



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

TRUE FAITH IS NOT A FRIEND OF THIS WORLD-PART 2: JAMES 4:1-6

TO: COLORADO LEGISLATORS, SPOUSES AND THE GOVERNOR

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The book of James was written to believers who were scattered abroad because of persecution. In chapter 3, the foundation was laid for believers to live and operate from a wisdom that comes from God. Worldly wisdom is evidenced by jealousy, selfish ambition and pride rooted in Satan's lies rather than God's truth. It stands in direct contrast to "wisdom that comes from above" characterized by humility and gentleness that's heavenly, spiritual and from God. Yet in James 4, it is clear that "believers" are operating from a worldly wisdom revealed by conflicts, envy, self centered selfishness leading to disorder, chaos and every evil practice. Relationships with one another were marked by "quarrels and conflicts". Moving from the picture of a life governed by heavenly wisdom to the appalling picture in the opening verses of chapter 4 is startling, but it demonstrates effectively the need for this vigorous rebuke now administered.¹ Here in James 4, the author addresses those who seek to satisfy their selfish desires rather than yielding to God.

I. TRAGIC RESULTS OF SELFISH PLEASURES - JAMES 4:2-3

James 4:1-3: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2. You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

In James 4:1 the question is asked, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" Their personal, uncontrolled pursuit of fulfilling their fleshly desires is the source of such conflict. These self seeking pleasures "wage war", they carry on a military campaign with the goal of securing the satisfaction of their craving. Where is this war being waged? James says "within your members". James is referring here to the inner battle of sinful, selfish craving described in Romans 7:18-25. James 4:1 reveals the **internal** conflict that ensues from pursuing self centered desires and James 4:2-3 exposes the tragic **external** conflicts that result.

A. RESULT OF UNSATISFIED LUST - JAMES 4:2A

James 4:2a: "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder."

James deals with the external conflict resulting from pursuing selfish passions, directing his rebuke clearly by using repeatedly the pronoun "you".

1. "YOU LUST"- JAMES 4:2A

%lust+Greek %epithyneo, to strongly desire, crave for.

Clearly there were those in the church whose lives were consumed by their selfish lusts, craving for what they desired. This sadly represents the

opposite focus of believers who live to pursue God's pleasures and please Him alone. These however were consumed by their pleasures, not God's. James addresses their selfishness, their sinful lust whether it was for prestige, money, position, power, affections of others we do not know, but, the context makes clear this was a seeking to be gratified by lustful desires.

2. "AND DO NOT HAVE"- JAMES 4:2A

James shows that while they lust, and pursue their sinful craving, that desire becomes a frustrated desire. They sought satisfaction and self advancement in preference to God's will and work...the aim to find true satisfaction through self gratification is an ever eluding goal.² Their craving did not bring the desired satisfaction. Maybe they even had what they longed for, yet it didn't provide the satisfaction they thought it would bring.

3. "SO YOU COMMIT MURDER"- JAMES 4:2A

When the lusting person cannot satisfy his sinful desires, the result is destructive. Obviously James wanted to startle his readers with the realization of the depth their evil cravings could go. The word for "murder" is very difficult to translate. It simply means to kill. This of course refers to violent actions. If actual murders were taking place in their midst, the government would have stepped in. It seems more likely that James could be reminding them of where their lustful, unfulfilled desires could lead if they go unrestrained. The danger of serious violence is real. The struggles they have stem from their desires to get what they don't have. When a person cannot satisfy his sinful desire, the reactions can be destructive.

B. THE RESULT OF UNSATISFIED ENVY - JAMES 4:2B

James 4:2: "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel."

1. "YOU ENVY"- JAMES 4:2B

%envious+Greek %zeloo, a synonym of lust, but denotes an even stronger desire, to covet.

"Envious" is another present tense verb exposing the escalating intensity of pursuing fleshly desires. "You" who seek the uncontrolled desire to fulfill your passion are "envious". Epictetus, a second century moralist noted that Caesar can free people from "wars and fighting" but not from "envy".³ Envy is the insatiable desire to want what somebody else has whether it be success, good fortune or possessions.

