

A. The Origin of Church _____ (1-3)

Evil _____ (1-2a)

Lack of _____ and Selfish _____ (2b-3)

_____ with the World (4-6)

B. The Solution (7-10)

_____ to God (7a)

_____ the Devil (7b)

_____ to God (8a)

Cleanse - _____ Hands and _____ Hearts (8b)

Repent - _____, _____, _____,

_____ (9)

_____ yourselves before the _____ (10)

C. Who Is the _____ ? (11-12)

Homework

- **Read James 4:13-17.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 9: Speaking Well of Others" (pp 89-96).**
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
 1. According to James, why should believers in Christ not speak against each other?
 2. What does it mean to *slander* another person? How would you define the term?
 3. What advice does James offer in this passage about making plans?
 4. When does planning turn into boastful pride?
 5. What attitude does God want you to have about the future? Why?
 6. Why is God not satisfied that you simply *know* how to do good?
 7. Why is it critical to stop the "drips" when it comes to speaking poorly of others?
 8. How have you seen anger and gossip erode relationships in the church?
 9. What part does pride play when it comes to judging others and speaking poorly about them?
 10. Why do you think it is so hard to practice humility with our works?
 11. What have you learned from people in your life who demonstrate a spirit of humility?
 12. What steps can you take to develop a spirit of humility as you plan for the future?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** How are you choosing to look to God as your source of affirmation rather than to others?

Introduction

1. What is going on in our world today?
 - a. A young man from Dallas, TX drove 12 hours to El Paso, TX where entered a WalMart and shot and killed 22 people and wounded 24 others.
 - b. Another young man early last Sunday morning in Dayton, OH shot and killed 9 people in 30 seconds before he was shot and killed by police. Fourteen other people were injured by gunfire.
 - c. We hear of these events and wonder what is going on in our world today?
 - d. The answer is that the world has been, is, and will continue to be filled with human pride and selfishness that has its origin with the devil.
2. Human pride and selfishness also invade even the church body through misguided leaders or rebellious church members. Church fights can be nasty. They may not always lead to murder but character assassination and the death of the church's witness in the local community often result.
3. What is the answer? The only answer to resisting these devilish impulses is humble submission to God.

4. **Read James 4:1-12.****A. The Origin of Church Fights** (1-3)

1. James starts chapter 4 with a rhetorical question just as he did at the beginning of chapter 3.
 - a. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? (1a)
 - 1) "fights" (Gk., *polemoi* = lit. "warring") – This term could refer to a state of hostility, outright war, or battle but could also be metaphorical in its use.
 - 2) "quarrels" (Gk., *machai* – lit. "swording") – Used of both physical and metaphorical battles.
 - 3) The sense of this passage as well as evidence from the NT, which will be shared below, points to the fact that there were physical conflicts between believers within the church.
 - b. This question is posed to those to whom James writes, the leaders and members of Messianic congregations, but it also applies to us.
 - c. He answers his own question: "Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (1b)

2. **Evil Desires** (1-2a)

- a. "desires" (Gk., *hedonai*) – This word is the source of our word hedonism. The desires/cravings of the teachers were selfish. As we observed last week in Jm 3:13-16, they gave in to bitter envy and selfish ambition in their desire to gain power and control.
- b. While James used a different word here, it can be linked to another Greek word also translated as desire (Gk., *epithumia*) that he used in Jm 1:14-15:

"... each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."
- c. There is a war going on within each of us that can lead to fights.
 - 1) Will we submit our evil desires to God's control or the devil's?
 - 2) In Jm 3:13-18, James presented the two sources of wisdom.
 - a) an "earthly, unspiritual, demonic" source of wisdom (Jm 3:15)
 - b) or a source of wisdom that "comes from heaven" (Jm 3:17)
 - c) He also said, "Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing" (Jm 3:10).
 - d) Which source of wisdom controls our desires, attitudes, and actions in life?
- d. When we give our evil desires over to action, the results can be quite devastating.
 - 1) When we covet (Gk., *zoulte* – zealous pursuit) our own way, it leads to quarrels and fights.
 - 2) Unfulfilled evil desires, such as envy and selfish ambition, can lead us to "kill" (Gk. *phoneuete*).
 - a) Murder began in Genesis 4 with envious Cain murdering his brother Abel.
 - b) It is possible that some zealous Messianic Jews were willing to kill those, such as Paul, who did not believe as they did (cf., Acts 21:20-28; 23:22-23).
 - c) The reference to killing/murder could also be metaphorical, but either way it is sinful.
 - d) Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Mt 5:21-22).

3. **Lack of Prayer and Selfish Prayer** (2b-3)

a. James pointed out two reasons that believers don't get what they desire, what they covet.

b. First, they do not ask.

1) James has already counseled those lacking wisdom to ask God for it: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do" (Jm 1:5-8).

2) Jesus even said, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (Jn 14:13).

