

Fact Sheet for **“Who Are You Friends With?”**
James 4:1-10

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So many parts of our lives depend on our finances. But our attitude toward money and its acquisition can create a problem for us. We are going to hear from James on this issue.

Pause and read James 1:2-4, 9-11. From the outset of our study of James I've mentioned that much of what James wrote has the inordinate desire to get rich in the background. As we come into chapter four notice that James has picked up the intensity. Friendly words like “brother” are missing. And you can imagine from his words the things that were going on with his readers.

¹ What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

How would you like to be in a church like this? The grammar James used for “You ask” in verse three has the thought “You ask for yourself”. This reminds me of something Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:10).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did instruct his listeners to ask God for what they needed (Matthew 7:7-11). But this was not in the context of greed. But James said that they would ask and *not* receive because they were asking out of greed.

^{4a} You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Notice again that James did not use the nice word “brothers”, but the words “You adulterous people!” They were seeking money before God. This is what James meant when he said, “**friendship with the world**”.

In the book of Jeremiah God used the word “adultery” when he spoke of idol worship (Jeremiah 3:8-9). Later Paul would equate covetousness with spiritual adultery (Colossians 3:5). James has the same thought here.

^{4b} Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ^{6a} But he gives more grace.

James wrote verse 5 and the first part of verse 6 as one sentence. And it happens to be notoriously difficult to translate.

Firstly, several of your versions include quotation marks in this sentence after saying something like “**the Scripture says**”. Here are problems with those quotation marks. One, you can't find anywhere in the Bible a quote that even comes close to "**He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us**". And two, although we have quotation marks in English they don't have them in the Greek New Testament. The quotation marks we have are the

translators' understanding of what the biblical authors meant. I'll give you a solution in just a moment.

Secondly, who expresses this jealousy or envy? Is it us or God? Here are two versions, both having removed the quotation marks, which present a different view on who expresses that jealousy or envy.

NIV James 4:5-6a Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he (God) jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? ^{6a} But he gives us more grace.

NLT James 4:5-6a What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the spirit God has placed within us is filled with envy? ^{6a} But he gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires.

James' words can actually be translated both ways. And the version you regularly use will choose one of these paths.

Here's how I understand it. "**The spirit that he has made to dwell in us**" is not the Holy Spirit, it is our human spirit. It is we, in our fallen nature, who can be intensely envious and jealous. There are multiple examples of this in the Bible... Cain, Achan, Ahab and his desire for Naboth's vineyard... etc. Rather than being a direct quote this is a general understanding from Scripture. And this view is entirely consistent with everything James said in verses 1-4. Here is the RASV (the Robert Allen Singer Version)...

"Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain that the Spirit who dwells in us envies intensely(?), ⁶ but He gives greater grace."

They were envious and jealous of other people who had more riches than they did. But God can give us the wherewithal (the grace) not to give into the tendency to envy, if we so desire. This flows right into another general understanding from Scripture. It is also not a direct quote.

^{6b} Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

The word "opposes" is a military term meaning "to battle against".

In the next several verses James gives ten strong imperatives or commands.

⁷ (1) Submit yourselves therefore to God. (2) Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ (3) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (4) Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and (5) purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ (6) Be wretched and (7) mourn and (8) weep. (9) Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ (10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

God always gives us what we need (Matthew 6:25-33). God also gives us many of the things we absolutely don't need, but which we enjoy. But God has never promised to satisfy our greed, though at times He may, but to our detriment (Psalm 106: 13-15 NKJV).

Here is the point. Be sensitive to where that line is in your life and avoid it like the plague. Proverbs 3:5-6 are two verses that can help if you live by them.

Who are you friends with?