

**THE EPISTLE OF JAMES**  
**Study Guide**  
Lesson Six – James 3:13-4:12

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Quarrels and conflicts were obviously a problem in the new churches that James wrote to. Political and civil unrest was widespread throughout the area and there were people from many different factions who were coming to Christ. Not only were there Gentiles and Jews, but within the Jewish realm there were separate groups. For example, there were Judaizers, who wanted Gentiles to conform to Old Testament law before accepting Christ. There were Zealots, who were revolutionaries who wanted to overthrow Roman rule. There were those who preached Christ, but for their own selfish motives. Finally, there were those who had a zeal and desire to preach Christ with the pure motive of seeing men drawn to truth. All had their own agenda. There were many voices in the wind and, as we saw in the first part of chapter three, many destructive words.

While the historical context of James is important, the Word of God is timeless. The book of James applies as much to our lives as it did to the early church. The human desire to be important and assert our own agenda is as present today as it has been throughout history. Arguments and dissent within our communities, our churches, and our families grieve the Lord. Yet, because of His great love for us, He has given us a way to not only resolve disputes but to, *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”* (Rom 12:18)

**James 3:13-4:12**

1) **Read James 3:13-16.** Verse 13 may be referring back to those who desire to teach in 3:1. He encourages them, and us, to be wise AND have understanding. A person can have knowledge and yet not be able to apply their knowledge to real life applications. There are many foolish people who have college degrees. Likewise, there are many Christians who know the Bible well but lack the wisdom to apply it to their life. Read Proverbs 9:9-10. How are we to gain wisdom AND understanding?

a) In verse 13, how are we to show our wisdom? What word is used to describe wisdom?

i) Why do you think wisdom is gentle (i.e. humble or meek)? You may want to think back to the lesson on the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11 (lesson 3).

Note: <i>“Meekness [humility] comes not from cowardice or passivity but rather from trusting God and therefore being set free from anxious self-promotion.”</i> ESV Study Bible Notes
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- b) From verses 14 and 16, what are the two things that we can have in our hearts that cause disorder or confusion and every evil thing?
- c) Name the three places this kind of “wisdom” comes from (verse 15).

Note: Verse 15 is the origin of the old saying that a Christian’s enemies are “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” James 1:14 clarifies that we sin when we are enticed by our own natural lustful desires (or the flesh). The world and the devil have no power over us unless our sinful desires provide an opening into our hearts.

- d) Read the following passages. What were the ugly results of jealousy and selfish ambition?
- i) Genesis 37:9-11, 18-21:
- ii) Matthew 27:17-18, 26:

2) **Read James 3:17-18.** The chart below lists the qualities of “wisdom from above” from verse 17. Write down the opposite of these words. The first two are done as an example.

Description of Wisdom from Above	What is the opposite of the description listed on the left
Pure <i>(Not stained with sin)</i>	Sinful and Self-centered
Peaceable	Conflict / Disputes
Gentle	
Reasonable <i>(Could mean rational or willing to yield)</i>	
Full of Mercy <i>(Not giving the punishment deserved)</i>	
Full of Good Fruits <i>(Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control Gal 5:22-23)</i>	<i>(Write down the opposite of each fruit not already listed)</i>
Unwavering <i>(Impartial)</i>	
Without Hypocrisy <i>(Sincere)</i>	

- a) The New Living Translation makes verse 18 easier to understand. It reads, “*And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.*” Look back at James 1:20. Discuss how these verses are opposite.
- i) Describe a time when you chose peace rather than anger and saw a harvest of God’s righteousness in either your heart or the heart of someone else.
- 3) Read James 4:1-5. James describes the source of quarrels and conflicts as our own pleasures that wage war within us. From verses 2 and 3, describe the war that rages within us.
- a) We may not literally commit murder, but what does Matthew 5:21-22 say?
- b) Reflect on a time that your selfish desires stirred up a quarrel or conflict with someone. Describe how you could have handled it differently. Share with the group if comfortable.

Note: The essence of the end of verse two through verse five is to show the seriousness of our self-serving motives. When our focus is on our own pleasures (rather than loving God and loving others) we either don’t think to pray, or we pray with selfish motives. In verse four, James calls us adulteresses when we love our own desires more than we love Him. This may seem harsh but this imagery was used several times in the Old Testament to describe Israel’s rebellious spirit toward God (e.g. Jeremiah 9:2, Hosea 3:1). Jesus said that if a man even looks at woman with lust, he has committed adultery in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28). Likewise, when I love myself and lust after my own desires, I have committed adultery against God in my heart. The book of Hosea symbolically represents God’s longing to bring Israel back from her place of harlotry. This is a beautiful picture of Christ’s sacrificial and continual love for me!

In verse five, James contrasts God’s jealousy with the earthly, natural, and demonic jealousy described in James 3:14-16 and 4:1-2. God is jealous for our relationship with Him because He loves us and wants the best for us. Similarly, I have a righteous jealousy toward my marriage. I want to protect my marriage any way that I can because I know that unfaithfulness from either of us would bring much pain to my husband. It is not a self-centered jealousy but a godly jealousy that desires to protect him. Ungodly jealousy focuses on my own fears, insecurities, and selfish desires. Ungodly jealousy can be extremely destructive to any relationship.

- c) Read Proverbs 1:28-2:8. These verses contrast foolishness and wisdom. The foolish person may pray to God, but God will not answer because he hates God’s counsel and seeks his own way. How should we search for wisdom (verse 2:4)? List the promises made to those that search for wisdom.

4) Read James 4:6-10. Even as believers, we can all be self-serving. From verse 6, what does God give us? What attitude is God looking for?

a) The NASB Study Bible (Zondervan copyright 1999) indicates that verses 7-10, “*contain ten commands, each of which is so stated in the Greek that it calls for immediate action in rooting out the sinful attitude of pride.*” List the ten commands (hint: verse 9 contains four of them). If desired there is room for notes from the lecture.

Commands	Notes from Lecture
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

b) Considering the context of these verses, what do you think verse 10 means when it says that God will exalt us?

5) Read James 4:10-12. In chapter 2, James talked about judging others because of their finances. Now, in chapter 4 he talks about judging others by how well they keep their interpretation of the law. By doing so they were breaking the royal law mentioned in James 2:8. What is that law?

a) Read Romans 14:1-4. Why are we not to judge a fellow believer on issues of faith?