

James 4:1-6

"He Gives More Grace"

The Bible teaches that as the body of Christ, we are one. That just as your physical body is composed of many individual members, yet comprises one body, so to the body of Christ. Though we are many, we remain one body. Each individual adding an element to the body that makes up the whole. *You need me, & I need you if we're to function & flourish as God intended. I serve you through the means in which God has gifted me & you serve me through the means God has gifted you... That is, we serve one another. It may be individually or corporately, however the case may be. We are to edify one another & glorify God.*

The psalmist wrote, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!"*¹ There's something beautiful, something powerful & formidable about a church that is united. – But it's incredibly tragic when a church body is divided. – We belong to one & the same *family*, we trust one & the same *Savior*, we're indwelt by one & the same *Holy Spirit*... yet we will fight & war against one *another*.

In his letter, James is speaking into such a situation. He's writing to a people who *should be united* in their love for God, for His word, for one another. A people who should be united in worship & in service... But they're divided. There's contention & strife... ongoing hostility toward one another... The curtain closed on Ch 3 w/words of peace. It opens in Ch 4 w/words of war.

Vs 1-3

It's interesting how we can have a tendency to sort of *glamorize* the early church. (& Of course, we would *never* seek to diminish or in any way detract from the work of the fundamental/foundational work of the apostles & prophets as the church was born & being established. Absolutely there were wonderful, powerful, incredible goings on in the early church.) Yet if you honestly/objectively read through the N.T. you *have* to conclude that there was *a lot* of problems in the early church!

The vast majority of epistles are written as *corrective* letters. They're addressing problems that needed to be repented of, reconciled & made right... The Corinthians were dividing over which church leader they followed. They were suing one another & allowing flagrant unrepentant sin to flourish in their midst under the banner of love & acceptance. Paul said that the Galatians were "biting & devouring" one another.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 133:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Ephesians were struggling to maintain unity, there were issues in Philippi. Of the 7 churches that Jesus addresses in Rev 2-3, 5 of them needed to repent of some kind of sin or compromise in their midst...

Here's the point. The people in the early church were a lot more like you & me than we too often care to admit. & That's because even though times/cultures change, the human heart remains the same.

James is going to put his finger, not only upon the "what" that's happening here, but also upon the "why". *What* is it that's happening? "Wars & fights" taking place among them. There's conflict, contentions, strife & division. & He covers the full gamut here. The word "war" is a "big picture" word, the overall long-term experience (be it something w/in yourself [like an ongoing addiction for example] or an external ongoing relationship issue. The word "fights" pointing to the individual skirmishes w/in the overarching war.

Essentially, what's taking place is that these guys are going at it w/one another & James is going to expose the why of it all. It's not because of some honorable, spiritual resolve that's creating conflict. (Last week we spoke of how carnality likes to disguise itself as spirituality. Miriam & Aaron complaining to Moses when really, they were just gunning for his position, wanting to share in his authority, wanting to be seen & recognized as people of importance. They were putting on a front that appeared spiritual, but the heart behind it was self-centered).

Such will always be the case & the cause of wars/fights among us. It's not because we're all walking in such humility & are only hungry for God's glory. It's due to the *desire* for pleasure that war in our members... It's not God's *glory* we're after, it's our *gain*.

The desire to obtain what you don't have but really want. (It could be power, position, preeminence, influence... whatever.) This is where war originates from. We're seeing it play out on the global stage right now... but it's equally true & applicable between individuals.

This word "pleasure" is "hedonon" from which we get our word "hedonistic". Someone who lives for pleasure, absorbed in self-indulgence. Constantly looking for gratification but never finding it... because the flesh is never satisfied.

& Where he says that these desires "war" in your members. This word "war" is different from the word translated "war" earlier in the Vs. *This* word is "strateuo" from where we get our word "strategy". Never underestimate the deviousness, the cunning craftiness of your flesh to undermine/overcome & destroy you.

This is the word that Peter used when he wrote, *"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,"*² Your fleshly lusts will strategize against your soul...

But the point here is that conflict will come out of that desire for more. Something we don't have, but we want it & we think it will bring the fulfillment, the gratification we're looking for along w/it... Ultimately, it's what we developed back in Vs 14. It's rooted in "self-seeking" in our hearts. It goes back to that selfish ambition we spoke of last week that Paul wrote of in Phil 2:13. Not esteeming others but putting ourselves forward first. This word "lust" in Vs 2 simply speaks of a craving. Same idea. You don't have it, but you crave it.

