

James 4:1-10 The Cause and Cure of Conflict among Brethren

Dear Mr. Bluedorn,

Would you mind giving me a literal translation of James 4:5. I am reading it from two different languages and they simply say different things. Gracias! Carolina

XT

1 What {is} the cause of {hostile} conflicts and {contentious} disputes among you? {It is, is it} not, from this cause: from those pleasures [/cravings] of yours, which serve as soldiers [/wage war] among your members. 2 You are {always} strongly desiring, and yet you are never possessing; you are {always, speaking spiritually,} committing murder and coveting, and yet you are never able to obtain {your pleasures}; you are {always contentiously} disputing and having {hostile} conflicts. You are never possessing because of your never {rightly} making a {spiritual} claim [/petitioning {prayer}]. 3 You are {always formally} making a claim, and yet you are never {actually} taking possession {of the thing claimed}, because you are {always} making the claim with wrong {motives, namely:} that you may freely spend [/consume] {the thing claimed} **on your pleasures.**

4 {O you} adulterers and adulteresses {speaking spiritually}! You do know, {do you} not, that **friendliness with** [/active fondness toward] **the world** is **enmity with** [/active hostility toward] **God**? So then, **whoever may prefer** [/choose] **to be a** {fond} **friend of the world**, he {thereby} makes himself a {hostile} enemy of God. 5 Or are you {in the habit of} thinking that **the Scripture** is {recurrently} saying {this} for no {effective} purpose: {that} the spirit {— the inner personality —} which He has caused to dwell in us **is** {continually} **yearning toward envy** [/resentfulness].

6 Yet He does grant a **superior** [/greater] **grace**. For this reason He says, “**God** arrays Himself in battle against [/opposes] {those who are} proud [/haughty /arrogant], but He grants grace to {those who are} lowly [/humble /unpretentious].” [Proverbs 3:34] 7 So then, put yourselves in submission under God: take a stand against [/resist] the devil, {for only} then will he flee for safety from you; 8 draw close to God, {for only} then will He draw close to you; {outwardly} cleanse {your} hands, {O you} sinners, and {inwardly} purify {your} hearts, {O you who are, practically speaking} between two opinions; 9 lament, and mourn, and weep aloud, let **your laughter** be changed **into mourning**, and your joy into shame [/dejection /horror]; 10 cause yourselves to be humbled in the sight of the Lord, {for only} then shall He lift you up [/exalt you].

NKJV

1 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires* for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Actually, the Greek language will allow different translations of James 4:5.

XT = eXegetical Translation, 2000 etc.
 NKJV = New King James Version, 1982
 NASV = New American Standard Version, 1977, 1995 update, margin 1
 NIV = New International Version, 1978 edition, 1984 edition, margin 1, margin 2
 TNIV = Today's New International Version, 2001
 ESV = English Standard Version, 2001, 2007 update
 HCSB = Holman Christian Standard Bible, 2004, margin 1, margin 2

