

**Confronting the Enemies of Unity – In our Hearts**  
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**James 4:1-12**  
**July 22, 2012**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 4. We are continuing a series of messages we've been looking at from the Epistle of James. We've entitled the series 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity', and we are in James 3:1-4:12, about 7, 8, 9 messages, I guess, total by the time we're done, because we're looking at the importance of unity in the Body of Christ. We've stepped aside from our exposition of the Gospel of John for a period of time to work on an issue, an area that we feel like is important at this time in the life of our church. We've been looking at scriptures that relate to that. We've seen how unity is a high calling of God. We're to walk in a manner worthy of our calling from Ephesians 4. We saw in John 17 that unity is our birthright as part of becoming a partaker of the divine nature. That is possessing the living God in us, the presence of Christ through His Spirit. We now are a part of the oneness of the triune God that Jesus describes in John 17 in such glorious language. We're supposed to manifest that in our relationships, and so we've been looking at James as kind of a practical book because James deals with this issue of unity in the idea of working against the enemies of unity.

James 3:1 and halfway through James 4, he's confronting the enemies of unity. We looked at the first section there, taming the tongue, confronting the enemies of unity in our words. Now the enemies are always the same—the world, the flesh, and the devil. They are our enemies. Flesh and blood are not our enemies, it's the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world's system, our own flesh, our own sin nature, not really the blood and stuff of our bodies, but the sin that dwells in us that the Bible speaks of as the flesh because it resides in the flesh. And of course, the enemies of our souls, the accuser of the brethren, Satan himself and his kingdom. Those are our enemies but they confront on different battlefields and James really deals with three successive battlefields that we need to fight for unity, to guard the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. We need to fight in our words and fight against disunity in the way we speak.

Then we saw for a couple of messages from James 3:13-18 that we need to guard against disunity in our attitudes, particularly our attitudes toward wisdom and leadership. If we look to people to lead us who don't have true wisdom, we will have disunity in our body, in our lives. True wisdom is manifest primarily in

meekness, which we saw is really being very hard to offend. So we looked at that for a period of time, and we saw that James talks about the fact that if you have leaders who are easily offended, or if you're easily offended, if you're not meek, if you have the wisdom from below, the result is disorder of every kind, disharmony, and disunity. So he's on that flow of thought now leading into Chapter 4.

It's always important when we read the scripture to realize that the chapter and verse designations are not inspired. James wrote an epistle, a letter, he didn't chapter and verse it when he wrote it. We've done this as a way of referencing the same things. If I just said, "Turn to James," and there was no chapter and verse, it would take you a while to get on the same verse I was on, wouldn't it? We're thankful for chapters and verses, but it's important to remember that Chapter 4 is not a whole separate thought. It flows right out of Chapter 3. In fact, I want us to read 4:1 to 12, this new section of messages, but I'm going to read James 3:13 to set the context and see how this flows together. So we're looking at confronting the enemies of unity. We looked at it in our words, in our attitudes, and now we're going to see today, he's going to deal with, in Chapter 4:1-12 in our hearts. Now he's not going to use the word 'heart' in the text. I'm using the word because I think he's talking about our hearts because he talks about our desires, our affections, our yearnings, and in the Bible the seat of the affections is the heart. So James is basically saying, "If you want to get to the root of your conflicts, the root problem is in your hearts. You've got to tame your words, you've got to deal with your attitudes, but if you really want to deal with it, get to the heart, the affections, the yearnings, the lust," as he says, "The things that you long after." Let's start reading at James 3:13 and read all the way through James 4:12.

