

James 4:1-6 – Envy Never Lives Alone

Calvin, TSK, Lexicon, Henry, Vincent, Geneva, Trapp, Robertson, PNT, Rienecker, Gaebelein, Ellsworth, Adamson, JFB, Poole, Gray, Clarke, Family, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: There were **Christians in James' day who welcomed the ungodly rich into the church and ignored the godly poor. These men lacked true wisdom.** True wisdom was killed by their envy. With envy alive, they kowtowed to the rich and ignored the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner.

So the Apostle James decided to show Christians the **danger of envy** and added that **envy did not end with ignoring the poor**, but it **continued with other horrible sins**. Envy had many other destructive brothers and sisters. This is what you will hear about today.

Our headings are:

The Problem

The Encouragement

Our goals are: **That you will guard you minds and heart from envy, which destroys, that you will be content with what God has given you, and that you will be kind to God's children -whether rich or poor.**

The Problem

1 Where do **wars** and **fights** come from among you? Do they not come from **your desires for pleasure** that **war in your members?**

1. There were constant wars within the church because many lusted for profits so they could have pleasures.

These wars were rooted in **envy on the inside** and so **came war on the outside, with other believers.**

Romans 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

This was the *modus operandi* of Jews historically. **Jews had constantly battled Rome**-not merely because Rome had conquered their homeland, but because Rome had **upset their businesses and finances.** So **it wasn't zeal for Jerusalem that drove Jewish opposition to Rome, but zeal for jewels.**

Similarly in the church, for financial gain, bad Christians attacked the poor and anyone they perceived hindered them from wealth, and they **pretended they were kind to the rich for financial advantage.**

2 **You lust** and do not have. You **murder** and **covet** and cannot obtain. You **fight and war**...

3. When lust (lit. strong desire) took over, certain other sins soon and certainly followed:

a. Murder. Not literally, but he was likely speaking of the destruction of others. Apostle James used a lot of hyperbole in his writing. Jesus said if you hate someone you are guilty of murder. **Hate is the root of murder or destruction.**

1John 3:15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Of course, you will remember what envy did to **Abel and Uriah** the Hittite! And there are many such cases in the Bible.

Envy always has his buddies with him. Envy is like a bad street gang.

b. Coveting. This was an obsession with what others had.

c. Fight and war. Not physical, but in order to get what they wanted. They **pretended they were acting out of conviction, but it was only out of envy.** Maybe these men had financial needs. Maybe they had legitimate needs for food, drink, housing, and clothes. But they so badly wanted what their neighbors had, they were ready to use either **force or fraud** to get it.

2...Yet you **do not have** because **you do not ask.**

3. Instead of coveting, hating, and fighting to get what they wanted, these men should simply have asked their Heavenly Father.

They didn't ask, so they didn't get.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

4. But some would have said, "But we did ask, how come we did not receive what we ask for?"

God replied, "You did ask, but you did not ask correctly." They had asked "amiss." They abused the ears of God!

They had to ask **according to God's will.**

1 John 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if **we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.**

They had to **ask for things so they could do the work God called them to do.**

They had to ask with **sincerity and selflessly.**

They had to ask in faith... **faith in Jesus**.

They had to ask for things they needed for the **glory of Christ**.

4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

5. These who envied and lusted were adulterers and adulteresses.

Why would Apostle James use such strong language? After all, he was addressing people in the church! **Jeremiah 3:1** "They say, 'If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again?' Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; Yet return to Me," says the LORD.

See also Hosea... #Jer 3 Ho 2,3,4 Isa 54:5 62:4,5. Also, #Mt 12:39 2Co 11:2 Re 19:7 21:9.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

He was speaking of figurative or spiritual adulterers and adulteresses. These people ran to the rich wicked to give them the things they needed and ignored going to the Bridegroom in heaven for their needs.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

(Covetousness is considered idolatry. So adultery is considered idolatry.)

