



Faith's Valor in Spiritual Battle James 4

Introduction

So far James has established that a valid faith overcomes trials and temptations victoriously, views people impartially, works with them harmoniously, and produces good works and wise words. In all situations, valid faith is verified.

However, even a valid faith may stumble over little things. Solomon said, It is the *little foxes that spoil the vines* (Song of Solomon 2:15). But then valid faith has the capacity and resiliency to bounce back (Psalm 34:5, Romans 5:5, and 8:35-39).

James now turns his attention to vexing, though inevitable, trials: unanswered prayer, the pull of the world and the flesh, and the harrassment of the devil. Also, the tongue returns with the temptations to berate and boast. These are trials of a different sort. Add the daily little struggles in which people wrongly think that God is not interested, and many are in need of a faith-lift. *He knows our frame, He remembers we are but dust* (Psalm 103:14).

The field of inner conflicts has been pre-empted by the psychologists from the priests and ministers who formerly dealt with these struggles of the soul! These vexations fall into three categories: the flesh, the world, and the devil.

Outline of James 4

- I. A Valiant, Virile Faith versus Various Vexations - James 4:1-10
- II. Two More Areas of Vulnerability - James 4:11-17

I. A Valiant Virile Faith versus Various Vexations - James 4:1-3

A. Faith Versus the Flesh - James 4:1-3

1. The traitor within - 4:1

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that wage war in your members? Each person carries the root of his or her own imperfection from the moment of conception (Psalm 51:5). Some people are the cause of their own vexations and frustrations. Life never provides for every want because wants conflict. Furthermore, the writer of Ecclesiastes points out that the eye is never satisfied. Some people are so out of touch with the truth about themselves and life, due to sin, that even acquiring

everything they want would not eliminate vexation of spirit (Ecclesiastes 4:7-8).

One characteristic of fallen, sinful nature is that it is never satisfied. Restlessness and dissatisfaction reside in the flesh. (Spell flesh backwards without the "h".) Fallen nature, or flesh, is the traitor within. Exterior forces such as environment, society, government, or education are often blamed but are seldom the root cause.

Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalyst became aware of an inner source of conflict. He recognized the ambivalence produced by a "me" that wants to do things "I" cannot condone, and balks at doing other things "I" know "I" should do. Freud named these two parts of the psyche the Id and the Ego. He likened the Id to a fierce beast raging within, competing with the accultured, civilized Ego, and pushing individuals to sensuous indulgence which a rational mind knows is against a person's best interest. Today's culture barely restrains the Id. The scriptural counterparts would be the Flesh and the Conscience.

The Bible identifies the source of conflict as sin, inherited from the Fall (Genesis 3:6-21 and Romans 3:23).

2. Lusts of the flesh - 4:1

Wars and fightings (KJV), *quarrels and conflicts* (NAS), which include disagreements, squabbles, hostilities, schisms, disputes, and arguments come from within, James says. Where strife exists, it is always some individual who causes it, often someone with an unresolved inner conflict.

Lust translates a Greek word meaning the "overdesire," or "a desire that is inappropriately strong," usually a legitimate need but wanting satisfaction at the wrong time or in the wrong way.

3. You lust and do not have - 4:2

Behavior arising from conflict is unproductive. Burning desire is usually thwarted. Frustrated, it becomes intensified.

You murder and covet and cannot obtain. But the frustrated person keeps trying.

4. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss - 4:3

In God's economy, prayer is the path to the fulfillment

of one's desires. But first flesh must die. James says you will not have your petition if your motive is selfish and sensual, *that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

Since no one can conceal from God the real purpose of asking, many prayers receive a "No." It is necessary to learn to ask believing that God's will and way is best. He knows every need (Philippians 4:19 and James 1:6-8).

It is easy to overlook or scorn God's answer to one's needs. God may have provided, but because people are seeking gratification of lust rather than true satisfaction of need, they fail to appreciate His provision, and become depressed when they should be thankful. This is where faith must be virile to believe that God will meet each need in His time and in His way.

What is your true desire? Have you brought your request to God (Philippians 4:4-6)? Is your motive to satisfy self or to glorify God?

