

# SUMMER 4

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] James chapter 4. If you're looking in the Bibles in the pew, you'll find that on page 982. 982, James chapter 4. Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from?
- Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and you do not have it, so you commit murder. And you commit and you covet something you cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts.
- You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and you do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. Adulterers, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
- Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. What do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us, but he gives us all more grace.
- [ 1 : 1 1 ] Therefore, he 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. Lament and mourn and weep.
- Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves, therefore, before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters.
- Whoever speaks evil against one another or judges another, 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 who is able to save and to destroy. So who then are you to judge your neighbour? Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.
- [ 2 : 1 6 ] Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.
- As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Anyone then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.
- Well, before the study we are going to sing again. The words this time will be... We pray that you will speak to us now through your word so that we may be not only hearers of it, but doers also for Jesus' sake.
- Amen. It ought to be the case that those who are not Christians in the world look at Christians and say, see how they love one another.
- But all too often, as I'm sure you know, the opposite is the case. They look at Christians and say, see how they fight with each other or hate each other. The world sees a Christian church that's divided, fractured not only into denominations, but within denominations as well, and often within congregations and within small groups within congregations.

[ 3 : 44 ] Often dissension, rather than harmony, is what characterizes the Christian church on earth. There are all too frequently conflicts, bitterness, disputes, power struggles, and without exception, these bring the gospel and Jesus' name, of course, into disrepute in the world in which we live.

Sometimes there are ministers who are fighting with the lay people. Sometimes it's the lay people fighting with ministers. Sometimes it's ministers fighting with ministers. Sometimes it's lay people fighting with lay people.

Sometimes it's the old fighting with the young, the male fighting with the female, and so on. And if you're really lucky, you might get all of that in the one congregation. The end of chapter 3, we saw last week that we ought to be striving for the gift of wisdom and asking God for it, in particular, defining wisdom as that which produces peace.

And now at the beginning of this chapter, we see the particular context for James addressing that issue at the end of chapter 3. It seems that in the church or churches to whom he writes, there are dissensions and conflicts and breakdowns in relationship.

James ended chapter 3 by commending those who make peace. For them will be sown a harvest of righteousness in peace. Now he continues by specifically rebuking these Christian readers, the churches to whom he writes, for their conflicts and disputes.

[ 5 : 23 ] Those conflicts and disputes among you, he says, where do they come from? Now the idea of conflicts or disputes may even have the connotation of violence, as though a church congregation was like Lennox Lewis and Mike Tyson today, if you saw that on the news, where they've got a press conference or something like that, and they end up fighting with each other, with all their bodyguards and entourage as well.

Who knows, it may well have been staged. But the idea of conflicts here and disputes may not just be personal and verbal, but may even spill over into some form of violence as well.

Now we need to remember a couple of things here. Some battles need to be fought. We see elsewhere in the New Testament that there will be Christian battles to fight, a stand for the truth against heresy and also against gross immorality.

But the manner of fighting those battles is as crucial as fighting them. And all too often I think people in our world degenerate into personal vitriol rather than keeping on the argument and the issues.

I remember once when I was ministering in England before I came here I was living there and somebody was complaining about something that I'd said in a sermon and it degenerated very quickly into you Australians should just go back to the colonies and stay there.

[ 6 : 56 ] Well it was fairly hurtful let me say. I thought the English have a lot to learn from the Australians but having said that that's just one example of how if we're trying to negotiate or debate an issue we can just make it very personal and we end up hating the person or bringing down the person in our dispute.

So we've got to be careful here not to overreact with what James says about conflicts and disputes. There are ones in the church that need to be fought but they need to be fought in love they need to be fought for people's interests but above all for God's interests and for the gospel's sake they need to be fought seeking to win people over to the truth both in doctrine and in practice and not in personal vitriol or hate or violence and that is what James is challenging here.

Where do they come from he says do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you that is your desires your longings now remember the sort of person that James is addressing in this letter we've seen it time and again he's addressing a person who we've called double minded or double hearted or double sold that is in their innermost being there is a divide on the one hand they're wanting to go after God on another they're attracted by the world on the one hand they want the wisdom of God but on the other they want the wisdom of the world here now we see a Christian remember where James is addressing Christians not non-Christians who find that within them there is a war going on that is there are their own personal cravings wrong desires last week we saw that expressed in terms of bitter envy and selfish ambition but it's war within you because there is part of them that wants to be godly and wants to get on with the work of the gospel and live godly lives and so on so here is this double minded

