

James 4 Exegetical Notes

The Test of Worldly Indulgence - James 4:1-10
The Test of Judging Others - James 4:11-12
The Test of Dependence on God - James 4:13-17

Test 8 - Worldly Indulgence

The eighth test listed by James is the test of worldly indulgence. A person's closeness to the world is a good indicator of their spiritual condition. Throughout the New Testament God makes it clear that the closer one is to the world, the farther one is from him.

1 John 2:15-17 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

John 15:18-21 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

John 17:14-16 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil [one]. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.

Ephesians 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

An Apocryphal Story

The story is told of a wealthy man that lived on the top of a high mountain that was only accessible by a narrow, winding road with precarious dropoffs to either side. He needed to hire a new chauffer, so he interviewed three men for the job. He asked the first man, "How close to the edge of the cliff can you drive without falling off?" "One foot" said the man confidently. He asked the second man the same question, to which he answered, "Six inches!" "Wow, you must be a good driver," the wealthy man said. But then he asked the third man, "How close can you come to the edge without falling off." The third man answered, "Man, I wouldn't get close to the edge", to which the wealthy man responded quickly, "You're hired!"

The real issue is not how close we can get to the world and remain Christians, the issue is that we should not even want to get close to the world at all.

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

What is the source of war and contention? The answer is our own pleasures. The Greek word translated “lusts” is *adonon*, which means pleasure in the sense of sensuality. James says that these evil desires for pleasure war in our members. Romans 6 states that we are to not yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness unto God. In that passage “members” refer to our physical bodies and fallen flesh. It is in our fallen humanness that these sensual lusts dwell and it is these lusts that cause all of the fights and wars among us.

2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not because ye ask not.

Again, the word translated “lust” is *adonon*. We are constantly seeking pleasure. The word translated “kill” is better translated “envy”. This is the best verse in the Bible on the lust of the eyes and flesh. Our entire world today is one big arena of war and fighting for more things. We never have enough. It is sad that Satan gets us so busy warring and fighting for the passing things of this life that we lose sight of eternal things. Colossians 3:1-2 says we are to set our affections, our desires, on heavenly things, not earthly things.

For a person to have their sights set on the passing things of the world is a sure indicator that they have misplaced priorities. To claim a true relationship with God and yet love those things that hate him is inconsistent. It makes no sense for a person to go to God in prayer and ask for things whose only purpose is self-indulgence.

3 Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

The word translated “lust” is *epithumea*. It is used to speak of the general desires of the flesh. The word “amiss” is *kakos*. This word is used to speak of those things that are “worthless”. This is the same word to speak of our works at the judgment seat of Christ, where all of our “worthless” works will be burned up. The word “consume” means to spend or squander foolishly. It carries the idea of throwing to the wind.

The problem with pursuing material things is that they will never satisfy. Moreover, those who have material things often squander them foolishly on that which is of no eternal value. The true believer is one who understands the real value of things and people, and invests with eternity in view.

Keys to Answered Prayer

- 1. No Unconfessed Sin in the heart - Psalm 66:18**
- 2. No Unforgiving spirit (note paternal/positional) - Matthew 6:14-15**
- 3. No Husband/Wife problems - 1 Peter 3:7b**
- 4. No Broken relationships - Matthew 5:23-24**
- 5. Praying in Christ's Name - John 14:14**
- 6. Praying according to God's Will - 1 John 5:14-15**
- 7. Praying according to faith - James 1:5-7; Mark 11:23-24**
- 8. Regarding Behavior - James 4:4-10**

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

This is perhaps the clearest statement regarding the relationship between God and the world that is found in the Bible. God and the world are at opposite ends of the spectrum. It is not possible to be close to God while at the same time being close to the world. The reason for this is that the world system, as headed by Satan, is diametrically opposed to all that God represents.

What Is The World?

- 1. The world system as headed by Satan (John 14:30-31).**
- 2. The sphere of fallen humanity (Ephesians 2:2).**
- 3. The values, principles, and mores of a fallen society.**
- 4. Anything that is part of this fallen system, headed by Satan, that draws our affections away from God and our eternal home.**

5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

In verse 5, we see that the world has an avenue into us through our own lustful hearts. The word, "lusteth", comes from *epipothē*, which is translated in Philippians 1:8 and 2:26 as "greatly long for". Our hearts "greatly long" to envy and desire all manner of pleasures. The word "envy" in this verse, *phthonon*, is the same word that appears in Romans 1:29 and 1 Peter 2:1. The idea here is that our lusts love to envy, that is, seek avenues for fulfillment. The person who is wrapped up in this world is consumed with new ways and ideas to get more of the world.

