

Exegetical Difficulties with Jms 4:5-6: Ignored Parenthesis Has Blasphemous Results; Holy Spirit Deeply Loves; God Opposes Arrogant, Gives Grace to Humble

- 6) James 4:5 is declared by most theologians to be one of the most difficult in Scripture to translate. This has resulted in a mistranslation of the last half of the verse in all the major English versions: (1) KJV: “The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” (2) NIV: “The spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?” (3) NET: “The spirit that God caused to live within us has an envious yearning”? (4) NASB: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?
- 7) The problem that the commentators wrestle with is the fact that there is no place in the Old Testament where such a quote is found, and we can thank God for that.
- 8) In fact, all English versions so botch the verse that it makes it almost impossible to explain what their translations actually mean other than they are blasphemous.
- 9) Let’s start with the NASB which reads:

James 4:5 - Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?

- 10) The *Scofield Study Bible*: NASB offers a footnote that reads: “The spirit which He has made to dwell in us lusts with envy” [NKJV]. Are we to believe that such blasphemous statements can possibly be an inspired text?
- 11) At least the NASB translators chose the word “jealously” rather than “envy” but the Greek word —φθόνος, *phthonos*— is not an adverb but rather a noun and it does not describe “desires.”
- 12) The fact of the matter is that none of these translations make any sense. There is no such quote in the Old Testament.
- 13) The Holy Spirit is not “lusting to envy” or “jealously desiring.” The problem is resolved when it is realized that what James quotes is not in verse 5 but in verse 6 which is taken from Proverbs 3:34.
- 14) What is in between is a parenthesis in which James inserts the fact that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer whom He loves.
- 15) Further, all translations link the word jealousy, or *phthonos* with (1) “lusteth” (KJV), (2) “intensely” (NIV), (3) “yearning” (NET), and (4) “desires” (NASB).
- 16) The Greek word that is translated “desires” in the NASB is actually a verb, the present active indicative of *ἐπιποθέω*, *epipotheō*. The major versions’ translations are fine with the gross exception of the KJV’s “lusteth.”
- 17) But the word that best transmits the idea is “love,” in fact it refers to a love that longs after its object and describes the enduring, unwavering, unconditional love that the Holy Spirit has for all believers, including reversionists.

- 18) The words “jealous” (*phthonos*) and “deeply loves” (*epipatheō*) are separated: one outside the parenthesis and the other inside it. Here is the corrected translation of the two verses:

James 4:5 - Or do you imagine that the Scripture speaks without purpose in the face of the jealous [φθόνος, *phthonos*] reversionist (The Holy Spirit, Who dwells permanently in us, deeply loves [ἐπιποθέω, *epipatheō*].

v. 6 - Moreover, He keeps on giving greater grace. On which account He says): [**Proverbs 3:34**] “God keeps on opposing the arrogant but He keeps on giving grace to the humble.”

- 19) From this we can see that although the Holy Spirit deeply loves the jealous reversionist, He still opposes them because of their arrogance, yet he will give greater grace to them if they will humble themselves to God.