

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



James 4:1-12 **“Whose Friend Are You?”**

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(5th Sunday in Lent)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

II'E: JAMES 4:1-12 "WHOSE FRIEND ARE YOU?"

Continues *Topos* Of Envy: Wars/Battle Language, Zealots?

E. 4:1-12 WARNINGS TO THE ARGUMENTATIVE AND JUDGMENTAL.

Christian Teachers?

		1) vv.1-3 Conflicts And Passions: Question & Answer.		Envy→War/Murder, Prime Ex. = Cain/Abel (Gen. 4)
1 Q1		WHAT CAUSES FIGHTINGS AND WARS AMONG YOU?		3:13, Fine Diatribe, Hellenistic <i>Topos</i> , 2:11, 3:5-6
		Assumes Problem, Distorted Desires! Each Of Us = War Zone!		
A1	a	Is it not your passions (<i>hedonai</i> /cravings) that are at war with your members? (Yes)		1:14-15, Shift To 2 nd Person
2a	b	You desire and <u>do not have</u> desire/ do not have		<i>Killing = Common In Envy Topos</i>
		so you kill;	kill	Mt. 5:21-22 , Lk. 8:14, Ps. 59:6, Sir. 28:17-18
	b	And you covet (jealous) and cannot obtain; covet/cannot obtain		2/10 Commands, Ex. 20:17, Envy As Core
		so you fight and wage war./	fight-war	Added <i>So</i> , Pattern = Accusation + Indictment
				If Not From God, Don't Want It
	c	You <u>do not have</u> ,	not have	1:5-6 (Pray For Wisdom)
		because you do not ask.	not ask	//Mt. 7:7-10, Lk. 11:9, 18:1-8
3		You ask and do not receive,	ask/ not receive	1:5-6, Unanswered, Health/Wealth Gospel
		because you ask wrongly (evilly)	ask wrongly	<i>kakos</i> , Envy Influenced Even Prayer
	a'	to spend it on your passions (pleasures, <i>hedonai</i>).	God As A Vending Machine! No Coveting, Open System: Abundance	

2) vv.4-6 Opposition: God And The World (2 Questions/2 Answers/2 Quotes), Insult.

Strong Language, //1:27 *Unstained From The World*, Ezek. 23:45, Mal. 3:5, Hos. 1-3, 9:1

4a	a	<i>Unfaithful (adulterous) creatures!</i>	D.A, Mt. 16:4, Mk. 8:38, = Broken Covenant/Wrong Lover! 1 Jn. 2:15-17
b, Q2		Do you not know "that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"	Mt. 6:24 , Loyalty, Identity Issue
			<i>World = Fallen Creation In Rebellion, Friend = One Soul</i>
c, A2	b	Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.	//2:23, Inference (<i>oun</i>), <i>Topos</i> = Friendship Real Dualism, Hell Is The Best God Can Do For Some People!
			In Greco-Roman World, Friends Viewed The World Alike = Deep Affinity
5a	a'	Or do you suppose it is in vain that the Scripture says,	(paraphrase?), Problems With Quote: T. Jud. 20:1
b, Q3		"He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us?"	(NRSV), Gen. 6:3-7, Ex. 20:5, Zech. 8:2
			God Helps, You Must Choose: No <i>Both Ways</i> With God!
6a	b'	But he gives more grace; therefore it says,	Divine Aid, Depend On God, Not Envy!
b, A3		"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the HUMBLE."	Prov. 3:34 (LXX), v.10//1:10, 17
			1 Pt. 5:5-6, Proud/Envious = No Humility

2') vv.7-10 Opposition: God, The Devil, And Sin (10 Imperatives).

