship with God cannot be maintained, then what peace can be had when dealing with men? Can there be peace with God if the desire of the heart is to be in friendship with the world because of a love for worldly possessions?

Also, since we are now an enemy of God, who can fight against God? Who can prosper against God? These questions are left with those who have chosen the world, but most people know the answer already, for it is madness to consider that you have a chance against God, despite who or what you align yourselves with.

**Verse 5.** James makes a reference here to the Scriptures. The consensus is that he is not referring to a particular verse but to a general theme in the Old Testament about the nature of men and evil desires. Since there was not a particular verse, chapter or letter that really said this outright, then he pieces it together as a general lesson taught to us by God. This is it; that the Scriptures teach that since sin entered the world through man, the hearts of men by nature is evil, the imagination is evil and continually so. He stresses that there is a profound separation from God.

The corruption that exists in man's heart manifests itself in many vices including envy. Envy drives man and reinforces the evil imaginations that exist in him. The result is that man is always seeking to satisfy himself with whatever he sees and likes. He will also do whatever it takes to procure whatever his heart desires. With such actions and will driving man, it leads to strife and quarrels to obtain such things; and this is the friendship with the world that the Bible warns against.

Scripture warns in many places about man's propensity to envy. Proverbs 27:4 states, "*Who is able to stand before envy?*" (See also Ecclesiastes 4:4, Psalm 106:16; 73:3; Proverbs 14:30, Genesis 26:14, 30:1; 37:11)

In the world, everyone is after something for themselves and not caring about others. This is the spirit that dominates. In contrast, for Christians we are given the Spirit to help us become one, in thought, deed, and purpose. With a coming of this 'oneness', the unity God desires is a much more profitable outcome.

The Spirit, and thus God teaches us to avoid friendship with the world. Friendship with the world breeds envy, and if we continually yield to that spirit, then we will always walk in the flesh and be separated from God. It also teaches us to reach for nobler principles as shown by God. The Spirit teaches us to be willing to communicate to the necessities and to the comfort of others, thereby doing good to those around us, according to our ability. In so doing, we must yield ourselves to the Spirit, who actively through the grace of God, corrects and gives us Godly guidance.

**Verse 6.** God has provided the solution. God's creation needs His grace in order to survive and thrive until we meet Him. God has set a very high standard for His people and so He gives grace that is greater than the pressures that His people face. They can face the evil passions within themselves, because He gives more grace to overcome their evil passions and control their corrupt inclinations.

In order to 'stand' until that day, professing Christians must separate themselves from a prideful nature. They must be humble before God, for He is against those that have an unwarranted self-esteem and an unreasonable conceit about their importance and their excellence. No believer should accept that beautiful looks, strengths, attainments, family status, country of origin, rank, or anything else, should give anyone the right to be conceited about their importance.

Having more strength, attainments in learning, or more skills than others is absolutely no reason for pride. Pride makes a person think that they are more important and God hates this arrogant claim. God looks at things and people as they really are and so he knows that the proud is stupid and foolish. (See Leviticus 26:19; Job 33:17; Psalm 59:12; Proverbs 8:13; 16:18; 29:13; Isaiah 23:9).

We must understand that there is a certain amount of disgrace associated with the proud. God resists them, and even more strongly God sets himself as in battle against them. This is the strength of the word used to describe how God feels about a prideful spirit. God has set the proud as an enemy, a traitor to His crown, dignity and sovereignty and thus has proceeded against him as such.

At first, it might not be obvious why God hates a prideful spirit, but it is clear from reading the Bible that, in their understanding, they are resisting the truths of God. The proud wilfully resists the

truths, the laws and the providence of God. Can it be any wonder that God must array himself against those with prideful hearts?

On the other hand, God gives grace and honour to those who resist pride. God imparts more grace to the humble, because they require it and are thankful for it and because they see the need for it. Thus, for those who are sensible of their own vileness and meanness and acknowledge it; those who realize that they are not worthy and who ascribe more honor to others than to themselves and who struggle not to envy the gifts and graces of God bestowed upon others, but rejoice in them, to those God imparts much grace.

