

themselves to the very Lord they professed to serve, and failed to live out the truth that God Himself is the One Who gives to each of His own that which He has ordained for them. And this includes the plan He has for each of His children to accomplish the work He has given them to do, even equipping them for that work so that as they rely upon Him, they are successful in their service for the Lord.

What is more, failing to seek the Lord to supply one's needs and desires is tantamount to denying that He is the source of all that is good. To presume that one is able, on his own strength and ability, to obtain what is right and good, is in essence to deny that God is the sovereign of the universe and that He is the source of all blessings including equipping each of His children to complete the work He has given them to do. James' emphasis is that self-centeredness is a slippery slope, and if left unchecked, can end in denying the very God one claims to serve.

### 3 – You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

*You ask and do not receive* – At first reading, it may seem that James is contradicting himself, for here he states “You ask” but in the previous verse he writes “you do not have because you do not ask.” Yet it is clear that a chiasmic arrangement links the opening clause of verse 3 with the final clause of verse 2.

- |      |    |              |                                 |
|------|----|--------------|---------------------------------|
| v. 2 | A  | οὐκ ἔχετε    | – “you do not have”             |
|      |    | B            | μὴ αἰτεῖσθαι – “you do not ask” |
| v. 3 | B' | αἰτεῖτε      | – “you ask”                     |
|      | A' | οὐ λαμβάνετε | – “you do not receive”          |

Given this obvious parallel structure, it would seem at first reading that James is contradicting himself, for he states that those to whom he is addressing his words “do not ask” and then he states that they “do ask.” But the present active indicative verb *αἰτεῖτε* (< *αἰτεω*, *aiteō*, “to ask”) could be understood in several ways. Since the verb *aiteō* can also carry the sense of “demand,” i.e., “to ask for something with a claim on receipt of an answer,”<sup>1</sup> this may help us understand James' intended meaning in our verse. For instance, Peter uses *aiteō* in the sense of requiring an account from someone.

1 BDAG, “αἰτεω,” p. 30.

but sanctify Messiah as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1Pet 3:15)

If the verb “to ask” is being used by James with this usage of the word in mind, then we may understand “you ask” to mean “you demand” or “you ask expecting that God is obligated to give you what you request.” Understanding our text in this way parallels John’s teaching in his first epistle, for in emphasizing that prayer is the means by which God supplies His children with their requests, he likewise stresses that we are to pray in accordance with God’s will.

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1Jn 5:14–15)

It is clear that when John writes “He hears us,” he is utilizing the word “hear” from its Hebrew perspective. Even as the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-9) begins with “Hear, Oh Israel...,” which, in context, means to “pay attention in order to do what God commands,” so it is that when the child of God prays in accordance with the will of God, He will most certainly do all that is required to fulfill that request and thus to bring about His sovereign will. On the other hand, when a request comes before the Father which is not according to His will, it is not as though He is unaware of the request, for that is not what the word “hear” intends in the context of 1John 5. That which is contrary to His will He obviously does not do, and this would mean He does not “hear” the request in the sense that He does not undertake to fulfill or grant the request.

...*because you ask with wrong motives* – This is the very thing that James makes clear in our text, for he gives us the reason the child of God does not receive what he or she may have requested of God—the request is not according to God’s will.

The NASB, NIV, and TLV translate the Greek two-word phrase with a paraphrase, “you ask with wrong motives.” The Greek simply has *διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε*, “because you ask wrongly (or) badly” thus the NASB and NIV have interpreted the adverb *κακῶς* (*kakōs*) as indicating that James is teaching “wrong motives” as the reason for not receiving what one requests of the Lord. The ESV along with the NET have “because you ask wrongly” which is a more literal translation of the Greek.