Christian at war within themselves with things that are wrong and things that are right and that is where these conflicts and disputes come from the word for desires is a Greek word from which we have the word hedonism now that doesn't mean necessarily that the Greek word for desire here has the fully fledged idea of just indulgent hedonism but it certainly has the idea of selfish pleasures ambition what is good for me as being dominating the desires that are at war within you or the cravings that are within you so the reason why there are conflicts and disputes in this church to whom James is writing is because there are Christians there who want what is right or what they think is best or indulgent for them that is there is a selfish pursuit a selfish or indulgent desire that is motivating Christians and inevitably that will clash because if one person wants their own desires met and another person wants their own desires met inevitably at some point they will clash the only way we end up with harmony in relationships as Christians is when our motivating desires are for what is

Christ's sake for the gospel sake what is godly that is what unites us but as soon as we want to become personal and achieve our selfish desires and ambitions then we'll inevitably clash and there'll be conflicts and disputes and maybe even spilling over into our violence James goes on in verse 2 to say you want something and you do not have it so you commit murder and you covet something and cannot obtain it so you engage in disputes and conflicts and what we see there let me firstly say is what we see elsewhere in this chapter as well is a style of writing that's called parallelism that is the same thing in effect is said twice and notice there the progression you want something you don't have it you murder you covet something but you can't get it so disputes and conflicts so the same chain is coming twice in effect this chain in verse 2 has often raised eyebrows is it really the case that there were

[ 11 : 26 ] Christians in these churches who committed murder of other Christians that's a fairly horrific idea just occasionally we might hear of that happening in our own day and age but pretty rarely I can count on the fingers of one hand all those who killed each other in this congregation the last few weeks none I think of course it may be that James has in mind here murder as Jesus taught it in the Sermon on the Mount that is if you hate somebody you murder them that is not the physical action of killing but it's the hatred so maybe that's what James has in mind but some don't want to water it down too much because the idea of murder is fairly strong it may well be that in fact some have killed and maybe coming out of a culture where there was perhaps more murder and killing than we're used to it has spilled over into them having become Christians from being perhaps Jews or even some would say zealot Jews that is the

Jews who were not Christians but were seeking to overthrow the Romans by force basically a terrorist organization there were many Jews some of Jesus' disciples came from those zealots so maybe that zealotry has spilled over into their new Christian faith as well well either way it's clearly showing us the seriousness of the disputes and conflicts in the churches to whom James is writing what happens is that frustrated desire that is personal desire for one's own pleasure or power or glory is frustrated and that leads to conflict could be frustrated lay people wanting to be in charge it could be frustrated ministers with the lay people it could be all sorts of combinations of that now these words we might say well this is a bit extreme aren't we glad we're not like this but all too often Christian churches are full of conflicts that in respectable society might just sort of be put under the surface but every now and again they bubble over and I guess these words here challenge us to think about what are my desires in my involvement in my local church are my desires my own glory my own ego my own pleasure or are they godly desires now if the truth were told I guess at some point we have conflicting motives because we're not perfect people and so sometimes we even do the right thing but for a mixture of good and bad motives

I think James is calling us to check ourselves here why am I wanting to do what I'm doing or what I want to do in a church is it really to stoke my ego or is it to serve Jesus Christ because the dissensions and conflicts in the church all too often come when people's goals or aims or desires are thwarted or frustrated by other people rightly or wrongly well he goes on at the end of verse 2 to say you do not have because you do not ask that's a striking statement because the desires that they don't have fulfilled at the beginning of verse 2 seem to be sinful things that is personal ambition and ego and pleasure and indulgence is James then saying well you do not have because you do not ask so just ask God and you'll get it well in the context of what

James has already said in this letter what I think he's now saying at the end of verse 2 is not that you know ask God for what will boost your ego and you'll get it but the thing you ask God for is wisdom remember back to our first week chapter 1 verse 5 if any of you is lacking in wisdom ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly and throughout this letter there are dotted references to prayer God answering prayer but also ticking people off for wrong motives in prayer as well and that's what's coming now in verse 3 as well what I think James is saying at the end of verse 2 then is about asking for wisdom for right things rather than for what you want so he says in verse 3 you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly so sometimes you don't have what's right because you don't even ask end of verse 2 but sometimes you don't have what you should have because you ask but you ask with wrong motives you ask for something for your own benefit not for the benefit of the church or the gospel or

