

Backsliding

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Turn back with me this morning, please, to the chapter that we read in James, James chapter 4. We're going to look at the first six verses. And you may or may not remember the last time we looked at the end of chapter 3. We were left with two kinds of wisdom, the wisdom of the world and the wisdom that comes from Jesus Christ. And we were left with a standard, a standard by which we are to try and examine our own lives and try and live up to. And that standard there is in verse 17 of chapter 3. The wisdom from above is first pure and impeachable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. And we look at that standard, we look at the mirror which is scripture. And spiritually we stand in front of the mirror and we find that we fall terribly far short. And we read that passage and we say, Lord, which one of us can meet that standard? How can we come near to this standard of Christianity that God expects of us? We seem to fail, Lord, we're miserable.

And we maybe feel like giving up or we feel like complete failures in the light of Christ's standards and in the light of Christ's strength. But in this chapter, God reminds us through James that as Christians, there are two parts of our lives. We live in war and we live in peace. And that's quite right that we are at war and that we are at peace. When we come to Christ, we find that the sin that's within us and all that we do wrong, we're at war with. We're at war with the devil and with the world and with the flesh within us. And we're at peace with God. We've made our peace with Jesus Christ. And so as long as we live here and now, we're going to have a conflict between the war within us, the fighting against sin and the peace that we have in Jesus Christ.

But when we fail to reach up to these standards or get anywhere near the standards of Christ, when we find that we are disinterested in the gospel anymore, when we find that we've fallen away from grace, that we've backslidden from the first love we had with Jesus Christ, when we find that we're in the position where we've given up, we've given in, we're fed up, we're fed up of church and we're fed up of the Bible and we're fed up with God, then we find that we've mixed up our priorities.

There's still war in our lives and there's still peace, but we've mixed them up and we've got them in the wrong priority. And that is what God explains in this chapter. We're no longer at war with the sinful desires within us, but we're at war with each other as Christians and we're at war with God. And instead of being at peace with God, we find we're angry with God and we're at war with him.

And instead of being at war with the world, we're at peace with the world. And we find that we're relaxed in the world's company and we enjoy being in the world. And the whole thing is turned on its head. Our love and our hatred are confused and they're mixed up. And God explains that backsliding, growing cold in the faith comes when we mix up our priorities and get things wrong. And he explains it in the first six verses of this chapter. So he says, first of all, that we fight against ourselves as Christians and we fight with God. Instead of being at peace with one another and at peace with God, we're fighting. We're aggressive against God. And there's wars and fightings among you.

[3 : 42] And the lusts and war in your member, you lust and you have not, you kill, you desire to have and you cannot obtain, you fight and war. It's the language of the battlefield. And he's saying that within the church, that's what's wrong with you, that you're fighting with God and fighting with your fellow man.

You see, when we're saved, we're given a new nature, a nature that's a gift from Jesus Christ implanted in our hearts. But we've still got the old nature inside us. And the old nature causes problems and rears its ugly head throughout our lives. And when we backslide, it's when we've allowed the old nature to gain control again. And we've let the new nature slip away. We've allowed the sinful habits that we had before we became Christians to continue. We're told here that the lusts that war in your members gain control. The desires, the sinful desires in your heart, they roam wild when we backslide. They rule our hearts. Christ doesn't rule anymore. And we find that what is the seed problem is that Christ is removed and that the old nature is back in control and sinful desires well up within us and become powerful. So the problem when we backslide, when we grow cold, when we're disinterested in the gospel anymore, it starts inside. It's no good blaming the church. It's no good blaming the Bible.

It's no good blaming other Christians or people at work or how hard it is in your situation. The problem always begins inside our own hearts. So that desire wells up and selfish ambition wells up within us. And ye lust, we're told in verse 2, and have not. Or we desire and we don't get it.

We return back to days before we were Christ and desire and selfish ambition is on the throne of our heart. We find that desire becomes an insatiable beast within us. It becomes a hungry beast. It becomes a bottomless pit.

It's a black hole. It can't be satisfied. And the more we get, the more we want. And the less satisfied we become with what we're striving after. There's one cry from desire or from lust and it's give, give, give me more. And it's never satisfied. The world looks for peace. The world looks for satisfaction. But it never finds. Supposing God came down this morning and said, I'll give you whatever you want. List me all the desires of your heart. Tell me them. Whatever it is.

[6 : 31] Whatever you want to go and do and see and marry and be with. Whatever it is. I'll give you whatever you want. Everything. And you would find that when you received everything, you would still want more.

It would still be a hunger for more. Because desire is never satisfied. The sinful nature is never content. Never finds what it needs. Never finds what it's looking for. Solomon tried it in Ecclesiastes.

And whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy. For my heart rejoiced in all my labor. And this was my portion of my labor.

Then I looked on all the works that my hand had wrought. And on the labor that I had labored to do. And behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit. There was no prophet under the sun.

He'd built palaces. He'd built vineyards. He'd got harems of women. He'd got everyone he wanted. And the richest man in the world. And the wisdom of the world. Yet he found that none of it satisfied.

[7 : 37] None of it was good for him. Because there was no peace. Desire couldn't be satisfied. Christ satisfies alone. And when you came to Christ, you found your satisfaction in him.

How are our souls this morning? Are we satisfied with life? Are you at peace as you sit here? Or are you longing for Monday morning to come to get outside again?

To fill your desires? To satisfy what you want? Is there a nagging unhappiness? And a nagging lack of content?

And unease in your soul? Because you're not satisfied. And you're not at peace. Desire and our sinful desires will gnaw on and on in our hearts.

And they will carry on. There's a tremendous destructive power in lust and in desire. Which God finds, opposes everything that he stands for.

[8 : 46] When we allow desire to take over, then God gets marginalized. He gets pushed out to the side. It doesn't matter what God says or what God wants.

Because desire comes in on top. So we find that people lust and yet they don't have. But also we find that when desire comes back into our hearts, when we backslide, that there's division within the Christian fellowship.

Not only is there this desire within us, but there's division within the fellowship. Remember we were told that in Christ we're to be peacemakers. We're to be at peace.

We've made peace with God. We're to show it in our relationship with men and women. But what do we find is a picture here. James is saying there's anger, there's war, there's fighting, there's bitterness.

And it's what is happening in the church he was writing to. You see, we should be fighting. But we should be fighting sin within us.

[9 : 48] And fighting sin outside and fighting immorality. But we find that our aim has changed and we're fighting with one another. And we're fighting against God.

A backslidden church is a church that fights with itself. A church that's divided and it's split. A church full of quarrels and splits and fights and full of destruction.

God says if you're angry with a brother, that's as bad in his eyes as murder. It's the same thing. You've broken the law. You've broken the commandment. When you're angry with a brother, it's a serious matter.

Being angry with a brother or a sister in God's cause. God says if you're angry with a brother, that's a serious matter. Desire, this tremendous lust within us which takes over. This self-centeredness creates antagonism.

It allows gossip to slip in. Fault finding becomes very relevant and very obvious within the church. We go around, wandering around, looking for specks in people's eyes.

[10 : 54] We can't keep banging into things because of the beam that's sticking out of our own eye. We're looking for faults. We're looking for mistakes. We're ignoring advice.

We're rejecting the fellowship. We find that there's plenty room to stir. Plenty room to cause division. We make our stand. We will take up arms.

We will uphold what we believe is our just cause. While the world outside goes to hell. While Christ looks down on us as a church with tears pouring down his face.

And we're unfurling our banner which says all over it, Desire, selfish ambition. That is what James is saying. It happens within a church and within individual hearts when we backslide.

So our relationship with ourselves is wrong as one another among Christians. Because of this desire.

[11 : 56] Because of this wrongful desire. But also our relationship with God is wrong. Ye ask and ye receive not. Because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

And also the last bit of verse 2. Yet ye have not. Because ye ask not. So when desire takes over again. When selfish ambition takes over. When we backslide and go away from Christ.

Our relationship with God is ruined. We don't ask. We don't pray. We're so busy chasing what we want to do and we want to be. We forget to pray.

We forget that we need to do work in prayer and in activity for Christ. We think God is disinterested in what we're chasing. We think we can't possibly tell God about this desire.

Or that desire. Well if we can't tell God. If we can't share with God. Then should we have this desire at all? Should we want to do what we're doing?

[12 : 56] If we can't share it with God. If we can't ask for his blessing. If we can't plead for him to put a blanket of blessing upon us. Then is it right that we should ask for it at all?

It's no good being DIY Christians. Thinking we don't need God. We don't need to ask his help. We don't need to pray. Do we ask? You do not have because you do not ask.

Are we asking Christians? Is there a relationship? Lord I need this thing. In your will. Is Jesus Christ the first person we go to with our desires.

With our requests. Or is he the last resort? I've tried everything else. I've tried on my own. Maybe I need spiritual help. We go to God. We do not have because we do not ask. And it goes on to say we do not get.

Because we do not ask in a right way. When we do ask. Because Christ has been dethroned. And because self is back on the throne. Because we're back slidden.

[13 : 58] Then we find that our motives are wrong in what we ask. The throne of our heart has been taken over. Prayer just becomes a request spot.

Becomes a lucky dip. God becomes our Santa Claus. He becomes our servant. Lord I need. Lord I want. Lord give me. Because I.