***James 3:13-18 ~ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.***

***James 4:1-12 ~ 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. 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. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 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”? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit therefore 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 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*

*11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?*

Let's pray together:

*Our Father, as we come to this passage we are confronted here with our blindness and our sinfulness, our blindness to our sinfulness. Help us, Lord. We pray that the entrance of Your Word might give light, and that in Your light that we might see light, and we might walk in the light. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

I tried to read that passage with the force that it really ought to be read with. This is not a light-hearted discussion. James is one of the more forceful authors in Scripture. I mean, Paul certainly has that kind of emphatic force. All of the Scripture has that at times, but there are passages that seem to just slap you in the face, don't they? When you read them, and you read them carefully, you're like, "Wow!" This is one of them. James is continuing a diatribe here. It's a Spirit-inspired diatribe against disunity in the Body. He is asking questions and he's making harsh, not unbiblically harsh, he's making righteously stunning statements to shake us out of our lethargy. It's kind of like a 'wake-up call'. We are prone to allow conflict in our lives and to get comfortable with it. We get happy with it. It's kind of like when you have noise that's going on and you get used to it. Somebody was telling me the other day that they had something going on, I forgot who it was

that was telling me that there was this noise going on. It was pretty loud but then they got fine with it, and then when the noise stopped then they woke up. You get used to that level of noise, so then when it's not there, something is wrong, right? Well we get used to a level of conflict in our lives and we fall asleep to it.

That's really the idea that the Lord has given us here through the apostle James. We get used to levels of anger. We get used to levels of mistreatment of one another, and we're okay with it. He uses shocking and blunt language to try to shake us out of it. I mean this passage is almost hyperbole. Hyperbole is a literary device where you say something that's beyond reality to make a point. 'You know every person knows this!' Or 'Every person doesn't know anything.' That's hyperbole. It means that you should know this because everybody does. We speak in hyperbole a lot in language. James uses several expressions in the passage that appear at first hyperbolic, but are really in fact not hyperbolic. They are not hyperbole there, they are reality. The problem is we're used to a level that's so far from reality that it seems like hyperbole. Let me give you an example. Let's just look at the language. ***What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?*** The word for 'quarrels' is translated in the King James as 'wars'. The word 'conflict' is translated as 'battles'. ***Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*** I think one of the most powerful ones though is in Verse 2.

***James 3:2 ~ You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.***

Now that sounds like hyperbole. Is he talking to a church of murderers, literal murderers? Of course not. He's not writing to the penitentiary. But he says, "You want things, and when you don't get them, you murder." He says in the most forceful way, "What you're doing is displeasing to God."

Now we find in 1 John 3:15, and in Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus said, "If you call someone a fool, you've murdered them in your heart. If you say, 'You empty head,' you're guilty before the court. If you say they are worthy of death you should go into fiery hell," Jesus says. So we say things like that so easily. It flows out of our mouths. "That was idiotic." We say things like that. "You nut." I don't know about you, but I'm continuing to work on that. The place that that comes out most is in driving, and in watching the news. "What are these people thinking?" When you watch the news you think, "What's going on? Do they have a brain? How can they do this?" Well, there is a way to have those thoughts in a godly way. There's a way to say, "Wow, they are blind. God help them. That person really needs to learn to drive because they may end up killing themselves or somebody. Lord, help them." That's a godly way to handle it. When it comes out, "You idiot!"

When that thought is in our mind, what is happening? That's coming from the depth of our soul and that is wicked and evil. James is saying when you have that kind of thought, you're a murderer. When we slander one another, when we mistreat one another, when we have rage against one another, have an outburst of anger, or when we give someone the silent treatment and ignore them, and stay away from them, and have nothing to do with them, treating them as if they're dead—we're murderers. That's what he's saying. He's trying to say it with that force so that we'll hear it.

Now, what we want to do this morning is begin looking at this passage. The title of this message is 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity in Our Hearts'. This will be part 1. Next Sunday, Dr. Mack is going to be here, he'll be preaching. The following Saturday, August 4<sup>th</sup>, he's doing a seminar on God's solutions for anger and depression. I love the way he titles things: 'How to be Good and Angry'. You can be angry and not sin. It's a righteous anger, but the problem is that it's very hard for us to maintain that, isn't it? How small of a line it is to cross from being indignant for God's name to now becoming a murderer in our hearts. But there's a way, and that's going to be how to deal with anger in a godly way. The afternoon is 'Out of the Blues', dealing with depression. So you want to make plans to be here. It's going to be 8:30-4:30, Saturday, August 4<sup>th</sup>. He's preaching next Sunday and then we'll pick this up on August 5<sup>th</sup>, Lord-willing, this passage.