2. "AND CANNOT OBTAIN"- JAMES 4:2B

You are envious and you cannot have what you want. You cannot possess what you so deeply desire, for it belongs to someone else. You desire but

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can never obtain. Your satisfaction is brief and your desire is always for more. When these intense, fierce desires go unfulfilled and cannot be satisfied, they lead to disastrous results.

3. "SO YOU FIGHT AND QUARREL"- JAMES 4:2B

The Greek word "so" points to a causal relationship between the lusting and the killing, between the envying and the fighting and quarrelling. These frustrated, unfulfilled desires lead to fighting and wars. Because you don't get what you want, there is an escalating cycle of destructive disputes and conflicts. James makes it clear that pursuing selfish, sinful pleasures for self gratification wages an immense war within the believer's heart and these frustrated desires will be demonstrated externally as well.

C. TRAGIC SPIRITUAL CONDITION - JAMES 4:2C

James 4:2: "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask."

James goes on to say "You do not have because you do not ask" Instead of turning to God to satisfy they turn to themselves and their own efforts. Their desires could be met by their own pursuit, hard work, and wisdom to get what they wanted. They don't want to ask God because they don't really want what He would give them. Their pursuit is for temporal, self gratification and not the eternal fulfillment that comes from only pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ. They were seeking their pleasures, not God's and we see the fulfillment of James 3:14-16 come to pass here. Ephesians 2:1-3 describes them as living according to the course of this world. 1 John 2:15-16 depicts them as consumed by the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. Mark 4:18-19 illustrates them in Jesus' parable of sower and the seed. They are the ones choked by the cares of this world and the craftiness of riches. These things characterize their worldly passion for personal satisfaction and reveal their tragic spiritual condition.

D. TRAGIC MOTIVES - JAMES 4:3

James 4:2-3: "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

First James says at the end of verse 2 that you don't even pray or ask God and now he goes on to further incriminate them by saying that "You ask and do not receive." (James 4:3a) This group prays but James suggests they pray and ask with selfish motives and they do not receive answers to those selfish prayers. Prayer is not meant to serve our sinful lusts and desires. God is not some genie in the sky who will give help as we wish. These prayers will receive no hearing from God. These people are asking God for what they want rather than His will. In Matthew 7:7 clearly Jesus had in mind that asking which has as its focus and motive God's name, God's kingdom and

God's will. - Matthew 6:9-10, not an asking that had the purpose of indulgence of those "pleasures" that are at war with our souls.⁴

Then James gives us the reason that God does not answer their prayers, "because you ask with wrong motives." (James 4:3b)

%wrong+Greek %kakos," bad, evil, wicked, in an evil manner.

Why does God not answer their prayers, why do they not receive? What are the wrong motives? They ask for their self centered pleasures and not God's. Their motives are totally selfish and worldly. They are asking for the purpose of their own personal indulgence. God gives us what we need and not what we greed. This prayer will not be heard.

What was the reason behind their "wrong motives"? James says "so that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:3c) They are not seeking to please and honor God but rather to please and gratify themselves.

%spend+Greek %dapanao," completely use up, squander.

This term is used in Luke 15:14 referring to how the prodigal son completely used up all his resources by squandering his inheritance as he pursued his selfish desires. Hiebert comments, "They are not accused of praying for sinful things, but their basic purpose in making their request is to further personal pleasure."⁵ They are asking God for those things that would satisfy their worldly lusts. The ask was with the intention of gratifying and indulging themselves in their own selfish desires, their lusts, their appetites that will never fully be satisfied. They will only be left searching for more. God alone satisfies fully.

This is so sad. These people desired their way and not God's, seeking their pleasures and not God's. That's the way of the world. James talks about the wrong motives, but what's the right motive? 2 Corinthians 5:9 says this, "Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." What is your ambition, your pursuit in life? Is it to please God or yourself? The disastrous results of a self seeking, sinful life reveals a tragic spiritual condition of one in need of a Savior. Our highest and greatest pursuit...is knowing, serving and glorifying God forever. Don't wait!

¹Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 219.

²Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 225.

³Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.183.

⁴Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.185.

⁵Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 226.