

James: Lesson #77 – Draw Near to God
Notes for Parents to Study With Their Children
For Sunday, Feb. 22nd

Read James 4:1-17 (a simplified explanation of the text will be supplied at the end of these notes).

Memory Verse: James 4:7 “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Wanting the Wrong Things in Our Hearts

- When we want to do bad things, sooner or later it will cause us problems. If you want what other people have and you dislike them because they have it and are upset because you don't have it, it leads to bad feelings and could lead to a fight.
- But instead of wanting what others have, and being jealous of them, you should first go to God in prayer and ask Him for it. Sometimes we don't have because we have never bothered to ask Him.
- There are also times we have asked God for something, but when He looks at our heart He sees that we only want it because we are greedy. Maybe we want more money or more things, but when God sees that we only plan to use it selfishly just for our own pleasure, He knows that we asked for a bad reason and doesn't give it to us.

How God Looks at Worldly Christians

- James says that it's not a good thing to have friendship with the world.
- By the world, he isn't just talking about the people of the world, but all the things of the world -- all the sinful things that the world offers. Friendship with the world means you are more interested in pleasing the world than pleasing God. When you don't put God first you are worldly because you care more about things of life than you do about what God wants. The Devil uses worldly things to try to get us away from God.
- What does God think when He sees Christians acting worldly? Here is someone who is supposed to love Him, but God sees that they love worldly things more than Him. God feels jealous because of that. Have you ever had a friend who you talked to all the time and you did things together, and then they just stopped acting friendly to you?. They didn't want to do things with you any more. Then you noticed they had started being friends with someone else and they didn't even act like they wanted to talk to you anymore. That would hurt you and make you feel bad.
- God feels the same way when we act like we love the world, but not Him. It's really even worse because it's like we are saying we would rather be friends with the Devil than to be friends with God.

Get Close to God

- Christians who really want to do right, don't ever want to be worldly and act like we don't care about God. But even the best Christians can feel like their being pulled away from God by things in the world.

- We need to humble ourselves. That means we need to remind ourselves that God is the most important thing in the world. We are just people. We should live our lives knowing that God is much wiser than we are and we have to listen to Him, trust Him and obey Him.
- We need to be sorry when we do wrong. We need to know that we have hurt God and pray and ask His forgiveness.
- We need to stand up against the Devil. You can't be double-minded. You can't say "Well I'll serve God on Sunday, but the rest of the week I'll live worldly the way the Devil wants me to." As we said, God can't stand that. We don't need to be interested in the things the Devil has to offer. Make up your mind that you won't listen to him when he tries to get you to do something wrong.
- If we will make it clear that we serve God and our lives belong to Him, then the Devil will flee from us.
- When you do these things, you will get closer to God. And guess what? He will get closer to you.

Don't Tell Evil Things About Your Brother

- James reminds us that we don't need to talk bad about other Christians. If they are doing wrong, we can try to help them do better, but we shouldn't be going around saying bad things about them and criticizing them around everyone else. And we better never go around telling things that aren't true about them.
- Jesus is the real Judge, not us, so we need to be careful what we say about other people.

If the Lord Wills

- Do you ever make plans? Do you ever think about what you are going to do tomorrow or next week? Making plans can be a good thing. It helps us get our minds on what we need to do. But do you make your plans thinking about God?
- We talk about what we will do tomorrow, but we forget that tomorrow is in God's hands. We make plans, but we forget that we need God's help to carry out those plans.
- A lot of things can happen tomorrow that may or may not keep us from getting to do what we wanted. We don't know what will happen tomorrow. We need to remind ourselves that our future depends on God. It's good to say, "If the Lord is willing, I will do this or that."
- James says that your life is like a vapor. Vapor is the steam that comes off of a boiling pot or it could also be like fog. A vapor is never around for very long – its here and then gone. James is saying life on this earth is short. That may be hard to understand right now, but grownups know that this is true. So we need to live our lives for God and serve Him so that we can have eternal life in heaven.

If We Know to Do Good, But Don't Do It

- We all know that when God says don't do something (like lie or steal), and we do it, that it is a sin.
- But sin can also happen when we God says to do good and do right, and we don't do it. You can sin by leaving out things God wanted you to do.

- If God says don't do something, we better not do it. If God says do something, we better do it.

Simplified Explanation of the Text

Trouble Comes When We Want Sinful Things

4:1 Don't those wars and fightings among you come from the sinful desires that war within your own members?

2 You're lusting for something, but you don't or can't have it. You kill and envy, but you cannot obtain what you want. You fight and make war. But the reason you don't have it is because you have not asked God for it.

3 And the times some of you did ask for something, you didn't receive it because you asked wrongly to waste it on the evil things you want.

Worldly Christians Make God Jealous

4 Adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So anyone who is a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

5 The Scripture says, "I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her." (Zech. 8:2) Do you think God gave that Scripture for no purpose? God wants us to know that the same Spirit that dwells in us has a great desire for us with jealousy.

Get Close to God

6 But God can give you greater grace. That's why the Scripture tells us, "God opposes those filled with pride who exalt themselves above others, but He gives His favor to those who lower themselves in humility." (Prov. 3:34; Ps. 138:6)

7 So put yourself under God's authority. Stand up against the Devil and he will run away from you.

8 Get close to God and He will get close to you. Sinners, cleanse your hands. Those of you whose minds are divided and not wholly God's, purify your hearts.

9 Afflict yourselves, mourn and weep. Turn your laughter into mourning. Replace that joyful expression with a look of sorrow.

10 Lower yourself in humility in the Lord's sight, and when you do, He shall lift you up high.

Don't Speak Evil of Your Brother

11 Brethren, let's not be speaking against each other. If you speak evil things against your brother and condemn your brother, then you're really guilty of speaking against the Law and condemning the Law. The Law said not to be unjust in your judgment of others by showing partiality to either the great or the small, but to be fair. It said not to go around slandering them or telling tales about them. It said not to harbor hatred in your heart that motivates such evil actions. (Lev. 19:15-17)

So when we are guilty of such things it is like we have judged the Law to be unimportant; it is like we are criticizing the Law because we don't want to obey it. Now if you've become a critic of and judge over the Law, you obviously think it doesn't apply to you and that you don't have to live by it.

12 Just remember that there is only one Lawgiver. He is the one who has the right and ability to save or to destroy. So who are you to judge another person?

If the Lord Wills

13-14 Those of you who say, “Today or tomorrow were going to this city and work there a year buying and selling and making money.” Come on now, you don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow! For what is your life? It’s a vapor – it can be seen for a little while and then it’s not seen any more.

15 Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”

16 But right now you’re boasting about your plans with a bunch of arrogant, empty talk. And all that kind of boasting is evil.

Sins of Omission

17 So if a person knows to do good, and they don’t do it, they are guilty of sin.