

Draw Near to God

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our Bibles to James chapter 4. In other words, we are saints who sin.

So those of us who have put our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we have received the forgiveness of our sins. We have been reconciled to God. He has saved us.

He has set us apart as saints. And yet, we still sin. Scripture tells us that if we deny that, that we're deceiving ourselves.

Now, if we truly belong to the Lord and we are Christ's, then we do not sin in the same way that we sin before coming to Christ.

If there's no difference in our lives as it relates to sin after Christ, and as it was before Christ, then we should evaluate whether we are indeed in Christ.

[1 : 36] But the reality is, even after we come to Christ, we still sin. And sometimes our sins are such that they identify us more as being of the world than being of God.

Sometimes our sin, the way we sin in our lives, can identify us more as being of God. And if you've lived long enough, if you've been around the church long enough, I think you would agree that we see this contradicting reality in life.

But not only do we see it in life, we also see it in Scripture. And James 4, verses 1 through 10, is one of those places where we see it.

And this morning, as we prepare for our week of corporate consecration, consecration, starting tonight, may these words from the book of James guide us and prepare our hearts to come before the Lord this week.

So please follow along as I read James chapter 4, starting in verse 1. I'm reading from the English Standard Version.

[3 : 03] 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?

[4 : 16] 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 bloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the privilege of being able to sit under, first the reading of your word, and then the preaching of your word.

Lord, your word is truth. Would you sanctify us by your truth this morning? Would you give us ears to hear?

[5 : 34] Would you posture our hearts to obey? Not just this morning, Lord, but throughout the course of this week, and we pray that you would truly use your word this morning as it is preached as a foundation for this week.

O Lord, I pray that we would let your word and your spirit have their way with us this morning, and that you would do the work in our midst that only you can do.

Father, would you work now through the preaching of your word, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. The words of James that we just read are convicting, and at the same time, they are encouraging. But before these words can truly encourage us, they really need to truly convict us. James is challenging us about the reality of worldliness in the lives of the people of God, and he calls for repentance.

As we prepare for this week of corporate consecration, I believe these words are fitting for us to hear and for us to contemplate.

[6 : 59] And the truth is, these words are actually stinging. But they do offer us hope, and they offer us encouragement. And here's the hope and the encouragement that I pray that we will all leave this place with this morning, and that we would hold on to throughout the course of this week.

Here's the hope and encouragement. As we draw near to God, our lives will be marked more by godliness than by worldliness.

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And so that we don't have any illusions about this, this will not be perfectly. There will be none of us who will be marked by godliness in a perfect way as in God himself.

But as we draw near to God, which is a lifetime endeavor, which is an endeavor that we will engage in until the day we draw our final breath. If we will draw near to God more and more, our lives will be marked more by godliness than by worldliness.

[8 : 27] This morning I have two simple points, and I will build them around two single words. The first word is worldliness.

Worldliness. Worldliness is one of those words that is defined in many ways, depending on who you ask the definition.

I grew up in a very legalistic Pentecostal church. I see my mother at the back, and I hope she's not offended, but what I would say is that I thank God for the church I grew up in.

It's through that church I came to faith in Jesus Christ as a 12-year-old boy, through that denomination. Not in that particular church, but through that denomination. The little church I grew up in was a little church, and on a Sunday morning like this, we'd be sitting there, and I'd have my seat out next to the window so I could look outside.

It was a little wooden church, and it was called Riverside Church of God. And holiness for them was largely on what you wore.

[9 : 40] And it was largely, this was basically the rule of thumb. If it was in style, it was sin. And if it was out of style, then it was righteous and holy.

And so when I was younger, back in the early 70s, bell-bottom pants, remember those were in. And broad belts, they were in. And so they were sin. And we couldn't wear them.

And BJ and I, we had our straight leg pants, and we had our skinny belts, because we couldn't wear those. And then, of course, eventually, bell-bottom pants went out of style, and broad belts went out of style, and straight leg pants, and skinny belts came in.

And so now we could wear bell-bottom pants, and broad belts, and we did. And then, in those days, too, Afro was in.

So Afro was sin. We couldn't have Afro, so our hair was cut to the skin. Cold days like this, I mean, you didn't want to be, you know, having your hair like that, but we used to have it cut down to nothing.

[10 : 43] And then Afro eventually went out of style, and then we had Afros. And so we were always the odd ones out. And then, they also felt that it was a sin to go to the movie theater.

So we could not go to the movie theater. Now, what was interesting was that when the movies that were shown in theater got old, and they were shown on TV, you could watch them at home, but you couldn't watch them in theater, because the theater was a hellhole.

