

## CHAPTER VIII

### CAUSE AND REMEDY OF STRIFE

James 4:1-12

#### *Introduction*

Can it be possible that the church of Jesus Christ could descend to the sins mentioned here so soon after Pentecost? In less than half a century could there be war in the kingdom of God on earth? Lust- ing, killing (at least in spirit), coveting, fighting, adulteresses who embrace worldliness, not subject to God, but the devil; with impure hands and filthy hearts; double - the midst of their sins - surely this cannot be the church of Jesus Christ!

Yet James, who calls himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, calls these sinners: my brethren (1:2; 2:1; 3:1) the brother of low degree (1:9; my beloved brethren (1:16; 19.); a brother and his brother (4:11); brethren (5:7) etc. James is quite clear within the epistle that some of the brethren may err from the truth and face eternal death in the end because of the mul- titude of sins (see 5:20). But even as he admits this possibility (and probability), he says; "My *brethren*, if any *among you* err from the truth..." (5:20a)

Paul has the same spirit in the First Corinthian letter. In listing sins so numerous, so vile, and so contemptuous that few Christians today would dare call those who do them brothers, Paul calls them "the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sancti- fied in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.." (I Cor. 1:2). Then he says, even within the letter which clearly states some shall be judged, that some are guilty of the body and the blood of Jesus, that they provoke the Lord to jealousy, and that some are continuing in the same sins by which they shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

And what is the lesson for us? It is God that accepts and God that rejects. His Word is the standard, and He is the judge. The church is not in the business of punishing saints for their sins, but rather to persuade them to repentance that a soul might be saved from death. New converts in Christ do not come from the watery grave of baptism heavy with the fruit of the Spirit, but rather bud and sprout from the Spirit within; and there is a growth in Christ, and a

continual "putting on". There is often a stumbling and a falling, and a picking up. There is temptation, and there is repentance; and baptism removes neither the devil, nor the necessity for repentance for sins committed. Growth in the Christian graces is usually gradual.

But the miracle is there! Rebirth gives within the saint the Spirit of Christ, and a new nature for the man. There is a love for Jesus, and a repentant attitude that brings grief when the saint sins. There is the blood of Christ that has removed all sin's guilt so that with the grace of faultlessness the saint picks himself up from his sin and turns to Jesus; humiliated and shamed by his own weakness, but thankful and grateful for salvation in Christ. With a loving heart he seeks forgiveness as a son who talks to his father. Sinners yet, but sinners saved by grace. Sinners yet, but sinners growing and glowing in the love of Christ. Sinners yet, but sinners who have a hope and a promise. Sinners in fact but saints in grace.

To the sinning members of the church of Jesus Christ in Corinth, Paul said, "but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." (I Cor. 6:11). This is the appeal of James as he addresses: "my brethren, my beloved brethren." This is the appeal of John as he says, "my little children."

Though the time may come when the church must withdraw "from every brother that walketh (continues to walk) disorderly," the call to repentance must be patient and continued in love; with a hopeful and loving spirit, with an expectancy to rejoice over the soul saved from death and the multitude of sins covered. This is what we see again and again in the New Testament: the example of the apostles and prophets as they issue the loving call to repentance to the saints of God.

The picture of the sinning brethren to whom James addresses the epistle is not pretty. In fact, some commentators who earlier wished to discredit the epistle, claimed that the description in James 4:1-12 showed the book to be uninspired and a product of Jewish writers who were not even Christians, but adjusted and adapted in such a way as to "fit" the canon of Scriptures.

Let us be honest, brethren! There is sin in the church; and that, often! We as Christians *do* need to repent; and that, often! Christ not only *was* my Savior, but *is continually* my Savior. Without Him I have no life. It is not just grace that I needed, but grace upon grace that I now need!

Growth I must have, but perfection eludes me, for as I grow I see Him more clearly; and what was no sin to me yesterday has become sin to me today. This is true when my eyes focus upon Him more clearly and my heart becomes more attuned to His wonderful Word. The further down the road I get, the more I yearn for flawlessness, for a complete overcoming. The closer to Jesus the more beautiful His flawless character becomes and the more acute is my longing to be like Him. Death becomes no more that dreaded monster that robs life, but rather that gateway through which I find eternal life; through which I go to be with Him and through which I go to be like Him.

James in analysing the destructive strife within the saint describes heart of the trouble as selfish pleasure. Love of self and enrapture with the senses can be overcome, but only through a complete dedication to God. The only way to overcome is to lose oneself in God: complete subjection; coupled with resisting the devil. When we humble ourselves to God He exalts us as if we were righteous, and we continue to proceed from where we are to where we should be.

Then, finally, James returns to the original thought . . . we are not the judges of our brethren, but God is. As sinners we are not fitted to be judges; and as being subject to God, we did not originate the law of God. We, being neither able to save nor to destroy, along with our brother, must submit ourselves to Him who is able to save and destroy.

### SELFISH PLEASURE A SOURCE OF TROUBLE

#### *Text 4:1-3*

- 4:1 Whence come wars, and whence come fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your pleasures that war in your members?
2. Ye lust, and have not: ye kill and covet, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not.
  3. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures.

#### *Queries*

274. Are these three verses addressed to nations that go to war, or to individual people like you and me? How do you know?

275. What is the difference between wars and fightings?
276. How could it be said that individuals have "wars?"
277. How do you know that the first "wars" spoken of here are among Christians?
278. Are these "members" of a person's body, as his arms, legs, lips, etc. or do they refer to members of the spiritual body, the church? Why?
279. What kind of pleasures in verse one?
280. The second "war" reference in verse one refers to what?
281. "Lust" of verse 2 refers to what in verse one?
282. Do you think this "kill" refers to actual murder? Must it?
283. The word "covet" is not the ordinary Greek word for covet. This word has a second meaning . . . to be jealous. How could the word "jealous" fit in where covet is? (Remember the comments of 3:14).
284. Does v. 2 indicate that people who covet, fight and war would have what they want if they would ask for what they want while they covet, fight and war?
285. Of whom do we ask in v. 2? (Be careful..think of who really has what we want).
286. How can v. 2 and 3 be true when obviously many people have a great abundance of what this world wants and they didn't ask for it?
287. What is the wrong manner of asking (praying) that is referred to in v. 3?
288. Are there other ways of asking amiss? If so what are some of them?
289. How can we reconcile the fact that James says "ye ask not" in v. 2, and "ye ask" in v. 3? Is he not speaking to the same people in both verses? Then how can the same people both ask and ask not?
290. What do you think "amiss" means? Would you be willing to change your mind if you found out it really meant something else?
291. Does "spend it" refer only to money? How could it refer to anything, even a wife, or a husband?
292. The word "pleasures" in v. 3 is important in understanding what is amiss. How does this furnish an answer to number 284?