Greek	ἢ	δοκεῖτε	ὅτι	κενῶς	ἡ γραφή	λέγει;	Πρὸς φθόνον	ἐπιποθεῖ	τὸ πνεῦμα	ὃ	κατῴκησεν	ἐν ἡμῖν
NKJV	(1) Or	(2) do you think	(3) that	(6) in vain,	(4) the Scripture	(5) says	(12) jealously”?	(11) yearns	(7) “The Spirit	(8) Who	(9) dwells	(10) in us
NASV Update	(1) Or	(2) do you think	(3) that	(6) to no purpose:	(4) the Scripture	(5) speaks	(8) jealously [Lit. desires to jealousy]	(7) “He (9) desires	(10) the Spirit [1963 ed. the spirit]	(11) which	(12) He has made to dwell	(13) in us”?
NASV Update marg 1	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(12) with envy?	(11) lusts	(7) The spirit	(8) which	(9) He has made to dwell	(10) in us
NIV 1978	(1) Or	(2) do you think	(--) ---	(5) without reason	(3) Scripture	(4) says	(10) toward envy?	(9) tends	(6) that the spirit	(--) ---	(7) he caused to live	(8) in us
NIV 1984	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(9) envies	(10) intensely?	““““	““““	““““	““““
NIV marg 1	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(7) jealously	(6) that God (8) longs for	(9) the spirit	(10) that	(11) he made to live	(12) in us?
NIV marg 2	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(10) jealously?	(9) longs	(6) that the Spirit	(--) ---	(7) he caused to live	(8) in us
TNIV	(1) Or	(2) do you think	(--) ---	(5) without reason	(3) Scripture	(4) says	(7) jealously	(6) that he (8) longs for	(9) the spirit	(--) ---	(10) he has caused to dwell	(11) in us?
TNIV marg 1	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(9) envies	(10) intensely?	(6) that the spirit	(--) ---	(7) he caused to dwell	(8) in us
TNIV marg 2	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(10) jealously?	(9) longs	(6) that the Spirit	(--) ---	(7) he caused to dwell	(8) in us
ESV	(1) Or	(2) do you suppose	(--) ---	(3) it is to no purpose	(4) that the Scripture	(5) says,	(7) jealously	(6) “He yearns	(8) over the spirit	(9) that	(10) he has made to dwell	(11) in us”?
HCSB	(1) Or	(2) do you think	(--) ---	(3) it’s without reason	(4) the Scripture	(5) says	(10) jealously?	(9) yearns	(6) that the Spirit	(--) ---	(7) He has caused to live	(8) in us
HCSB marg 1	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(13) jealously?	(6) He (12) yearns	(9) the Spirit	(7) who	(8) caused (10) to live	(11) in us
HCSB marg 2	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	““““	(7) jealously	(6) He (8) yearns for	(9) the Spirit	(--) ---	(10) He made to live	(11) in us?
XT Gloss	(1) Or	(2) are †you {in the habit of} thinking	(3) that	(6) for no {effective} purpose:	(4) the Scripture	(5) is {recurrently} saying {this}	(12) toward envy.	(11) is {continually} yearning	(7) {that} the spirit {— the inner personality — }	(8) which	(9) He has caused to dwell	(10) in us

The expression “the Scripture ... says” (found in these places, Mark 15:28; John 7:38, 42; 19:24, 37; Romans 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; Galatians 3:8; 4:30; 1 Timothy 5:18; James 2:23) is often used as a formula to introduce quotations, paraphrases, or allusions from the Old Testament. The expression is used at least once (John 7:42) to introduce, not a direct quote, close paraphrase, or allusion, but a summary of Scripture teaching. In James 4:5, the words which follow the expression “the Scripture says” are found nowhere in the Old Testament, so it seems that what James must mean by “the Scripture says” is that the words which follow must give the general sense or tenor of Scripture on the matter.

Reference to the “spirit” may refer to God the Spirit, or it may refer to “the spirit of the man which is in him” (1 Corinthians 2:11, compare Proverbs 20:27).

The text uses the word φθόνος, which means “envy.” It does not use the word ζήλος, which means “zeal” or “jealousy.” In English, we may use the words “jealousy” and “envy” rather loosely and interchangeably, but the Greek terms are distinct. φθόνος “envy” means malicious ill-will, resentfulness, bitterness, invidiousness, holding of a grudge, refusing. ζήλος “zeal” means zealous imitation, emulation, rivalry in a positive noble sense or in a negative jealous sense. Jealousy is when someone desires what another one has, and he may seek (positively) to have it by imitating it or (negatively) to have it by taking it; envy is when someone desires what he can never have, so he seeks to destroy those who do have it. The two can be mixed, where someone is both envious to the point of wanting to destroy the possessor of something and jealous to the point of wanting to imitate or to take what he can of that something.

Besides James 4:5, here are the other New Testament uses of φθόνος or φθονέω.