But today, 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity in Our Hearts'. What I want us to do is really start with the three questions that we need to ask here. Three questions this morning. Our thoughts are gathered around three questions: Where? What? And how? The goal is to understand where conflict comes from and to see the true nature of it, and to see how it develops. This is really what James is trying to teach us. Where? What? And how?

### 1) Where?

Now, Verse 1:

#### ***James 4:1 ~ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?***

The NAS reads: ***What is the source of...*** Really, in the Greek, it says 'whence'. This is literally what it says: ***Whence quarrels and whence conflicts...*** It says 'whence' twice. Now 'whence' is not a word we use, right? It means 'where from?' It's an older English term. 'Whence' doesn't just mean where, it means 'Where did it come from? Where is that from?' That's really the idea of this Greek

adverb that is repeated twice. Literally it says, ***Whence quarrels and whence conflicts among you?*** So the idea is repeated twice. Where from? Where did these things come from? That's one of the reasons I don't like the way the NAS translates it. ***What is the source...*** just says it one time. It should say, "What is the source of quarrels and what is the source of conflicts?" That's how it reads in the text. So the idea he wants us to deal with is: Where do these things come from? Where do conflicts, and arguments, and disputes, and disharmony come from? James asks that question. He introduces this section just like he did the last section when he said in Verse 13: ***Who among you is wise in understanding?*** He says, ***What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?*** Where from quarrels, where from conflicts among you? Then he answers his question in Verse 1 with another question, but this is a clear answer. ***Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*** Is it not true that conflicts come from your pleasures, that is he's speaking metonymically, pleasures, or desire for pleasure. "Is not the source of your conflicts your desires for pleasure?" Then he begins to prove it in verse 2. "Yeah, exactly. That's exactly what it is."

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

So he says, "Where do conflicts come from? Conflicts come from our hearts." It's important to realize that because what you and I think, as a way of sort of imbibing the spirit of the culture, we think conflict comes from out there. So you have several conflicts going on in your life right now. It's because there are several problem people in your life. There are some bad circumstances in my life. Now listen, there's a place where people are a problem and people are bringing things in and they're sinning, but if I have sinful anger in my heart, if I have resentment in my heart, if I have disunity in my heart, regardless of what the other person has, the conflict that God is concerned about started right here. It didn't start there. Someone can sin against you and you could handle it before God without becoming sinfully angry. That's what he's saying here. "Where do these conflicts, where do these ongoing argument and quarrels, and conflicts come from? They come from the sinful desires of your own hearts." He's getting to the root. He dealt with the words, he dealt with the attitudes. Now he's going down to the root. He says, "The root is the heart. The root is the affections at the deepest part of a person's being."

That's exactly what Jesus says in Luke 6. Right after He says, "Before you get the speck out of your brother's eye, take the log out of your own eye," Verse 41 and

42. Then He says in Verse 43, now where does conflict come from? Look what He says:

***Luke 6:43-45 ~ For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. 44 For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45 The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.***

This is that King James language: ***Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.*** So what comes out of your mouth is what's in your heart. You know if you squeeze a tube of toothpaste, what are you going to get out of it? If no one has tampered with your tube of toothpaste, you're going to get toothpaste out of it. Every time. So when circumstances come in, they don't make me the way I am, they reveal the way I am. A sinful person in my life does not make me angry, he reveals that I have an angry and sinful heart. That is the way God sees it. Now we don't see it that way. We say things like, "You made me angry." Don't we? "I'm sorry I got angry, but you really made me angry." "You have this incredible power over me that you created anger in my heart." God says, "No, no one can do that." In fact, if you turn over to Mark 7, from Luke 6 just turn back over to Mark 7. See Jesus teaches the same thing in another passage, another place.

