



## **The Truth about Humility**

### **James 4:1-12**

#### **What causes fights and quarrels among you?**

James chapter four begins some of the most harshly spoken verses of the entire letter. His rebukes come within the context of looming social and political unrest in Israel, which would extend over the next few decades. Zealots were pushing back against the Roman Empire's occupation of Israel in the AD 60s; finally, the "Great Revolt" culminated with the sack of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the future Roman Emperor Titus. The first century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that when Jerusalem fell, 1.1 million Jews lost their lives.

About 25 years before this, James who is in Jerusalem and at ground zero of the resistance, is letting these believers know that the stakes are large. In James 4, we see that if "peace from heaven" does not rule the lives of the believers, then "peace from hell" will be the default. When "peace from hell" takes charge, even prayer—the means for wisdom (James 1:5) and for healing (5:14)—becomes a channel to fulfill one's one evil pleasures. James insists that now is the time for God's people to show the world that there is a better way.

#### **The issue you think is the issue is not really the issue**

Although the believers who heard these words had been displaced from Jerusalem/Israel, their patriotic passions were doubtlessly still intense. Persecuted racially and for faith in Christ, some of them began to turn on one another. The pressures of these "trials of many kinds" began to fragment the Christian community. James knew that these conflicts and quarrels were not merely the result of the Roman oppressors. The war was a war within. Scholars are divided as to whether the killing in James 4:2 was metaphorical or actual. Perhaps both. (Did not Saul of Tarsus approve the killing of Steven in Acts 9:1?) Yet killing and coveting and quarreling and fighting are symptoms of a deeper, darker war. In a sense, James says, "You think that the enemy is out there! It's not—your quarrel is not with Rome! It's within your fleshly and divided hearts!" The world which tempted Jesus in the wilderness is tempting them.

## **The root issue—spiritual adultery!**

“Adultresses!” James cried. (So much for seeker-sensitive preaching! ☺) Insightfully, James pinpoints the ultimate reason behind the reason for their conflicts and quarrels—they have broken covenant faith with the Bride-groom, Jesus Christ. They are passionately pursuing friendship (a much stronger word than ours) with the world. The church has been cheating on Christ! The church is running after another lover who in the end will cheat on her!

The Christian, living in the overlap of the ages, is pulled between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan, the realm of the Spirit and the realm of the “flesh.” To allow the “world” to entice us away from total, single-minded allegiance to God is to become a people who are divided in loyalties, “double-minded”, and spiritually unstable. James’s church has been failing to act on the Word in their double use of the tongue and are guilty of this double minded attitude. James wants us to see sin for what it is: a serious breach of a relationship with a loving heavenly Father, a breach that if not healed can lead to both temporal and spiritual disaster. (Moo 2000, 194)

## **When you love Jesus more than life itself, humility follows.**

James 4:7-10 is not merely a list of moralistic “try harder” commands. These vv. appear in the context of calling the bride to humbly return to the Groom. These vv. plead with Christians then—and now—to love Jesus first and most! Loving Jesus first and best affects our hearts (“purify your hearts”) and then our treatment of others (vv. 11-12). “Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.”

With gratitude to C.S. Lewis:

Every Christian would agree that a [person’s] spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God.

It is probably impossible to love any human being simply “too much.” We may love him too much in proportion to our love for God; but it is the smallness of our love for God; not the greatness of our love for the man, that constitutes the inordinacy . . . . But the question whether we are loving God or the earthly Beloved “more” is not, so far as concerns our Christian duty, a question about the comparative intensity of two feelings. The real question is, which (when the alternative comes) do you serve, or choose, or put first? To which claim does your will, in the last resort, yield?

God knows quite well how hard we find it to love Him more than anyone or anything else, and He won’t be angry with us as long as we trying. And He will help us. (*“But He gives more grace. James 4:6*)