

INTRODUCTION

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to James chapter 4.

Last week we considered verse 1 in our current study on “Worldliness,” and this morning we’re looking at verses 2-3.

James 4:1-3 says, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. 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.”

“The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16) is what the apostle John terms as “worldliness.”

And with this trilogy we come to our present text.

James has identified to his readers that the “source” of their “quarrels and conflicts” is their “pleasures” or hedonism or “their uncontrolled personal desire.”

They wanted “to fulfill every passion and whim that [promised] sensual satisfaction and enjoyment.”¹

Because of this, they were slaves to their own desires, tyrannized by their passions.

So their “violent verbal disputes,”² resulted in...

¹ John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James, 187.

² Douglas Moo, James, 138.

CONFLICT WITH OTHERS (v.1a) and their...

CONFLICT WITH SELF (vv.1b-3)

This “war” that was in their “members” represented the seat of the desires and passions.

And instead of considering them as dead as Colossians 3:5 says, they were yielding to them and the inevitable result was conflict.

“When sinful pleasures gain the dominance in a person, that individual will become the center of strife.”³

And “when desires for the wrong kinds of pleasure are frustrated and unfulfilled, they also wage external war.”⁴

That brings us to verse 2.

³ Vernon Doersken, James.

⁴ John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible: James 4:2.

James says, “You lust and you do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.”

He says, “You lust.” This is the Greek word *epithumeo* which refers to having a desire or longing of any kind, but the context makes it clear that the desire mentioned here is inordinate, misdirected, and sinful.

James has already mentioned this word in chapter one, verse fourteen stating that the source of temptation was not God but “his own desires.”

In 4:2, James does not mention the specific object of that desire, because the particular object does not matter as far as his point here is concerned. He is addressing what is at the heart of his pleasures....lust.

The phrase “and do not have” in chapter 4, verse 2 “records that their self-seeking was often frustrated.

This thought, mentioned [three times] in this verse, underlines the fact that the methods they used did not bring the desired satisfactions.

And when they did attain the thing fought for, they found that it did not yield the satisfaction anticipated.”⁵

It’s like the story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:1-15.

He wanted his sister so bad that when he finally forced himself on her, he hated her more than he had previously loved her.

Listen to the story:

⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, James, 246.

“Now it was after this that Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar, and Amnon the son of David loved her. Amnon was so frustrated because of his sister Tamar that he made himself ill, for she was a virgin, and it seemed hard to Amnon to do anything to her. But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David’s brother; and Jonadab was a very shrewd man. He said to him, “O son of the king, why are you so depressed morning after morning? Will you not tell me?” Then Amnon said to him, “I am in love with Tamar, the sister of my brother Absalom.” Jonadab then said to him, “Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill; when your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘Please let my sister Tamar come and give me some food to eat, and let her prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat from her hand.’ ” So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, “Please let my sister Tamar come and make me

a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand.” Then David sent to the house for Tamar, saying, “Go now to your brother Amnon’s house, and prepare food for him.” So Tamar went to her brother Amnon’s house, and he was lying down. And she took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. She took the pan and dished them out before him, but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, “Have everyone go out from me.” So everyone went out from him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food into the bedroom, that I may eat from your hand.” So Tamar took the cakes which she had made and brought them into the bedroom to her brother Amnon. When she brought them to him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, “Come, lie with me, my sister.” But she answered him, “No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing! “As for me, where could I get rid of my reproach? And as for you, you will be like one of the fools in

Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.”

However, he would not listen to her; since he was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, “Get up, go away!”

Joshua Harris, in his book, “Not Even a Hint,” says, “Ultimately, lust doesn’t want sex. It wants the forbidden, and it’s willing to take you deeper and deeper into perversion if you’ll indulge its latest requests.”⁶

“When any strong, sinful lust is not gratified, the worldly person is prone to lash out in angry frustration, sometimes even committing murder.”⁷

⁶ Joshua Harris, Not Even A Hint, 93.

⁷ John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible: James 4:2.

James says, “you lust and do not have; so you commit murder.”

“Murder” translates the verb *phoneuo*, which, in this context, could include murderous hatred, extremely destructive behavior, and even suicide” (MacArthur).

James is telling us that “Murdering, fighting, and quarreling are results of unsatisfied lust and envy—results of thwarted desires” (Vernon Doersken, James, 95).

John MacArthur says, “When the lusting person cannot achieve his desired goals-whether for reputation, prestige, sexual gratification, money, power, escape through drugs or alcohol, success, possessions, the affections of another person, or whatever---the result is often catastrophic to others and always destructive of oneself.”⁸
Genesis 19:1-11 records an example of this:

⁸ John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James, 189.

“Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. And he said, “Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant’s house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.” They said however, “No, but we shall spend the night in the square.” Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.” But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, “Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. “Now behold, I have two daughters who have

not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.” But they said, “Stand aside.” Furthermore, they said, “This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them.” So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. They struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway.”

“The men of Sodom were so obsessed with their perverted lust that, ignoring their blindness, they continued groping for the door in a vain attempt to gain entrance and satisfy their unrelenting passions” (MacArthur).

