

The Epistle of James

Lesson #10

November 28, 2021

James 4:1-6

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

- Throughout Scripture, the people of God are told to remember something. There are at least fifty occurrences of this concept in the New Testament alone. And why do you think we are told to remember? Well, it's because we tend to forget!
 - So before we dive into today's discussion, let's be reminded.
 - We are not saved because of our good works; we are saved so that we may perform good works.
 - We are not saved because we are so holy; we are saved so that we might become holy.
 - We are not saved because we loved God, but because he first loved us.
- Last week, Tim led in a discussion of 3:13-18, which addressed the contrast between worldly wisdom and wisdom from above.
 - Worldly wisdom is characterized by envy and selfish ambition, and produces disorder and every vile practice.
 - But the wisdom from above is "pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere" and it produces a "harvest of righteousness" and peace.
 - (Reminds me of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.)
 - What I find interesting about both of these lists is, they tend more towards attitudes than behaviors. They are not primarily lists of "do's-and-don'ts", and yet the actions follow naturally from the attitudes.
- And so it is with worldly wisdom; it gives rise to worldly behavior, and that is what James addresses next.

Let's break it down.

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

- This verse sheds a little light on the 10th commandment, doesn't it. "Thou shalt not covet."
- The word translated here as "passions" really means pleasures.
- On a side note, scholars debate whether or not there was actual murder involved.
 - Given that this was a general letter with wide distribution, it is more likely that James was using hyperbole. He may have even been remembering Jesus' teaching about anger in the Sermon on the Mount.
- James is digging into the underlying cause: "your passions are at war within you."
 - The conflict originates within, and then reveals itself.
- The question is, which passions are at war? What is in conflict? Is this a question of "Which sinful desire do I want to pursue first?"
 - The battle is between serving ourselves and serving God and others.
 - This is the same battle the apostle Paul wrote about in Romans 7.
 - Romans 7:19, 24-25 – "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

2 You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

- The first sentence sounds pretty familiar.
 - Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."
 - Matthew 21:22 "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."
- So if you haven't received, it's because you haven't asked, right?
- Well, not necessarily. The context suggests a different explanation. The reason they do not ask, is because they are embarrassed by what they want to request, since they know it is wrong.
 - Verse 3 makes that clear, they were asking for pleasures, which is why they did not get what they were asking for.
- What does this teach us about prayer?
- Have you ever found yourself doing this, failing to ask, because you knew what you were wanting was outside God's will, yet pursuing it anyway?

4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- OUCH! Adultery? Really? Why do you think he is so harsh?
 - This is Old Testament language. The prophets frequently referred to rebellious Israel in terms of adultery. (cf. Isaiah 57:2-8; Jeremiah 3:20; Jeremiah 9:2; Hosea 7:4)
 - In the New Testament, Jesus is spoken of as the bridegroom, and the church as His bride.

- In Ephesians 5, Paul says that marriage between a man and a woman in some way portrays the relationship between Christ and the church.
- What is friendship with the world, and why does James call it enmity with God?
 - What is enmity anyway?
 - The word “enmity” conveys the idea of deep hatred, animosity, or hostility.
 - The first place we find this word in Scripture is in Genesis 3:15 right after Satan has tempted Eve. God curses the serpent and says “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”
 - Eve’s offspring is Jesus Christ.
 - We see the word in Numbers 35, where it is used to distinguish between accidental homicide and premeditated murder (or murder with malice).
 - Another place we see the word *enmity* used is in Galatians 5:19-21: “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.”
 - This list immediately precedes the listing of the fruit of the Spirit.
 - Notice that “jealousy” and “envy” are included here as well.
 - James uses the word *friendship* differently than the way we use the term today.
 - We speak of having hundreds of friends on Facebook. At best they are casual acquaintances. The truth is, we might have never even met some of them.
 - In the ancient world, *friendship* meant you were more connected, in terms of worldview, values, goals, interests.
 - Here, when James refers to the “world”, he is not primarily speaking of people, but of the world’s values and systems.
 - By choosing friendship with the world, by choosing to embrace the world’s values and systems and strategies, they were violating the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.”
 - Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 - “No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.”

5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

- This can be a hard verse to understand.
- First of all, we need to be clear. James is not quoting a specific verse of Scripture, since none exists that says exactly this. Rather, he is summarizing Old Testament teaching.
- Secondly, there are a couple of different ways this verse has been translated, and respected scholars disagree on which is correct.
 - In the ESV and NASB translations, the idea James is communicating is that God is jealous for his people, and he is offended when we are drawn away from our love for him. This idea is conveyed consistently in the Old Testament.
 - The other translation is found in the NIV (and KJV):

Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?