6. Lessons:

a. There is nothing worse than segregation in a church! And that segregation can be based on race, education abilities, or economic status. Segregation is deadly to the cause of Christ.

b. Don't crave for the things of this world. Remember Lot who turned to green pastures of Sodom, only to lose his wife and sons-in-law in the process. Don't crave the things of this world like **Lot's wife, whose heart was turned to evil and she caused her own death**. When you lust, which starts with envy, it controls you, and you don't care who gets damaged in the process. You may badly hurt your wife, husband, children, or, as in Apostle James' day, your brothers and sisters in Christ.

c. If you are friendly with the world systems and desire their praise, you are an enemy of God. It is committing adultery against your Lord! Any law the state makes that makes you sin, you must oppose.

d. "The one who gives himself to the world has divorced himself from God."

e. When you don't pray in faith according to God's will, it is like planting in a snow storm. When you pray in faith, you'll get what you need and you won't have to resort to lusting, envy, and destroying others.

Philippians 3:19 whose end is destruction, **whose god is their belly**, and whose glory is in their shame — **who set their mind on earthly things**.

The Encouragement

5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

1. In order to encourage Christians not to be envious, Apostle James told them the Holy Spirit of God yearns for them to live godly lives, lives of grace and purity.

For starters, they could not deal with their sin in their own strength. Why?

The **spirit of the world teaches man to look out for himself**.

But the **Spirit of God teaches man to look out for his neighbor**.

Galatians 5:17 For the **flesh lusts against the Spirit**, and the **Spirit against the flesh**; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Christians rebel against the Holy Spirit on a regular basis. But God's **Holy Spirit** fights with Christians' spirits, not to beat them up, but because he **yearns for them to do what is good**.

6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "**God resists the proud**, But **gives grace** to the humble."

2. To further encourage Christians to give up envy and work for the good of others, Apostle James reminded Christians that God is set in battle array against the proud and yet, at the same time, he answers the prayers (giving grace) to those who are humble.

Psalms 18:27 For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks.

Proverbs 3:34 Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble.

And be clear: **Pride is the mother of envy!** Another way: **Pride is the perilous pinnacle of self-exaltation.**

God "resists" was a military term of resisting the enemy. God was resisting them because they resisted his truth – the law and the Gospel. God said the same thing through Apostle Peter. 1Peter 5:5

3. Lessons:

a. Whether you have a lot or little, learn to be content with all God has given you.

b. To learn to be content, understand how rich you already are. This way you will escape not only envy, but all the friends of envy – like crushing people, ignoring your family and worship, and endangering their spiritual welfare. Being contented, you will know your gifts are great... **but you will know they are all gifts**...given to you. **They did not originate in you.**

c. Don't fight the Holy Spirit who yearns for your faithfulness. When you are tempted to sin, especially secret sins, and you think it is wrong, and you know it is wrong, and you know God will be hurt, ask God for the strength to resist the temptation.

d. Put to death envy, if it ever raises its ugly head before you. Yes, kill it!

Colossians 3:5 Therefore **put to death** your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, **evil desire, and covetousness**, which is idolatry.

e. If you don't kill envy, it will give birth to the nastiest, most obnoxious children. Who wants children like that?

Psalms 138:6 Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; **But the proud He knows from afar.**

Conclusion:

Envy kills. It kills the one in whom it lives and it kills the one exposed to it. Envy has many friends, bad friends. So Apostle James called on his readers to not "quench" or stifle the Spirit of God from working in them but let him bear fruit. He knew if that happened then God would bless his people. And in fact, they would bear fruits...riches that would be saved up for them in heaven, and even give them a peaceable heart now.

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

1. Take the time to think about what you have: eternal salvation purchased with the blood of Jesus, certainty in your hearts, God's Holy Spirit, the church, the sacraments, elders, brothers and sisters, everything you need to live obediently. **You have absolutely no grounds for envy.** Don't complain about what you don't have something. Instead, thank God for all you have.

2. Use what you have! You have so much! Let what you have enrich your life now! Let them nourish you and help you to grow.

3. Share what you have! You have much! When was the last time you told someone of God's eternal salvation?

Finally: If you are dissatisfied with what you have, you will envy. If you envy, you won't care who gets hurt. But God does! And he will send you to hell if you do. But if you want to get everything you need for body and soul, ask God to make you his child and make your life right with him. Jesus died to make that possible.