It was a sinful place. It was a worldly place, and so you could not go there. That wasn't true of just Riverside Church of God. That was true of all the churches largely in the Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy.

Some of you may have that particular background, but that's the way they defined worldliness.

From the passage that we have before us this morning, James doesn't define worldliness that way.

And not only does James define worldliness, James also describes it for us. And since he describes an example of worldliness before he actually defines worldliness, the example that he gives is quite surprising.

[11:59] And there would be few of us, I would argue, who would ordinarily use the example that James uses as an example of worldliness. In verses 1 through 4, look at what James says again.

Verses 1 through 3, actually. 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. James is talking about quarreling or what we would refer to in the Bahamas as rowing.

Not rowing, but rowing. So if you think this morning of your last argument, for some of us that may have been this morning, but the last argument, maybe it was an argument with your spouse, an argument with a child, perhaps with a sibling, or maybe an argument this past week with a co-worker.

[13:19] And imagine James speaking with you and he says to you, what was the quarrel about? What were you quarreling over? And it may be any number of things.

Or you may say as a man, well, I was quarreling with my wife because she lets the children have their own way and she doesn't discipline them. Or the wife would say, I was quarreling with my husband because he doesn't do anything around the house.

He drops his clothes on the floor. He doesn't pick them up. He doesn't help the clean. And we both go out and work and I'm just tired of it and I keep talking to him and he wouldn't listen. That's why we were quarreling.

Or you give whatever reason the attending issue was. You know what James would say? James would say something like, well, I hear you, but that's not why you were quarreling.

That's not why you were fighting. You were fighting because you can't have things the way that you want them and your passions within you are at war and you therefore fight and you murder and you even quarrel.

[14:36] It's quite interesting to hear the crime statistics this week and one of the statistics they have, one of the categories of murders is domestic violence.

And you can rest assured that these aren't people who are just casual and their tempers are under control. Now these are people who are raging. These are people who are angry. And although James may not have been referring to murder literally, he could have been, we're not sure, he may have been speaking figuratively, but we do know that some anger leads to murder.

And sadly, even sometimes for some Christians, some Christians have so allowed their passions to be ungoverned that it resulted in them taking another person's life.

James would say to us, those surface reasons are not the reason that you quarrel. The reason you quarrel is because these angry passions are within you and you are not able to have what you desire and therefore you fight and therefore you quarrel.

But James helps us to see that this is not just a human issue. This is not just something that we have man to man, but it is an issue also that is man to God.

[16:03] He helps us in verses 2 and 3 to see that this issue is on a divine level as well. Look at what he says in verse 2. You do not, you have not, because you do not ask.

When he's talking about asking, he's talking about prayer. He's talking about not just asking a person, but really asking God. And James is saying that some of the things that we desire and we don't have, we don't have them because we aren't talking to God, we aren't praying to God, we are busy interacting and engaging with people, fighting with people, but God is the one to whom we need to speak.

He is the one we need to address. So rather than fighting with our spouse or fighting with our child or fighting with our co-worker or fighting with our brother or our sister, we need to be talking to God and praying to Him and asking Him.

And then James also tells us that it's not just that as an issue, that we're not asking God.

He says, and sometimes the reason we don't have is because we ask and our asking of whatever it is is to fuel the passions and the desires within us and God says, no, I'm not going to give that to you because though you want that, all it's going to do is further inflame those passions and desires

in you to cause you to act in this ungoverned way in your desires.

[17 : 36] Now let me make a distinction between what some might think James is saying and what he's not saying.

I think it's important to know that James is not talking about disagreements, not mere disagreements. We will have disagreements. We will have disagreements because we're different. We see things differently. We bring different perspectives to the same issue. Last week, we looked at the incident in Acts 15 where there was the big dispute in the church concerning the Gentiles and what they had to do to be saved.

James was there. James was one of those who was helping to settle that dispute. He was a part of the disagreement. We can disagree without quarreling.

We can disagree without fighting. We can disagree without looking and acting, like those who don't know the Lord.

[18 : 38] In that same passage in Acts 15, we actually see the Apostle Paul and Barnabas.

Scripture says they came to a point of disagreement. It was a sharp disagreement, so sharp that they went separate ways.

And we don't know the details of it, but there's no indication that simply because they disagreed on the matter of John Mark and whether he should go on the journey with them or not.

That in and of itself doesn't indicate that they were at each other's throat and they were fighting.

They were simply disagreeing and they parted ways. So I say that to say we can have disagreements and we will have disagreements.