6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

We finally find the source of our sin, the root source, pride. This is very interesting since the source of sin in the universe was Satan's pride. See Isaiah 14:12-14 for the 5 "I wills" of Satan.

We cannot overcome our pride in and of ourselves. The source of victory lies in God's overcoming grace. This is not "salvation" grace, but "sustaining" grace. We need to understand that all sin is based in pride. The origin of sin in the universe is traced back to pride.

The person who is consumed with the things of this world think only of themselves. They have little interest in others unless it is to use others for their own ends.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

How can we as believers overcome the allure of the world? It is by submitting to God and resisting the devil. Although the believer is faced with three major enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, all find their path into our lives through the flesh. Satan uses not only the flesh, but also the world, to lure Christians into sin. Therefore, for us to overcome the draw of the world we need to submit (*hupotaga*, line up under) God and then resist the devil.

This goes against that which is being taught today regarding spiritual warfare. In many circles Christians are told to take the offensive against Satan and his demons. No where is this taught in Scripture. Our response to Satan and his attacks on us is to stand firm and resist. If we do, God promises to us the victory. To seek out Satan in some hope of destroying him or “beating him up” is contrary to sound Biblical teaching.

Two Errors To Avoid With Satan

1. All evil is a direct result of demonic forces

This view puts a demon “behind every bush.” Whenever anything bad happens, it is directly the result of demonic activity. Whenever we sin, it is because “the Devil made me do it.” All natural disasters find their source in demonic activity. Natural results of this viewpoint are:

- a. An excessive interest in the demonic.**
- b. A feeling of constant oppression.**
- c. A tendency to write personal sin off as the result of a demon.**
- d. A tendency to “second-guess” all bad events as to why Satan is doing them or what we can do to counter them.**
- e. A tendency to attribute physical disease to Satan, and the role of the believer is to deliver people from those demons.**

2. Satan is minimally involved in the evil in this world

This view minimizes the activity of Satan. Unfortunately, it directly contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture that Satan and his demons are involved in evil in this world. Natural results of this viewpoint are:

- a. A failure to recognize that Satan is indeed involved in a cosmic struggle with God.**
- b. A failure to realize that bad events could be caused by Satan.**
- c. A tendency to fight the Christian battle in our own strength rather than rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.**
- d. A dulling of the realization of the battle we find ourselves in as believers.**

Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical Critique

- 1. The Spiritual Warfare movement places too much emphasis on Satan as the cause for personal sin and too little emphasis on the flesh.**
- 2. The Spiritual Warfare movement encourages believers to become familiar with Satanism and the occult, a practice clearly forbidden by the Bible.**
- 3. The Spiritual Warfare movement falls to a mystical form of Christianity when it teaches that we can pray hedges and bind Satan.**
- 4. The Spiritual Warfare movement incorrectly seeks out encounters with Satan when it assumes that we have unlimited authority over Satan through the power of Christ.**

5. **The Spiritual Warfare movement attributes many results of the fall, such as death, disease, and natural disasters, to the direct work of Satan.**
6. **Nowhere does the Bible indicate the existence of territorial demons in the form presented by the current Spiritual Warfare movement.**
7. **Nowhere in the Scriptures are we told to confront Satan in “power encounters.”**

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

How can we draw near to God? It is by removing ourselves from sin, and in context, the world. Note that James is saying the same thing over and over again in this passage. The closer one is to the world, the farther one is to God. Therefore, to draw near to God necessitates our removing ourselves from the world and from sin. When we mean business with God, he will mean business with us.

“Cleanse” is the word *katharitso*, to clean. This word is used throughout Christ's ministry to represent the cleansing of a person from leprosy. This is not a “quick rinse of the hands” but a thorough cleansing. How are we cleansed? We, as Christians, are continually cleansed when we continually confess our sins (1 John 1:9). Confess, *homolegeo*, does not mean list, but means “to say the same thing as”. The word “purify” is *agnisate*. It means to purify in the moral sense before God. It also seems to carry the meaning of “ceremonial” purity before God when used of the Levites and used in the Temple sense. Double minded is the word *dipsucha*, also used in James 1:8.