These individuals ingenuously confess the deficiency of their duties, and the insufficiency of their righteousness to justify themselves to God, so that they realize that assisted or by themselves, they are unprofitable servants. With such humility in them, God bestows grace, which is a free gift; but to accept it, the heart of the person must be humble. So grace is given to believers to make them humble, then another portion is given to keep them humble. Grace is a free gift of God and is from God only. Men do not possess it nor can dispense it. It cannot be earned by man. God gives it freely by His sovereign will and good pleasure, and also to the degree whatever He wishes.

**Verse 7.** James stresses two aspects of ones nature and the language used is that of a command that must be obeyed. There must be submission to God and a forsaking of the things of the world.

With respect to the world, James implores us to forsake any friendship with the world, because this only leads to envy and pride, and thus is always going to lead to contention among men.

The better part is to submit to God. By grace we glory in submission to God, not just because He is our Creator and Provider, but is one who also cares for His children. He knows everything that is necessary for our best welfare and our salvation. So we must accept what He has given. We are subjects, God's subjects, and as such should be submissive to Him. We must submit our understanding to the truths of God, our wills to the will of God, His precepts and His providence. Thus our submission to God is not only as a result of fear, but it is also knowing who it is we serve and love.

God always seeks to do good to His children. He does not act like earthly parents, the church or the government, but looks to supply our every need. In submitting ourselves to Christ, to God, we put ourselves at odds with the Devil, as this is what he is fighting against. He wants to prevent us from coming to and be engulfed by the holiness of God. To that end we must resist his suggestions, but not in our strength, but relying on the strength provided by our Father in heaven.

The Devil will come to us saying things like yielding to the will and providence of God will bring us sorrow and leave us open to contempt and misery, but that is just the use of fear talking. Likewise we should recognize that submission to God is not a hindrance to our outward ease or worldly preferment, that would just be pride and sloth in us asserting itself.

It is clear that if we yield to the suggestions of the devil, then he will continue to be with us, drawing us further away from God, but if we resist, put on the 'whole armour of God' and stand

against him under our Lord's banner, then we will in effect shut the door to the devil; at least for a season.

The word '*resist*' as used by James comes from two Greek words which means 'stand' and 'against'. James is telling us to stand against the devil. In doing that, yielding ourselves to God and His reign, then the resistance even of the lowliest believer will send the devil running in the other direction, due to the authority of what Jesus did on the cross. But only the humble is capable of this, and so we should be humble.

**Verse 8.** God both promises us something and invites us to draw closer to Him. If we want favor from God we must approach Him and ask of Him. He's always around us; so this verse invites us to come near Him in a spiritual sense, praying directly to Him, and thinking about Him in our meditations.

(See the advice of Psalm 1).

If we consider what has happened since sin entered the world, we can see that it was humans who moved away from God. Even beyond that, now due to sin, in and of ourselves we have no desire to seek after God, unless He calls us. We have moved away from God, and it is God who is making the effort to bring us back to him. A heart in rebellion must be brought, back to God. Since sin has separated us from the ease of communion with God that Adam and Eve first enjoyed, we must find our way back to that blessed state. Prayer and fasting is just one of the steps that can help us, but as always, the humble spirit will allow that door to be opened.

In the opening sentence, James points out that if we draw closer to God, He will, even though He was not the one who moved away, will move or draw near to us. So an invitation and a promise is given to us, but we must come under God's authority and resist the devil's attack, to ensure that what we do have long standing consequence.

To '*cleanse our hands*' means that we are to leave behind, hands free of blood, pride, and everything that is ungodly, unjust, cruel and free ourselves from the defilement of sin. The 'heart' is where the motives and intentions and the devices we create come from reside and the 'hand' is the instrument that we use to carry out our sins. The heart must therefore be purified and hands cleansed.