*Paraphrases*

- A. 4:1 What causes constant contention and continual battle between different factions of the church of God? Are these not caused by your spirits being in submission to the sensual pleasures within your own bodies?
2. Your abnormal earthly jealousies drive you to destroy your brother. You want what he has, and being unable to get it, you make yourself his enemy; when the real reason you are unable to obtain is because you haven't asked God for it.
  3. And even if you have asked God for it, you still do not get it because you want it for the wrong purpose. Instead of wanting to be a better servant of God you are seeking only a more complete fleshly satisfaction.
- B.\*4:1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it because there is a whole army of evil desires within you?
2. You want what you don't have so you kill to get it. You long for what others have, and can't afford it, so you start a fight to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is because you don't ask God for it.
  3. And when you do ask you don't get it because your whole aim is wrong - you want only what will give you pleasure.

*Summary*

The continual fighting within the church comes from your unsatisfied fleshly desires. These drive you to fighting your brother instead of serving your Lord.

*Comment*

Some people may assume that the "wars" referred to in verse one are literal, in that Christians actually take sides and arm themselves with lethal weapons and have "gang" fights in which they kill one another. This type of fleshly murder and literal warfare with lethal weapons would not only have brought the civil authorities immediately into the conflict (murder was against the civil law then, even as now), but does not fit the context of the bickering and feuding church described in the book. When 4:1 is read within the

context of the entire epistle, it is much more likely that the weapons of this warfare are the tongues of the saints and that which is killed is the spirit, peace, and souls of the saints.

Some may feel that referring to these tongue battles as "war", and to these soul murders as "kill" is overly harsh; but in view of the true value of the human soul and the complete destruction of the grace of fellowship, war and kill might even seem too mild! In the eyes of God Himself, is not soul murder just as horrible as physical murder? Is not the destruction of the church a destruction of the most valuable kingdom this world has ever seen? Is not the entire Christian walk described as a continual war, and the individual saints, the soldiers of the cross, armed with spiritual armor? If this is true of the church's warfare with the forces of evil; it is certainly not too harsh for the Spirit to refer to this self-destruction between factions of the church as war within the church.

James' real concern is to find the source of the trouble. The trouble within the church is quite obvious to the church that has this kind of trouble. James is not addressing a group of the Zealots among the Jews who wish to arm themselves against Rome. He is still speaking to "my brethren" who are having real trouble through the misuse of this little member called the tongue. "Among you" locates the war.

Although James has already spent half a chapter on the terrible destructive power of the tongue, it is obvious that the blame for the action cannot be placed upon the tongue itself. The tongue is only the weapon. What causes a Christian to use his tongue as a weapon against his brother? What is the real source of this warfare that ought not to be?

The Christians who are engaged in this ignoble battle will desire to place the blame on their brother who is now their enemy. James' answer to the question will not be popular with those engaged in this tongue-slaughter who have no desire to repent. Whom a person will blame for his shortcomings is often very revealing of the character of that individual.

Honesty in facing one's sin is also assumed in this portion. Not only should a person admit the right source for his wrong-doing, but he should be honest in facing the enormity of the trouble. This is hard for a man to do. It makes one guilty and in need of God's grace. It robs one of pride in his own ability to be right. It drives one to remorse and repentance.

James does not pull any punches when he answers the question. Even though the question, as he stated it, is thought to be too harsh by some; his answer in the original language is harsher yet! Perhaps this is the real trouble with facing the issue. We do not like to admit the hedonic lusts he so vividly described so we would rather attribute the entire problem to a people away from the church, or at least far removed from ourselves to-day. And what is the answer?

"Come they not hence, even of your *pleasures* that war in your members?" The word "pleasures" here has a metonymical usage representing lusts. The word is used in an evil sense (here) and is very much like the lusts of James 1:14 that brings forth sin and death. These pleasures are really "evil desires for gratification of the flesh." This is the word from which we get our "hedonite", one who lives for pleasure.

This sinful and pleasureable desire is not a thing of the moment, nor a short-lived passing fancy. Rather this speaks of selfishness for the sake of the flesh; of wantonness in tramping over the rights of others while pleasing the self; of lasciviousness in revelling in the sensual appetites. It is a long-time revelled lust indulged at the expense of the brother's soul. Peace within the church and even the very existence of the local congregation must give way to the satisfaction of these inordinate desires.

Yet the devil is so clever with his deception that the warring church members do not readily see the true cause. Pointing accusing fingers and accusing tongues at one another they conveniently shrug off the blame and blind themselves to their own miserable state. Glibly they state: "God hates division," while they proceed with wanton murder within the church.

And where do these pleasures war? In your members, states James . . . but in what members? Some would say within the members of the church; i.e. that one member has a sensual desire but fulfillment is barred by another member; and thus differences in sensual desires cause the church members to war with one another.

A far more likely interpretation is that these pleasures reside within the members of an individual, within one particular physical body. The tongue is described as a "world of iniquity among our members . . . which defileth the whole body." (James 3:6). Even so these lustful pleasures reside within the inner man.

If this second interpretation be correct, then the "*pleasures that war in your members*" explain the situation. Within the individual

it is the *pleasures* that drive and attack again and again, forcing the tongue into its fiery defilement, and forcing the other members of the body into creating strife within the church. Thus, the second "war" in 4:1 refers to the war within the individual caused by pleasures within him.