3) However, they cannot ask for their evil desires to be fulfilled in Jesus' name because what they desire does not glorify Jesus. What they would ask for is unfaithful, full of doubt and unbelief, double-minded.

4) Scot McKnight summarizes, "They did not ask God because they wanted what they wanted and not what God wanted. They had no capacity even to pause to consider what might be the good and honorable path. . . Zeal, ambitions, cravings, and desires ruled their hearts and prevented them from having the very thing required of the one who grows into godly wisdom: humility" (McKnight, *James*, 329)

c. Second, what they asked for was selfish.

1) Prayer centered on sinful, selfish desires is not worthy of asking and will not be fulfilled.

a) McKnight notes, "Unanswered prayer is caused by doubt (1:6-8; cf. 5:14-15), not asking (4:2), and asking for the wrong reasons (4:3)" (McKnight, 329).

b) James pointed out to these unfaithful teachers that their prayers were wasted on their zeal, selfish ambition, cravings, and evil desires. They wanted glory and power not wisdom and the will of God.

2) True prayer, like that of Jesus in Gethsemane, is centered on others and the will of God. It will be answered.

d. James MacArthur states, "James argues persuasively that genuine spiritual life and faithful Christian living involve separation from the world and all its countless contaminations. Conversely, a continuing habitual friendship with the world is grounded in human wisdom and is evidence of unbelief. Such a lifestyle invariably leads to interpersonal conflict" (MacArthur, *James*, 67).

4. **Friendship with the World** (4-6)

a. I remember my parents' good advice, "Choose your friends. Don't let them choose you."

b. James accused the teachers in the Messianic community of unfaithfulness—"You adulterous people"—because they had chosen friendship with the world (Gk. *kosmos*) over friendship with God. (4)

1) Since the time of the Prophet Hosea in the 8th century BCE and through the words of Jesus and into the teaching of the early church, adultery has been a metaphor of spiritual/religious unfaithfulness to God (cf., Ho 1-3; Isa 54:1-6; Jer 3:6-14; Ezk 16:23-26; Mt 12:39,16:4; Mk 8:38; 1 Cor 6:15; Eph 5:22-32; Rev 19:7,21:9).

2) John clarified the nature of friendship with the world, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 Jn 2:15-17).

c. If we claim to be Christians but look to the devil to fulfill our desires, we are spiritual adulterers (4).

1) As members of the church, the bride of Christ, we are wed to Jesus.

2) When we go to the devil to fulfill our desires, then we are unfaithful to Christ.

3) We become "an enemy of God" when we make friends with the devil.

4) We become proud and selfish like the devil instead of humble and selfless like Jesus.

d. James quoted Pr 3:34: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble” (6).

- 1) James commented “. . . he (God) jealously longs for the spirit (i.e., human spirit here not Holy Spirit) he has caused to dwell in us?” (5)
 - 2) McKnight comments, “V. 5 explains friendship of the world as the natural yearning of the human spirit, a spirit that God in his freedom placed in humans to use in their freedom. V. 6 forms the contrast with v. 5 and, at the same time, provides the alternative to divisiveness: God’s grace” (McKnight, 340).
 - 3) God wants us to want his will and his way, even when we go our own way. Our fallen human nature leans toward envy and selfish ambition.
 - 4) However, God gives us his grace so that we return to him, when we are willing to submit to his will and way.
 - 5) James’ main point in vv. 5-6 is that the envious, selfish, murdering, quarreling, fighting, unfaithful believers are not past the point of no return. God’s grace is still available to forgive and restore them.
- e. Each one of us needs God’s grace to forgive our selfish and prideful actions.
- 1) The only way to receive God’s grace is to humble ourselves before Him.
 - 2) We must submit our desires and actions to God.

B. The Solution (7-10)

In Jm 4:7-10, James gave ten commands that chart the course of repentance for teachers and other believers who have given in to bitter envy and selfish ambition and caused quarreling and fighting in the church.

1. **Submit to God** (7a) – “Submit (Gk., *hupotagete*) yourselves, then, to God”

- a. For me, Jm 4:7 is the heart of this passage. Humility before and submission to God are the beginning of seeking and finding the heavenly wisdom of God’s plan for life.
- b. Submitting to God means that we live in the order established by God as we yield to his will and receive his gracious forgiveness through repentant living.

2. **Resist the Devil** (7b) – “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”

- a. Peter said, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith . . . (1 Pe 5:8-9).
- b. Paul echoed, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Eph 6:13).
- c. Max Lucado asks us, “What are some ways you can stand against the devil?” (Lucado, *James*, 83)
- d. We must stand in faith, knowing what we believe and sticking to it. We must always do what is right in God’s eyes not our own. We must live in accord with the gospel that we proclaim. We must not lose our heads, remembering God is the source of our hope and salvation. We must walk in the power of God’s Holy Spirit day by day. We must resist temptations to misuse our tongues, pursue selfish ambitions, satisfy natural human cravings and desires, and refrain from being envious of others and over-zealous for our own views and ways.