But this leaves us with the obvious question: what does James mean by the phrase “you ask wrongly”? Clearly it does not mean that proper prayer requires a specific “formula,” for if that were the case, the Scriptures would surely make such a “formula” known. Indeed, the three-word prayer of Peter, “Lord, save me,” as he began to sink into the stormy water, was answered immediately by his all-powerful Savior, Yeshua (Matt 14:30). Rather, as James will teach us in the final paragraph of our chapter, to “ask wrongly” means to pray that God would grant something without having “if You are willing” as the foundational principle upon which the request is made. Praying as God intends us to pray has this primary goal: to glorify and honor God as the giver of everything that is good, and thus to submit to His will in all aspects of our lives. This is perfectly modeled for us in the prayer of Yeshua as He anticipated the terrible self-sacrifice He would endure to procure the salvation of all those for whom He would suffer.

And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” (Lk 22:41–42)

...so that you may spend it on your pleasures. – James makes it clear in the final phrase of our verse that to “ask wrongly” in prayer is to have one’s own desires in view rather than God’s will. This is made all the more evident when James uses the metaphor to “spend” (*δαπανάω*, *dapanāō*) coupled with “on your pleasures” (*ἡδονή*, *hēdonē*), for this clearly pictures seeking God in order to fulfill one’s own desires rather than desiring to honor Him by doing His will and giving Him the praise He deserves. Moreover, as we noted in v. 1 of our chapter, where the same word, *hēdonē* (“pleasures”) is used, in every other place outside of James where this word for “pleasures” is found, it always denotes “sinful pleasures,” i.e., that which pleases oneself without regard for others and particularly for what honors and pleases God.

**4 – You adulteresses! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

Now James makes it very clear in regard to his meaning: to live life putting oneself as of highest importance is to deny the God Who created you and to identify oneself with the world.

*You adulteresses!* – The language James employs is bold and piercing to anyone who claims to be a child of God. He uses the term “adulteresses” metaphorically, but in doing so he does not diminish whatsoever the magnitude of the offense.

The Greek word itself, *μοιχαλίδες* (*moixalides*), is feminine in gender and thus answers to the biblical metaphor of marriage used to describe the relationship between God and His covenant people. In the Tanach, for instance, Israel is viewed as the wife of Adonai, Who is her husband, to emphasize the covenant relationship established by God with His chosen nation.

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. (Jer 31:31–32)<sup>1</sup>

The same metaphor of marriage is used to describe the *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build (cf. Matt 16:18).

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Messiah I might present you as a pure virgin. (2Cor 11:2)

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” (Rev 19:7–9)<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the *ekklesia* that Yeshua promised to build encompasses all believers from all ages who, by God’s sovereign appointment, have a covenant relationship with God through faith in Yeshua. This covenant relationship is pictured as a marriage in which Yeshua is the Groom and His *ekklesia* is the bride.

With this picture in mind, when James refers to those who profess

1 Note also Jer 3:6–10; 13:27; Isa 57:3; Hos 3:1; 9:1; Ezek 16:38; 23:45.

2 Note also Eph 5:25–27.

to belong to Yeshua but who, in reality, are duped into believing that their “religion” is the means of gaining their own pleasures, they are like a person who is married and wears a wedding ring but is unfaithful to their spouse.

This is why James uses the feminine form, “adulteresses,” rather than the masculine “adulterers,” because the Greek word ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) is feminine in gender. As such, he views everyone who confesses Yeshua to be their Lord and Savior as representing the *ekklēsia* and thus as representing the “bride of Messiah.”

The prophets used the imagery of “adultery” to figuratively describe unfaithful Israel. Since the covenant relationship between the chosen nation of Israel and God was viewed as a marriage, when Israel gave themselves to the worship of idols, they were committing spiritual adultery.

Surely, as a woman treacherously departs from her lover, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,” declares the LORD. (Jer 3:20)

Then it came about after all your wickedness (“Woe, woe to you!” declares the Lord GOD), that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square. You built yourself a high place at the top of every street and made your beauty abominable, and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry. You also played the harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your harlotry to make Me angry. (Ezek 16:23–26)

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.” (Hos 1:2)

Likewise, Yeshua referred to the generation of His time who were rejecting Him as those who were committing spiritual adultery, because the covenant God made with Israel required faithfulness to Him .

