

James 4 Notes

Worldliness (4:1-17)

- Its cause (4:1-2).
 - Worldliness is one of the continual problems in the church. Christians are in the world, but they are not of the world (John 17:14).
 - “Wars and fightings” were normally used of national warfare, but they had also become common, forceful expressions for any kind of open antagonism (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:9). There were internal bickerings and strife, leading to hatred.
 - “Lusts” is from the word from which we get “hedonite,” one who lives for pleasure. The word in a bad sense means “evil desires for gratification of the flesh.” “Lust” in vs. 2 is another word suggesting lust for gratification of the instincts. It is a verb form of the word “lust” in 1:14. When men live merely to satisfy their desires, they never realize their goal. He who lives for the satisfaction of his pleasures and desires will always “have not.”
 - Continuing the figurative references, it seems best to take “ye kill” as hyperbole for hatred (equivalent to murder [Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15]). The style of this verse is colloquial speech (but is also used by orators and in comedy). The brevity of the sentences heightens the points of the description.
- Its consequences (4:3-6).
 - The prodigal son exemplifies one who spent his money on his pleasures (Luke 15:14). It was the desire of James’s readers for pleasures that was battling within them for satisfaction (vs. 1) and even leading them to try to use prayer as a means of gratification (cf. John 18:23; Acts 23:5). They wanted to gratify themselves rather than help others and please God.
 - God’s people to living in the realm of pleasure, which in turn leads to envy, lust, and fighting, is like the betrayal of the relationship between a husband or wife when one commits adultery.
 - “The world” in this context refers to evil, worldly men who are at enmity with God. James used the word in the same sense in 1:27. “Friendship” means affection for pleasures. If Christians assume the proper attitude toward the evil world, it will hate them (1 John 3:13). “Enmity” means “hostility or hatred of God.” This means that one cannot love God and the world at the same time. To love the world is equal to hating or being hostile to God (1 John 2:15).
 - Vs. 4 indicates that Christians who are friends of the world are guilty of spiritual adultery. Although their love and devotion belong to God, they have fallen in love with the world. It is natural, therefore, to ex-

pect vs. 5 to speak of God's jealous longing for His people's love, not the people's own envious spirit.

- God has set a high standard for wholehearted love and devotion on the part of His people as they resist the appeal of the world, but He gives grace that is greater than the rigorous demand He has made (cf. Proverbs 3:34).
- Its cure (4:7-10).
 - The verb "submit" involves aligning one's self against Satan rather than seeking his friendship. The word is mostly associated with the idea of rank or order (in an army, for example). Thus it means to put one's self in the ranks as a soldier, resigning his will to that of his chief.
 - Peter's roaring lion is actually a cowardly beast (1 Peter 5:8-9). This lion is defeated by a steadfast resistance of faith and will flee when resisted. But he must not be given an advantage.
 - "Draw near" is a figurative use of the verb and is associated with spiritual worship or serve to God (cf. Exodus 19:22; Ezekiel 44:13; Leviticus 10:3; Isaiah 29:13). It is used of the Christian's approach to worship under the new covenant (Hebrews 7:19), especially through prayer (Hebrews 4:16).
 - "Cleanse" your hands is a figure of moral cleanliness (cf. Exodus 30:19-21). We must be sincere, setting our hearts and hope perfectly on Him. He knows if we are disloyal in mind. The word "double minded" is the same word that describes the doubting man in 1:8. Here the double-mindedness is in holding onto the world and the Lord at the same time, or perhaps serving Him with the outward appearance (1:26) while his heart is not right.
 - "Be afflicted" means "to endure sorrow" or "be in distress." It likely means mental wretchedness brought about the realization of their sinful condition. When the enormity of sin strikes home, the penitent is sorry for his wrong (2 Corinthians 7:10). The "laughter" is the glad sound of their worldly pleasures. "Joy" is the inward condition of the sinner, as the "laughter" is the outward.
 - In vs. 10, James is not speaking of humility as a trait of character so much as he is an act of resignation, of self-humiliation, of bowing to the will of God. Similar words are found in other scriptures (Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 1 Peter 5:6).
- Its characteristics (4:11-17).
 - The command in vs. 11 refers to defamation of character or slander (2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Peter 2:21). Slander and judgment go together. The judgment is the condemnation of one brother by another. The law referred to is probably the command of Leviticus 19:18. To speak against your neighbor is to violate this law. Those who do so

- place themselves above the law and, by their actions, declare that law to be a bad or unnecessary statute. Rather than submitting to it and keeping it, they pass judgment on its validity and set it aside.
- There is only one who is able to legislate and say what should be done. A human is treading on dangerous ground when he willfully sets aside God's law and judges that it is not for him. The sin of judging rebuked here has nothing to do with the duty to rebuke sin (1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13).
 - With their involvement in the business and commercial enterprise of the ancient world, the rich seem to have been guilty of carefully planning their activities without thinking of God and His rulership of their lives (Proverbs 27:1; Luke 12:19-20). No allowance is even made for unforeseen circumstances. These businessmen are confident that they will be able to carry their plans through to completion.
 - We make tremendous schemes in our lives, but we have no control or knowledge of life's issues. "Vapor" stands for something seemingly with us which vanishes suddenly and is seen no more. Even a full life is only a moment in eternity.
 - "If the Lord will" or a similar form occurs several times in the New Testament (Acts 18:21; 21:24; 1 Corinthians 4:19; 16:7; Hebrews 6:3). This teaching means more than merely prefacing all our statements about the future with a prescribed formula. It means that every plan we make should be made with the certainty that it depends upon the will of God.
 - Instead of relying on the will of God, they boasted in their arrogance or vauntings. They dared God to interfere with their plans. "Evil" means that it not only lacked the quality of being good, it is aggressively and viciously wicked. These descriptions indicate attitudes much more serious than simply saying, "We are going to do this tomorrow."
 - Although the statement in vs. 17 may apply to any number of situations, James intends it to refer to the immediately preceding context. Perhaps this is a maxim that means something like "Now that I have pointed the matter out to you, you have no excuse." Knowing what should be done obligates a person to do it. However, it is worth observing that James is not speaking merely of the sin of failing to do a good deed. He is speaking of failure to live a morally and spiritually excellent life when one has the knowledge to do so.