***Mark 7:18 ~ And He \*said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him,***

Nothing coming from the outside of a man can defile the man, can make us impure, can make us sin. Nothing from the outside can make you sin. That's what He's saying.

***Mark 7:19 ~ because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.)***

Now they were talking about washed hands, but He's giving a bigger principle here.

***Mark 7:20-23 ~ And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22***

***deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”***

This is making clear that we are 100% responsible for every sin that we commit. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are responsible. God holds us accountable. In fact, 1 Corinthians 10:13 makes this really clear. There is no situation that you or I will ever be in that we can blame our sin on someone else.

***1 Corinthians 10:13 ~ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.***

If you say you were in a situation where you had to sin, you are lying about God. God is faithful and He will, with a temptation, provide a means of escape. Always. His grace is there every time, and when you and I sin, we can blame no one but ourselves. We need to learn this discipline. When we talk to one another, and when we confess sins to one another, it shouldn't be a blame game. "I'm sorry I got angry, but..." "I'm sorry *if* I offended you." The words 'but' and 'if' are needed to stay out of the room. "I'm sorry I offended you." "I was wrong."

So, since He's faithful when we sin, we sin because of our own wicked desires. In fact, turning back over to James now, and our text in James 4, Chapter 1 of James told us the same thing.

***James 1:13 ~ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.***

Don't blame your sin on God. "God put me in a circumstance I couldn't overcome and I sinned." No, that's not true. God cannot be tempted by evil. He Himself does not tempt anyone.

***James 1:14-16 ~ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.***



Do not be deceived, you cannot blame your sin, I cannot blame my sin on anyone else but me. So this means that in any conflict, I need to be about taking 100% responsibility for whatever part of the conflict is mine. Now in reality, it's never 100% one side or the other. We tend to overestimate the other person's part and underestimate our own because of our pride. I've never seen a conflict that was 100%-0%. I've seen some that might have been 98%-2%, but in that situation, what does the Lord want you to do? He wants you, if you're the 2%, to take 100% responsibility for your 2% because your 2% is not excusable because of their 98%. Your 2% is an assault on the name and goodness of God. When we see it that way, it makes us lowly to deal with the other person's 98%. We have to take 100% responsibility for ours because it's from our own hearts. That's what He's saying here. Where do these conflicts come from? Where do these situations come from? These unresolved issues? They come from the lust of your own hearts. Not from outside of us, from inside of us. That's where. We need to know the source of conflict and always be looking here first. Now the temptation is to look over there. Now that we know that it's from the heart, to look at their heart. "I know why we had this conflict, because you had so much sin in your heart." Well they do, but we have so much sin in our hearts, and the Lord says to me, "Ty, follow Me. Yeah, and then after you get the log out, then you might be able to help your brother with a speck." The 2% should still be a log because it's what is keeping us from God, so it's a log for us. Do you see that?

## 2) What?

All right, now, that was 'Where?' The second question is 'What?' Where conflicts come from is what he starts with in Verse 1, and then the second question is: What?

### ***James 4:1 ~ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?***

Or 'where from' quarrels and 'where from' conflicts among you? We said it was from our hearts.

The second question is: What is the true nature of conflicts and quarrels? I say that because I mentioned earlier when we were introducing this, that he speaks in almost hyperbole, in hyperbolic fashion. He uses the strongest language to wake us up. ***What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?*** The NAS translates it as 'quarrels and conflicts'. The NIV says 'fights and quarrels'. The KJV says 'war and fights'. There are all these different words, but basically, these are arguments, disputes, and division. In reality, the words that he chooses, I wish they

had translated it more literally. I mean obviously he's using it figuratively, but why not take the word from the Greek directly into the English with the same kind of force? Because it really says: ***What is the source of wars and what is the source of battles among you?*** These are military terms. The word translated 'quarrel' in the NAS, is 'war'. It's a state of ongoing hostility. It embraces the whole course of hostilities. The word translated in Verse 1 as 'conflict' is really better translated as 'battle'. It's the idea of a particular fight as a part of a war. The word for this word 'conflict' is *machē* (μάχη), and is turned into the word for 'sword', which is the short sword that's used in close hand-to-hand combat.

