

Readings

Scripture

¹What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ²You 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. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴You 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. ⁵Or 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"? ⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

- James 4:1-10 (*English Standard Version*)

Reflection

35. '...all this while, when I thought I kept this or that commandment, or did, by word or deed, anything that I thought was good, I had great peace in my conscience, and should think with myself, God cannot choose but be now pleased with me; yea, to relate it in mine own way, I thought no man in England could please God better than I.

36. But poor wretch as I was! I was all this while ignorant of Jesus Christ; and going about to establish my own righteousness; and had perished therein, had not God in mercy showed me more of my state by nature [which over a long period God made Bunyan see]. ...

229. But one day...I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand: there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, He wants My righteousness; for that was just before Him. I also saw moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Heb. xiii. 8.

- *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan, 1666 (p. 17, 81-82)

Sermon Outline

Shaped by God's Wisdom

James 4:1-10

True Religion

Stephen Baldwin

The Lord intends for us to be shaped by his wisdom.

His wisdom shapes us as we learn that...

Conflict abounds for the worldly wise (James 4:1-5)

- The worldly wise war within Christ's church (James 4:1-5)
- The worldly wise war with God (James 4:2b-4)
- The worldly wise war with their own new nature (James 4:4-5)

Grace abounds for the humble (James 4:6-10)

- The humble are given more grace (James 4:6)
- The humble walk in the way of Christ (James 4:7-9)
- The humble will be lifted up (James 4:10)

Reflection Questions

- Where is the warfare in verses 1-5 happening?
- Have you been in a situation where you experienced this?
- Considering the fact that it "takes two to tango" have you ever been aware that you were starting a fight, or keeping one going?
- What is your reaction to the James' choice of the words "quarrels", "war", "fighting", and "murder"? Isn't that a little extreme? Why do you think he uses such strong language?

We use the word "passions" rather freely today and in a predominately positive way—as when we talk about something we love to do. James used the word with its meaning of "pleasures", "gratification", even "sensual pleasures" - the word in Greek sounds just like hedonism.

- Does that definition help you to see the connection James makes between passions and friendship with the world? Why do you think James sees this as such a black and white issue? (See the similar black and white statement of Jesus in Matthew 6:24).

In verse 6, James says "But he gives more grace." That should make us breathe a deep, grateful sigh of gratitude. Jesus has inexhaustible grace for those who are humble before him.

- In verses 7 through 9 what does James teach us will flow from the supply of grace God freely gives? What kinds of fruit are produced? James gives a string of straight up directives in these verses. Name them. Now what results will those obedient actions bring about?
- Verse 10 seems to stand as a restatement and summary of the "more grace" that God gives. What is James saying is "the way up?"