

## James 4:4-10

### I. Neg: Do not conform to the world's ways and human wisdom (4-5)

#### A. Do not choose friendship with the world (4)

##### 1. You cannot ally both with God and the world (4a-b)

###### a Adulterous people, don't you know that: (4a)

“adulterous people” uses standard OT imagery for people unfaithful to God, cf. Hos. 3:1  
James accuses them of being unfaithful because they lack godly wisdom (vv. 3:13-18)  
and they are giving in to selfish desires (vv. 4:1-3)

###### b Friendship with the world is enmity toward God (4b)

“the world” is human existence without, and in opposition to God  
Godliness is to keep oneself untainted by the world, cf. 1:27, 1 John 2:15-17

##### 2. If you choose the world, you place yourself against God (4c-d)

###### a Therefore, whoever wants to be a friend of the world (4c)

That is, to conform to the world's wisdom and standards and desires

###### b He is made an enemy of God (4d)

God is an enemy to the worldly mindset that resists, ignores, and dishonors Him  
Therefore, to choose the side opposed to God is to put oneself in opposition to God, and  
thereby to make oneself a victim of His enmity and wrath

#### B. Reason: God is a jealous God (5)

-cf. Exo. 20:5

##### 1. Or do you think that...? (5a)

-cf. 1:26

##### 2. What they think (5b-d)

###### a The Scripture says in vain (5b)

There is no Old Testament Scripture that says these exact words, but James is almost  
certainly referring to the passages that speak of God as a “jealous God” such as Exod.  
20:5, 34:14, Deut. 4:24, 5:9, 6:15, 32:21, Josh. 24:19, and Nahum 1:2  
James's point is that those who love the world fail to take this warning seriously!

###### b God's Spirit in us longs jealously (5c-d)

###### 1) The Spirit longs jealously (5c)

The point is probably that the Spirit longs to the point of jealousy  
God is a jealous God, and desires His own glory and fame, and therefore, He desires that  
His people delight in His own glory and fame, more than in the things of the world.  
The disputes among God's people are caused by their jealousy, which has its root in their  
selfish desire for ungodly things (cf. vv. 1-3). The solution comes from God's righteous  
jealousy for what is good.

###### 2) Whom God has caused to live in you (5d)

God's Spirit is resident with God's people, even as they love and pursue friendship with  
the world

## II. Pos: But God gives grace to change, to conform to God's ways, and God's wisdom (6-10)

### A. God gives grace to experience blessing by conforming to His ways (6)

#### 1. But He gives greater grace (6a)

"Greater" compared to what? God's grace is more abundant than our sin and shortcoming and disputing. If anyone lacks anything, he should ask from God, who is more than sufficiently able to provide all the grace that is needed.

In this context, it refers to His giving grace to the humble, overcoming the proud.

#### 2. Therefore, according to Proverbs, God confronts or blesses appropriately (6b-d)

##### a Therefore, it says (6b)

Quoting Prov. 3:34, cf. Matt. 23:12

##### b God confronts or blesses, according to what is appropriate (6c-d)

###### 1) Neg: God opposes the arrogant (6c)

The arrogance can show itself in boasting against others and quarreling, like described in the previous passages. The arrogant are not demonstrating godly wisdom, but are characterized by wisdom that is earthly, human and demonic -cf. 3:15

And the arrogant think much of themselves over against others, and especially over against God. It is impossible to be arrogant if you are looking to God's greatness and wisdom to supply a personal lack

"oppose" is a strong word, involving not only an attitude, but also behavior. God shows hostility toward, and works against the arrogant

###### 2) Pos: but He gives grace to the humble (6d)

When we acknowledge our neediness, and ask God to supply what is lacking, God is gracious and gives generously without finding fault -cf. 1:5

Just as God gives favor to those who are poor in the eyes of the world (2:5), He gives favor to those who are poor in their own eyes, cf. Matt. 5:3

God's grace to the humble is a statement filled with hope. Some people historically have claimed James does not contain much Gospel. But statements like this and later propositions in vv. 8-10 are full of Gospel promise, even though not spelled out as explicitly.

The obvious implication, to be spelled out in the next section, is that James's readers should humble themselves.

**B. Therefore, conform to God and He will exalt you (7-10)**

**1. Submit and conform to God (7-9)**

**a Overcome the devil by submitting to God (7)**

**1) Reject the devil by pursuing God (7a-b)**

**a) Subject yourself to God (7a)**

Resisting the devil is futile without first submitting to God. On our own, we are not strong enough to have any hope of success against the enemy of our souls. But if we place ourselves on God's side, He will take up the fight on our behalf, and He will always win.

This subjection is a voluntary act of placing oneself under the authority of God willingly, even though, of course, we are already under His authority and control. Every knee will bow, willingly or unwillingly. But Christians are invited to submit willingly by faith, before God exercises His full authority in glory.