"You murder & covet & cannot obtain" ... Wait, what!? "Murder!?" What's this about? Are people literally drawing their swords & running people through to try & get what they want? Probably not ☺... Though covetousness can certainly lead to the literal act. – This takes us back to James' big Brother's Sermon on the Mt. It was there that Jesus explained that the law was never really aimed at the outward action so much as it was the inward intent of the heart. *The religious leaders were interpreting the law as physical when in reality the law is spiritual... So Jesus explained, "If you look on a woman w/lust in your heart, you're guilty of adultery." "If you hate someone in your heart, you're guilty of murder." Meaning that you've cut them off in your heart, they're dead to you...* In Ch 15 of Matt's gospel Jesus said, *"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."*³

Think about the words Jesus spoke to His disciples the night before He was crucified. He said, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*⁴ But what happens when rather than having love for one another, a church is caught up in strife, divisions, contentions & conflict? People aren't drawn to Jesus in that kind of environment. More than anything it causes people to question His validity, turns them away, turns them off. The gathering of the body isn't an arena in which we promote ourselves, it's a place where we exalt J.C.

So... the essence of sin is selfishness. Covetousness leads to conflict. But here at the end of Vs 2 James adds to the mix something else that's promoting their problems... prayerlessness.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 2:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 15:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 13:34–35). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He says, “Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” – The appropriate means by which a believer’s needs are to be met (legitimate needs, not greeds) is by asking God. In other words, so much of our destructive desires are rooted in us because we’re not seeking the Lord to meet our needs. We’re not bringing our desires before Him in prayer... The bible is clear, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;”*⁵ Bring your requests to God. Let Him satisfy, refine, or deny them. If you find strife or envy, covetousness, or lust in your heart, take it to the Lord. Commit to Him those things that are in your heart... It’s interesting how much focus people will place on what they refer to as “unanswered prayer” (& James will get to that) but before we get there, let’s think through “unasked prayer”.

If you have a desire in your heart, bring it to the Lord. “It’s hard to ask for things that I know are selfish...” Exactly, that’s part of the value of prayer. Bringing those dark desires into the light, allowing God to deal w/them... Or there may be nothing wrong w/the desire. It’s just not what God has for you (at least not right now).

But I want you to realize something. (Because now & then you’ll run across someone who says they don’t pray because they either feel it’s selfish or God already knows what they want/need so to ask Him is to bother Him [or something along those lines]). You should realize that, that mentality (though it may sound noble) is in direct defiance to the Word of God.

The Father, in speaking to the Son (in Ps 2) said, *“Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.”*⁶ Charles Spurgeon said of this, *“If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that he may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?”* Which is to say, *“Why should God make an exemption for me that He wouldn’t for His own Son?”*

I wouldn’t go so far as to say it’s a spiritual law (because God can freely give by His grace). But I’d say it’s about as close as you could get apart from that. Jesus said, *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”*⁷ He said, *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it*

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Php 4:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 2:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 7:7-8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

shall be done for you."⁸ I'll give you one more, *"I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."*⁹ I'm trying to get you to see that absolute priority of prayer. If I won't so much as humble myself, obey God's word & bring my request before Him. Then why would I anticipate Him to do what I won't even petition Him for? I'm in defiance of His word...

"I did ask. But I didn't receive!" James deals w/that too! "You ask & do not receive, *because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*" He's touching a sore spot here, isn't he? He's putting his finger on the fact that selfishness shows up, even in our prayers. We forget that prayer isn't about persuading a reluctant God. It's not about getting our will done in heaven, but getting God's will done on earth. It's about aligning our will w/His, partnering w/Him in the accomplishing of His will *on this planet, through our lives by whatever means He deems appropriate.*

Jesus, when He modeled for us how to pray, He said, *"When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven."*¹⁰ When He was praying just prior to the cross, He said, *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."*¹¹

We love to take things out of context & say things like, "Jesus said, 'Ask & will be given.' Or, 'whatever things you ask, when you pray, believe you'll receive them & you will have them.'" & We like to apply that to our greeds rather than our needs or even really consider what God desires in the situation. But when Jesus uttered those words, He was speaking to His disciples. What was the very 1st prerequisite for becoming His disciple? *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross (death to self), and follow Me."*¹²

We come to God, asking for a raise at work, or to win the lottery, or find the next exploding crypto currency & we tell Him we'll give more at church. But underneath it all is that nice car, or bigger home, some creature comfort. We want it for our gain, not really His glory... (you get the idea). God is always searching our heart.