Jesus sake and in particular I think the context is asking for wisdom wisdom that will bring peace and harmony unity and then through that the glory of Jesus through a unified church on earth now in particular also we've got to bear in mind that their wrong desires reflects in effect their love for the world the Christians to whom he writes and what follows now in verse 4 onwards is perhaps one of the strongest rebukes in the New Testament you could easily be mistaken for thinking that you're reading an Old Testament prophet here certainly the words are lifted out in every verse from the Old Testament directly or indirectly and much from the prophets as well notice how verse 4 begins adulterous exclamation mark now in the translation I find this a bit ironic let me say in the translation we've got in the pews it's the new revised standard version and the reason this version came out was to make the language non gender specific so that for example to quote Psalm 1 you may be used to blessed is the man who but it makes it blessed are those who because it's not just the male person but male and female person and in one sense that's a good thing to do because in our day and age English is changing and so we don't want to be gender exclusive the thing I find a bit ironic here is that they've made actually a female term male I think huh all these females who want this

[18:11] Bible to be non gender specific but they don't like being called adulteresses but literally that's what they're called adulteresses now I don't think having said this I think it's a fair translation James is not addressing the female members only of the churches he's addressing everyone but the reason he calls people adulteresses female is because he's lifting out a big biblical theme that runs through old and new testaments where the people of God are likened to being the wife or bride of God that their relationship to God of the church or of the Old Testament people of God before that was to be like that of a wife to a husband and it was to be an exclusive relationship that is not adulterous in having other sexual relationships with other men around about our relationship to God is to be exclusively to him not to any other God or any other idol and so the female term is used because the church is often regarded and ancient Israel is often regarded with female terms or pronouns and so on well that's a bit of by the way about the actual word but it's a very important theme and it's very important here because when it's used in the Old Testament and that's the background James has possibly James is the first bit of writing of the New Testament that we have he's full of denunciation of the people of God he's not addressing non Christians that he's not addressing the world out there saying because you're worshipping other gods you're adulteresses or adulterers no that's not who he's addressing at all in fact in the Old Testament the Gentile people of the world are never called adulteresses because it is the people of God who have an exclusive relationship with the God of the Old Testament and in the New Testament times the church with Christ it is Christian people or the people of God we might say who are vulnerable to committing spiritual adultery now James is dealing with this at a spiritual level that's where the theme lies throughout scripture he's not saying yeah you've gone and had sex with some bloke somewhere he's saying spiritually speaking you have compromised your relationship with God now in the light of the Old Testament we might expect him to go on to say because you've worshipped to the Baal gods the Canaanite gods or you've had an idol or you've done some worship of other things pagan gods and so on but James has none of that in the verses that follow so what this tells us is that committing spiritual adultery is not about renouncing God and going and worshipping some other God overtly or explicitly but it's when we behave like the world behaves ethically we commit spiritual adultery that is when we act like the world acts then we are in a sense compromising our exclusive relationship with God now if you want to look up the Old Testament imagery just look in the prophets Jeremiah has this imagery of of Israel being an adulterous nation in its relationship with God

I said what I say Jeremiah Ezekiel Isaiah Hosea of course in particular but in other places as well and in the New Testament it comes out with the language of the church being the bride of Christ for example in the book of Revelation now James readers are committing spiritual adultery by loving what the world loves their wrong desires of verses 1 2 and 3 by discriminating between people that is showing partiality and favoritism that's the beginning of chapter 2 by their wrong speech their slander of people their tearing down people with their rash words the beginning of chapter 3 by their bitter envy and selfish ambition in the second half of chapter 3 all those things which we might think oh yeah they're not they're not good things but you know everyone does them let me tell you that's spiritual adultery it is compromising your exclusive relationship with God because you are showing a love for the world and a love for the world's values and desires and so James is in effect raising the stakes here for his readers he's been rebuking them for all sorts of worldly attitudes and actions and words and now he exposes the complete evil of what they do it is spiritual adultery do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God that is they are behaving as the world behaves bitterness envy selfish ambition wrong use of words etc etc that's the world and whenever you and I act like that we show our friendship with the world and that then compromises our relationship with God of course we can be friends with lots of people the notion though of friendship in the ancient world in the ancient Greek world was actually quite stronger than our own word of idea of friendship quite often people say oh yes he's a good friend of mine but but what they mean is yeah I know him a bit or her a bit friendship was a slightly stronger idea in the ancient world than it is for us even so by showing friendship with the world by behaving as the world behaves we are then denigrating we're sharing our allegiance with God and compromising our relationship with him therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of

God you can't have it both ways and here again is this double-minded or double-souled person the one who wants to be friends with God but but is torn apart because part of them wants to be friends with the world aren't we like that if we're honest with ourselves it's a description of us we do want to be friends with God surely all of us want to be friends with God and do what is right and godly but oh how often we also want to be friends with the world and perhaps in our day and age it is easier to be tempted to think we can do both than it was in James day in James day the Christian faith burst under the scene very counter-culturally we live in a sort of what some people call a post-Christendom sort of society where there's so much of Christian values so-called floating around in in society in general we can be so easily conned to think that we can be friends with the world while remaining friends with God but the truth is we can't our relationship with God is to be absolutely exclusive oh yes we live in the world we've got to get on with people in the world we've got to be a witness and light and salt in the world and so on but our friendship is to be exclusively with