There is no peace with the brethren because there is no peace within the individuals. There is conflict within the church because of the warring pleasure within the inner man. The peace that passeth all understanding is drowned out by evil desires to please the fleshly appetites, and so that which is within the individual causes that which is without the individual.

In verse two James uses another word for strong desires to appease the fleshly appetites; lust. (See comments on 1:14). Lust here is used in the evil sense, as in 1:14. There seems to be a progressive sense in these first two verses. From living for pleasure to inordinate desire (lust), and on to kill seems to have a parallel in coveting, then fighting, and finally war! (Westcott-Hort, margin).

The word for covet can be translated either "bitter jealousy" (3:14; Acts 17:5); or simply to desire earnestly (I Col. 12:31). In the context of contention and evil here would favour "jealousy" as the proper usage.

The object of the desire as well as the purpose seem to indicate its good or evil sense. The "better gifts" of I Cor. 12 are spiritual in that they are for purposes of edification and instruction, whereas the object of this James 4 coveting is evidently the satisfaction of the hedonic pleasures at war within the members of the body. Yet even the noble gift of God can be used for the wrong purpose and be turned into selfish edification (see I Cor. 14:4a). Both what a man longs for, and for what purpose he longs have to do with the quality of the longing. So James indicates in 4:3.

It is interesting to note that these who lust and fight with bitter jealousy do not obtain. It would seem that such frantic and bitter zeal would accomplish the purpose of sensuous satisfaction, but not so! It is the nature of the senses within our members that when overly indulged and gratified, the body becomes fat with indulgence, yet hungrier than ever. The more a man eats, the greater his appetite. This is also true of the sex appetite, or of most of the other instinctive desires when they are pursued by a hedonite.

Solomon was probably the most notable example of this truth in the Old Testament. He had the wealth and position to gratify all his



sensuous desires; and he held back on nothing his "heart" desired. After a lifetime of gratification, he declared it was all useless, futile, unfulfilled; "All was vanity and vexation of spirit."

A lust that can never be satisfied is born of indulgence. Let the young man and woman realize this when they are tempted to indulge in a necking party. Let the man realize this when he begins to make frequent visits to the beer parlor. Let Mr. and Mrs. "Overweight" realize this when they approach the dinner table! Real satisfaction is only possible within the limits of self-control.

The "asking" of v. 3 is in a "reflexive" sense (middle voice). This means the action is turned towards oneself. Thus one might say, "since you want for yourself you do not pray for the kind of things the heavenly Father will give, so you are not willing to ask Him for it; and you do not receive it. And even if you do ask Him for it you do not receive it, because you ask it for yourself."

Successful prayer life has a great portion in the Saint getting what his heart desires, or should desire. If he does not desire what is good for him (i.e. what God wants for him) then he will not pray for it. Not praying for it he does not receive it. Who can determine the extent of spiritual blessings ready for the saint if he would but seek them? And what sense it makes to seek these blessings from the source. "Every good gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." To desire to succeed in spiritual matters is not enough. To work for success, good as it is, is not enough. Desire and work should be coupled with prayer.

And this prayer should be for the right cause . . . the cause of Christ. When we realize that God has the blessings, and that God has the knowledge; we also realize that God knows what is best under all circumstances. With the justice, mercy, and love of God in mind, we ask that His will be done above all that we might think or desire. Our personal desires may be expressed, but with the understood condition (which may often be expressed) that if our desires are contrary to God's desires; He knows what is the better of the two, and His will we really want. If we really mean it, we want His will to be done even at personal inconvenience, or suffering, or a shortening of physical life itself! Not to pray with this understanding ("in the name of" or "for the sake of") is to pray amiss; and we often do not get what we want because we want the wrong thing, or we want for the wrong purpose.

James expression (that ye may spend it in your pleasures) goes

beyond the wrong purpose expressed above. The word for "spend" has the idea of excess, or waste. In Luke 15:14 the prodigal son "spent all." Thus we ask of God with the unspoken desire to exhaust it upon our own fleshly pleasures. The initial selfish purpose balloons, which is the nature of selfishness. A man may pray for money, but the selfish purpose involved in his seeking expands so that even should he receive it, he is then unwilling to share and would resent even an unselfish token in the use of the money.

## DEDICATION TO GOD ALONE IS THE ONLY ANSWER

### *Text 4:4-8a*

- 4:4. Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world, maketh himself an enemy of God.
5. Or think ye that the Scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the Spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?
6. But he giveth more grace. Wherefore the Scripture saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.
7. Be subject therefore unto God: but resist the devil and he will flee from you.
8. Draw nigh unto God and he will draw nigh unto you.

### *Queries*

293. Do you think the term "adulteresses" refers to people who commit the physical sin of adultery, or is this used in a figurative sense?
294. Assuming that the term "adulteresses" refers to spiritual adultery, are there any other cases in the Scripture where the term is used to your knowledge to refer to spiritual adultery of those who are "married" to God?
295. Why do you think "adulteresses" is used in the feminine case here?
296. Why do you think the King James translators wanted to add the masculine "adulterers" to the phrase? (It is not in the original Greek).
297. Try in this verse to identify the adulteress, the person the

- adulteress in "married" to, and the person with whom the adultery is committed. (They are all referred to in v. 4!)
298. What does the term "enmity" suggest to you?
299. Do you think the adultery described in v. 4 is a very common thing?
300. "The World" refers to what? (Don't just say "world", but name what it probably refers to . . . rocks and trees; money; people; a certain kind of people, or what?)
301. Is friendliness with the unsaved forbidden in v. 4? What can "friendship of the world" mean?
302. When does the Spirit take up His dwelling within us? (9 v. 5)
303. For what, do you think, the Spirit in us longs?
304. Do you think envy, or jealousy, is too strong a word to refer to the Spirit?
305. Can envy be a good thing? If so, under what circumstances?
306. Who gives the grace, God the Father or the Holy Spirit? Does it really make any difference. Why so or why not?
307. He gives "more" grace . . . more than what?
308. How is the "proud" in verse 6 related to verse 4?
309. The term "the Scripture" in v. 6 is not in the original. The subject is not stated. Can you think of anything else that might possibly be the subject other than the Scripture?
310. "Humility" suggests that something is to be surrendered, given up. What?
311. Who are the humble of v. 6?
312. Grace is an unmerited favor. What is the favor bestowed in v. 6?
313. In v. 7, *therefore* refers back to what?
314. Note how *being subject* and *resisting* are opposite actions.
315. The action of the devil when he is resisted is clearly stated. But what is the action of God. (v. 7) when a person is subject to Him?
316. Love begets love, and obviously "drawing nigh" begets "drawing nigh" in v. 8. What might be implied if we resist God?
317. Why do you think we wish to classify v. 8a with v. 7 in this section?