NKJV **Matthew 27:18** For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

NKJV **Mark 15:10** For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

NKJV **Romans 1:29** being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers,

NKJV **Galatians 5:21** envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

NKJV **Galatians 5:26** Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

NKJV **Philippians 1:15** Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:

NKJV **1 Timothy 6:4** he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,

NKJV **Titus 3:3** For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

NKJV **1 Peter 2:1** Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,

As far as I know and am able to discern and reason, the Spirit of God does not – could not – envy, so I conclude the text must be speaking of the human spirit.

Though Scripture may not use the word for envy very often, it nevertheless describes many situations of envy. Satan both envies and is jealous of God. Joseph’s brothers both envied and were jealous of Joseph. Scripture says explicitly that the Lord Jesus was delivered to death because of envy. Many persons believe that envy is the strongest and most driving of human emotions. Modern politics is largely driven by envy and jealousy. Envy is one of the principal warring members of the carnal nature of the old man which wars against the spiritual nature of the new man.

NKJV **Jeremiah 17:9** The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

So, does this translation and interpretation fit the context?

Here is my own translation of James 4:1-10.

XT — James 4:1-10

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2 You are {always} strongly desiring, and yet you are never possessing; you are {always, speaking spiritually,} committing murder and coveting, and yet you are never able to obtain {your pleasures}; you are {always contentiously} disputing and having {hostile} conflicts. You are never possessing because of your never {rightly} making a {spiritual} claim [/petitioning {prayer}]. 3 You are {always formally} making a claim, and yet you are never {actually} taking possession {of the thing claimed}, because you are {always} making the claim with wrong {motives, namely:} that you may freely spend [/consume] {the thing claimed} **on your pleasures**.

4 {O you} adulterers and adulteresses {speaking spiritually}! You do know, {do you} not, that **friendliness with** [/active fondness toward] **the world is enmity with** [/active hostility toward] **God**? So then, **whoever may prefer** [/choose] **to be a** {fond} **friend of the world**, he {thereby} makes himself a {hostile} enemy of God. 5 Or are you {in the habit of} thinking that **the Scripture** is {recurrently} saying {this} for no {effective} purpose: {that} the spirit {— the inner personality —} which He has caused to dwell in us **is** {continually} **yearning toward envy** [/resentfulness].

6 Yet He does grant a **superior** [/greater] **grace**. For this reason He says, “**God** arrays Himself in battle against [/opposes] {those who are} **proud** [/haughty /arrogant], but He grants grace to {those who are} **lowly** [/humble /unpretentious].” [Proverbs 3:34] 7 So then, put yourselves in submission under God: take a stand against [/resist] the devil, {for only} then will he flee for safety from you; 8 draw close to God, {for only} then will He draw close to you; {outwardly} cleanse {your} hands, {O you} sinners, and {inwardly} purify {your} hearts, {O you who are, practically speaking} between two opinions; 9 lament, and mourn, and weep aloud, let **your laughter** be changed **into mourning**, and your joy into shame [/dejection /horror]; 10 cause yourselves to be humbled in the sight of the Lord, {for only} then shall He lift you up [/exalt you].

1-3

James attributes their conflicts and disputes to the pleasures which serve as soldiers in their members. More specifically, he names their spiritual murdering and coveting – the two key elements of envy – the desire to destroy somebody for what he has. Whatever they pray and petition God for is always twisted by their wrong motivations in the direction of serving their own pleasures instead of serving God’s good pleasure

4-5

Fondness toward the world is hostility toward God. James asks sarcastically if it is for no purpose that the Scripture constantly teaches that man is driven by envy – ultimately, envy toward God, wanting to destroy God and take His property. Fondness toward the world amounts to exactly that.

6-10

God grants a grace superior to the yearning toward envy, namely, the grace of humility and submission to God. We must outwardly correct our ways and inwardly correct our thinking, humbling ourselves and

seeking His good pleasure; then and then only may we expect our petitions answered. (The Imperative plus the future is a Hebrew conditional idiom conveying the “only then.”)