[ 25 : 28 ] God he then asks in verse 5 well do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us now those of you who are great on memory verses will probably ponder oh where's that one from where does scripture say God yearns jealously for the spirit he has made to dwell in us well there's no verse in the Old Testament which is the scripture that James refers to that says that there are some scriptures that sort of go along that way but not very close some people think oh it must be a lost text from somewhere maybe it's in some of the ancient Jewish writings that were not part of our Old Testament but there's nothing there either in what's being found but probably what James is doing is just not so much quoting a verse of scripture or maybe misquoting it as saying what the scripture as a whole says because what he says here in verse 5 is fair enough God does yearn jealously an odd word that's used for God here let me say for the spirit that he's made to dwell in us his own spirit dwells within us as

Christian people the spirit that was promised in the Old Testament in the books of Joel Ezekiel Jeremiah for example to be poured into our hearts and so on that's happened God's spirit is in us and he yearns jealously for us like a husband for a wife now the word here for yearning jealously is one that's pretty much always used with negative connotations for people when we are jealous using that word it's a bad thing but I think James is using it as a shock language probably he's saying you are people who are who are jealous he's talked about that at the end of chapter three and then beginning of chapter four verse two about coveting and desiring things the same idea and God in response yearns jealously for you shock language to make them realize what their own behavior and attitudes are actually like flirting with the world arouses the jealousy of God and that's not something that we want to attract lightly in verse six it looks as though

James is just sort of jumping to some other topic and I said at the beginning of this series three weeks ago that the book of James is a bit like that it's a bit like the book of Proverbs in a way it looks as though it jumps around a bit from time to time but probably not quite as like that there is a connection he says at the beginning of verse six but he gives all the more grace and where does that fit in God yearning jealously for those whose spirit is within them but he gives all the more grace what James is telling us here is that God's grace is greater than our sinfulness and failure time and again we read in scripture of these rebukes for evil behavior practice wickedness and so on and we could be easily tempted to think I'm just not good enough I can't get right in my life and here is the reassurance God gives greater grace to overcome or or cover over our sins and our failures so even in the face of God's jealousy being aroused because of our sinful desires and actions

God's grace comes to us and our lack of perfection is counted or made up for by his greater grace but notice to how these things fit together because so often we can be tempted to just become complacent as we rely on his grace but James like Paul like every other writer in both old and new testaments for that matter will have none of that idea grace is freely given lavished upon us above all of course in the cross of Christ but that gives us no grounds whatsoever for becoming complacent grace is meant to stimulate us to obedience not complacency so God's grace demands a response and that's what the second half of verse 6 is about God gives all the more grace and therefore it says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble so we cannot presume upon God's grace but rather in order to be a recipient of God's grace we need to be humble God opposes the proud no grace there but he gives grace to the humble now he's quoting here from

Proverbs 3 Peter's first letter quotes the same verse from Proverbs chapter 3 verse 34 and this theme of humility obviously runs counter to the sinful desires that we've seen earlier in this chapter already tonight that are really proud desires they're selfish it runs counter to what we saw last week about bitter envy and selfish ambition humility is its opposite it's its contrast or contradiction if you like pride is so often associated with envy and covetousness and ambition and conflict because pride sets me up against everybody else in the end so inevitably there will be conflicts and dissension and disharmony humility is the counter to that and so the verses that follow in effect flesh out what it means in one sense to be humble and in particular it is about being humble before God that's what we see at the beginning of verse 7 but also in verse 10 bracketing these few verses these four verses are a list of commands imperatives and the first and the last are about being humble submit yourselves therefore to God the beginning of verse 7 and verse 10 humble yourselves before the Lord first half of verse 10 so our response to the statement the quote from

[ 31 : 59 ] Proverbs 3 God opposes the proud that gives grace to the humble is we must be humble we must submit ourselves to God before God that is renouncing our own claims and in effect coming empty handed to him in I think it's a is it David Copperfield there's one of those great Dickensian characters Uriah Heep who just keeps calling himself I am but an humble man or a humble servant or something like that it's not a lot of humility actually in Uriah Heep it's fairly ironic that he keeps calling himself humble our humility is to be real humility before God that is a recognition that we contribute nothing to our salvation or standing or relationship with God we've got no claim on him at all we are to place ourselves under his lordship to humble ourselves or submit ourselves to God means that we are to be obedient to him in every aspect of his commands not picking and choosing not reserving areas of our life for our own control submitting ourselves to God also might challenge us in the way we share the gospel with people because I think the trend has been that the gospel gets shared that Jesus is our saviour but we perhaps keep back our card that says