The idea is you're in a battle and you're fighting hand-to-hand, so James says, "Listen, guys. Why are there all these wars and battles among you?" We say, "We're not warring. We're at peace. The wars over there in Afghanistan and Iran, with the war on terror, but we don't have a war in here." James says, "No, you have war in here. You have battles going on in here."

He continues. He actually uses the words 'war' and 'battle' twice. You have it in Verse 1: ***What's the source of wars and battles among you?*** And then you have it in Verse 2: ***You are envious and cannot obtain; so you battle and war.*** Those are the same two Greek words. So, they're repeated. And then you have in the middle of those two repetitions another word, and I like the way they translate this one in the second part of Verse 1:

***James 4:1b ~ Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?***

This is a different Greek word. Actually, it comes from a Greek noun 'strategos' (στρατηγός) from where we get our English word 'strategy'. The idea is to soldier, to marshal an army, and to fight a battle. Do you see how he's just layering these terms on top of one another? He's saying, "Look, the conflicts that we've got used to living with, it's like living with war going on." If we saw it rightly, it's not hyperbole. He's saying, "Spiritually, it's war."

One of the things I appreciate (even though I think there's a healthy amount of how much you want to see these things), but in recent years, a lot of things in the movie industry are just in a terrible decline. They're awful and wicked, but occasionally they'll get something right. Even a blind squirrel finds an acorn sometimes. One of the things I think they've gotten right more recently in the last 20 or 30 years is that when you watch a war movie nowadays, you see the horror and the ugliness of war. When you watch a John Wayne movie, it was more of just a glamorized,

cleaned-up version. In the more recent war movies, you see people in the throes of death and agony. You see dismemberment, disembowelment. You see the awful horror of war. As William Tecumseh Sherman said, “War is hell.” He’s not accurate. Hell is worse than war, but there’s something powerful about that. War may be as close to the physical experience of hell as anything else that we can experience in this world. It is awful, and when you see that, it makes you shudder, and you want to stay away from it. James says that’s what conflict is like in the church. It’s that ugly. It’s that repulsive. It’s that disgusting. It should be abhorred by us. That’s what he’s saying.

You can’t get used to the hum of conflict where we begin to think, “It’s okay that we’re not resolved. It’s okay that we’re in disharmony. I’m going to just let that wait.” It’s not the heart of God. We’re to be peacemakers. We’re to be those who reap righteousness because we sow peace and we make peace. This is why we have these exhortations. Do everything you can to promote peace so that you’re not a part of the carnage, the bloodletting. You are I are to turn from these things and we have the Gospel. The bigger issue is that it’s so heinous and awful for the church to be characterized by these kinds of conflicts. This should be the safe haven. When we gather together as believers, there’s to be shalom, peace, for He Himself is our peace. He’s made us one. We’ll take the Lord’s Supper later. It’s called communion in many traditions, because it celebrates our union in Christ. We are united to Him, and if we’re united to Him, we must, by definition, be united to one another. That’s why we’re to make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit, to guard it. When we don’t, and when we allow jealousy and selfish ambition to exist in our hearts, it’s brings disorder and every evil thing. It robs us of that and we lie against the truth. We deny the Gospel. You can preach the Gospel and deny the Gospel at the same time. Jesus is the Savior of sinners. He makes peace between me and Him. He makes peace between you and Him, and yet I don’t love my brother. These things ought not to be. He wants to unmask the true character of conflict. It is war. It is carnage. It is grievous and ugly. That’s *where* and *what*.