There can be no external reformation. There must be a deep work inside the heart, for if the heart is wrong nothing can be right. There must be no covering up of the corruptions of the heart.

Once again, we cannot be subject to God, if we are subject to sin. How can our hands be cleansed? It is through faith, repentance and reformation. If these things have not taken place within us, then drawing near to God will be an insurmountable task and there will be no devotion to Him.

The *double minded* are those stopped between God and the world. God does not appreciate any such person, or the other type, the lukewarm Christian. Here James is really referring to people who are vacillating, having no fixed heart or purpose, who are halting between good and evil.

We must be committed to one, the Lord or the world; for sitting on the fence is being ‘of the world’ as far as God is concerned. To purify the heart implies that we must be sincere, to separate ourselves from all forms of adultery. It is God who will eventually do the cleansing and purifying through the blood of Christ, as only He can, but we should put ourselves in a position to have Christ come into our hearts and clean up our corruptions. At times, we confess one thing with our lips, but in our hearts we are pulled away from God. Our words and the attitudes of our hearts and must be in submission to God and we must be humble and have His grace do its work in us.

**Verse 9.** In giving the instruction to be ‘afflicted, mourn and weep’, James tries to convey to us that there are times when God may permit affliction or send afflictions our way, and that we must learn to deal with them. The word rendered “be afflicted” means to endure hardship, and so it means in this context that they were to feel distress and sad because of their transgression. (See Ezra 8:21).

James calls on them to express deep sorrow or grief, to get right with God and abandon their joy and laughter in pursuing their personal desires. They should realize what they had done and repent of their hedonism.

Sometimes that may mean going to God and asking Him for strength or asking Him to remove our grief and suffering altogether.

One thing that James mentions to us or leads us to, is that we should not despise afflictions from God, or when it hits those near us. We should mourn and weep because of the sins that we have and the sins of others. It is these sins that will continue to keep us separated from God, and will cause the ‘wars and fightings’ among us to continue. We should know that if afflictions come as a result of our sins, then we should use it as a sign to repent with deep sorrow instead of the arrogance and laughter that we sometimes exhibit, because sometimes it is a quiet sin, those which only we know of. If we repent and draw close to Christ and the cross, we can be convicted of our sin, and move to a state of humility before God, so that He can do his work in us.

Let our laughter be turned to mourning, and our joy to heaviness, is a message to the unconcerned Christian, to get a hold of their carnal joy on account of their friendship with the world and repent.

**Verse 10.** In terms of encouragement to believers, James again calls on the brethren to submit to God in humility and put Him before their personal desires. We are told that if we draw close to God in the way of duty, God will draw near to us in mercy. He will change that person from being a broken-hearted person that has repented, to that of a forgiven child, with tears wiped away and sorrow and sadness removed from the heart.

We should strive to demonstrate and live the life of faith, trust and obedience. Only through living a life with these ideas will humility be able to take root and develop within our hearts and spirits which God can see, which when He is satisfied that we are truly repentant, will He apply deliverance to us.

As always, close communion will help this process move further, and we should understand that the only reason we are not closer to God, is that we are the ones moving away from him, and not Him from us. Thus if we are truly humbled in the sight of the Lord, then in due time we shall be exalted,

as His favour will be towards us. We should remember that the highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth.

**Verses 11-12.** It is important that we do not neglect this part of the letter which is not really in our lesson Study Text.

James cautions us about the sin of evil speaking. The Greek word, *katalaleite*, means speaking any thing that may hurt or injure another. We must not speak evil things about others, even if factual, unless we are called to do so, for certain situations may call for it. We should not speak disparagingly of others.