I. I. And we replace Christ with self. The motive. The motive. Is wrong. Christ's glory. Isn't taken into account. And even spiritually.

We can ask the wrong thing. Lord fill this church. So that we can look good. In the free church. And pass out as the best. Congregation in the land. No. It must be for God's glory. So that this place.

Will be filled with God's glory. And so that people outside. Will shudder. Because of God. Not because of us. Because of God. So the first thing that's wrong.

[15 : 00] Is that. We are fighting. Among ourselves. And fighting with God. When we should be fighting. With the sin within us. And at war. With the devil.

It's. Upside down. It's topsy-turvy. It's the wrong way. And in the other. Part of this. Section. We find. That the other problem.

In backsliding. Is friendship. With the world. We ought to be friends. With Jesus Christ. And we ought to find. The world. Is not our friend anymore. But when things go wrong.

When we don't. Seek Christ's wisdom. Then. We're enemies with God. As we've seen. And we become friends. With the world. All over again. The old nature.

Is in control. And we're backslidden. And we would rather be. With the world. Instead of God. We're much happier. When we're away. From Christian company.

[15 : 57] When we're away. From the gospel. When we're away. From the Bible. We're much more at ease. With the conversation. Of our friends. At work. Or the jokes.

That they tell. Or their aims. Or their ideas. Is. We're much happier. And contented. When we're with them. We're delighted. Just to be. At home. To be entertained.

To be pampered. Away from God's word. Away from prayer. Away from God's house. Away from God's people. We find. We kind of cringe. When we see God's people.

And we cross over. To the other side. Of the street. The danger is. God says. That. If we make our friendship. With the world again. Verse 4.

You adulterers and adulteresses. Know you not. That friendship. Of the world. Is enmity. With God. He's saying. That if that's the case. If we become friends. Again with the world. Then. God is our enemy.

[16 : 51] We've made enemies. With God. And that is a tremendously. One of the most solemn things. Surely. In the whole Bible. For Christians. For Christ. Who died on Calvary.

For you. And you've turned your back on him. And you've gone back. Into the world. It's like saying. To hell. With Jesus Christ. It's like saying. Crucify him. All over again.

It's saying. He died on a cross. For my sins. So what? I've changed my mind. I'm going my own way again. I prefer. The company of the world. Send him to the grave.

We choose. Enemy. Territory. We despise. Christ's love. We choose. To be on the wrong side. As Christians.

And for unbelievers. The same is true. If you are somebody. Who is out. With Christ. Who has not a new heart. Or a new soul.

[17 : 46] Through Christ's work. Who do not trust in Christ. For your salvation. Then you're his enemy. According to himself. You've spurned his love. You're the enemy of the one. That's allowed you.

To come into his house. The enemy of the one. Who gave you breath. Gave your heartbeat. This morning. Your soul. Is at stake. From being an enemy of God.

Oh. I'd rather you had an enemy. In your house. I'd rather you had a best friend. Who was your enemy. I'd rather that you had the state. And the police. As your enemy. Or the queen.

Or the IRA. Or the mass murderer. The greatest mass murderer. There is. I would rather. All these people were your enemy. Than God. And Jesus Christ.

It's an awesome. Frightening thing. To be an enemy. Of the living God. Can we be relaxed. And contented.

[18 : 40] And casual. As we come in our worship. If we recognize. That we're in dangerous territory. Or recognize. That we're the enemy. Of the creator. Or recognize.

That there's people outside. Who are God's enemies. So God says. That we. End up in enemy territory. And he also says.

That if we backslidden. If we've fallen away. From the love. Of Jesus Christ. That it's spiritual adultery. He tells us. That we're adulterers. And adulteresses. If that is how we're acting.

You see the Bible. Again and again. And I'm sure. You know it well. Because we often say. Here the. Religion. Our faith. Is seen in the Bible. Is illustrated. As a marriage.

Between God. And between his people. Between Jesus Christ. And his church. And like any other marriage. We vow. When we come to Christ. That we've forsaken all others. And.

[19 : 35] That we will stick with Christ. For better. Or for worse. Backsliding. Is when we turn our back. On Jesus Christ. And on that love. And on that commitment.

So it's adultery. We stop talking. With our saviour. With our lover. We stop sharing with him. We stop loving him. His company becomes dull. And ordinary.

And our passions. And our desires for him. Have gone. They lie elsewhere. We've been attracted. To something. Or somebody else. And Christ. Is dull.

Spiritual adultery. Sets in. There is division. We break. God's heart. We grieve.

His spirit. We cause sorrow. In the Trinity. God is affected. By how we live. By how we act. As Christians.