### 3) How?

Conflicts come from where? They come from our hearts. What is the nature? It’s war. It’s ugly. How do they develop? He tells us in Verse 2. The process of conflicts starts with desire. He told us that in the second half of Verse 1. ***Is not the source your pleasures...*** That is your lust for pleasure. Your passion. But he says it also in Verse 2: ***You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.***

#### A) It Starts With Desire:

There are three words in the passage that are used of desire, which are all strong words:

- The first word is the word translated as ‘pleasures’ in Verse 1. ***Is not the source your pleasures...*** That same word is repeated in Verse 3:

***James 4:3 ~ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.***

The ESV translates this word as ‘passion’. It’s the Greek noun *hēdonē* (ἡδονή) from which we transliterate our English word ‘hedonism’. This is the word for that, and the idea is it’s a delight in the pleasures of the senses. Hedonism was a philosophy which was prominent in Greco-Roman culture, and changed a little bit over time, but today is evident in our society where pleasure is the highest good. It’s the thing to be sought above all else. So this word has that connotation. When we want pleasure, and when we’re longing after pleasure, that’s the root of conflict.

- He also uses the word in Verse 2: ***You lust and do not have;*** That first clause in Verse 2. This is a word which means to set your mind on something, to have the affections directed with intentionality toward something, or to long after. It means to desire greatly. It can be anything. It doesn’t just have the idea of sexual sin. It’s anything that you set your mind on and you want.

- The third word is the word in the second clause of Verse 2: ***You are envious and cannot obtain;*** The word ‘envious’, there, is a word we’ve encountered a couple times in our last passage. It’s the word for jealousy or zealous. It’s your pleasures, your lust, your mindset, your affections set upon things, and this idea of envy or desire. A person moved with envy. A person moved to pursue something. So it starts with desire.

## B) Our Desires Actively Wage War:

***...your pleasures that wage war in your members...*** The idea is to fight for control. This pertains to even good things. This isn’t just about bad things. Our desires for good things wage war for control of our hearts. This is the anatomy of idolatry. We’re really seeing the formation of an idol. This is what James is teaching us is how an idol develops. He’s talking about idolatry. He doesn’t use the word here again, but when he says in Verse 4: ***You adulteresses...*** he’s talking

about how when you live like this, you're being Spiritual idolaters and adulterous against God. When you look at the Old Testament background, particularly the book of Hosea which we're going to begin studying on Wednesday night, it's all about Spiritual adultery, which is idolatry. The nation of Israel worshiped other gods, and therefore they were idolaters. So James says you're worshiping other gods, and therefore, you're an idolater.

What does he mean? The people weren't necessary worshiping the idol in Philippi or in Ephesus. But he's saying, "Whatever controls your heart, if it's not God, it's idolatry. Idolatry is when your heart is controlled or ruled by anything other than God.

That's Paul David Tripp's definition in his book 'War of Words'. Idolatry is when my heart is controlled or ruled by anything other than God. What happens is we have a desire for even good things, and that desire wages war for control. I'll give you an example. We, as parents, have the desires that our children would be respectful, don't we? We have desires that they would act in a way that pleases God, that they would learn to obey, and obey quickly, that they would learn to show respect: "Yes, Ma'am. No, Ma'am." That kind of stuff. And we desire that they would do it gladly. Well, if that desire has maintained its proper level and hasn't become a lust or a controlling desire, then when they don't act properly, we don't get sinfully angry. We just get concerned a righteous way, and maybe there's a little bit of Godly anger, but it's basically under control. We say to our son or daughter, "What you're doing is not right and it's not pleasing to God. You need to change your attitude right now." That's the best I can do at modeling out a godly response to a situation. It's not this: "What are you doing? Who do you think you are??" That is like a red light going off, saying, "Something's wrong in my heart," because if I were just concerned about their soul and them pleasing God – it started there. I want my child to please God. You want your child to please God, but when we get angry, what we're revealing is we want something else, too. We want something wicked. *What I'm getting angry about is that you are not respecting me. Do you see that? You are not respecting me, and I want you to respect me, because I need to be respected. I want respect. I want this. I need this. I've got to have this, and if you don't give it to me, I'll punish you for it.*