But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; (Matt 12:39, cf. 16:4)

The eternal salvation procured by Yeshua for all who are saved is

also revealed to us as a covenant:

and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1Cor 11:24–26)

This teaches us the eternal and infinite significance of being chosen by God unto eternal salvation. All who are truly His have become covenant members with Him, having been joined to Him through faith in the Messiah. This means that all who are "in the Messiah," will seek to be faithful to Him even as a wife and husband are faithful to each other in the covenant of marriage. It is the promise of God through the work of His Spirit, that those Yeshua has redeemed by His death will remain faithful to Him through the work of the indwelling, abiding Spirit.

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge. (2Cor 1:21–22)

Some may wonder why the KJV, for instance, has "Ye adulterers and adulteresses" while the NASB, ESV, NIV, etc. have only "adulteresses." The reason is that there is a textual variant here. Some scribes were apparently surprised at the use of the feminine gender alone, apparently feeling that it was improper to exclude men as well. Thus, they wrote *μοιχοὶ καὶ μοιχαλίδες*, "adulterers and adulteresses" but the weight of textual evidence clearly shows that "adulteresses" alone is the original reading. Thus, early English translations such as the KJV, were done before many of the older manuscripts had been discovered, thus relying upon later manuscripts which had both "adulterers and adulteresses."<sup>1</sup>

... *Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?* – James considers it the norm that all who have come to saving faith in Yeshua recognize and accept that there is a marked difference between the godless perspective of the world and the life of faith in Yeshua which honors Him and His righteousness.

---

1 *μοιχαλίδες*,  $\Phi^{100}$   $\aleph^*$  A B 33. 81. 1241. 1739 *pc* latt sy<sup>p</sup>  
*μοιχοὶ καὶ μοιχαλίδες*,  $\aleph^2$  P  $\Psi$   $\mathfrak{M}$  sy<sup>h</sup>

The Greek word translated as “friendship” in our verse is *φιλία* (*philia*) and is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. It can carry the range of affection from “friendship” to “marital love.” *Philia* is found a number of times in the Lxx of the Tanach, but only in the book of Proverbs.<sup>1</sup> In Prov 5:15–19 the word *philia* is used to describe intimate relations that are reserved for marriage.

It is clear in our text that the word *philia* is used to describe something beyond what our English word “friendship” engenders. When James writes *ἡ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου*, “the *philia* of the world,” he is not describing common courtesy or kindness to others as we live in this fallen world. Rather, he is describing participation in the debauchery of the world which is contrary to the very righteousness of God. We can be sure of this because James describes such “love/friendship with the world” as causing “enmity with God.” The Greek word translated “enmity,” *ἐχθρα* (*exthra*) can also carry the sense of “hostility” and “hatred.”<sup>2</sup> To be at enmity with God is to be against Him and to desire the world, caring nothing about what pleases Him. This is made explicit in the next sentence of our verse.

... *Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* – Here, James makes it very clear what he means by being a “friend of the world.” To be a “friend of the world” is, at the same time, to be an “enemy of God.” Here, the Greek word is *ἐχθρός* (*exthros*), which most often is used in the Apostolic Scriptures to denote an “enemy.” This word is used of Pilate and Herod who were enemies (Lk 23:12). James’ statement here reminds us of John’s words in 1John 2:15.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1Jn 2:15)

John is using the word “love” in a covenant sense. To love the world means to live in accordance with the world’s standards, that which is contrary to the righteous standards of God, and thus to identify with the world and against God.