- [20 : 33] By our lukewarmness. Or by our. Burning heat. Or by our stone coldness. Verse. Five. Which is a. Incredibly difficult verse.
- To understand. But I would see it. As being. A verse. Which speaks of God's jealousy. And God's loving jealousy. For his own people. He is jealously.
- Burning with a loving concern. For you as a Christian. As an individual. It's the jealousy. Of the marriage bond. It's the jealousy. Of love. And of purity.
- He's jealous. For your love. He's jealous. For your holiness. He's jealous. For your greatness. He's jealous. That his glory. Will shine. In your life.
- God of the universe. Jealous. Over us. He wants us. He cares about us. He has moved.
- [21 : 28] He has touched. But when we're in love. With the world. And when our passions. Have grown cold. And when our desire. Is for ourselves.
- And our desire for Christ. Is drowned. The passion. And the fire. Of our religious. Fervor. Is dampened. Do we care. That God.
- Is jealously. In pain. For us. If we're backslidden. Do we care. That it hurts. The very trinity. That we're backslidden. Does it matter. To us.
- That we're backslidden. Does it matter. To us. That others. Are backslidden. In this congregation. Does it matter. To this. That people have stopped. Coming from this congregation. And that God is grieved.
- Do we know. Who they are. And do we care. That they've stopped. Coming. That the love. And the marriage. Bond. That they have. With Christ. Is being adulterated.
- [22 : 26] So we find. That he explains it. In terms. Of being an enemy. And. Of an adulterous. Relationship. But he concludes. By telling us. Thankfully.
- That his grace. Is sufficient. To overcome. God resisteth the proud. But giveth grace. To the humble. He giveth.
- More grace. There's grace for us. In verse six. Backsliding. A heart has grown cold. It stems from pride. Pride. That it says.
- Mentioned here. Pride. Pride. Feeds our selfish desires. And our selfish desires. Feed our pride. So they both get fat together. And grow bigger. And push God.
- Out of the way. And if we stand proud. God resists us. God is opposed to us. If we will stand proud. If we reject Christ.
- [23 : 23] If we reject salvation. If we reject his authority. And his demands. God resists us. God is opposed to us. He'll not force salvation.
- Down anybody's throat. He'll not make you a Christian. He's not a puppy dog. That will beg. And demand. That you accept him. He's not a God.
- Who will change the terms. Of his salvation. For your particular character. Or for mine. God is opposed to us. If we're proud. He will leave you.
- You're free to reject him. You're free to go your own way. You're free to be in control. Of your own life. You're free to choose desire. And selfish ambition.
- And popularity. And ease. And freedom from the devil's interest in you. You can choose that way of life. But therefore you choose also the consequences.
- [24 : 19] And you will choose God's resistance. God's opposition. God's being your enemy. Is it worth remaining outwith of Christ?
- Can anything or anybody else in your life satisfy that ache? Christ alone can satisfy. And God will resist you if you resist him.

And he will oppose you if you oppose him. Humility. We're told here. Is the basic requirement of our Christian lives.

And of our ongoing lives as Christians. Seeing our need. Seeing our need to pray. Seeing our weakness. Seeing our feebleness. Seeing our mistakes.

Putting others first. Putting ourselves last. For those who will be humble. There is plenty of grace. There is the solution. There is the answer.

[25 : 20] Are you having problems in your Christian life? Try applying to God for his grace. In all humility. And we will find. That as we look into the pit of grace.

We can't see the bottom. It will never run out. It's inexhaustible. We can ask for so much. We can ask for grace. That would move mountains. God gives us it in Jesus Christ.

We needn't fail. We needn't be failures. I needn't be a failure. As a Christian. Because God provides the grace. If we're humble enough to plead for it.

And to ask. We meet God's standards. By applying for God's grace. And that grace never runs out. We'll find the next time we study.

That he goes into more depth. About how we overcome backsliding. And how we overcome the problems. Of the wisdom of the world. Amen. Let us pray.

[26 : 20] Gracious God. We ask for your wisdom. To go before us this day. And we ask for your power. And for your strength. And for your guidance.

Forgive the feebleness of our lives. And the appalling lack of passion. And vision and concern for the lost. Forgive us oh Lord God.

For the mistakes we make. And we give thanks. That we can come to a God. Who is willing to provide. Who gives us all we need. All we ask.

In his name. And for his glory. Make us a people. Who are willing to request great things. Bless our requests. In private and in public. Bless our prayer meetings.

We ask that you would make us a people. Who will long to pray. And be burdened to pray. And to plead for God's help. Because that is what our idea of God's sovereignty is.

[27 : 17] That because you're so sovereign. We need to ask. And ask and ask for your help. Lord bless us. Bless us in this coming day. The remainder of this day. And this coming week.

And grant us the help. And strength. To live for Jesus Christ. Amen.ós-