In 2 Samuel 11:14-17, the Scriptures also reveal that David's lust for Bathsheba led to him having her husband Uriah murdered.

“Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, “Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die.” So it was as Joab kept watch on the city, that he put Uriah at the place where he knew there were valiant men. The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David's servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died.”

Absolam, David's son, so lusted to rule Israel that he was willing even to kill his father to achieve it.

2 Samuel 15:6 says he “stole the hearts of the men of Israel” so that they were “with Absalom” (v.13).

In chapter 17 Ahithophel, who was the grandfather of Bathsheba, was so enraged over the injustice of David’s sin with her and killing Uriah that he joined forces to “pursue David” (v. 1).

Ahithophel said to Absalom, “I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king. 3 Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace” (vv.2-3).

When Ahithophel’s counsel was ignored by Absalom, Ahithophe was so frustrated and indignant that 2 Sam.17:22 says that he “arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he

put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died.”

James continues in verse 2 by saying, “you are envious and cannot obtain.”

The word “envious” (zeloo) is a synonym of epithumeo, and it connotes an even stronger, more compelling feeling of desire.

it is the word from which we get “zealous” and “zealot.”

The noun form is rendered “jealousy” in James 3:14, 16.

“The essential significance of the term is a hot or intense feeling either for or against.

Like the noun, the verb can have either a good or a bad connotation.”⁹

⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, James.

The word literally means “to be earnest, to set one’s heart on, to be completely intent upon” (Louw-Nida),

The phrase “cannot obtain” pictures their “repeated inability actually to possess that which they so ardently sought” (Hiebert).

“When people harbor such fierce desires but ‘cannot obtain’ what they covet, they ‘fight and war.’”

“Marital conflicts, family conflicts, job conflicts, natural conflicts---all these are the result of unsatisfied personal lust and envying.”¹⁰

As would be expected, worldly, ungodly desire not only is uncontrolled and unfulfilled but also selfish.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James.

9 times in vv.2-3 James uses the terms “you” and “your” to indicate that the audience he is addressing is unbelieving. He calls them “adulterers and adulteresses” in verse 4.

Leading up to his point about selfishness, James first says that worldly unbelievers “do not have because [they] do not ask.”

This phrase does not mean that “they were utterly prayerless, but, as D. Edmond Hiebert, points out, “they [apparently] felt it inappropriate to ask God for the things they had their heart set on. They devised their carefully laid plans to attain their desires, but their ruthless efforts to achieve them in disregard of the rights of others resulted in failure and frustration.”¹¹

¹¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, James, 247.

“Ask” Gr.aiteo is the same verb used in 1:5-6 and carries the idea of pleading, begging, imploring” (MacArthur).

It is used “in the present tense and points to their repeated failure to ask” (Hiebert).

Many unbelievers *do* ask God for things but “do not receive, because [they] ask with wrong motives, so that [they] may spend it on [their] pleasures” (v.3)

“They do not ask for things in order for God’s goodness and grace to be magnified or for the sake of His glory and honor. They do not ask in order to be able to fulfill His perfect and divine will but to fulfill their own sinful and selfish wills” (MacArthur).

John Calvin said, “Though they sought, yet they were deservedly denied; because they wished to make God the minister of their own lusts. For

they set no bounds to their wishes, as he had commanded; but gave unbridled license to themselves, so as to ask those things of which man, conscious of what is right, ought especially to be ashamed. Pliny somewhere ridicules this impudence, that men so wickedly abuse the ears of God” (Calvin's Commentaries: James).

They “with wrong motives.” This means they ask “in an evil manner, badly” (Hiebert).

Their purpose when they asked was “that [they] may spend it on [their] pleasures” (v.3).

“On your pleasures” stands emphatically and could be read back this way: “in order that in your pleasures you may spend it” (Hiebert).

D. Edmond Hiebert says, “They are not accused of praying for sinful things, but their basic purpose in making their requests is to further

their personal pleasures. It is possible to ask for good things for a bad reason. To use what is requested from God in accordance with ungodly principles is a complete perversion of the relationship to God” (James, 248-9).

The word “Spend” (dapanao), means, “to completely use up or squander and was used by Jesus to describe the prodigal son’s wasteful squandering of his inheritance (Lk.15:13).”

The word “Pleasures” (hedone), same word used in verse 1 that refers to “uncontrolled personal desire to fulfill every passion and whim that promises sensual satisfaction and enjoyment” (MacArthur).

CONCLUSION

Does this passage describe you?

Have you passed this test of worldly indulgence that James gives?

If not, then maybe it's because you're not a true child of God.

You're like in the parable of the soils, where the seed fell among thorns.

You heard “the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mk.4:18-19).

If this describes you, I want to call you to repentance—to turn from your sinful pleasures to Christ who can fill your heart with godly pleasures for Him.

As John Piper says, “He is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.”

God, My Heart and Pleasure (Pt.2)

James 4:2-3

Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

Preached 10/24/10 (c) 2010

Find all your satisfaction in Him this morning as we pray together.