That is wicked idolatry masking itself as righteousness, the worst of both worlds. If we're really godly, that's where meekness comes in. He told us earlier that the people who have wisdom from above are those who are meek, who aren't all into the fact that you offended me. That's the opposite of meekness. Meekness is, "Hey, what does it matter that you offended me? You can trample all over me. I'm

nothing. I'm a servant. I'm a slave of Jesus Christ. I'm concerned for you and for Him."

So James is continuing to unpack this idea that a good desire gone to seed can become an opportunity for murder. That's when we say something like, "I can't believe you're never going to change." That's a violent act with our words, our tone of voice. Like slamming a door, all of those things are revealing the fact that some desires have been waging war, and they have won the ascendancy, because if my desire really is for my child to please Jesus Christ, then I don't forget that that's my desire for me too.

Lord, I want to please You right now in dealing with this sinful offense. Help me to honor You. Help me to love them, and serve them, and wash their feet like Jesus did. There can be strong words spoken in love. "You cannot act like that. You must not do that. It displeases God." But there's control. When there isn't control, there's sin. These desires wage war. It starts with desire. The desires wage war for control, and you can tell when they have control by how you react when you don't get what you desire. That's the litmus test. If you just desire your kids to be obedient kids and to love the Lord, when you don't get what you're desiring, how do you respond? Do you still praise the Lord and go to Him and say, "Lord, I don't know what's wrong. Obviously I need help here, but I'm not controlled with anger." What happens is a desire for obedient children becomes "I want you to make me look good." Do you see that? That's idolatry. Isn't it amazing how small the line is between Godliness and idolatry? We slip over it.

Paul tells a story of this in his book 'War of Words'. He says he imagined going home at night to his wife and saying, "Honey, let's go out to dinner." He wants to surprise her by taking her to her favorite restaurant, and he's had this idea percolating in his mind. It started out as, "I'm thankful for my wife. You've given me a godly, precious wife. I want to love her and show her how precious she is to me and serve her and take her out." It starts with a good desire. He keeps thinking on it, and there are a lot of good thoughts going on here. "It'll be great. I'll surprise her. I'll take flowers home and she's going to just love this. It's going to be wonderful." He gets home, and what's happened is the kids have been giving her a terrible time, and when he says, "Honey, I've got an idea about dinner," she says, "I would like you to take the kids out of this house. Take them for pizza, and let me please take a bath. That's what I need." Do you ever have days like that? Dad comes home and you say, "It's your turn." He had a noble desire starting out, but do you know how he knew he had a wrong desire, a sinful desire? It's because when she reacted like that, he started lecturing her and becoming angry. "Don't

you care about our relationship? Obviously you're not committed to our relationship the way that I'm committed to it." He started judging her rather than understanding her, and he said, "It showed that my heart was wicked. A good thing had turned into something I had to have or I would murder. I would put her down." That is the progression of an idol.

One of the best chapters on this that I've ever read is the fifth chapter of the book 'The Peacemaker' by Ken Sande. This chapter encapsulates this in such a helpful way. Basically, it's talking about the progression of an idol.

Let me just give you 4 points that Sande points out, and we're going to work on this again in the future, working back through it, because he continues to talk about this through the passage.