### *Paraphrases*

- A. 4:4. You who break the marriage vows to God by embracing the world, don't you know better than this? Your affection

for the pleasures of this life have made you so hostile to God you have made yourself to become His enemy.

5. Or perhaps you simply think the Word of God does not mean what it says! The Spirit that lives inside us longs for our affection even to the point of jealous envy.
6. But the Spirit gives us a greater measure of undeserved blessing in order that we might yet accomplish His will. To this end it says, "God arranges Himself against the proud but gives unmerited favor to the humble."
7. Therefore set yourself under God's authority and align yourself against Satan, and he will run away from you.
8. Come close to God and He will come close to you.

B.\*4:4. You are like an unfaithful wife who loves her husband's enemies. Don't you realize that making friends with God's enemies—the evil pleasures of this world—makes God your enemy? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy the evil pleasure of the unsaved world, you cannot also be a friend of God.

5. Or what do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, Whom God has placed within us, watches over us with tender jealousy?
6. But He gives us strength to stand against all such evil longings. As the Scriptures say, God gives strength to the humble but sets Himself against the proud and haughty.
7. So give yourselves humbly to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
8. And when you draw close to God, God will draw close to you.

### *Summary*

Your adultery with the world leaves God's Spirit yearning for you, so submit yourselves to God, your husband, and resist the devil.

### *Comment*

Universally, adultery is a particularly obnoxious sin. Because of the devil's deception and because of sensuous pleasures involved, the obnoxiousness is not always apparent to the participants at the

moment of involvement. But to those sinned against, the very thought is repellant. A man's most prized possession is his wife, and a wife's most precious possession is her husband. Adultery is the sin that contaminates the preciousness of that possession. A jealousy is provoked, but not as much as jealousy of what is, but a jealousy of what was. A singleness of devotion and a giving of one's self to only the mate is one of the prized rights of marriage. He or she who has lost this single devotion of the mate and has shared their mate's body with another has been deeply hurt over a terrible loss. And that which was lost cannot be returned in its former singleness and purity. The knowledge of the inability to return to the purity of the former state is part of the irreparable loss.

It is God who has given man this most precious of all human relations . . . marriage. From the very beginning of man, He ordained that a particularly godlike kind of person would be a one-woman man and a one-man woman, and "Till death do us part" is engrained into the entire framework of marriage from the beginning. So emphatically is the sin described in the New Testament that Paul has stated by the Spirit of God "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God." (I Cor. 6:9-10).

It is recognized that he or she who commits this sin may repent and return to a wholesome relationship with God even as they may repent of any sin. It is the continued practice of any sin that makes a proper relationship with God impossible. And this is just the point of spiritual adultery!

As terrible as physical adultery is, there is an adultery more terrible yet! This is spiritual adultery. Of course, he who continues in physical adultery is also committing spiritual adultery. And what is this "spiritual adultery?"

Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. When we obeyed the Lord in full surrender through baptism, He added us to His body, the church. This church body is also called the "bride" of Christ, for whom Christ will one day come and receive unto Himself. After a discussion of the relationship of husband and wife, in which the Spirit speaks of a pure love, being holy and without blemish, He says, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: *but I speak in regard of Christ and the*

*church.*" So we, the members that make up the bride of Christ, are presented to Him "a glorious church, not having spot or blemish." (See Ephesians 5:22-33).

To embrace the "world," with its sensuous pleasures and carnal appetites being put ahead of devotion to Christ, is spiritual adultery. To love anything or anyone ahead of God is spiritual adultery. The prophet Hosea's unblushing faithfulness and continued love for a harlot wife is so vividly described that it appears repulsive (and was obviously intended to so appear), and even shocks one's moral sense. And through the prophet's situation, the lesson from Jehovah went forth to Israel, who had for generations been committing spiritual adultery. The love of Jehovah for his bride is magnificent beyond understanding, and the indifferent adultery of Israel is worthy of all abhorrence. If the message through Hosea could not shock Israel to repent of her spiritual adultery, surely nothing could.

And so it is the Holy Spirit speaks through the same message. The ones who are married to God have embraced the world as their first love, and have thus committed adultery. In this friendship with the world they have made themselves an enemy of God and a friend of His enemy. The Holy Spirit that dwells within the Christian yearns and longs for that saint's devotion as the bride of Christ.

Loving the world more than loving Christ is a sin so common with Christians that it would seem few know the terrible adultery involved. Yet James says, "Ye adulteresses, don't you know better than this?" The very nature of sin is to so deceive the sinner that he soon is unable to tell right from wrong. The longer the sin is embraced, the denser is the veil drawn over the eyes of understanding.

For this reason there is a desperate earnestness in admonishing the saint to give up sin and wrong-doing. This is evident in the Spirit's endeavor to warn the Christian before he embraces sin too long to again see and recognize the truth. Twenty-one of the Twenty-seven New Testament books are addressed to Christians and filled with pleas to shun the embrace of the world and to cling steadfastly to Christ Jesus.

The saint, too, should feel the same desperate circumstances when a brother becomes engaged in spiritual adultery. To love the pleasures of this life James calls "friendship of the world." This perpetual adultery breaks the heart of God and soon passes the

point of toleration of the Christian involved. The Christian who refuses to repent soon finds his love for ungodly things of this life has changed himself into an enemy of God. He actually has a hostility toward God that keeps growing to the point of hatred. This is the meaning of "enmity with God." Thus one who once loved God can, through continued sin, become a God-hater and an enemy of God.