We'll see things in a different way. That's what James is addressing. James is addressing when we go beyond the disagreement and we allow the passions within us to rage because we want to have our own way.

We want to bring the resolution to let it be the way we want it, the way we see it. And we'll see later on what James tells us to do with that. But that's the point.

[19 : 42] That's the line that we cross when we go into quarreling and fighting. So it's quite a surprise when we come to verse 4 and we see James after talking about quarreling and fighting it's quite a surprise that he remarks you adulterous people.

How does he move from quarreling to talking about adultery? Again, look at what he says in verse 4. 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. And those are strong, strong words.

Where did that come from in light of James talking about quarreling? How do you move from talking about quarreling people to start talking about adulterous people?

At first glance, these words of James seem, they are stinging and they seem in a way discouraging, but when we look at them more closely, they're actually also encouraging.

[21 : 14] What James says, starting in verse 4, is encouraging. And here's why. James is saying that the quarreling conduct that he just described is of the world.

That's what he's saying in verse 4. The quarreling conduct that he has just described is the conduct of the world. And when God's people behave in that way, they've aligned themselves with the world and it's spiritual adultery.

That's what James is saying. James is saying when you act like that, you are acting like the world. And when you act like the world, when you align yourself with the world, you set yourself up as an enemy of God.

He is talking about this kind of comfortable way of behaving ourselves, and he likens it to friendship with the world. It's a spiritual adultery.

And he says whoever makes himself a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Brothers and sisters, this is why what James addresses is so deceptive and so dangerous.

[22 : 37] What James has in view here is the rebellion of the world, that the world, though created by God, is in rebellion to God. When the scripture talks about the world in this way, it's talking about fallen humanity setting itself up in rebellion against God.

And so James says when we align ourselves with God, the one who created us, the one who has put his spirit within us, says God jealously yearns over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.

And God has redeemed us out of that. And then we find ourselves cozying up to it again, aligning ourselves with it again because of the way we conduct ourselves, because of the way that we live.

God is now why it should be clear that the reason that James is speaking this way, what should be very clear to us is the reason James is speaking this way is he's speaking to Christians.

James is speaking to people, he's writing to the church, he's writing to those whom he recognized to be saints. They are acting like the world, they're conducting themselves like the world, but in fact they belong to God.

[24 : 07] And again, this is why this issue is so, so important. It's important because James is not just talking in isolation here, James has been addressing this issue from the early section of his letter.

In chapter two, James is addressing this issue of people who say, I have faith, I'm a Christian, but there's no evidence in their life to say that they're a Christian.

And James says, that's not enough. James says, it is not enough for you to say, I am a Christian, I belong to God, and there's no evidence in your life that matches the faith that you profess.

that you claim to know God. And then he goes on in chapter three, and he goes on to talk about the tongue. And he tells us that we can't be claiming to belong to God and have blessing and cursing coming out of our mouths.

Look at how he says that starting in verse 10 of chapter three. James three, starting in verse 10, he says, from the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

[25 : 34] My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

Can a fig tree my brothers bear olives or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

And then he goes on in the latter part of chapter three, starting in verse 13, to talk about jealousy and selfish ambition.

Notice what he says, starting in verse 13. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly and spiritual!

[26 : 45] selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace in those who make peace. peace. So James is not just talking about something here in isolation.

James is making a case. He is bringing this concern about the people of God living like the people of the world. And then he comes to this passage that we are considering.

And the one word to define or to describe this contrary conduct for God's people is this world worldliness. But for most of us we wouldn't think about worldliness in this particular way.

Acting like the world it is so easy as I said from my own upbringing in the church I grew up in to confine it to more cosmetic things.

[28 : 03] Clothes you wear and the places you go. And it's not to say that those things are not relevant. It's not to say that we aren't to consider those things and not to say that we aren't to consider how we dress ourselves whether we are modest or not.

It's not to say that we should not consider the things that we view and we watch. We should consider those things. But those really are secondary issues. James is addressing how we live our lives And how that may align us with the world instead of aligning us with God.

And so this morning I believe that we should all consider our own conduct. And the question is is your conduct is my conduct contrary to the life that you and I should be living as Christians.

Is it in this area of quarreling not governing the desires that we have within us. We should be praying to God and trusting him but we are instead fighting and quarreling and trying to bring to pass what we should be looking to God to bring to pass.

I think this again is important because although James affirms that God's people sometimes would act and live like the world so much that he would call them adulterous.

[29 : 46] This is important because there is the real possibility that people who are living that way and conducting themselves that way may not be Christians at all. Yes, the people of God at times sin and they sin grievously and they look like the world.