Staccato, All Plural

Inference (*oun*), Call For Life-Change, Remedy Friendship With World

7a	a	Submit yourselves therefore to God.	1) Submit	3 Central Parts, Each With a,b
				3:15
b	Moral	b1 Resist the devil	2) Resist/ Promise	Test. Dan. 6:2, T. Simeon 3:5
8a		and he will flee from you./		1 Pt. 5:8-9, Eph. 6:13, Warfare, 1 Cor. 10:13
b		Draw near to God	3) Draw Near/ Promise	Ascent, Ps. 121
		and he will draw near to you.//		Incredible Promise! Mal. 3:7, Zech. 1:3
				Is. 1:11-17, Ex. 30:19-21, Jer. 4:14, Job. 22:30, Ps. 24:3-4, 73:13; Sir. 38:10
c	Cultic	b2 Cleanse your hands,	4) Cleanse Hands: Outer/ D.A. (//v.4)	
9a		and purify your hearts,	5) Purify Hearts: Inner/ D.A.	1:8, 27, 3:17, 4:4
				v.9b = a-b-c/c'-b'-a'
b	Prophetic	b3 Lament and mourn and weep./	6-8) Lament, Mourn, Weep	Joel 2:12-13
c		Let your laughter be turned to mourning	9) Laughter, Joy Turn	Lk. 6:21, 25
		and your joy to dejection.//		1:10
				1:9-11, 1 Pt. 5:6, Get On Knees/ Face
10	a'	Be HUMBLED before the Lord, and he will exalt you.	10) Humble/Promise	Mt. 5:5, 23:12, Lk. 14:11, 18:14
				Job 5:11, Humility Is Not Passivity But Bodily Engagement

1') vv.11-12 Conflict And Judgment: Ex. Of Selfish Ambition (3:9).

Ex. 20:16, Sins Of Tongue, 3:1-12

Lev. 19:16-18 (Love Law), Mt. 7:1-6, Lk. 6:37, 1 Cor. 5:1-5, Mt. 18:15-35

11a	a	Do not speak evil (slander) of one another, brethren.	(Shift Tone, D.A.)	a. ONE ANOTHER
b	Ethical	b He who speaks against a brother/sister or judges a brother/sister, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.		b. MAN AS JUDGE
				Superiority, Not Humility
				Never Take God's Place In Another's Life
12a	b'	But if you judge the law, you are a not a doer of the law but a judge.		b' GOD AS JUDGE
b		There is One lawgiver and One judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.	2:19, Mt. 10:28, Shema, Dt. 6:4, 32:39	
c	a'	BUT WHO ARE YOU THAT YOU JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR?		a' NEIGHBOR 2:8, Lev. 19:28

A Brief Treatment Of James 4:1-12

With this unit we moved to the fourth essay (II' 4:1-5:6). The surface structure of 4:1-12 is a 4:2 concentric pattern (1. vv.1-3, 2. vv.4-6 // 2' vv.7-10, 1' vv.11-12) with rhetorical questions as inclusions (v.1a/v.12a). The unit also opens and closes with examples of conflict (v.1, *fightings and wars among you* // v.11a, the *slander of one another*) as brackets. The central parts (2. vv.4-6 // 2' vv.7-10) share an ethical dualism (v.4, *God v. world* // v.8, *God v. devil*) plus a reminder from Proverbs that if *grace* is for the *humble*, (v.6), then *humble yourselves before the Lord* (v.10) as a verbal link at the end of 2 (v.6b) and 2' (v.10). The second person is used throughout, and in 2//2' are vivid direct addresses (v.4, "adulterous creatures" // vv.8c-9a, "you sinners... you men of double mind." Echoes of Jesus' are found in each part (vv.2c-3a, 4b, 9, 10, 12b). James has digested his brother's words and assumes they will be noticed.