3. **Come Near to God** (8a) – “Come near to God and he will come near to you.”

- a. As we turn from the devil, we find that God has been with us all the time. As we come to God in repentance, he is already there, like the Prodigal son’s father, to restore our relationship with him.
- b. Lucado asks, “What steps can you take today to draw nearer to God?” (Lucado, 86)
- c. We come near to God in humble submission and repentance; by resisting the devil in the ways noted above; by being mindful of God’s presence; by reading and doing God’s word; by praying and seeking God’s will above our own.

4. **Cleanse - Wash Hands and Purify Hearts** (8b) – “Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded”

- a. Washing hands is a sign that outward behaviors are changed from the impure ways of the world to the pure ways of God. Our hands, like those of a priest, will be used to serve God.
- b. The purifying of the heart symbolizes an inward commitment of attitude and mind to follow God and not the world.

5. **Repent - Grieve, Mourn, Wail, Change** (9) – “Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.”
 - a. Mourning and wailing are signs of repentance that accompany grief over past sins, but they can be faked (i.e., crocodile tears).
 - b. Real repentance will be demonstrated by life/action change.
 - c. Past laughter and joy in sinful actions become mourning and gloom over these sins as we submit to God.
 - d. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted” (Mt 5:4) - Along with God, my heart is broken by sin, and I seek his forgiveness and help in overcoming it.
6. **Humble yourselves before the Lord** (10) – “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up”
 - a. James ends his exhortations where he began with a call to be humble before the Lord (vv. 6, 10).
 - b. Again in this command there is a call to reverse direction from being proud and selfish to humble and selfless.
 - c. There is a promised blessing that as we humble ourselves, the Lord will exalt us. This is a kingdom truth.
 - 1) Jesus said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mk 9:35).
 - 2) There is perhaps an echo here of one of the early hymns of the church concerning Jesus humbling himself to death on the cross for our sins and his consequent exaltation to “the highest place,” with “the name that is above every name” and the one before whom “every knee should bow” (cf., Ph 2:5-11).
 - d. McKnight notes, “The exalted place into which God will elevate them is nothing more than living before God properly, loving one’s neighbor as oneself, showing compassion for those in need, controlling the tongue, generating peace in the messianic community, and exercising gifts of teaching and leadership in the way God intended” (McKnight, 358).

C. Who Is the Judge? (11-12)

1. James had a hard message for the leaders of the church who were destroying the community of faith.
 - a. However, he concluded with a softer tone (i.e., “Brothers and sisters”).
 - b. He returned to matters of how the leaders used their positions and especially their tongues, which is back to where he began in Jm 3:1ff.
2. James warned that we must not “slander” (Gk., *katalaleite* – “harshly criticize, bring incorrect accusations, speak maliciously to influence others against”) other believers.
3. James had said some things that may appear to be harsh and judgmental (e.g., calling believers “adulterous people” v. 4).
 - a. Remember that he is speaking under divine inspiration.
 - b. What he says is not said maliciously to hurt the hearers but to confront them with sin and to draw them to submission to God in repentance.
 - c. The word “slander” means the words are spoken maliciously, with an evil, selfish intent, and most likely are not the full truth, if the truth at all.
 - d. We must only speak the truth in love, and we must be careful what we say and how we say it.
 - e. We must share the truth of God’s word and allow the Holy Spirit to bring conviction.
4. When we slander others, we put ourselves in judgment over them.
 - a. It is easy to point out the mistakes and flaws of others, but we have enough to worry about in our own lives without judging the lives and actions of others.
 - b. Jesus said, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven . . . Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Lk 6:37,41-42).
 - c. Paul said, “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor 4:2-4).
5. To judge a brother or sister usurps God’s role as the one and only Lawgiver.

- a. It is an act of idolatry (e.g., “adultery” in v. 4) because we put ourselves in the place of God.
 - b. We defy God’s authority by transferring it to ourselves.
6. Let’s get the devil out of here—out of each of us!
- a. Submit to God in humble repentance.
 - b. Resist the devil by facing him and your own evil desires.
 - c. Draw near to God and seek his wisdom and help as you face temptations to be envious and selfish in daily life.
7. Remember, we come before the Lord as equals.
- a. We have all yielded to our evil desires in sin at some point.
 - b. Each one of us are sinners in need of the gracious forgiveness of God.
 - c. As we repent of our past sins and come near to God in humility and with renewed attitudes and corresponding actions, we commit to God’s plan rather than our own.
 - d. We will take up the importance of living by God’s plan rather than our own in next week’s lesson in Jm 4;13-17.
 - e. For now, let’s leave this place renewed by God’s grace, recommitted to get the devil out of here and keep him out of here as we receive God’s wisdom and grace for living life according to his plan.