Jesus is Lord to be obeyed we want people to to be one for Christ by saying Jesus is going to be your friend he's going to be gracious to you he's a saviour come to him but he's also our Lord and so becoming a Christian and being a Christian necessitates submitting ourselves to God and to the Lord in effect in our lives then as we submit ourselves to God we are anticipating that final day when everything will be before the feet of Christ or under his feet placed under his feet as for say for example Philippians 2 10 and 11 goes on to say Ephesians 1 verse 10 the same sort of idea if we are to submit ourselves to God then the following things will also be part and parcel of that and again we find parallelism here resist the devil he will flee from you draw near to God he'll draw near to you the first one is negative the second is positive the first one we resist the second one we draw near to and the responses the resultant responses are appropriately the opposite as well the devil will flee and God will draw near to us resisting the devil is to stand against him it's the same idea of a pose that's at the beginning of that quote in verse 6 God opposes or resists the proud behind this idea is that God empowers us to stand against the devil we don't defeat the devil which is sometimes the sort of language that we hear but in the great passage of spiritual warfare in

Ephesians 6 our job is to stand resisting the devil with the spiritual armor that God equips us with through the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus now James doesn't unpack it in the detail that Paul does in Ephesians 6 and Paul wrote much later than James that letter I'm sure but the same sort of idea is here humble ourselves before God will be the counterpart of resisting the devil that's the world if you like we've been dealing with a person Christians people who are two-minded there's a war going on within them part of them wants to submit to God and be obedient part of them wants to flirt with the world in order to be single-minded Christians we're to resist that devil that half of us that's fighting within us and submit ourselves wholly to God our Lord the balance comes in the beginning of verse 8 if we are to resist the devil it will also mean at the same time drawing near to



God that is they're in a sense they're the same thing drawing near to God will mean resisting the devil and vice versa you don't do one without doing the other sometimes people think I can resist the devil without actually trying to draw near to God now James doesn't tell us in one sense how to draw near to God the language to draw near is often there in the Old Testament with respect to offering sacrifices and coming to the temple or the tabernacle in approaching God through the priests if James is picking up that language deliberately and it seems to be particularly worship type cultic sacrificial language then in the theology of the New Testament what he's saying is we draw near to God through Jesus death that's how we get close to God now sometimes Christians I think in our day and age get this a little bit astray I find from time to time Christians saying I want to get closer to God and so they're looking for some sort of experience or feeling or warmth or glow but they're not actually coming to the death and resurrection of Jesus which is where we draw near to God through as Hebrews spells it out in more detail of course the letter to the Hebrews that we draw near by the blood of the lamb by the blood of Jesus so if you want to get close to God come back to the cross and come to him through Jesus death and resurrection there's no way to get closer to

God than that there's no other spiritual experience that will genuinely bring you closer to God than approaching him through the death and resurrection of Jesus which means that we come to him with sins forgiven we come to him through grace we come to him able to stand but not in our own righteousness but in the righteousness of Christ and so on so we resist the devil and the counterpart to that is draw near to God and he'll draw near to you and then this language of Old Testament ritual continues in the next parallelism clean your hands you sinners purify your hearts you double-minded now the readers are not meant to say now which of the two am I am I a sinner or am I double-minded he's addressing the same group of people they're to do both things washing their hands well I think well that's a bit pointless but he's not talking about a you know just going to the basin washing your hands he's using ritual language from the Old Testament when you would cleanse yourselves before offering sacrifices and approaching the temple etc but it's symbolic of cleaning your whole self and what James has in mind here is that our both our external actions and our internal attitudes and desires need to be right it's parallelism that's putting the two things together it's not two different groups of people one who wash their hands one who purify their hearts one who's sinners and one who are double-minded it's the same group of people he's addressing

[ 38 : 46 ] Christians and I'm sure then he's addressing us as well so drawing near to God will be by being cleansed through the death of Jesus that's where our cleansing comes as Christian people James of course is using Old Testament language but writing in New Testament times and he describes sinners in that verse verse 8 as double minded you see we might think oh it's quite acceptable because we live we live here in the world waiting for the world to come we're caught up in a in an overlap in a sense we belong in heaven but we're on earth as well so there's a sense in which it's okay to be double minded because I know I'm not going to be perfect till heaven so I know that so long as there's some godly desires within me and I'm really wanting to be like God that's good and the other bits of me well they'll go in the end James though has a different view he's saying yes you do live in the overlap of ages you do belong in heaven and you're working on earth there is a war going on within you but it's not an acceptable war we are to purify ourselves submit ourselves wholly we're to become single minded single-hearted single-souled

