



Lesson 4

Warning against worldliness (Verses 1-5)

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

James explains why we end up arguing with each other and being nasty to each other. The process starts with bad thoughts like jealousy and coveting and if we are not careful leads on to quarrels, fighting and even murders. What a dreadful process! How awful that this could be said of brothers in the church.

But bad thoughts can also lead to prayers not being answered by God. In James’ time the brothers were obviously praying selfishly to try to make their lives comfortable. No wonder God did not answer. However, it is clear that if we do not pray in the right way God will not answer. It is therefore important to find out from the Bible how we should pray.

An adulterer is someone who breaks marriage vows and goes with someone other than their wife or husband. It is not a complimentary term. But if we have promised to serve God – to be a slave to Jesus – then that must be a sacred promise, like a wedding vow. If we start to behave in selfish ways then we are friends with the world, and unfaithful to God. In fact, we become enemies of God. How awful!

Jesus said:

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

The Need for Humility (Verses 6-10)

“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

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

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

There is no room for pride; we have nothing at all to be proud of. We must be humble. Jesus said

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

This has to be talking about the future kingdom of God on earth: meek people are not in power now!

We need to fight against evil and try to be close to God; we need to clear our hearts and minds of evil ideas. God will lift us up if we are prepared to be humble.

Again, Jesus said

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

If we are truly repentant, God will forgive us and we will find comfort in His word.



Not Speaking Evil (Verses 11-12)

“Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour?”

James goes on to say how we should talk about fellow-believers. We should not say evil things about them. We should not judge people. Jesus will judge people when He comes back and it is not for us to judge people. We should try to obey, not to judge. We are no better than other people – we all sin and are worthy of death – so we are in no position to judge.

Boasting about tomorrow (Verses 13-17)

“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”--

yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

Once we have this correct attitude we realise that we do not even know what we shall be able to do tomorrow. We should never imagine that we are in control. It is only by God’s grace and mercy that we will be able to do anything. If He takes away our breath we will not be able to do anything at all. So everything is ‘if the Lord wills’.

When we know what is right – as instructed in the Bible – and do not do it then this is sin. And the Bible tells us what is right, so we have no excuse.



Lesson 4 Questions

Name _____
Address _____
_____ Reference Number _____
Tutor's Name _____

Answers to most questions can be found in the lessons or Bible passages given. Please write your answers on this question paper and send them to your tutor.

1. Describe the process of bad thoughts leading to bad sins.
2. Verse 7 talks about resisting the devil. Which one of these three statements about this is correct?
3. Who is the lawgiver and judge? (verse 12).
4. Why is a friend of the world an enemy of God?
5. Why should we not speak evil of our brothers?
6. What does it mean to 'cleanse your hands' and 'purify your hearts'? (verse 8).
7. Read Luke 6:37. What did Jesus say about judging people?
8. What did you learn most from this chapter?