Surprisingly, James begins with a clear echo of Plato's analysis. Whether he read the philosopher or absorbed conventional wisdom, the echo is precise in content and interrogatory form, "Whence come wars and fightings and factions? Whence but from the body and the lusts of the body" (*Phaedrus* 66C)? James' gloss is that the problem is not just *the world* outside the church but *among you*. The war within, i.e. disordered passions, is externalized as conflict for the same limited goods and pleasures. James answers his question (v.1a) with a question (v.1b) plus explanation (vv.2-3) as a rhetorical technique. Note the 4:2 structure (a-b//b'-a') of vv.1b-3 where *passion* (Gk. *hedonai*) is an inclusion (v.1b//v.3b) and where the two central components contain the phrase *do not have* (v.2a//v.2c). Unbridled desire unchecked leads to interpersonal violence. Since some of our desires may be met through asking God (v.2c//Mt. 7:7-8), ask! But if we ask for things to indulge our disordered passions (v.3a), God cannot grant them. There is conflict between us because it is first within us. God's gifts are for our good, not our further corruption.

In the second part (2. vv.4-6) the form is two questions (v.4a, v.5) and answers (v.4c, v.6), an a-b//a'-b' step pattern. He begins with a direct address (v.4a, *adulterous creatures*). The church is unfaithful to God by shacking with *the world*, "Do you not know that friendship with *the world* is enmity with God?" (v.4b)? Creation is good, but *the world* (Gk. *cosmos*) is creation corrupted and overlaid with sin, evil, death, and idolatry in all forms. If we reflect the world's obsessions, we've embraced the wrong lover. Loyalty to God, like marriage, is exclusive; monotheism is monogamous. Friendship in that world was more than casual; it was for two to look at lifethrough one set of eyes and share in all things; it was immersion. When disciples merge with the culture and forget our *over-againstness*, we are unfaithful. Verse 5b is difficult to translate; I prefer, "He yearns jealously over the spirit he has made to dwell in us." God loves us and seeks the full restoration of the divine image. So does God leave us in our mess? No, as promised in Proverbs, God gives extra grace to those who see their need; the humble look up to God rather than longingly at the world or down at others.

James now shifts (2' 2:7-10) to ten imperatives for the humble to act upon in their battle with vice and its supporting passions. It begins and ends with surrender to God (v.7a, *Submit yourselves* // v.10, *Humble yourselves*). In between are three clusters (vv.7b-8 [*resist.. draw near*], vv.8b-9a [*cleanse...purify*, v.9b, *lament...let*). We are militant because our foe will flee when resisted. If we respond to the call and draw near to God, we will find the presence (v.8b). The next two commands (vv.8c, 9a) match a confrontive direct address (*you sinners* // *you men of double mind*) with a call to clean up outward actions (i.e. *hands*) and inward desires (i.e. *hearts*). Repentance is not a single event but a lifestyle with strong emotional component (vv.9b-c). To see the truth of myself and the world is painful; the true response is to turn to God in humility. James saves a Jesus quote (Mt. 18:4 // 23:12) as the punch line (v.10). Self-promotion is resisted; kingdom promotions are from above. James returns to the topic of community conflict in the last part (1' vv.11-12.) To slander another is to put myself in God's place as lawgiver, a dangerous arrogance. I am to love my neighbor. The reminder is sealed with a blunt question, "Just who do you think you are?"

WHOSE FRIEND ARE YOU?

“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”

An assumption that drives American cultural Christians bonkers!

J A M E S 4 : 4 b

Some mornings I see the most amazing thing. That it’s so common doesn’t make it less remarkable, only less noticeable. I shower, drink two cups of coffee, down a smoothie and head to the Y. It’s dark when I leave, and then— if the timing’s right— the sun rises on the way home. Darkness gives way to long shadows stretching west and soon the light of day. On the way I see little beyond my headlights; now I see not only the sun but everything else in light of it, an image C.S. Lewis used to describe the capacity of the Christian faith to make sense of things, to comprehend the whole of life. Here’s how Lewis put it, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”¹

Christian faith is allegiance to Jesus and an opening to the Father who sent him and the Spirit who accompanied him.² He once said of himself without apology, “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”³ With Jesus it’s always dawn. He illumines; he enlightens; he warms; he reveals a new way of seeing ourselves

¹ “Is Theology Poetry,’ in *C.S. Lewis: Essay Collection* (London, HarperCollins, 2000), 21.