Christians and to the extent that we are double-minded to use his expression here in verse 8 we are sinners and we ought to repent of that sin and strive and strive to become single-minded not double-minded we strive for the perfect even if we're not going to be perfect till the day that Jesus returns that is to be our goal that we work for every day of our lives well he moves in verse 9 to probably language that comes from the prophets rather than the priestly bits of the Old Testament like Leviticus and sacrifices and so on lament and mourn and weep let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection now these are the words that the prophets often said to Israel in the Old Testament Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Hosea

Joel Micah and no doubt others as well had this this sort of statement that is they are addressing the people of God who think they're okay so there is laughter and joy and yeah we're right we're with God he's saying come on turn your laughter into mourning lament and wail and weep for your sins he's addressing Christians you see who are complacent about their double mindedness they think that their sins are sort of okay excusable and these words when they're used in the Old Testament come in the context of calling people to repentance that is not just brushing over your sins and pretending that they're outweighed by your goodness or something like that but repent of your sins with weeping and wailing Joel 2 we haven't got time to look at but he's probably the clearest example of that and James here like the prophets of the Old Testament when they use this language is expecting judgment day soon now we might think oh James got it wrong we're 2,000 years later we know better judgment day is not soon but remember that Jesus thought that judgment day was soon that is be ready be ready for the son of man to return in glory to judge

James will go on next week we'll see in verse 8 of chapter 5 the coming of the Lord is near so he uses the Old Testament prophet language that talked about judgment that was imminent that is how we are to live we do not know whether we'll be here in a year's time it may be that Jesus doesn't return for a few million years but we may not be here tomorrow our judgment day is close so we are to be ready at a constant state of high alert ready for God's judgment and therefore that means that we must be in a constant state of repentance wailing about our sins James words here are no different from Jesus in many places woe to you who laugh now for you shall weep he said in Luke 6 James is attacking those who are flirting with the world the joys and pleasures of the world eat drink be merry what does it matter it's okay no way

James says he's attacking those who treat sin lightly he's attacking those who presume upon God's grace and remember that these words come in the context of giving grace to the humble don't presume upon God's grace if you're going to humble yourself you must repent of your sins if you don't repent of your sins you're not humbling yourself and therefore grace will not be yours humble ourselves before God he will exalt us as the hymn writer says nothing in my hand I bring but simply to thy cross I claim or another hymn no merit of my own I claim but holy trust in Jesus name you see the humbling before God is for salvation we contribute nothing to it salvation is not our achievement or our desserts and if we aren't prepared to humble ourselves before

[ 44 : 28 ] God then we will never receive his grace of salvation that's why some people don't like the gospel we think the gospel is great news everyone should be eager with itching ears to hear it but no they don't have itching ears to hear it as Paul says in 2 Timothy for example because the gospel humbles us it exposes our sinfulness nobody likes that being exposed but we'll only respond to the gospel of right if we humble ourselves then we'll receive grace to save us from our sins and exalt us on that final day well James comes back to the issue of conflict in the next couple of verses one level it looks as though he's just jumping subject again but it's still in the general theme of conflict within the Christian community do not speak evil against one another slander each other that is brothers and sisters whoever speaks evil against another or judges another speaks evil against the law and judges the law but if you judge the law you're not a doer of the law but a judge and there is no there is one lawgiver and judge who's able to save and destroy that is God so who then are you to judge your neighbor and this is again sort of telling us that our little slanders bringing down other people our words that might somehow destroy other people's reputations they're not trivial sins because when we speak evil of someone that's a form of pride self-exaltation that is to question their legitimate authority that's where the words used in numbers for example with the Israelites slandering Moses it might be in secret behind people's backs that they don't hear or it might be an incorrect accusation about somebody that's all what's meant by this idea of speaking evil or slander the reason why we must not do it is because when we slander a fellow believer when we criticize them then we stand in judgment over them and when we do that we do not show love to our neighbor therefore we are exercising we're trying to exercise self-authority over the law we're a judge over the law we're saying the law actually is not quite right because I'm slandering that person legitimately I'm not therefore loving the person the law tells me to love a person