This continued spiritual adultery is not a sin that is done accidentally, but a life that is lived deliberately and continually. Willful choice is clearly implied by the usage of the word "would." "Who-soever *would* be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God." The point is, whosoever would wish to be; or would desire and intend to be . . .

It might even be implied from this section that the desire to be a friend of the world could be in the heart without doing the deeds of sin; and still the person could become an enemy of God because of the adultery in his heart. Thus, a person who names the name of Christ, yet spends his hours and his heart's devotion in longing and lusting for the sensuousness and rottenness of this life could develop a hearty hostility toward God that would lead him to be God's enemy. This inner hatred for God might not be evident to the saints of the church, until one day it breaks forth in an act of such hatred toward godliness and such embracing of worldliness that the entire brotherhood is "shocked" by the "sudden fall."

It might appear that "overnight" the person has changed from a devoted saint to a devoted sinner. "He's not in his right mind," "he must be insane," would be typical remarks. In shocked disbelief, the saints who observe such a one might tremble at the possibility of a sudden fall that appears to completely transform the character in an instant. The warnings of the Spirit, however, indicate that the fall is not sudden, but began with a desire in the heart that was fed and nurtured to the point of making oneself an enemy of God.

"Or think ye that the Scripture speaketh in vain?" There is a problem in this portion. What Scripture is speaking in vain? A single passage? A quote that follows? If this is so, then that which follows should be a Scriptural quote: "The Spirit which he made to dwell in us doth long unto envying." The difficulty is that the particular sentence is used nowhere else in the Bible! Such versions as the Revised Standard that use this sentence as a direct quote are unable to refer the reader to the passage quoted!

The more acceptable reading would be to understand that *all* the Scripture is speaking in vain. It is foreign to the tone and teaching of all revelation that a man could be a friend of God's enemy and a friend of God at the same time. This lesson is evident in every account of sinful man from the beginning. From Cain and Abel through all the Patriarchs; from the beginning to the end of the children of Israel; within the Lord's own apostles, the lesson is clear: a man cannot serve both God and the devil. He must hate the one or despise the other. If he is not for the Lord, he is against Him.

The last portion of verse five is more difficult yet. Whether or not it is a quote, it is still difficult to determine exactly what is said. Some of the difficulties in this portion bring up these considerations: Is it a question, or a statement? Who does the yearning? If it is God, or the Holy Spirit that longs, does He, or does He not, long unto envy?

The Revised Standard seems to indicate that God longs jealously over man's spirit which He made to dwell in man. The American Standard seems to indicate that the spirit of man which God made to dwell in man longs to the point of envy. (If so, he longs for and is envious of what?) The King James, like the American Standard, makes the sentence a direct quote. The Revised Standard does not make the sentence a direct quote, but makes it a question. (If the reader is not confused yet, let him look up a few more translations for himself!)

The clearer and most compatible rendering (to this writer) would be to say, "Or do you think that the Scripture (as a whole) speaks to no profit? The (Holy) Spirit which God made to dwell in us longs (for us) to (the point of) envy."

The preference for the above exposition rests upon the phrase "which He made to dwell in us." The gift of the Spirit is promised to those who are baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38). The Christian's body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit which he has from God and which dwells in him. (I Cor. 6:19). The saint has the down payment of the Holy Spirit in his heart. (II Cor. 1:22). Since this is one of the major teachings of the New Testament, it seems most natural to understand that it is the Holy Spirit that God made to dwell in us, and He longs for our alienated affections even to the point of envy.

This longing and yearning of the Spirit (or God, if you prefer)



for the adulterous saint's affection is heart-breaking. In this longing we hear Jesus weeping over adulterous Jerusalem; and if we look closely, we will see His fresh tears to-day as countless members of His bride break His heart afresh. Oh, if we could only realize His love and understand His mercy. How we need to hear the groanings by which the Spirit makes intercession for us. The grace upon grace by which we live should break our hearts. Because He first loved us, we can now love Him with His kind of love. And we can love Him to the point of full surrender—to the point of keeping His commandments.

"But He (whoever was doing the longing in the previous verse) giveth more grace." This giving of grace comes from the Holy Spirit of verse five (or the Father), but certainly not from man's spirit. This reinforces the argument that it is not man's spirit in verse five that is longing. It is man that needs this grace because his adultery has caused the Spirit's longing. It is a greater grace (marginal reading) that this man needs, as if shown by his sin.

But what is this grace that is given? Grace is usually thought of as an unmerited favor of forgiveness. Justification and forgiveness are truly the greatest graces of all, but certainly not the only graces. Every good gift is from God, and is an unmerited favor. Having done all, I have earned nothing of His gifts. This grace is more likely the attributes necessary to be an overcomer. When a man returns back "home" to the Spirit that yearns for him, and yields himself in full surrender, then the Spirit favors that man with strength and help in living the surrendered life. He would never have the strength otherwise.

"Because of this (it) saith," probably refers to the Scripture; but here, unlike verse five, is a definite quote from Proverbs 3:34, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." If it is the Scripture that does the saying, then the subject immediately follows the verb. (The Greek verb is actually impersonal, with no subject: *it* says).

James' use of the Proverbs' quotation showing God (Jehovah) to be the author of grace is a direct implication of the deity of the Holy Spirit. This is true if the Holy Spirit is the author of the grace in 6a and the longing in 5. This is what should be expected when the unity of the Spirit and the Father are considered along with many scriptural implications concerning the deity of the Spirit.

The meaning of the proverbs' quotation is that the proud man

centers his life in himself and the gratification of his senses. He makes himself an enemy of God, so God resists him, or arranges Himself against him.

On the other side, the humble man is one who denies himself, and he is more likely to take up the cross and follow Christ. God gives him grace that he might do just this. It is this humble man that responds to the yearning of the Spirit, so the grace is given to him that his response might be complete.