It's ok to say, "God, this is what's in my heart. But I don't really know if it's what You want. So, have Your way, Your will be done in my life, this ministry, my family..."

Vs 4-5

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [In 15:7]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mk 11:24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 11:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 22:42]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 16:24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So many pastors today are worried about offending their congregation. James just makes it plain. “Adulterers, Adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship w/the world is enmity w/God?”

Btw, the oldest manuscripts of this letter don’t have the word “adulterers” here, only “adulteresses”. It’s possible that some scribe was thinking, “Well, adultery isn’t a one way street so I’ll write out both genders.” But James isn’t speaking of *physical* adultery. He’s speaking of *spiritual* adultery. Of believers being unfaithful to God! In the O.T. God considered the nation of Israel to be His bride & when they would succumb to idolatry, God considered that spiritual adultery. They were unfaithful to Him.

You & me, we (as the church) are the bride of Christ. & When we succumb to the ways/wants of the world (the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh & the pride of life), that which He has called us out *of* & to be separate *from*, then we are being unfaithful to Him! We’re giving the love & devotion that belongs *to* Him to something other *than* Him.

Imagine your wife getting closer to another man than she is to you (or your husband being closer to another woman than he is to you). Yet we do this to Jesus & think it’s somehow different...

He says, “Do you not know that friendship w/the world is enmity w/God?” “The world” simply being the state/standards of man (the desires, values & aspirations) apart from God. Friendship w/the world, wanting to live like this world is *enmity or hostility* w/God.

Here’s what you need to think about. What do you really *want*? “Whoever therefore *wants* to be a friend of the world makes *himself* an *enemy* of God.” Here’s the idea, you need to make your choice. Are you going to set your desires/affections upon the things of this world? Or are you going to draw near *to* God, set your heart to be loyal to J.C. & give your devotion, your affection to Him? You see, God doesn’t need to declare you His enemy. If you choose the way of the world, you choose to *make yourself* an enemy of God.

& I don’t think anyone wakes up one day & decides to go the way of the world. It starts w/subtle compromise. A slip here & there. Hebrews 2:1 warns of the dangers of *drifting*. You begin to drift toward friendship w/the world...

But the Spirit who dwells in you yearns jealously... This Vs isn’t one easy to translate. James could be saying that God yearns jealously over the spirit He’s made to dwell in you. Or the Holy Spirit in you yearns jealously... Either way, it’s true.

God is jealous for you. Not jealous *of* you, but *for* you.

He wants *all* of your heart. & James isn't so much quoting a particular Vs as he is the essence of the truth of scripture. We serve a jealous God, the Spirit will convict you when you're in sin... "Be holy, for I holy".

Vs 6 Close

I love the way our section of scripture concludes today. Because for all of the sin, all of the self-centered motives & ambitions leading to horrible behavior, grace is available. Where sin abounds, grace abounds still more. What a contrast between who *we are* & who *He is*. He gives more grace... The more help that's needed, the more grace that's available.

"Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Here's the point. Grace is available, but only if you're willing to set yourself in a place to receive it. You can't earn it, you can only position yourself to receive it. How do you do that? Through humility. God *resists* the proud... This word "resists" is actually a military term meaning "to range in battle against". Our pride will call God to set Himself against us... Think about that.

But humility, submission to God's authority, invites His grace. It's by grace that we're saved, by grace that we're sanctified... Listen, all the medicine in the world won't cure our sickness if we won't take it. Even so, God has grace, but if you won't receive it... Whatever your sin, God has more grace... Humble yourself before Him. Come boldly before the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy & find grace to help in time of need...

Prayer Points:

God we thank You that You give more grace. Surely, it's what we need. Forgive us our pride & obstinate ways. Help us to deny ourselves, to crucify the flesh along w/it's passions & desires. May we walk in humility, & may our lives bring You glory.

It's by grace that we're saved. Don't rest in your pride, humble yourself before the Lord. We all like sheep have gone astray, but God has laid upon Jesus the iniquity (the sin) of us all. Jesus paid the penalty of death, shed His blood on our behalf. He was crucified for our transgression & raised for our justification. Believe upon Him & be saved.