

JAMES 3:14-18 | KINGDOM WISDOM

VERSE 14 –

The word **envying** is translated from the Greek ζήλος [zelos], sometimes translated *zeal*. It can be used in a positive or negative way, but in the New Testament in much more negative than positive, as here. From Genesis 30:1, possibly the first expression of envy in the Bible, we see dozens of examples of how **bitter envying** can destroy homes and hearts.

James also accuses his listeners of having **strife in your hearts**. The Greek word carries the idea of “ a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.”¹

Both **envying and strife in your hearts** can be a fuel to bring one to **glory** and to **lie**, so James warns against both the action and the characteristic result.

While this instruction is to Jews awaiting the Kingdom and its judgment, there is a universal sense of truth therein.

VERSE 15 –

The “**wisdom**” of **envying and strife** (v. 14) is **earthly, sensual, devilish**. While in modern usage **wisdom** is practically always beneficial, the particular Greek word translated **wisdom** (σοφία, [sophia]) can be of any variety, from man, God, devil, etc.

There are times when **envying and strife** (v. 14) may lead to advancement among men, but this “**wisdom**” is, among other things, **sensual**. James uses the word ψυχικός [psychikos], from which we get *physical*. The word **sensual** is not used here in a sexual sense but rather “relating to the senses.”

VERSE 16 –

This verse completes verse 14. **Envy and strife** lead to **confusion and every evil work**. Such a result would clearly not be the work of God.

VERSE 17 –

James encourages a **wisdom that is from above** rather than that which **descendeth not from above** (v. 15). He describes such wisdom in a wholly positive manner.

This verse helps us better understand an often-misunderstood passage about the Kingdom. Far too many use Romans 14:17 to “prove” that the Kingdom of God is not physical but spiritual. However, James 3:14-17 shows a *wisdom that is earthly* and a *wisdom that is from above*. Does talk about *spiritual wisdom* give any proof that such wisdom is not *used by earthlings while they live on earth*? Of course not! In the same way, the Kingdom of God is not about *physical wisdom* but *heavenly wisdom*, and this is the message of Romans 14:17. Even closer as a parallel to James 3:17 is John 18:36, also used to prove a spiritual rather than physical nature of the Kingdom. John 18:36 no more disproves the physical nature of the coming Kingdom than James 3:17 proves that **wisdom that is from above** is not used below.

¹ James Strong, [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#) (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

VERSE 18 –

James is asking the 12 tribes to bear the **fruit of righteousness**, and reminding them that it is **sown in peace** rather than **envying and strife** (v. 15).

JAMES 4:1-5 | CHASTISEMENT FOR NOT LIVING UP TO KINGDOM STANDARDS

VERSE 1 –

It is difficult to tell whether James refers to specific **wars and fightings** or is speaking in a general sense. Judaism was having an internal contentious crisis throughout most of the first century, so it is likely a *general statement of the specific battles* within Judaism.

The evangelical interpretation is to spiritualize this entire section rather than taking it as actual **wars and fightings**. This is done with no real merit and causes a damage to the understanding of the passage.

Shouldn't we take this as James' chastisement to his countrymen for the **lusts that war in your members** rather than a general statement of human interpersonal conflict? Wouldn't doing so help us avoid creating a legalistic kind of avoidance of conflict in general? This passage, spiritualized, has been used for ages to spiritually abuse Christians who disagree with their pastor.

VERSE 2 –

This verse has been so spiritualized that it has virtually lost all of its meaning. Christians constantly quote the last portion of the verse, **ye have not, because ye ask not**. It is one of those passages so well known that almost everyone quotes it in the King James Version, even when they use other versions for other purposes.

Is this saying that we do not have a nicer car, a second home, a better marriage, and a longer vacation *because we do not ask God for such*? Standard "evangelical garbage" preaching would make one think that to be the case.

But in context could it be that this passage speaks to the nation of Israel explaining to them why their society is falling apart? There is a **war in your members** (v. 1) that causes them to **fight and war** with each other and with the Romans. Yet Jesus had told the nation that they could *have the Kingdom when they asked Him to deliver it!* Compare Matthew 23:39. An acceptance of Jesus as Messiah (and all that that entailed) would have ended the internal fighting that led to total collapse.

Taking a *literal, grammatical, historical* approach to understanding this passage releases us from creating fictitious prayer-promises which have never been proven accurate.

VERSE 3 –

James elaborates on his previous statement, adding that they **receive not** due to their motives: they desire to to **consume it upon your lusts**.

If, as I propose, the subject in mind is the Kingdom, the reason they did not receive it in the First Century was not only that they failed to ask, but when they did, they solely wanted it to **consume it upon your lusts**. This also goes with Paul's chastisement in Romans 14:17.

In the future, when God delivers His Kingdom, it will not be so that the Jews can feast and frolic, but rather to rescue the repenting Jews from the hands of their enemies and fulfill His promises to their nation.

There are two different underlying words used to translate **lust** in verse 2 and 3. In verse 2, the word is ἐπιθυμέω [epithumeo], the common word for lust. In verse 3, the word is ἡδονή [hedone], from which we get *hedonism*. The first carries the concept of *desire*, the second of *pleasure*.

VERSE 4 –

The problem with the Jewish nation, and specifically with **the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad** (James 1:1) was **friendship of the world** and thus **enmity with God**. The Jewish people were always called to be *saints - sanctified - set apart* from the world.

James calls them **adulterers and adulteresses**, a term typically reserved for marriage. Since it is Israel that is the future bride, these words are fully fitting.

We should note that though verses 1-5 are to the nation of Israel, there are certainly aspect of it that would be true of anyone in relationship with God, in any dispensation. But if we take them as *for us* then we will make application of the promise of verse 2 *for us* as well. It is always best to refrain from direct application in Scriptures that are not directly to us.

VERSE 5 –

There is almost always a treasure of insight made available when Biblical writers quote from Scripture. However, in this case, it is very difficult to determine *what Scripture is being quoted*. Bullinger says, “This can only refer to the general testimony of Scripture that the natural man is prone to selfish desires, leading to envy of others who possess the things desired.”²

It seems to me that Bullinger is perhaps too quick to make this a “general testimony of Scripture.” Perhaps the passage in mind is Proverbs 21:10, which says that **The soul of the wicked desireth evil**. It then goes on to say **His neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes**. Because **soul** in Proverbs 21:10 is the same concept as **spirit** in James 4:5, and there is also a correspondence between **desireth evil** (Pro. 21:10) and **lusteth to envy** (James 4:5), this seems to be a very close connection. We know that quotations of Scripture within Scripture are not always done with a verbatim identity. If this be the case, then it very well may be that the Proverbs can and should be taken *prophetically*, and thus James makes a *last-days* reference from Scripture to Israel. We could not build this case without flaw, but we can certainly build the case enough to allow it for consideration.

² Ethelbert W. Bullinger, [*The Companion Bible: Being the Authorized Version of 1611 with the Structures and Notes, Critical, Explanatory and Suggestive and with 198 Appendixes*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2018), 1852.