This subjection is an act of humility, not of falsely considering oneself lower than actual, but realizing one's true status compared to God.

**b) And oppose the devil (7b)**

This is an active opposition to his lies and influence, coming from an attitude of mistrust, contrary desires, and enmity, cf. 1 Pet. 5:9, Eph. 6:13, Gal. 2:11

**2) Result: he will flee from you (7c)**

We are promised that when we submit to God and resist the devil, he will go away in defeat, just as he did at the conclusion of Jesus' temptation

This is by God's power and protection, and not by our power or anything inherent in us

**b Convert and conform to God (8-9)**

**1) Come near to God and He will come near to you (8a-b)**

-cf. 1 Chron. 28:9, 2 Chron. 15:2, Psa. 145:18, Zech 1:3, Heb. 10:22

**a) Come near to God (8a)**

"draw near" will be defined more clearly below

This refers to intentional activity on our part to come into closer relationship with God

Every Christian should do whatever it takes to know and experience God more closely

**b) And He will come near to you (8b)**

And the promise is that whenever we make the effort, God responds with further revelation of Himself and closer relationship

This does not put us in control of the relationship as much as it removes barriers on our part to the fullness of relationship, especially in light of the manner of drawing close, which is described in the next propositions

2) By repenting and conforming to God (8c-9)

a) Conform to God's holiness (8c-d)

Cleansing of hands and purifying of hearts both draw on OT passages which use physical cleansing as a figurative symbol for spiritual purity and holiness.

Both of these are symbolic commands for people to conform themselves to God's ethical standards, typically by repenting and turning away from all unrighteous activities and attitudes

(1) Cleanse [your] hands, O sinners (8c)

-cf. Psa. 24:3-4, Isa. 1:16

(2) Purify [your] hearts, doubters (8d)

"doubters" is the same word as "double minded" in 1:8

-cf. Psa. 51:10, 2 Cor. 7:1

b) By lamenting and repenting (9)

(1) Lament (9a-c)

-cf. Eccl. 7:2, Isa. 22:12

(a) Be sorrowful (9a)

This term has the connotation of being miserable to the extent that the misery is expressed outwardly

(b) And mourn (9b)

This term means to grieve in sorrow

(c) And weep (9c)

And this term means to cry, obviously from sadness

-cf. Jer 31:9, Joel 2:12, Luke 18:11, 2 Kings 22:19

Notice that all three of these terms do not specifically give the reason why they should be miserable and sad. But in context, it is clear that they should be sad for those things that are not in conformity with God. In other words, James is not commanding his readers to be miserable and sad in general, as if that is virtuous in itself. Rather, he commands them to be miserable and sad about their sin and idolatry, such as favoritism (2:1-12), impure speech (3:1-12), selfish envy (3:13-18), selfish quarrelling (4:1-3) and friendship with the world (4:4-6) which is causing enmity toward God. These things SHOULD make us miserable, because they hinder our relationship with God and stand in the way of His blessings.

Two important passages from the penitential Psalms are illustrative of the kind of attitude James is commanding here:

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"--

and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah* - Psa. 32:5 and

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. - Psa. 51:17

(2) Repent (9d-e)

(a) Let your laughter be turned into sorrow (9d)

(b) And [let your] joy [be turned] into gloominess (9e)

A number of times in the OT, God promised to turn His people's mourning into dancing and joy. -cf. Jer. 31:13, Psa. 30:11, 126:5-6  
Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4)

Such passages speak about God's ability and willingness to change His faithful people's bad experiences to good, as an act of His justice. But the Old Testament also speaks of God bringing His people to justice when they are not faithful.

James seems to be turning the "mourning to dancing" verses on their head to challenge his readers to turn back to God. They should not expect joy when they are unfaithful to God. If they embrace the sorrow of repentance for God's sake, they can expect God to turn their sorrow to joy. This is not forcing God to bless them, but it is placing themselves in the situation in which God promised He would freely bless.

2. Therefore, be humbled before God and He will exalt you (10)

This passage may seem very harsh, but it is actually very hopeful. The sorrow and repentance commanded in the previous context is not an end in itself, but is for a gracious and hopeful purpose. As we turn away from those things in enmity from God, we turn back to God. As we turn back to God, we experience God. And there is nothing better than that.

a Be humbled before God (10a)

This summarizes the command of the previous context. Being proud before God is insane and inappropriate and offensive to God. The godly response is to be humble before God.

b And He will exalt you (10b)

But God's gracious response is to lift up His people who have lowered themselves. The paradox is that when people exalt themselves, they never ultimately find honor. But when people humble themselves and honor God, then God gives them honor. Jesus gave the perfect example of this dynamic, as described in Phil. 2:1-11.

-cf. Luke 1:52, 1 Pet. 5:6