B. Faith Versus the World - James 4:4-6

1. Friendship with the world - 4:4-6

Adulterers and adulteresses is what James calls those who keep one foot in the world and the other in the church. Not only do believers contend daily with their own insistent wants and desires, but life is also lived in a worldly environment of everyone else's wants and desires. "Keeping up with the Joneses" (who are desperately trying to keep up too) turns luxuries into necessities. God is pushed into the background in the frantic rat race with those who have no heavenly investment or eternal values. Soon, what one sought to possess, possesses them instead. Bible study wanes, prayer is powerless, perfunctory, or non-existent and the believer has joined the ways of the world.

The world exerts its pressures, sapping energy and interest until health is diminished and desire for God is gone. Putting the world's values ahead of God's is spiritual adultery. A believer's first waking moments could best be spent meditating on God's word rather than with the radio or television, where the world gains immediate access to one's mind and soul.

Bible reading and prayer should be as natural as breakfast, rather than having to compete with the morning "news" show. The media is the great preacher and teacher of the world's value system. Most people imbibe it effortlessly and painlessly until it bears its bitter fruit.

Jesus taught that, *My kingdom is not of this world.* The world has its own Christ-rejecting system. *He was in the world and the world was made through Him and the*

world did not know him (John 1:10). The same world system which rejected and crucified Christ is no friend to persons of faith. The believer continually battles two enemies - the flesh and the world, one internal the other external. Are you winning these battles by faith?

Paul speaks of crucifying the flesh (Galatians 2:20) and the world (Galatians 6:15). How is this possible? By faith in Christ's finished work on the cross, it is possible to live in the power of His new nature within us (2 Corinthians 5:17).

2. God's faithfulness and grace - 4:5-6

a. Does the Scripture speak in vain?

God knows the conflict and has given His word to help us. The Bible is our weapon against lust and envy. It is the sword of the Lord (Ephesians 6:17 and Revelation 19:21). Believers do well to keep the sword sharpened through daily study and use it as often as needed.

b. He gives more grace

Grace is one of God's most beautiful and available attributes. Every person is created by His grace, placed in a beautiful world by His grace, kept by His grace, and saved by His grace. His grace goes on and on. It is exhaustless. Therefore it can help you now in your trial and vexing situation. Grace is:

God's
riches
at
Christ's
expense.

But there is a condition for receiving His grace.

c. *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.* - verse 6

James quotes Proverbs 3:34. The quality of humility is emphasized throughout the Bible. James 4:5 may be a reference to Genesis 6:5 and conditions before the Flood. If so, James 4:6 could refer to Noah as alone humble in a rebellious and proud world. God manifested His grace to him, he received it by faith (Hebrews 11:7), obeyed God's plan, and the human race survived.

Does God see you as proud or humble? Jesus said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:3).

C. Faith Versus the Devil - James 4:7-8

1. Satan's limits - *Resist the devil and he will flee from you* - 4:7

The flesh within and the world without are formidable

enough. There is a third enemy forming an unholy trinity against us, whether we want it or not. (Thankfully, there is a more awesome Trinity available to us: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.)

The devil is real, but his power is not absolute. Resisting this powerful enemy necessitates submission to God who guarantees that he will flee when resisted. This guarantee is backed by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. At the Cross, Jesus Christ crushed the serpents head, as promised in Genesis 3:15, *He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel*. Believers need not be harassed by Satan when one little word will remove him. Martin Luther wrote,

The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him,
His rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word will fell him.

That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them abideth.
The Spirit and the gifts are ours,
through Him who with us sideth.

Three times Jesus met Satan's attacks with, *It is written* (Matthew 4:4,7,10), and the devil, having been resisted, left Him.

2. God's nearness - 4:8

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. God invites you to come closer to Him. *The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms* (Deuteronomy 33:27). Arms are comforting. A father's, mother's, or spouse's arms give comfort and strength. The *everlasting arms* are there for the asking.

We approach God in our thought life, through prayer and also meditation on His word. Is anything more comforting than the presence of God, where all is well? "Under His wings I am safely abiding," says the hymn writer using Psalm 91.

D. Four Conditions for Receiving God's Grace - James 4:8b-10

1. *Cleanse your hands* - 4:8

All known sin needs to be confessed and forsaken.