But we should not be comfortable in that. We should not be comfortable saying, well, you know, that happens as a Christian because again we could be one who simply professes Christ but not one who possesses Christ and this is the danger of living so close to the world.

This is the danger of being a friend with the world. This is the danger of being comfortable with the ways of the world. We shouldn't take comfort from that because the real danger is that the person may not be a Christian at all.

And so this calls for self-evaluation. That's you this morning. You profess Christ God's God's kindness to you. And so you're living the way the world lives.

Then I urge you this morning to see this as God's kindness to you, to be here, to hear this, that you may truly evaluate where you stand.

[31 : 16] And you can, as Scripture says, make your calling and election sure. you can turn from sin, repent of sin, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so this is a call to us to turn from worldliness and to pursue godliness. And this brings me to my second and my final point, which is again a single word, and that word is godliness.

how do we turn from worldliness to godliness? Well, James tells us in verse 6. See, our natural tendency would be to kind of go out and grit our teeth and say we're going to change, we're going to turn over a new leaf, and we're going to do things better and different.

But that's the way James is calling us to start. Look at what James says in verse 6. James says, but he gives more grace.

This is how we change. This is how we become less worldly and more godly. This is how we move from having our face and lives towards the world and having our face and lives towards God.

[32 : 41] We do it by the grace that God provides. James says, but he gives more grace. And with the grace that God provides, James tells us in verse 7 what we are to do.

We are to submit to God. We're to submit to God. First and foremost, we are to submit to God. So instead of exhibiting pride and aligning ourselves with the world and trying to make things happen in our lives, he calls us to submit to God and to pursue godliness.

It means that in the situations that would lead to quarreling, instead of quarreling, we would submit our situations to God and we would trust him. Trust him in our case and we would trust him to work. I was speaking with someone recently and I just said to a person concerning what we were talking about, I said, what would you do if your wife showed up and she told you she's going to Miami and she's just going to Miami and he smiled.

He said, what do you mean? I said, she's going to Miami. He said, no, she wouldn't be going to Miami. I said, what do you mean? I'd tear that passport up and he started to say all the things that he would do.

[34 : 12] See, that's quarreling. That's quarreling. The reality is that there are times when we face circumstances that we have no control over and we need to submit to God.

We need to submit ourselves to God. We need to submit those situations to God and the right response for one who belongs to Christ in that situation is to say, I don't think you should go to Miami and give all the reasons that she should not go, but not lift a finger to stop her if we truly are submitting to God.

See, because God can stop that person in his or her tracks. God can bring to pass whatever his will is in that situation. God gives grace.

James is saying to us that God gives us grace. He gives us grace to be able to submit to him that we don't have to live and act the way the world does.

To submit to God means to submit to his will and to submit to his way and to live life based on his terms. And thank God that he doesn't just tell us to do it.

[35 : 33] James says he gives more grace. he gives more grace. But that's not all that James says. James also tells us in addition to submitting to God he says resist the devil.

Resist the devil. And the promise he gives us is that he will flee from us. Big bold biggity Satan will flee from us when we resist him.

And what we have in view is Satan as the tempter. In the same way that he tempted Jesus in the wilderness and he was tempting Jesus. How did Jesus resist him?

Jesus resisted him by saying Satan it is written. Jesus used the word of God to resist him. It's okay to say Satan I resist you. It's okay to say that.

God but how much more powerful it is to be able to lift up God's word and resist him with God's word as we submit ourselves to God.

[36 : 43] And here this is a reminder to us as to why it is so important for us to as the psalmist said hide the word of God in our hearts that we may not sin against the Lord.

And this is why what we are seeking to do as a church to memorize scripture is so beneficial and we should see that there would be warfare around our ability to do that trying to give us all kinds of reasons to not even attempt to do that because that's the tool that's the arsenal that we would use to resist the devil to actively resist the devil so that he would flee from us.

Now it's interesting when you consider these two commands side by side. The first one is submit to God the second is resist the devil and you realize that we can't do both together.

We can't both submit to God and not resist the devil because if we're not resisting the devil in a sense we're really submitting to the devil we are aligning with him letting him have his way with us. It's really one or the other. To not resist the devil really is to submit to him. In Jesus' case it would have been to do all the things he was inviting him to do to turn stone into bread to jump off the temple and all those other things.

[38 : 14] And then he also tells us in verse say draw near to God. We're drawn near to God.

And the promise is that God will draw near to us. And the way we draw near to God is to repent. The way we draw near to God is to turn from sin.