I'm actually standing over the law and when we stand over the law we play God that's the force of verse 12 there is only one lawgiver and judge that's God so when we slander our neighbor you see in the end we're saying or playing God so that's serious sin and that's why James deals with it here in such words now again we must be careful not to overreact to what James is not saying here see Christians still must exercise discernment if somebody commits a sin within Christian fellowship but in love we are to seek to see them brought to repentance and change their ways Paul deals with those sorts of issues say in 1 Corinthians that is it's not saying oh well let anyone do whatever they like it doesn't matter because I'm not going to speak against somebody it's speaking evil it's bringing somebody down wrongly wrong accusations destroying reputations and certainly lacking in love for our neighbor so we must be careful but we must also act where we need to act within Christian fellowship the final section of this chapter is about arrogant proud planning without bringing God into consideration in a sense it's another way in which people exercise pride we have to be careful here too because James seems to be dealing with people who want to make lots of money but it's not actually about money it's about planning but it's not about planning per se it's not saying you should never plan it's about planning without bringing God into the equation if we were to summarize in effect what James is on about in these verses it would be two initials DV which in older days more often than these days people might write or say God willing

Dale Valenti James here though is not saying that we must say God willing as a little glib expression it's our attitude that matters not whether or not we say DV or whatever so let's see what he says verse 13 come now literally saying you know listen up here men like Captain Mainwaring might say in dad's army listen up you who say today or tomorrow will go to such and such a town and spend a year there doing business and making money now clearly it's it's hypothetical he's not quoting one person from their congregation he's attacking those in the congregation who make plans these plans are about just just doing business and making money so there does seem to be a sense in which you know there's a love of money that's corrupting them as well but then he says to about them yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring what is your life now these are people who are planning as though they're in control their future is guaranteed I'm going to do this this and this I'm going to make this amount of money I'm in control here again it's a sense of playing God although in a different way from the previous paragraph but what is your life you see human beings are not God you want to humble a person tell them that they're like this at the end of verse 14 you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes you ever tried to grab the mist it's not very substantial that is your your transitory on this world you're insubstantial it's not that you're inconsequential or unimportant that's not quite the issue it's just that we are just little beings really it is God who's in control that's of course the thrust we cannot exercise the control that that is in effect implied in verse 13 instead you ought to say verse 15 if the Lord wishes we will live or do this or that now James is not saying that's like a magical formula so every time you say look I'll meet you tomorrow you know and we'll go shopping together if the

Lord is willing and wishes and we will live or do this and that it's not a magic formula he's not saying when you want to you know make a lunch date well let's have lunch next Monday God willing that's okay to say that I'm not saying that but it's not James is not saying you've got to say that it's the attitude that matters that's what that's what the issue is he's not saying don't plan we've got to plan wise stewards will plan for their future financially planning for the benefit of their children or other people or the church's growth and life and so on we've got to plan we've got to be strategic and so on I mean imagine a life without any planning if Christians had no diaries and no planning well that'd be great if I had no diary but life would be chaos and no work of ministry would ever get done so James is not saying don't plan he's also not really saying don't make money he's saying it's the attitude of pride that shows I'm in control here I'm God that's what he's attacking and so he's humbling his readers to say God's in control not you God may not even keep you alive is in effect verse 15 it's not just if the Lord wishes we'll do this or that it's if the Lord wishes we will live and do this or that we're not in control of our own lives is what James is saying here and you see this idea reflected if you read say Acts or Paul's talking about his own mission in some of his letters not at every point does he say

I'm going to do this God willing there's no magic formula that you keep keeps cropping up through Acts but from time to time clearly Paul is striving to understand the will of God and his plans are always subject to God's will and that's how we should be as well and that's what James is commending here you see the root problem is our pride and arrogance that's what James has been consistently addressing and that sort of pride and arrogance is friendship with the world it's what our world wants to do and hence in the end it's enmity with God and double-mindedness James is addressing Christians with worldly attitudes and of course we've got to remember that though we're Christians it is so easy to be pressured by this world formed into its likeness not God's or Christ's squeezed into its mold but we're not in control we're to submit ourselves to God who is in control now the final verse at one level again looks as though

[ 53 : 47 ] James is almost jumping to another topic anyone then who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it commits sin he's quite possibly quoting a sort of well known saying even amongst Christians or Jewish people of his day it's not a an Old Testament quote per se but what he's saying in the context here is anyone who fails to take the Lord into consideration in their plans is committing sin he's probably using a broad expression well-known expression for this specific context although it applies in more general context as well that's worth just a concluding note about what that is saying in the broad sense anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it commits sin that is what we sometimes call a sin of omission that is you omit to do something you know what is the right thing to do but you do not do it a sin of omission now I think too often we tend to think that sins are sins of commission that is when we do the wrong thing now you reflect for example when you confess your sins at night or in church on a Sunday whenever you do when you think of the things that you need to repent of I suspect more often than not we will think of things that we've said that we shouldn't have said that we've that we've done wrong that we shouldn't have done and I suspect that mostly we will be less likely to think of things that we should have done but just didn't do but sins of omission are as serious as sins of commission I remember when Paul Eddington who played the prime minister and yes prime minister was dying of skin cancer he was interviewed I was living in England at the time he was interviewed on the BBC and he was asked about reflections on life and so on and he said well I think