2. *Purify your hearts* - 4:8

Hearts are symbols for the emotions. The motives born of emotions need to be pure, unmixed with self-centeredness and self-seeking. Beware of double-mindedness (James 1:1:8).

3. *Lament and mourn and weep!* - 4:9

Here is a warning not to draw near to God casually, but with an attitude of soberness and humility.

4. *Humble yourselves* - 4:10

Humility requires a proper acknowledgement of who God is and who we are. God is sovereign. We are poor and needy. He can do everything. Apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5).

These are the fourfold conditions that faith accepts in order to receive God's aid against a threefold enemy. Cleansed, purified, sober, and humble we have the potential for victory over the flesh, the world, and the devil. *And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith* (1 John 5:4).

Who is in charge of your actions and responses? Is it your flesh, the influence of the world, Satan, or God? Will you submit control of your life to God's Spirit by humbling yourself before God and calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for help?

II. Valid Faith Works in Two Vulnerable Areas - 4:11-17

One's words reveal two more vulnerable areas. Vexations from the flesh, the world, and the devil may become expressed verbally by 1) speaking evil, berating others or 2) boasting of one's plans.

Both are sin and break God's commandments. Speaking evil is slander (4:11); *boasting in your arrogance* (NAS) is called "evil" (4:16).

A. Berating of Others - James 4:11-12

1. *Evil speaking* (KJV) and Judging the Law - 4:11

a. Warning against berating believers

James returns to the subject of speech, an area especially vulnerable to sin (see James 3). He addresses *brethren*, which includes those who belong to Christ. Believers are not to say mean, critical, gossipy, or backbiting things about one another. What hurts one hurts all, for we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

b. Warning against judging the law

Judging others demonstrates a prideful exalting of oneself to judge of God's law, which gives the command to *love one another* (John 15:12). *Love covers all sins* (Proverbs 10:12) rather than exposing them. Slander vilifies God's law as inadequate, and accuses God of

leniency or neglect for ignoring the ever so obvious faults of others.

2. God the Lawgiver - 4:12

Slanderers put themselves above the Law as critics rather than as keepers of the Law. Only One is above the Law, and that is the Lawgiver, God.

Who are you to give a verdict on your neighbor? (Jerusalem Bible). The booby trap in being critical or judgmental is that the slanderer's standard will be used against the slanderer. Can you risk being judged by the same standard you use for others?

B. Boasting of Self - James 4:13-17

1. Rebuked - 4:13

Boastful advanced planning earns James' rebuke. *Come now, he writes, you who say today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.* All plans need to be submitted to God (Proverbs 16:3). For our thoughts are not His thoughts and our ways not His ways. His thoughts and plans are higher (Isaiah 55:8). Plans which bypass or ignore God presume upon His grace and may fall flat. His plan is infinitely better and will prove to be a surprise and delight.

2. Exposed - 4:14

No one knows what tomorrow holds, only the One who holds tomorrow. To plan apart from God assumes control over one's life which no one has. It also presumes time, energy, and resources, all of which come from God. Tomorrow's dimensions are unknown. Most plans depend on the stability and predictability of today's components. Yet governments fall, economies crash, health fails, fortunes fade, and friends become unfaithful. Faith acknowledges dependency upon God and plans as far as faith can "see."

3. Vapor-like - 4:14

Life is unpredictable. Every human life is but a vapor, a breath, without guaranteed existence. The longest life is but a little while compared to the Pyramids, the Redwoods, the mountains, or eternity. A tombstone in a Boston cemetery reads, "As you are, I once was; as I am, you soon shall be." Human beings are only visitors on this planet, susceptible to accident and microscopic viruses. Yet we plan as though we are immortal. This is arrogance.

4. Alternative - 4:15

James suggests the phrase, *If the Lord wills* before

doing this or that. This shows humility. There was a time when people wrote D.V. (Deo Volente), or "God willing," in correspondence. Such spiritual expression is disappearing from our culture. Planning as God wills is the only way to plan without presuming on God's grace.

5. Arrogant - 4:16

Not only do people arrogantly plan without considering God or seeking His will, but they gloat over their plans! They rejoice in their cleverness (boasting) and gleefully anticipate the realization of the plans. James calls that evil.