And so James further calls us to cleanse our hands. Cleanse our hands. James is actually saying, he's talking to Christians, and he's saying to us that there are times when our hands are dirty with sin.

When our hands have been actively involved in sin. And he says you need to cleanse your hands. You need to purify your heart.

He says you need to be wretched and you need to mourn and weep and let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. What is he talking about? This is the language of repentance.

[39 : 23] This is the language of feeling sorry for sin. This is the language of saying sin for what it is. And if we don't see sin for what it is, we will never repent. We will never have sorrow over our sin.

We would excuse our sin. We would cover up our sin. We would indulge in sin. God is calling us to repent.

He's calling us to draw near to God. Moving away from the world. Moving away from being a friend of the world. Moving away from living a life that is indicative of those who do not belong to God. It's a language of repentance. a call to turn away from sin and sitting on the fence. He says we cleanse our hearts you double minded.

Trying to serve God with a divided heart and a double mind. And I was preparing this for some reason I reflected on my own life as a young person.

[40 : 38] I reflected on some of the young people here at the church in particular those who would be with us this morning. And for our young people I would say we're not expecting you to fast in the same way that your parents may fast this week and to engage as we would do as adults because you have other commitments and priorities in this particular time most of you as students.

But here's what I want to encourage you to do. Talk with your parents about the way, the degree to which you can engage in this time. And one of the areas I was burdened for is this whole issue of a divided heart, a double mind.

Because the reality is, and I think a lot of us would identify with this, who sought to serve the Lord as we were young. We can just be torn.

We go to school and we hang with our friends and we give in to peer pressure and we don't want to stand for the Lord and we go with them doing things we know we ought not to do and then we show up to church and then we want to live that way for a day and it really is double mindedness.

And I believe that we need to pray for our young people, we need to encourage them in this endeavor to say, settle in your mind to serve the Lord. Settle in your mind that you will stand alone, resolve that you will serve the Lord by the grace that he provides.

[42 : 12] Not this world and not your friends. And trust the Lord to do a work in their lives even when they're young, not waiting until they get old, to say, when I get old, then I'm really going to serve the Lord.

But this is a call to godliness away from worldliness. James is calling us, brothers and sisters, to see our true condition when we are compromising and if we do, that we will be filled with weeping and mourning and joy and not joy and laughter.

And if we recognize that for some reason we're not weeping over our sin, for some reason we're not sorrowful about our sin, we recognize that there's sin on our hands and we're not affected by that. Let's cry out to God, say, God, would you give me a heart that weeps over my sin? Would you give me a heart that is truly sorrowful for sin?

Would you give me a heart that is pliable? Brothers and sisters, the worst condition we can be in is to have a heart that is hard and that we can go long not repenting of sin and we get comfortable with that.

[43 : 46] If we live that way, we are on dangerous grounds. We need to pray that God would enable us to keep short accounts, short accounts with him, that we would be pierced in our hearts when we sin and we would come quickly and repent and turn to him.

We need to pray and ask the Lord to help us to weep not only over what we would call the blue collar sins, going out and violating the very commands of God, committing sexual sin or stealing or those kinds of sins that are considered radiant they are.

We also need to ask the Lord to give us a heart that weeps over prayerlessness and weeps over spiritual coldness and lukewarmness and indifference and pray and say, oh God, would you change my heart?

Would you give me a love for your word? Would you give me a love for prayer? Would you enable me to weep over the things you weep over and have joy over the things you have joy over?

And all of this can be called godliness. All of this can be called a pursuit of godliness and we pursue godliness by humbling ourselves before the Lord and by submitting our lot to him and trusting him.

[45 : 27] The psalmist says, Lord, the boundary lines of my life have fallen in pleasant places.

Whatever your circumstances are today, whatever they are today, they are set that way under the umbrella of a sovereign God.

ways we wouldn't understand and although we wouldn't choose for ourselves, let us accept that this morning because part of the striving, part of the craving, part of the quarreling is that we're really quarreling against God because we don't like our lot in life or in a particular moment, in a particular circumstance and we fight to break those boundaries.

But the psalmist says the boundary lines, have fallen for me in pleasant places. And so Kingdom Life this morning, let us set our hearts this week to seek the Lord.

Let us set our hearts this week. Let's spend time in this passage. Let us seek to draw near to the Lord, but as we do, let us not lose sight of the essential ingredient for us to do so.

And that is the more grace that God supplies. if we don't do that, we will be condemned. If we don't do that, we will fall on our faces. We need God's grace to interact and to engage this week.

[46 : 54] So let us turn from pride and worldliness and let us pursue humility and godliness as we consecrate ourselves before the Lord for this week.