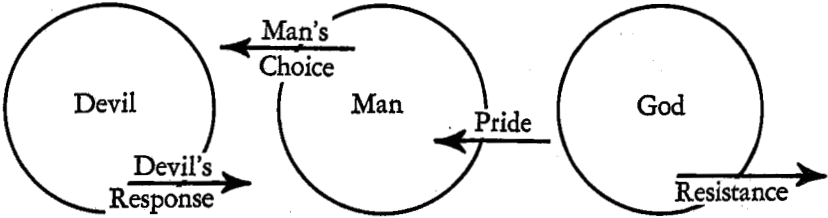
There is a very interesting relationship between the subjection and the resisting in verse 6b and 7: God sets Himself against those who set themselves against His authority. Pride and stubbornness make a man arrange himself against the authority of God; and like similar poles on a magnet, our repulsive action toward either God or the devil will likewise draw repulsion in return. Thus, when man is proud in resisting God, then God resists the proud; when man resists the devil, then the devil flees from man.

The opposite action is also clearly pictured: when man gives himself in subjection to God (is humble), then God gives grace. When man gives himself in subjection to the devil, then he is in turn devoured by the devil as by a roaring lion. Verse 8 clearly pictures the mutual attraction between God and man: "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you."

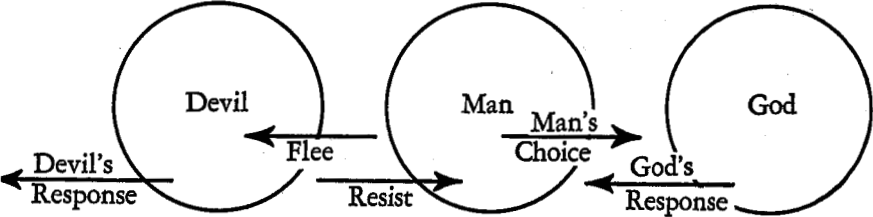
James makes it quite clear that God has allowed man to be master of his own destiny. Man's choice of heaven or hell rests on man's choice of God or the devil. The amazing thing about the entire system of grace is that God allows man to choose heaven and God's love even though man has earned the devil's destiny. The grace of God gives man the opportunity. The will and choice of man is the key. Man must choose to be with God, so God forces no man into heaven.

God's active participation in the redemption of man is clearly set forth many places in the Scripture. God calls, God loves, God gives grace, God saves. Although God's sacrifice and God's call are universal, the application of that salvation offered is *limited by man's own choice*. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve" is the plea double emphasized in the New Testament. This is the emphasis of James. James, however, is making very clear the principle that the choice of man is not manifest in a passive, non-participating faith. A wishful thought and a vague yearning for God in the man who continually surrenders his life and action to the devil does

"Spiritual Adultery"



"Draw Near to God"



not constitute a choice for God. We "draw nigh" with our active life, and we "cleanse our hands" with a repentant and pure life.

### FROM WHERE WE ARE TO WHERE WE SHOULD BE

#### *Text 4:8b-10*

- 4:8b. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners: and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded.  
 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 exalt you.

#### *Questions*

318. "Cleanse your hands" obviously means something other than washing the hands with soap. To what kind of sins does the expression refer?  
 319. Who are the sinners referred to in v. 8?  
 320. Does "purify your heart" refer to the same thing as "cleanse your hands"?  
 321. Of what in the book of James does the expression "double minded" remind you?  
 322. What does it mean to "be afflicted"?  
 323. *Why* be afflicted?  
 324. Is there any difference between mourning and weeping?  
 325. Should one coming to Jesus in repentance always weep? When do you think some action other than weeping would be permissible?  
 326. Laughter over *what* is referred to in v. 9?  
 327. Abraham laughed and was not reprimanded, Sarah laughed and was reprimanded.  
 328. When might it be proper to laugh over something God has said?  
 329. Is James discouraging a Christian from laughing and having joy?  
 330. What is to be *heavy* in v. 9? (It isn't joy . . . joy is gone; but where was joy just before it left?)  
 331. Is the humility of v. 10 a character trait that James wishes the saint to develop, or is it a humble deed of some type he wants

- performed? If a deed, what sort of deed would be a "humble deed"?
332. Is not all that we do in the sight of the Lord? Then why this particular admonition to so humble ourselves?
333. Does the Lord promise to exalt everyone who is humiliated?
334. What kind of exaltation should one expect of the Lord?
335. Note who is the author of this humiliation and of this exaltation.

### *Paraphrases*

- A. 4: 8b. Purify those ungodly hands, you sinning Christians, and set your heart right as well as your life; you have the mind to love the world as well as Christ.
9. Realize your wretchedness and weep; let the glad sound of your worldly pleasures be turned into mourning and your joy in spiritual adultery be turned to a downcast state of shame.
10. Bow to the will of God and He will lift you out of your downcast state.
- B.\*4:8b. Wash your hands, O sinners, and fill your hearts with God alone to make them pure and true to Him.
9. Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and sincere grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter and gloom instead of joy.
10. Then when you feel your worthlessness before the Lord, He will lift you up, encourage and help you.

### *Summary*

Repent of your adultery with the world, both in your heart and your life, and you can be renewed in your relationship to Christ as His bride.

### *Comment*

How the spiritual adulterer should feel, what his state is in relation to God, what has alienated him from God and what, in general, can draw him back to God has been discussed. Now James gets to the point of what to do about the condition. How can

the Christian who has been a friend (or has been *flirting*) with the world get from where he is to where he should be? He has been instructed to "draw nigh to God," but how does he go about this?

Repentance is the answer. Sinful deeds, sinful hearts, and double minds must be changed. James might have said, "repent and purify yourselves, and worship the Lord." His expression is much more colorful: "Cleanse your hands ye sinners."

Perhaps because man does so many things with hands, the hands have been, in literature of all times, symbolic of work and deeds. This is also true of the scripture.

The Jews had a custom of lifting their hands heavenward when they prayed. Paul, in saying that a man's prayer should be coupled with holy deeds, said "I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands . . ." (I Tim. 2:8). Pilate washed his hands before the people, thus trying publicly to disclaim responsibility for the terrible deed of crucifying the Righteous One. Today we still use the expression, "My hands are clean," meaning "I didn't do it!"