² On the dual missions of the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, incarnation and outpouring, as the historical revealing of the Trinity and thus the divine life, see Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), especially Chapter 4, “Incarnation and Pentecost,” 93-120.

³ John 8:12.

and the world around us. Jesus shows us himself and a view of the world; his lenses correct our distorted sight. Life looks different in his company. As we sing in our national hymn, written by a former slave trader, “I once was lost, but now I’m found, *was blind but now I see.*” Sight and illumination are his gifts, and by him we navigate our lives with his Spirit in our sails.

Now James, author of the letter,⁴ was Jesus’ next youngest brother,⁵ and—according to a note in John⁶— neither he nor his other brothers were followers during the ministry. That all changed with a one-on-one resurrection appearance to James as listed by Paul in a composite list that includes individual as well as group appearances, showings to followers and skeptics.⁷ “My brother is the crucified Messiah. Our God raised him from the dead and stamped him fully approved. Jesus is transparent to the LORD, how is that?” Imagine the shock, the time it took to work through to a new paradigm. Fresh divine revelation, and this was surely that, scrambles old categories. “For three years the whole family thought him crazy, and now this!”⁸ Lord, have mercy on us all.” And the family is there on Pentecost under the descending fire.⁹

Now at a lesser level something similar happened the summer after my first year at Wake Forest. I surrendered to One I once knew in a naive, childish fashion. Immediately the lights came on, and what I saw took time to clean up, but now I could see, as if a fog rolled back. I saw Phil differently; I saw the

⁴ On authorship, see Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2007), “Authorship of James,” 395-401, ending with this, “I conclude that this document was written at least by the 50s, by someone we know as James the brother of the Lord, as a hortatory sermon.”

⁵ Mark 6:3.

⁶ 7:5.

⁷ See 1 Cor 15:1-11.

⁸ Mark 3:31-35.

⁹ Acts 1:14.

world differently; I saw the challenge differently; I saw others differently, and that this change of life corresponds to James' four paragraphs is an indicator—I think—that it was grounded— even despite the time that separates us— in the same reality, a meeting with the risen Jesus. His a full blown resurrection appearance, mine a lesser, later meeting, but still with power to redirect the whole of life till today. That's real power, isn't it? A sense of divine presence that sets you on a new trajectory. Not only the memory of it remains; the presence has gone with me and haunted me in the best sense of the word.

I see myself as a fallen man in the process of being healed by Jesus Christ. All my basic appetites and desires are good since they were made such, but none of them are in their original innocent, supportive condition, nor have they ever been so. Just like yours, they've been infected by a virus of rebellion, diseased and inflamed by the fevers of this world, a nest of powers pushing me this way and that, almost a mind of their own, asking for more and more control, always with the possibility of genuine addiction and compulsion attached to any one of them. Hunger into gluttony, affection into lust, rest into sloth, proper self regard into inflationary pride, appreciation into envy, legitimate acquisition warped into insatiable greed, occasional anger as a warning of injustice into wrath as a controlling emotion even where it's not needed. Each of the seven deadly sins is a good thing gone sour and bad and dangerous. I want what I want; I want it now, and if you are in my way, I will connive and deceive a way forward.

This is our condition, however restrained and made respectable by law and custom, and even with the Spirit of Jesus now dwelling in the control center of life, the battle continues because I do not yet have a liberated, resurrection body but live with the old one and its deep habits of mind and flesh as driven by the passions to make me happy first and last of all. This is the source of human conflict, *fightings and wars* to use James' combat imagery. I am a battleground of competing passions, and when I go public, they go with me. James' violent imagery is realistic. We do not have peace with one another because we do not have peace within, and when we externalize our desires in behavior, it's what destruction looks like. If there's only so much to go around, I get mine first.