The idea in this verse is to stop trying to choose between God and the world. James is telling us to completely cut ourselves off from the world, cleanse our hand, purify our hearts, and draw near to God.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

We are reminded of the Beatitudes in this verse. When Christ gave the Sermon on the Mount, he made it a point to list the character qualities of a kingdom citizen. The first of these is poverty of spirit. This refers to the realization on our part that there is nothing we can do to please God. The second beatitude is that of mourning. Mourning over what? Mourning over sin. The heart of every believer needs to be consciously aware of the need to avoid sin, and where sin is present, to do everything possible to confess and forsake it. The third beatitude is a blessing on the meek. A person who is meek is opposite that of one who is proud.

There needs to be a solemn aspect to the Christian life. Believers need to be aware of their constant need of confession of sin and the urgency to avoid sin at all costs. Those who are not true believers do not sense the urgency and therefore do not deal with sin.

Test 9 - Judging Others

11 Speak not evil one of another brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, the are not a doer of the law, but a judge.

12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

The ninth test listed by James is that of judging others. This is one of the things that Christians like to do a lot. We have a great time judging the motives and hearts of others while at the same time cutting ourselves a lot of slack. We easily see the mote in our brothers eye while missing the log in our own. This passage gives us several truths about this issue of judging others that should characterize all true believers.

First Point - Speak Evil of No One

The word translated “speak evil” is *katalaleo*. This word is used in the sense of “slander” or “gossip”. It is the same word used in 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:16. It is also an onomatopoeic word.

We are not to slander one another. Slander, in this passage, means to speak evil of someone’s motives. The reason we are prohibited from doing this is that we cannot discern clearly the motives and hearts of others. We can look at their actions, and judge them, but not the reasons for those actions.

Second Point - Do Not Pass Sentence

Slander does not usually stop with merely judging someone’s motives, it continues on and passes sentence. We cannot pass sentence on a person’s motives, only their actions. God is the only one who can discern the real reason people act the way they do. When we take it upon ourselves to determine a person’s motives, we are treading on ground that God has reserved for himself.

Third Point - Judging Others Makes One a Judge of God’s Law

If we do judge someone, we are passing sentence on the law of God. In other words, we have set ourselves over the law and in doing so we are saying that we are not bound by the law. Only God has the right to pass sentence on the motives of others.

Fourth Point - God Is The Only Lawgiver

Only God, the lawgiver, has the ability to save, that is keep parts of the law, and destroy, that is “loose”, parts of the law. We do not have that privilege because we are under the law like everyone else. Only the lawgiver can loose and keep his own law.

Judging vs. Discerning Fruit

We need to understand the difference between judging one another in the areas of motives, and judging fruit. We as Christians are to judge fruit. Compare with Matthew 7 passage on false teachers and the Matthew 18 passage on church discipline. We need to understand we are accountable to one another. This kind of judgment, that of fruit or works, is not the judgment spoken of here. The judgment spoken of here is that of motives, something that only God can judge.

Other Prohibitions Against Judging Motives

Romans 14:10-13 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of men's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

Matthew 7:1-5 *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

Test 10 - Dependence On God

13 Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.

This is the capstone of a false believer and the man without God. Their whole life is bounded by their desires and plans. The thought of a transcendent God is beyond them. We need to understand, as Christians, that the idea here is not that we do not plan. The idea is that we plan with the understanding that God is in control. Our plans are to be thought of and bounded by God's will.

Using this thought as a pattern, we can quickly see that the things that are not God's will are things that we cannot do and please God. There is no use to plan for them. Paul definitely made plans. He made plans to go to Rome, Spain, and into the other parts of Asia. However, his plans were always bounded by God's sovereign will (Romans 1:10).

16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

When we order our life outside of God's divine will and with no thought of God, we become a boaster. The word used for "boasters" is *alazoneias*. This word is used to speak of the "quack" doctors who boasted of cures that were no cure. It is used to speak of those who promise things and do not have the means to make good their promises.