So James says, "cleanse your hands." Evil deeds themselves must be put aside. The action by which the Christian shows friendship with the world must be changed. Sorrow is not enough; for it must be a Godly sorrow that leads to repentance of the deed. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (II Cor. 7:1).

Note that James is preaching repentance to the Christian. Here he calls the Christians ("among you," v. 1) "sinners." When the Christian sins and continues to sin, he is facing death itself. James closes with that warning in 5:19-20.

In addition to changing the deed, James says the heart must also be made right. Just as one can make himself an enemy of God by wishing to be a friend of the world (Note comments on 4:4) so also a man can make himself a friend of God by having his heart freed from contamination. Physical adultery can exist in the heart. Should a Christian continue loving and wishing for the sensuous satisfactions of this earth contrary to the Spirit of Christ then he is continuing in spiritual adultery, even if he no longer does the deeds which he longs to do.

This spiritual adultery of the heart is usually a part-time occupation. So the doubleminded is also admonished to cease embracing both God and the pleasures of sin. This doublemindedness is the

same as that described in 1:8. There it ruined the prayer life; here it makes the heart impure.

The condition of this adulterous Christian is really serious! He should honestly look at his state and see how wretched it really is. The "be afflicted" means to be in distress, or be wretched. A wealthy man who was on the verge of losing all his money on a poor financial venture would be in a wretched state. He would have a hard time sleeping and food would not digest in his stomach because of his unhappiness, his uncertainty. But what is this Christian about to lose? The "pearl with out price" has almost slipped from his grasp. He is about to lose the costliest gift ever given to any man: his soul's salvation. This should make him quake in his danger and fill him with misery.

Verse ten summarizes the solution. Our humility and subjection is to be toward the Lord and not toward the devil nor this world. This humiliation is an act of surrender, or resigning one's own will to the will of God.

In this, Christianity is different from all other teachings, for the road to mastery is a road of service. Success comes through recognition of failure. Righteousness comes only after one has recognized his true sinful state. Exaltation is given by God to those who humble themselves before Him. This is the reversal of all human judgment and wisdom. Has not man learned that "he who toots his own horn" the loudest shall be heard? Is not the road to success paved with the failure of others? So logic, as well as human nature, tells us that if we would succeed quickly we must do all we can to bring failure to others: our competitors!

Man is ever a miserable failure at exalting himself. The man who brags the loudest and seems most successful in exalting his own virtues ends up in isolation; being detested by his fellow men. And, even if he is right in his estimation of his own superior ability and decision, his accomplishments are resented and his decisions are unpopular.

On the other hand, humiliation before the Lord and loving service to fellow mankind brings exaltation for God and sincere appreciation from mankind, (or at least a portion of mankind.) This kind of subjection and service is not for the purpose of getting a seat at the head of the table, or on the right or left hand of Jesus in heaven. This subjection and service is accomplished because it is the heart's desire, and real joy comes from this action. There

would be pleasure in the subjection without the exaltation; and there would be a drive for loving service without the reward of appreciation. But how much sweeter these rewards make service! Great is the wisdom of God that by regeneration He would make His nature a pleasure for the Christian, and then give added rewards beside. God wants nothing but that which is good for us; and truly He will give happiness to us in as great an amount as our subjection to will allow.

4:11-12

## JUDGING OUR BRETHREN

*Text 4:11-12*

11. Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaketh against a brother or judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.
12. One *only* is the lawgiver and judge, *even* he who is able to save and to destroy: but who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?

### *Questions*

336. If a brother has sin, does v. 11 forbid speaking against that sin?
337. What about the "law" would protect a brother from being spoken against?
338. What "law" is referred to? (Read the context before answering.)
339. What relation exists between speaking against and judging?
340. Would the particular defamation forbidden in verses 11 and 12 also be forbidden in dealing with the non-Christian? Why single out the brother in particular?
341. In what way is our relationship with a *Christian* different than our relationship with a non-Christian?
342. When one goes through life and is unaware of this difference in relationship is there something wrong? If so, what?
343. In what way could judging the brother be said to be judging the law?



344. Name some ways, other than judging the brother, in which a man can set himself up as a judge of the law.
345. Who is the one lawgiver and judge in v. 12?
346. In what way could v. 12 be said to be an admonition to search the Scriptures to see what God wants us to do?
347. How can you harmonize the proper rebuke of sin and correction of brethren (Titus 1:13; James 5:19-20) with verses 11 and 12?
348. Is there any difference in referring to the judgment God makes and in pronouncing the judgment one's self?
349. What is the relationship between 4:11, 12 and 4:1?
350. How could this kind of judgment referred to in 11, 12, engender strife and contention?

*Paraphrases*

- A. 4:11. Stop speaking evil of your brother, and slandering him!  
For he that slanders a brother, thus judging him, is actually slandering the Word of God that forbids such judgment. A person that slanders, or judges, the Word of God is acting like a lawgiver instead of a lawkeeper.
12. There really is only one lawgiver and judge: for it is only God who is able save or destroy for eternity. Puny man! Who do you think you are when you act like you were God in judging your brother and God's word?
- B.\*4:11. Don't criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. If you do, you will be fighting against God's law of loving one another, declaring it is wrong. But your job is to obey the law, not to decide whether it is right or wrong.
12. And He alone, Who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone decides to save us or destroy. So what right do we have to judge or criticize others?

*Summary*

When you slander your brother you also slander God's Word which forbids it. Stop it!

*Comment*

He who really desires to remedy the strife within the church should give particular heed to these two verses. Slanderous judgment of a brother betrays an attitude of arrogant assumption that can bring only resentment. This defamation is an assumption to be as God who gave and made the law. This was the sin of presumption of Moses, for which God said he should not enter into the promised land. "Shall *we* bring you forth water out of this rock?"

In sitting on the judgment throne with God and presuming to be a partner with God in lawgiving and judgment Moses brought God's wrath upon himself (Num. 20:10-12). We not only repeat Moses' sin but usually in a manner calculated to stir up strife and create ill will. Our sin is not a momentary assumption to be a partner with the lawgiver; but an assumed right to bring personal censorship and judgment against our brother that provokes both his wrath and God's!

