

James 4 : “Humble Faith in a Proud World”

Theme: Conflict, worldliness, repentance, humility, and submission to God

Text: James 4:1–17

INTRODUCTION

- Humanity is constantly surrounded by **conflict, division, ambition,** and **self-sufficiency**.
- James writes to believers wrestling with internal desires, external pressures, and divided loyalties.
- In this chapter James confronts the very **root** of human conflict and shows the way back to peace with God.

James 4 is one of the most direct, heartexposing chapters in the New Testament.

It deals with four great battles:

- The battle **within** (our desires)
- The battle **around us** (worldliness)
- The battle **above us** (God’s authority)
- The battle **ahead of us** (God’s will)

It calls believers to humility, repentance, and submission to God in all things.

POINT 1 — THE ROOT OF CONFLICT: DISORDERED DESIRES (James 4:1–3)

READ (NLT):

 ¹*What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you?* ²*You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it.* ³*And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.* ⁴

James 4:1-3

Key idea: Conflict comes from within, not from circumstances or other people.

James begins by confronting the source of all conflict — not people, not circumstances, but **desires out of order**.

- Inside every person lives a war between selfish desires and the Spirit of God.
- We want what we cannot have, and we are willing to fight, manipulate, and even pray wrongly to get it.
- Prayerlessness exposes selfsufficiency.
- Wrong motives expose selfcenteredness.

James is not addressing external conflict first — he is addressing **heart conflict**.

POINT 2 — SPIRITUAL ADULTERY & WORLDLINESS (James 4:4–6)

READ (NLT):

 ⁴*You adulterers! Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.* ⁵*Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is*

passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. Or They say that the spirit God has placed within us is filled with envy; or They say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, opposes our envy. ⁶ And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

James 4:4-6

James uses the strongest possible language: “**You adulterers!**” (James uses strong tone here. Not to bring shame. He says “**Wake up – This matters eternally. God through James is confronting the spiritual condition of the heart and not your individual worth.**) He is speaking covenantal language— when believers give their loyalty to worldly systems, values, and desires, they commit **spiritual infidelity**.

- Friendship with the world = hostility toward God
- Divided loyalty = spiritual adultery
- God longs with **jealous passion** for His people
- But the proud shut themselves off from grace
- The humble receive more and more grace

The Loving severity here is:

- **Severe enough** to expose self-deception
- **Loving enough** to restore the repentant
- **Clear enough** to demand a response
- **Hopeful enough** to sustain transformation

This section reveals a hard truth:

The heart always creates conflict where Christ is not King.

POINT 3 — THE PATH TO RESTORATION

READ (NLT):

 ⁷ So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. ⁹ Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor. ' James 4:7-10

James now gives the steps to spiritual restoration — a sequence of revival in the believer’s life.

1. Submit yourselves to God

Yield your will, desires, and control to Him.

2. Resist the devil

You cannot resist Satan while resisting God.

Submission comes first; then spiritual authority flows.

3. Draw near to God

God does not shame repentant people.

He **draws near** to those who draw near to Him.

4. Cleanse your hands & purify your hearts

- Hands = external actions

- Hearts = internal motives

5. Grieve, mourn, and weep

A trivial attitude toward sin blocks spiritual growth.

Repentance is not gloomy — it is **transformative**.

6. Humble yourselves

And the promise?

He will lift you up in honor.

God lifts up those who kneel down.

POINT 4 — THE SIN OF JUDGING OTHERS (James 4:11–12)

READ (NLT):

 ¹¹*Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.* ¹²*God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor? '*

James 4:11-12

James is not speaking about discernment — Scripture commands the church to discern.

He is condemning a **critical, condemning spirit** that:

- tears others down
- elevates self
- assumes motives
- replaces God as Judge

When we judge wrongly, we step into a courtroom that does not belong to us.

Only **one** Lawgiver and Judge exists — and it is not us.

James calls us to humility, compassion, and restraint in speech

POINT 5 — THE ARROGANCE OF SELFSUFFICIENT PLANNING

READ (NLT):

 ¹³*Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit."* ¹⁴*How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone.* ¹⁵*What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."* ¹⁶*Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.* ¹⁷*Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.'* James 4:13-17

James addresses wealthy merchants who planned their lives without acknowledging God.

Their sin was not planning — it was **presumption**.

1. Life is uncertain

"You don't know what your life will be like tomorrow."

2. Life is fragile

"Your life is like the morning fog — here for a little while, then gone."

3. Life must be surrendered

What believers **ought** to say is:

"If the Lord wants us to..."

This recognizes His sovereignty over:

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- time
- opportunities
- outcomes
- lifespan

4. The sin of omission

“It is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.”

This is one of the most overlooked doctrines in Scripture:

Sin is not just doing wrong —

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- The failure, then, is not ignorance—it is relational.
- At the moment of omission, something deeper is happening:
- I know what God is leading me to do... but I choose not to trust Him enough to obey.
- So the omission happens downstream of a heart-decision.

At the core here omission is a functional mistrust and declining a relationship of dependence on Jesus.

James calls us to:

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- humble planning
- surrendered living
- daily dependence on God’s will

CONCLUSION — A CALL TO HUMBLE FAITH

James 4 confronts the proud heart and invites believers into:

• Humility

Humility is rightly placing ourselves under God’s authority, recognizing our dependence on Him. God actively opposes pride but pours grace on those who humble themselves before Him, promising to lift them up in due time.

• Repentance

Repentance is a deep, heartfelt turning away from sin toward God, marked by sorrow over divided loyalty and renewed devotion. It is not external guilt but inward transformation that restores fellowship with God.

• Submission to God

Submission means yielding our will, plans, and desires to God’s rule. True spiritual resistance against sin and the devil begins only after we fully submit ourselves to God. Not Lording over you but coming under his mission for your life.

• Purified Motives

Purified motives flow from a heart undivided between God and the world. God calls believers to cleanse both outward actions and inward intentions so that their desires align with His will, not selfish pleasure.

• God-centered Planning

God-centered planning acknowledges the fragility of life and God’s sovereignty over every outcome. Instead of presumption, believers plan with humility, saying, “If the Lord wills,” entrusting every future step to Him. **(LIFE HAPPENS)**

• Compassion toward Others

Compassion flows from humility and restraint, refusing to judge or speak against others. Believers are called to leave judgment to God alone and relate to one another with grace, mercy, and love.

The message is simple:

God lifts up the humble.

God gives grace to the humble.

God draws near to the humble.

Humility is the pathway to peace with God, peace with others, and peace within ourselves.