We are encouraged to help our brethren when they fall, but if we are too quick to loosen the tongue, we should be aware of the dangers. Our lips must be guided by the law of kindness, as well as truth and justice. Even though Solomon associates this with a virtuous woman, but it holds true for all Christians

(Prov. 31:26). Since we are brethren and Christians, we should not defile nor defame one another. James stresses that if we do anything to the contrary, then what we are doing is moving from brethren to judge. On a writer comments on the meaning of these words:

**“What does James mean by ‘speaking against’ someone? Barclays says, “Usually this term means to slanders someone when he is not there to defend himself”. R.V.G. Tasker adds, “In the process of backbiting, James seems to suggest, the slanderer is in fact passing judgment”. It is very important that we understand what James is and is not saying here. He is not forbidding us to confront those who are sinning with their sin. There are two minute texts that make it clear that we are our brother’s keeper.”**

Keeping in mind verses like Lev. 19:16 and Matt. 7:1 we are not to judge, or else we shall be judge ourselves by the same standard. Instead we should strive to love each other, and part of that is not to defame our brethren.

One important lesson to be learned is that a detracting tongue condemns the law of God, and the commandment of Christ. When this is done, it speaks evil of the law of God. The background to most of what James says was the harsh things the brethren spoke to each other as a result of their differences.

The Apostle wants his readers to understand that the word of God is perfect and the law He has given is perfect, so then it should not be the cause of any divisions among them.

Note that the verse indicates that every Christian should obey the laws, but he’s not to assume the office of judge. He is to do what he knows the law requires of him and encourage others to do the same. The believer is not to make laws or to amend those that have been made but should seek to obey those that are appointed and lead others to do the same. Making rules which are not in Scripture and passing harsh judgments based on those man-made rules is forbidden.

We should understand as Christians that there exists a hierarchy to life. God first and foremost is the supreme Lawgiver, none can usurp his power and authority. He is the only one with the right to give law. That means that governments and countries are still subject to the laws of God. People are not encouraged to disobey human laws, unless they break the laws of God, for He is to be absolutely obeyed. The reason for God’s sovereignty is clear, but only He has the power to enforce the laws He has enacted. He has the power the save and destroy souls, whereas no other can.

As the Lawgiver, He provides the reward for the observances of His laws. He can save the soul, and make it happy forever, and in judgment He is the one who after the person is killed, can cast the

soul into hell. Therefore, we may infer that it is not for any man or company of men in the world to pretend to give laws to bind the conscience, it is God's prerogative, and as such must not be invaded. This of course leads us to the topic of being many masters, or judges. We have the law of God, which judges us all, no other rules or laws are needed to govern us. If such are constructed then we presume upon an already perfect law, and trespass on God's role as Lawgiver.

## **CONCLUSION**

These instructions of James are important to enable believers to live in peace with God, with others, and with themselves. He deals with practical matters. We are told to submit to God in love and to follow His instructions for they are good for us.

It appears as if there was a lot of spiritual adultery going on in the church to which James wrote. Unfortunately the same situation continues today.

Friendship with the world is a most dangerous thing. We know from reading the history of Israel how God feels about people who profess to believe in Him and yet are friends with the world. We have no reason not to understand how God feels when people today are not loyal to Him.

We must be humble, for only those people will receive the grace of God which will enable them to be faithful to God.

Avoid those that are proud of themselves. They have nothing of which to be proud. The proud are only deluding themselves. They are not of God

We must be humble and submit to God, placing our self under His lordship and committing ourselves to obey Him in all things.

James calls us to repentance so that we will stop allowing the world to encroach upon our loyalty to God.

So let us repent of anything in our lives which fails to put God first. Let us like David humbly confess our idolatry. Let us also confess inappropriate speaking against others.

Make plans for your future today. Search the Scriptures. Change your attitude. Talk to God and put Him before you. Make the right decisions to let God run your life.

The world is out there lying and enticing us away from the ways of wisdom.

So let us ask God daily to help us to see with His eyes what is best for us. Our God is faithful and if we draw near to Him and ask Him for help He will give us all the grace we need daily. In fact, He will give us more grace that we need.