Many boast that God will cooperate with their plans rather than their cooperating with His. Being grateful for today's blessings and content with today requires a childlike simplicity. Jesus said, *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things* (Matthew 6:34).

If you are absorbed with today, you will have no need to seek fulfillment through the dreams of the future. Faith is practical, and though it has its mystical element, it is not unrealistic. Faith knows that the future belongs to God. Even Jesus, God's Son, claimed no inside knowledge of the future, having laid aside His supernatural knowledge in becoming human (Matthew 24:36 and Philippians 2:7).

C. Conclusion - James 4:17

1. *Therefore*

When James says "therefore," he means we should look to see what it is there for!

2. *To him who knows to do good.*

Most people at least know to do good.

3. *And does not do it*

The entire human race is described here. Paul describes the dilemma and conflict of personal accountability of conscience in Romans 7.

4. *It is sin*

We are accountable for what we know and how we handle vexations and the vapor that is our life. Will you come to the cross of Christ and gaze by faith upon Jesus, the all-sufficient sacrifice for your sins? Will you trust Him fully? Will you surrender the inner and outer vexations of life to Him? He is waiting to bless you and give your life meaning, peace, and joy.

QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all comments and references.

1. Give the five areas of vulnerability mentioned in James 4 (see page 1).
2. ♥(Heart Question) Will you name a vulnerable area where you need prayer for victory?
3. What did you learn in the lesson notes that helped you?

DAY TWO: Read James 5:1-6.

4. What group does James mention here and in 1:10?
5. List reasons why the rich are advised to grieve:
5:1

5:2

5:3

5:4

5:5

5:6
6. Find Biblical guidelines for using wealth in the following verses:
 - a. Leviticus 19:13
 - b. Deuteronomy 8:18
 - c. Psalm 62:10
 - d. Proverbs 11:24
 - e. Matthew 13:22
 - f. Matthew 19:23
 - g. Acts 11:29
 - h. 1 Corinthians 16:2
 - i. 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 16-17

DAY THREE: Read James 5:7-11.

7. What topic is discussed by these Biblical writers, and what does each say about it?
Jesus in Matthew 24:30-36

Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Titus 2:13

John in 1 John 2:28

James in James 5:7-9

Peter in 1 Peter 5:4

Jude in Jude 14

8. a. What quality of character is stressed in 5:7-11?
 - b. What simple example of this quality is given?
9. What other examples of patience are given in 5:10-11? Why, do you think?
10. a. Using 5:10 and 5:11, try to find three benefits (good effects) of being patient until a trial is over.
 - b. What do people learn about the Lord when they outlast a trial?

DAY FOUR: Read James 5:12-15.

11. a. What does James put *above all*?
 - b. Who said this before James did (see Matthew 5:33-37)?
 - c. How important does society consider this to be?
 - d. How much of James 5:12 is also in Matthew 5:33-37?
12. In James 5:13, what expressions for one's emotions are recommended:
 - a. when afflicted?
 - b. when happy?
 - c. when sick?
 - d. Will you try a. b. or c. this week and report the result?
 - e. What was one of the last things the Lord Jesus did with His disciples (Matthew 26:30)?
13. a. What procedure does James recommend to a sick person?
 - b. Who goes to whom?
 - c. In illness, is prayer usually your first or last resort?
 - d. What quality is essential to prayer in the following Scripture passages?
James 5:15

Matthew 17:20

Mark 11:23

Luke 17:6

1 Corinthians 12:9

e. ? (Thought Question) Do you think God always heals in answer to prayer? Why or why not?

f. What supports your view in John 11:4,5,14; Philippians 2:27 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-9?

14. Can you find any connection in James 5:15 between illness (but not all illness) and sin (see John 9:2-3)?

DAYS FIVE AND SIX: Read James 15-20.

15. What word occurs in every verse of 5:13-18? Do you think the emphasis is on healing or prayer?

16. Apply 5:16 by confessing one fault to a close friend and asking for prayer concerning it. Offer to listen and pray for a fault of your friend's in return. Prepare to share a result you may find.

17. What kind of results did Elijah receive when he prayed? Can you find the Old Testament reference?

18. What do these verses say about helping someone change?
James 5:19-20

Proverbs 10:12

Daniel 12:3

1 Peter 4:8

19. Which question helped you to better understand a verse or verses?