

The Cure, pt. 1 (James 4:5-10)
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Introduction

1. The cause of wars and fights among believers stems from an inward war raging in the heart of every believer.
 - a. Everyone is infected with a virus (sin) contracted from Adam and passed to all his offspring simply through their being related to him (Rom. 5:12).
 - b. This virus affects the basic human desire for happiness and well-being (*hēdonē*, “pleasure”). It corrupts this desire, diverting it from its intended purpose—finding satisfaction in the person of God. The corruption causes the infected person to seek satisfaction apart from God, provoking wars.
2. James identifies the symptoms of the virus as reflecting the one originating the disease (v. 8; John 8:44).
 - a. *Murder*—the illicit desire to remove someone from one’s sphere of life either physically (killing them or driving them away) or spiritually (damaging their reputation or destroying their full potential through harmful means—defamation, neglect, or failure to help). It is the ultimate anti-love—hatred.
 - b. *Covetousness*—the illicit desire to have or to be something that belongs to another because of a real or perceived advantage that the other possesses (Eccl. 4:4). Three Greek terms expound the Hebrew term: *hāmaḏ* (Prov. 21:26); *epithymia* (expressing intense desire); *pleonexia* (ruthless self-assertion) and *zelos*, an intense desire for advantage or achievement (1 Cor. 12:31), which manifests in inordinate strife (Gal. 5:26). James uses *zelos*, and what he describes applies to the ongoing unfolding of current history—politics, racial strife, the feminist movement, etc.
 - c. *Asking*—*aitéō*, requesting or demanding something of a higher power to supply what is needed to gain advantage over another. Jesus never used this term for His prayers because it involves requests for self and has the element of demand (although it is used of praying; Matt. 7:7). Pagans view prayer, by ingratiating themselves to the gods and winning their favor in the struggle, as a means of gaining advantage over others. James rebukes that spirit by showing, in this case, that it does not glorify God but squanders the request on one’s passions.
3. The whole attitude is summed up in these believers’ acting like the world (thus friendship with the world) in their struggles.
4. This attitude is no less than spiritual adultery or idolatry—finding pleasure and satisfaction in the gifts God gives rather than in the Giver—God Himself.
5. Today we want to look closely at God’s response (vv. 5, 6) and begin to consider His remedy to correct corrupted and infected *hēdonē* (vv. 7-10).

I. The Problem of Verse 5

1. Who is jealous? Is it God or our spirit?
 - a. The ESV (I believe, rightly) has God’s being jealous over the human spirit that He made to dwell in us. One can certainly argue that God longs for our full loyalty and devotion.
 - b. The KJV and NIV both argue that it is the human spirit, not God, that is prone to jealousy and evil desires, to which the Scripture also testifies. However, the progress of James’s argument testifies against this interpretation.
2. Is the “spirit” (v. 5) the human spirit or the Holy Spirit?

- a. It is unlikely that the Holy Spirit is meant here because He is not mentioned elsewhere in this epistle.
 - b. God created mankind in His own image in order to be His for worship and service in glorifying Him. Animals have soul-life, as do humans; humans also have spirit, which perished in their disobedience but is regained in Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45; Eph. 2:1-5). God is very jealous to protect the spirit that was made to glorify Him.
3. Where is the Scripture quoted in v. 5?
- a. It is found nowhere; James was merely summarizing the sense of what is generally taught. Or—
 - b. It is found in Proverbs (3:34) and quoted in v. 6; v. 5 introduces His quotation of it.
 - c. Verse 6 joins v. 5 with the conjunctive “but” (“moreover”) and stresses God’s giving more grace after the strong claim of God’s jealousy (His wrath focused on those who disregard His intention and purpose) just as in the Scripture quoted in v. 5: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”
4. The OT demonstrates the jealousy of God for His people (Ex. 20:5, 6; Deut. 4:24; Neh. 1:2).
- a. God was moved to anger against Israel’s foolish desertion of Him by the desire to worship Baal (Deut. 6:15; 32:21). James argues that He will be jealous over His church for their idolatrous ways.
 - b. Just as God was moved with pity and mercy toward Israel (Ezek. 39:25), so He will give grace to His bride, the church.
 - c. Thus, the sense of the text is that God does not speak vainly that His wrath is focused on those who divert from His purpose in order to satisfy their own lusts and desires; nevertheless, should we become discouraged by His wrath, He promises more grace.
 - d. The condition that He requires for that grace, however, is that we humble ourselves, which means that we repent and return to God and submit to His plan for us.

II. The Steps of Repentance

In verses 7-10, James outlines the process of humbling —repenting and returning to God. Verse seven speaks of repentance in general terms.

1. Submission to God is the first step.
 - a. It is a military term meaning to rank under and yield to the will and command of the greater rank.
 - b. It means that one gives up his own life and plans (2 Tim. 2:3, 4; Rom. 6:12-14).
2. Resisting the devil must accompany the first step—submitting and resisting are two sides of one coin.
 - a. Resisting is taking a stand against or withstanding the enemy (Eph. 6:13). Withstanding is a defensive posture and assumes that the enemy is pressing an offensive. This is what you must do in order to avoid being “double-minded” (v. 8). Withstanding utilizes and God’s power and forces Satan to flee.
 - b. The enemy is called the devil (slanderer), which describes the nature of his offensive. Satan blames God and others of hurting or hindering you in your pursuit of success and happiness. Withstanding enables you to stop listening to Satan.
3. Verses 8-10 focus on specific actions that believers need to take. We will cover them in detail next week: drawing near to God; cleansing and purifying one’s life; learning to lament and grieve over sins and sinful bent; learning to trust God fully to provide what will be truly satisfying.