But if the world is not a closed but an open system, meaning if God is the supplier with no shortages, then why not take my desires to God to be sorted out

and supplied as is best for me. How much we miss because we do not pray. “You do not have because you do not ask,” he says. How much have I missed because I never asked? How much love, how much joy, how much peace, how much understanding, how many missed chances to do good? And, on the other hand, how many of our *No*’s to prayer are because God is not a vending machine for our disordered passions. So a valuable thing I received is a sober understanding of myself and where conflict comes from, which is why all need a Savior who remakes us inside out. In his light I see myself and my world truly. It’s an ugly shock and a wake-up call. Nothing is untouched.

A second gift is a new view of *the world*, and the Greek word is *cosmos*—from which get words like *cosmetic* and *cosmopolitan* having to do with the surface of things, and here I do not mean the good and beautiful creation. Creation and *cosmos* occupy the same space with different agendas. *The world* in the negative sense is the overlay of sin and death and evil and disordered human passions that corrupt us and scar the creation. It’s human culture organized against the knowledge of God with an independent agenda. And if the obsessions of the world become your guiding light; if your goal is to conform to the pressures around you, guess what? Even if you claim to be a Jesus follower, you’ve made God your enemy, as James says twice, “friendship with the world is enmity with God.” You’re playing to the wrong audience. If *go along to get along* is your slogan, you’re moving away from God, more an invertebrate than a soul attached to a spine for upright living.

I’m not speaking here of *worldly* as *sophisticated* or *knowledgeable* or even *fashionable* or *urbane*—all of which believers may possess— but *worldly* as independent of God and glad of it. Living with the self and its insatiable appetites at the center, not caring that the God who made us yearns for us to come back into relationship, as James’ paraphrase of Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us,”¹⁰ and that a detox is available for any who bend the knee, as Proverbs promises, “God opposes the proud, the self-sufficient, and gives aid to the humble, those who ask for help to be extracted from the claws of *the world*.” In the circle of Christ’s friendship, I see my world differently. I kneel under the hand of another.

¹⁰ A highly disputed text, perhaps the most difficult in the New Testament.

A third illumination is that I see a new agenda, and in imitation of the ten commandments James gives us a new list of ten in verses 7 through 10 with the first and last as parallels, “Submit yourself therefore to God.... Humble yourself before the Lord.” Give God the whole of who you are and who you are not. Without reserve, without qualification, without excuse, without an escape hatch. And not when you get your act together, but now! Take up the battle for your own soul. Learn to push back against the lures and lies of the devil and know the sense of victory over what used to shame and humiliate you. Press into God’s presence often because you know help is already on the way. Keep your hands and heart clean; monitor actions and attitude; repent quickly when anything is revealed; don’t let the crud pile up and weigh you down with guilt so tyou can’t look up into God’s face as a trusting child. Stay free and vulnerable with God. And when God pricks your conscience, let the emotions come. It’s good to mourn your sins, not to make excuses but name them plainly. Get low; a bowed head, a bended knee, and a face on the floor are all physical postures that help humble us, and they are good places to wait for the Lord’s lifting hand of restoration. Life is now God-centered, so submit and fight and pray and come clean and let God give you feelings that match reality. Then watch what happens as Jesus invites you deeper into his friendship and mission.

I once ran across an analogy that’s helped me. Let’s say you’re riding along and see Jesus at the side of the road. He waves and you slow. Do you pick him up? Where does he ride? Some put him in the trunk with the spare in case of emergency. They pray when life hurts. Many invite him into the back seat for polite conversation, say Sunday mornings. Fewer still invite him to sit in the front for face-to-face interaction: daily prayer. But notice in all three who remains the driver: *You!* Direction has not changed; you’ve just got a new passenger with more or less access depending on where he rides. As yet no abandonment of self, its agendas and demands. No submission.

At some point Jesus issues an invitation, “Why don’t you give me the keys and let me drive? If you don’t trust me, why don’t I just get out?” It’s decision time. “Submit yourself therefore to God,” says James.

Some of you have done that; the issue is settled. For others it’s not. ‘Yes, he died and rose for my forgiveness, but do I trust him with the keys?’”

“I did not come for a ride-along,” he says, “I came to drive.”

It all begins with surrender. And what a battle that is!