This fills out the meaning of “adulteresses” with which James begins this verse, for in using this metaphor James is describing the person who professes Yeshua to be their savior yet is marked by intimate con-

1 Prov. 5:19; 7:18; 10:12; 15:17; 17:9; 19:7; 25:10[*note addition in Lxx*]; 27:5.

2 BDAG, “*ἐχθρα*,” p. 419. *ἐχθρα* is a feminine noun cognate to *ἐχθρός*, most often carrying the sense of “enemy.” The word is found 31 times in the Apostolic Scriptures, and the NASB translates it as “enemy” 30 times.

nections with the world. There is no middle ground. There is no such thing as a “carnal believer,” that is, someone who is truly a child of God through faith in Yeshua but whose life is marked by those things which God hates, that is, the things of the world.

Surely every child of God, every believer in Yeshua, retains the sinful nature, the flesh, and must constantly be growing in spiritual strength to put to death the desires of the flesh and to yield themselves to the work of the Spirit in becoming more and more conformed to the very image of Yeshua. But when the believer gives in to the flesh and sins, repentance and the forgiveness God promises will inevitably be forthcoming.

The battle we fight against the draw of the world is one in which every child of God is engaged and will win, for by His grace we endure and through the work of the Spirit, enabling us to live in accordance with the truth of the Scriptures, we persevere in God’s grace until we will see Him face to face. It is this truth to which James now turns.

### **5 – Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?**

That in the previous context James pictures the relationship of the believer with God as that of a marriage, this now helps us understand the manner in which James portrays God as “jealous.” As one commentator puts it:

Verse 5 explains why flirtation with the world is so serious a matter by bringing to mind the jealousy of the Lord, which demands total, unreserved, unwavering allegiance from the people with whom He has joined Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Many commentators have remarked that this verse is one of the most difficult to expound upon in the whole of the Apostolic Scriptures. The reasons for such difficulty may be summed in a number of issues.

First, when James writes that “the Scriptures speaks,” one immediately presumes that he is giving us a quote from the Tanach. However, the text he gives is nowhere specifically found in the Tanach.

Second, due to the manner in which the Greek is written, the main

---

1 Douglas Moo, *James in The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2000), p. 188.

clause of the verse could be translated three different ways:<sup>1</sup>

1. He who caused the Spirit to live in us yearns jealously
2. the spirit He caused to live in us yearns jealously
3. He jealously yearns for the Spirit He made to live in us

Given the previous context, it seems best to understand James' words here to be expressing God's jealousy as a husband longing for His wife's full and unfettered attention and love.

If we understand the word "spirit" to refer to the Holy Spirit, then the meaning would be that God in His sovereign love for His own, desires and directs His Spirit to bring about true sanctification and holiness of the believer in whom He dwells, for God is "jealous" in the right sense of that term for those who are His.

But if we take the word "spirit" to refer to the human spirit which God made to dwell in mankind (Gen 2:7), then James is describing God's rightful jealousy for each of His chosen ones to be completely faithful to Him and to have no attraction to the "world," i.e., that which "hates Yeshua."

The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. (Jn 7:7)

Either way the verse is understood, its main message is clear: God has an enduring love for all of His chosen people, those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Yeshua and who are being sanctified by the work of the Spirit through the word of God, and therefore longs for each of His children to grow in genuine love for Him by living in a way that honors and glorifies Him as the one and only eternal, infinite God.

Thus, since James is not giving us a direct quote from the Tanach, how are we to understand his claim that the Scriptures state that God "jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?" We must understand James as not giving a direct quote from the Tanach, but giving us a general statement of what the Tanach teaches about God being jealous for His own. Thus we read:

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fa-

---

1 See Moo, *James*, pp. 188–191 for grammatical explanations for the various options.

thers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, (Ex 20:5)

for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Ex 34:14)

Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.' (Zech 8:2)

The application of this biblical concept, of God's jealousy for His own, is clear: the love of God for all those who are His, a love which is eternal and infinite, is expressed in our text as a divine longing for the faithfulness, fidelity, and expressed love for those He has redeemed. Knowing this truth should cause each of us to become more and more aligned with that which pleases Him and to put away from our lives anything that we know displeases Him. As His redeemed people, we must constantly commit ourselves to "walk by the Spirit" so that "we will not carry out the desire of the flesh." (Gal 5:16)