I would like to be remembered as somebody who never harmed somebody and I thought to myself that's a bit empty because he's failed to understand not that he pretended I think to be a Christian but he's failed to understand what God requires of us see God requires us to love our neighbor and also of course to love him with all our soul mind and strength so even if we don't do something perhaps that's an explicit prohibition that is we might think well I didn't murder that person today so that's pretty good but did we love them if we didn't love them if we omitted to love them then we've committed sin as if we've murdered them in a sense sin is sin in the end deserving of death God's primary commands are positive ones love God love your neighbor so probably we will commit more sins of omission than commission sometimes people get this wrong because they think God's just a God who says don't do this and don't do that certainly in the Ten Commandments most of them not all are negatives don't murder don't steal don't have graven images well if we do those things they're sins of commission but the primary commandments of God are love God and love your neighbor those two primary commandments I think are actually undergirding all James is saying in this whole letter be single-souled not double soul because we're to love God with all our soul so our sins of omission are probably more frequent but just as serious as our sins of commission with apologies to those who are not Anglicans let me finish by quoting from the old Anglican prayer book of 1662 in the prayer of confession we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts we have offended against thy holy laws we have left undone those things which we ought to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done sins of omission and commission and there is no health in us let's pray our father as we are confronted by these words of James it exposes our double minds and our double souls and our double hearts it exposes the war that is going on within us our desire to love you but also to love the world our desire to pursue our own interests in conflict with our desire to pursue what is right for Christ we thank you that you extend grace to us that is sufficient for us and to cover our sins because of Jesus death but we pray that we may not be complacent and presume upon that grace but rather with rigorous repentance strive for holiness that we may be single minded Christians loving you with all our heart soul mind and strength and loving our neighbor as ourself always amen well let's sing and this is writing to Christian church or churches and in particular he's addressing issues of disharmony and dissension within a church so he's particularly focusing in effect on loving your fellow Christian your fellow believer that's his primary focus and I think that's consistent with other places in the

New Testament that seem to place a higher priority on us loving other Christians not that we don't love the world or people in the world I should say but that our love for each other as Christians is to be of a greater level height intensity whatever than our love for other people I'm not sure that James is particularly addressing issues of being involved in society certainly not in chapter 4 tonight that's not to say we shouldn't be but it's not his concern I think you could be right I can't think of another place off the top of my head of of Christians being called sinners in the New Testament I think James does use strong language and perhaps even we might call shock language because I think he's addressing double-minded Christians who are relatively complacent in their double-mindedness and so like the prophets of the Old Testament he uses language to shock them I think for example in the Old Testament prophets you tend to find more things like word plays unexpected words or statements or extremes of language because they're trying to get through thick and stubborn skins so I guess that's probably why James uses such language language here exactly I think that's right it is sad I think though we ought not to be totally surprised because the root of it is our pride hence the cravings desires selfish ambition and so on pride in some senses is fundamental to sin and to fall in human nature before God strong language and and it it seems to run counter to Romans 5 you know with peace with God we're reconciled to God having been an enemy but James yes is using deliberately strong language throughout I think he's calling them adulterers because they've compromised their allegiance to God and he's saying you cannot do you can't do both like

Jesus said you can't serve God and mammon in effect James is saying you can't serve God and the world you cannot be friends with both and if you try to be friends with both then actually you are you've placed yourself at enmity with God very strong language but he's trying you know it's in one sense we might say it's a desperate measure for a church that is really it seems to me very complacent in its behaviors words attitudes and I think probably if he was to unpack it a bit he might well say well here are Christians who are you know you're on the borderline sort of stuff you will either end up going one way to friendship with God and staying there or if you can keep pursuing this double-minded thing you will actually end up at a final enmity with God but I think he's actually used the present tense to give it a more shock value well let's let me pray to finish and then we'll sing our last hymn

Heavenly Father we do recognize that there are times when we are complacent in our own lives tolerating friendship with the world and ignoring its compromising effect on our relationship with you so help us to be open to the shock and strength and severity of the language of this chapter and we pray that it may rebuke us correct us bring us back into a love for you and for our neighbor and and no longer compromising ourselves by flirting with the world and as we go from here this week may these words stay with us and form us and reform us into the likeness of Christ that we may not only be hearers but doers and that our faith may be accompanied by works

[ 64 : 06 ] Amen