This "speaking against" of verse eleven is really a very strong word. Perhaps "slander not another" would be more in keeping with the meaning than the milder "speak not against another." Since such a one, in acting as if he were immune from such mistakes, makes himself so unpopular it is amazing that the sin is so prevalent.

Why does man persist in doing that which brings him no reward from God, no good will from his fellow man, and no material benefit? Surely there must be a strong temptation involved in the action of slander, else it would not be a popular vocation. The reasons are probably psychological, and are based upon a rationalization of one's own condition. For one thing, a guilt complex might cause a person to sub-consciously assume a state of self-righteousness. Knowing he cannot be declared righteous by God nor by his own conscience, he finds a relative righteousness through accenting the sins of others. "At least I am better than they." Just a moment's reflection would help us recall that we are not able to climb into heaven on the shoulders of those we have shoved into hell. Since this is a subconscious temptation, the reasons are subjective and usually not thought out. The slanderer seldom examines his motives.

Another subjective temptation to slander (as psychologists often point out) may be to take the spotlight off one's own self. Fearing the censure of others, the slanderer strikes the first blow. He strives

to be so fast and furious with his accusations and defamation that his victims do not have time to take a careful look at their self-righteous judge. Perhaps in their desire for relief from the attack, they will refrain from bringing the proper rebuke and admonition to this sinner.

Of course, there is a fine line between defamation of character here spoken against and the proper admonition and rebuke of sinning brethren. Perhaps the greatest difference in the two actions is the motive. A Christian rebuke that comes from a desire of sincere love and a desire to bring blessings to a fellow saint is a virtuous action that James commends in 5:19-20. Yet the same rebuke that comes from a desire to cover up one's own sin, or to make oneself look good in comparison with the brother, (even if the rebuke is deserved) makes one a law-giver. He executes the law for personal reasons, ignoring the true author and intent of the law. He executes it against his brother for benefits to himself never intended by God who made the law.

"Though there is a fine line between the two actions, there is a great gulf between the results of the two actions. Proper admonition and rebuke given in love has a real opportunity to bring repentance and save a soul from death. Improper admonition given for selfish purposes brings only resentment and strife. The proper consideration in bringing rebuke is to "consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1).

Another result of this improper admonition for selfish purposes is that the brother is actually wronged in the charge itself. The truth of the sin is often stretched until the charge becomes a "half-truth half-lie" accusation. Since defamation of character is desired, the charge is pushed to the point of slander.

Again, repentance is not desired, as this would end the matter. Repentance will often be ignored; or no opportunity for correction given if the charge indeed has some truth attached. So the slanderer (assuming his charges to have some basis) actually hinders rather than helps the situation. He adds sin by creating a rift and hard feelings.

In summarizing this particular section (4:1-12), we might say that the Spirit warns that selfish pleasure brings trouble to the church. This selfish pleasure can only be overcome by a complete dedication to God—and God alone! So if we find ourselves in a posi-

tion of creating strife and contention out of our sensuous loves, we should repent. This repentance means resisting the devil and subjecting ourselves to God, both in heart and in actions. And there is a temptation even when we admonish and rebuke the sinning brother; for if this is done for the wrong purpose it brings trouble to the church and brings down the condemnation of God.

### *THIRTEEN THREE-POINT SERMON STARTERS*

#### A WAR THAT MAKES WARS 4:1-2

- A. War in your members, within your body. (4:1b).  
(Lustful pleasures that demand satisfaction).
- B. Lusting, killing, coveting, fighting, warring. (4:2a).  
(The coveting saint makes war with his brothers).
- C. Wars and fightings among the brethren. (4:1a).

#### RESULTS OF LOVE FOR WORLDLY PLEASURES 4:1-3

- A. No "peace that passeth all understanding."  
(They war in your members).
- B. Inability to obtain satisfaction.  
(Have not, and cannot obtain).
- C. Live in continual warfare.

#### THE FRUITLESS LIFE OF A SENSUOUS MAN 4:2-3

- A. He lusts . . . but cannot have that for which he lusts.
- B. He is jealous (kills and covets . . . but receives not in either case)
- C. He does or does not pray . . . but receives not in either case.

#### THE ACTION OF A SENSUOUS MAN 4:3

- A. A selfish "spending" of all his blessings.
- B. His prayer life, and entire spiritual life, is "amiss."
- C. He does not receive spiritual blessings from God.

#### SPIRITUAL ADULTERY 4:4

- A. The meaning of spiritual adultery.  
(Those who break marriage vows to God).
- B. The adulterous partner (The world).
- C. The consequences of spiritual adultery.  
(Friends of God's enemy, and an enemy of God).

## THE SPIRIT 4:5

- A. Given by God.
- B. Dwells within us.
- C. Yearns for our proper relationship with God.

## THE GREATER GRACE 4:6-7

- A. Power to resist the devil.
- B. Power to be subject to God.
- C. Given to the humble.

## THE MAGNET THAT WORKS TWO WAYS 4:7-8

- A. A magnet has two opposing poles. (Cannot love both God and man).  
(Does not attract another magnet at both poles, but attracts with one and repels with the other.)
- B. When we repel the devil, he repels us.
- C. When we draw near to God, He draws near to us.

## HOW A CHRISTIAN SUBJECTS HIMSELF TO GOD 4:7-8

- A. Draw nigh to God.
- B. Cleanse your hands.
- C. Purify your hearts.

## PRIDE, SIN, AND UNCERTAINTY 4:8-10

- A. The need of the proud saint. (v. 10).  
Humiliation of himself, exaltation of God.
- B. The need of the sinning saint.  
Cleanse his hands.
- C. The need of the uncertain saint. (v. 8).  
Purify his heart.

## A TIME TO WEEP 4:9

- A. When sensuous pleasures bring laughter.
- B. When things of this world bring joy.
- C. When the soul is afflicted with sin and in danger of destruction.

## THE JUDGE WHO SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN 4:11-12

- A. He judged his brother without authority.
- B. He broke the very law by which he judged.
- C. He shall be judged by the one true Judge.

THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE 4:12

- A. There is only one.
- B. He is able to destroy.
- C. He is able to save.