

In this chapter, James seems to be talking to those who are professing faith in Christ but whose behavior indicates that they have not yet been born again. Instead of showing love for one another, they were bickering and fighting with one another in an effort to satisfy their fleshly desires. James calls on these people to repent so that they can truly submit themselves to God in obedience.

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

**“From whence come wars [battles] and fightings [quarrels; disputes] among you?”** – After addressing the jealous pride that comes from the world’s wisdom and the sin that it produces (James 3:14-16), James now directs his attention to the source of quarrels and disputes among his readers.

**“come they not hence, even of your lusts [desires for pleasure] that war [wage war] in your members [body parts]?”** – We tend to place the blame for disputes on those that we are fighting with, but James points to the true source of such conflicts. The reason for the quarreling is that these people are being led about by the desires of their sinful flesh rather than by the Spirit of God, resulting in quarrels when their desires conflict with that of others.

2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

**“Ye lust [desire], and have not”** – Despite their desires for worldly things (v. 4) and all that they have done to obtain them, they have not been able to obtain them. God likely intervened to prevent them from obtaining the things that would satisfy their sinful desires.

**“ye kill [murder], and desire to have, and cannot obtain”** – Some commentators try to water down this reference to murder by saying that James meant it figuratively, but this attempt is based on the assumption that James is addressing genuine Christians. It seems that vs. 1-10 are targeting the professing Christians like the ones James spoke of in James 2:14-26. James is saying that even murdering the one with whom they were quarreling did not enable them to satisfy their sinful desires.

**“ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not”** – All of the bickering, quarreling, fighting (and even murder) had not satisfied their desires and James declares the reason: they have not sought God for their answer. They had resorted to human means to try to get what they wanted instead of asking God to supply it. They had forgotten the line from the Lord’s prayer that addresses asking God to meet our daily needs (**Matt. 6:11** “Give us this day our daily bread”).

**“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss [improperly], that ye may consume it upon your lusts”** – Even when they do ask God for the things they desire, they still have not received them because of the selfishness of their prayer. They were not asking for these things to glorify God or to benefit others. Instead, they were asking for things that their sinful flesh desired. It is not wrong to ask God for money, for instance, if it is for unselfish things such as providing for your family. God rarely answers a prayer to win the lottery, however, because the intent of that prayer is typically so that you can spend the money on things that your flesh wants.

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. 5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

**“Ye adulterers and adulteresses”** – James characterizes these people who are fighting because they are following their worldly desires as engaging in spiritual adultery. This metaphor is used many times in the OT to describe Israel when they were being unfaithful to the LORD. These people said that they believed in Jesus Christ but their affinity for the world gave evidence to the contrary (**James 2:14** “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?”).

**“know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity [hostility] with God?”** – The world and God are totally incompatible with one another (**John 15:18-19** (Jesus speaking to his disciples) “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”). A person who loves the world has chosen a side because you cannot straddle the fence between God and the world. They have chosen the world and the world is hostile to everything that pertains to God.

**“whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”** – The world condones sin and condemns the righteousness of God, therefore anyone who sides with the world has placed themselves in opposition to God.

**“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”** – James is not quoting a particular OT passage but seems to be citing a composite teaching contained in OT scripture to show the hostility between God and the world and our tendency to follow the things of the world. Commentators debate two possible interpretations of James’ scripture reference: 1) the “spirit that dwelleth in us” is the Holy Spirit, Who jealously desires to lead us to obey the will of God instead of our sinful desires; 2) the “spirit” is our unredeemed human spirit that jealously seeks to satisfy its sinful desires instead of the will of God. This second interpretation seems to better fit the context of James addressing professing Christians who are following the world and are in need of God’s redeeming grace (v. 6).

6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

**“But he giveth more [greater; larger; stronger] grace”** – James has good news for those that James has been addressing since v. 1, who are in need of salvation. God has more than enough grace to forgive their sin if they will humbly repent.

**“Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”** – James quotes **Prov. 3:34** (“Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly”) to show that God does not offer His grace to those who proudly believe that they don’t need it (like those who are proud of their worldly wisdom in chapter 3). However, those who humble themselves in repentance will abundantly receive God’s grace and forgiveness.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Satan does not want these people to submit themselves to God, so if they repent and submit themselves to God’s grace then they are effectively resisting Satan’s will. Satan will then have no choice but to flee when we have accepted God’s presence into our life.

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

**“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you”** – God is the One Who initiates the call to salvation, so when we respond to His invitation with repentance then He will draw near to us.

**Matt 11:28** *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

**John 7:37** *“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”*

**Rev 3:20** *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”*

**“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners”** – The term “sinners” is only used in scripture to refer to those who have not been redeemed. James is urging these sinners to “cleanse [their] hands” by confessing and repenting of their sins. This cleansing is of their outward behavior – they are to repent from following the world and engaging in its sinful behaviors.

**“and purify your hearts, ye double minded”** – This refers to the inner thoughts and desires which come from their heart. James addresses them as “double-minded,” meaning that their hearts/minds are divided between serving God and following the world. James is urging them to purify their hearts by becoming single-minded in their intent to obey God.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

**“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness”** – Instead of laughing in enjoyment of the world’s pleasures, James is urging these unsaved sinners to be broken hearted in repentance over their sin. **Matt. 5:4** *“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”*

**“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”** – It takes humbleness to confess that we are sinners unable to save ourselves and that we are in desperate need of God’s mercy and grace. However, when we do so, God will graciously forgive us and exalt us to be His children. **Matt. 23:12** *“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”*

11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

**“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law”** – It seems to be in our human nature to want to point out the sins of others. James tells his readers that we who condemn our brother based our own opinion are “speaking evil of the law.” To interject our opinion on what another brother “deserves” is to say that the law is incomplete or incapable of correctly enforcing justice. That would make us a judge of the law and thus placing ourselves above the law.

**“but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge”** – By placing themselves above the law as its judge, they are implicitly declaring that they are not under the authority of the law (not “a doer of the law”) and thus not required to obey it.

**“There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”** – James makes it clear that none of us have the authority to judge, supersede or circumvent God’s law, for there is only one Lawgiver Who is capable of deciding who to forgive and who to condemn for breaking His law (“to save and to destroy”). Who are we to second-guess God and judge someone else independently of the law of God?

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

It is human arrogance that causes us to think that we are in control of our lives. James points out that futility to those who believe that they can determine their own future when they have no idea what is going to happen tomorrow. Our lives are short and we cannot extend them for any significant amount of time.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. 16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

James condemns this attitude of self-sufficiency and autonomy, saying that we should plan our future with the knowledge that our plans will only be successful if God allows. It is our sinful pride that leads us to believe that we can determine our future. Boasting of what we will do in the future without acknowledging God’s will is an evil thing. Instead, we should submit our will and plans to God, recognizing that His purposes supersede ours.

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

James is likely making this statement in reference to the last few verses concerning the submission of our will and plans to the will of God. However, we can also take this statement in the general sense as well. If we know that doing a good thing is in God’s will, then we are sinning if we do not do it. Jesus spoke of this in a parable of a man who left a servant in charge of his household while he was away. The servant thought his lord would be gone for a while and began taking advantage of the situation and was not ready when his lord returned. **Luke 12:47** *“And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”*