He says that *I desire something* (which is a good thing) crosses the line and becomes *I demand*. When we start thinking, "I need something. I need you to respect me. I need you to obey me," then it's become an idol. It's gone from being a desire to being a demand. The second stage is, *I demand*. *I demand* becomes *I judge*. That's the third stage. "When you don't give me what I need, I judge you. I condemn you. I need to be respected and you're not respecting me. Therefore, I judge you as guilty of not worshiping the god that I've set up over here in the corner, which is my self-esteem." *I desire* becomes *I demand* becomes *I judge* becomes *I punish*. "I punish, and I will let you have it. I will teach you not to dishonor my god over here." That is the reality of what it is. It's like we're asking our children to bow down to a false god in the room. "And if you won't, I'm going to punish you." How heinous and ugly is that? The way we see it is we keep checking our desires. "Lord, we need to hold our desires with an open hand. I desire this, but if You don't want me to have it, I'm still going to praise You."

So this is idolatry and we have to labor constantly at walking in the Spirit, which means keep opening our hands. "Lord, I really would like this. I think this glorifies You and honors You for me to have the kind of relationship with this person that You would want, but if they're not going to meet me on that, I'm not going to hold it like this." Even when we try to do everything that we can to be at peace with all men, we can't make them be at peace with us, but we can start thinking, "I want to resolve this relationship," and it can become an idol. When they don't want to resolve it the same way, we desire, demand, judge, and then punish. "I judge you as being wrong in what you're doing. You're not cooperating with me and I will punish you."

Sometimes punishment means the silent treatment. Sometimes punishment means raging. All of it is rooted in idolatry. When we look at our hearts, the reality is it takes away the condemning spirit, doesn't it? "I'm the problem. It's not the people in my life that are the problem." The people in my life have been given to me just like they have to you, as God's gift, to bless us with enjoyment, and in many ways to bless us by showing us our sin like sandpaper. That's one of the reasons the Lord puts us together with our spouse. Your spouse, my spouse, we are each other's love gift from God to sanctify one another, and we need to stop trying to change each other, and start working on changing our own hearts, because we are idolaters. We want what we want, and the good news is that, for idolaters, there is hope in the Gospel. Jesus Christ came to save people who worship false gods, who put everything else above Him and His glory. He came and lived a perfect life. Never once did He demand anything. Isn't that amazing? He had every right to demand everything, but He came meek and lowly, and lived a life of perfect and complete surrender before God. As man should live, Jesus lived perfectly. Never sinful anger. He had anger, but it was always righteous, perfect anger, aimed at the glory of God and the help of the person in front of Him. Sometimes it was the Pharisee that He was trying to wake up out of their Spiritual death.

He lived a perfect life. He offered that perfect life, that spotless life, at Calvary and received all of our idolatry, all of the wickedness, all of the ugliness that you and I have done of asking people to bow down and worship our idols and punishing them when they didn't. Jesus bore the full price. So every time you recognize an idol in your heart and you see that warning light going off where you're having sinful anger, this is the question: What is it that I'm wanting that I'm not getting? We're going to find some kind of sinful desire there.

*Lord, thank You for reminding me that I am an idolater, and I need a Savior. Thank You for giving me a glorious Savior who paid for that idolatry. The fact that I've even seen it now is a gift of Your grace. Let me bow before Jesus and let Him be everything to me. I want Him to be my portion forever. He's all I need. All I want is to be pleasing to You.*

The power of the Gospel saves us from the penalty of sin when we repent and believe in Christ and receive Him as our personal Savior, and it saves us from the power of sin when we repent and believe in Christ on a daily basis in turning from idolatry. Hallelujah, what a Savior.



Let's go to Him in prayer right now...

*Our Father, we thank You for such an astonishing ocean of mercy that You have lavished on us, people who were committed to our own vain glory, living for ourselves, hating You, and You sent Jesus to pay the price for that. And then as born again believers, we still find ourselves turning away and bowing down to things which are not God. In amazement, we turn back to You and find mercy and forgiveness through Christ. Lord, we stand in awe of You, and we ask You that Your love might so captivate our hearts that the love of Christ might constrain us so that we might no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who loved us and died for us. Help those in this room who have not yet placed their faith in Christ to run to Him today in repentance and faith, to believe on Jesus Christ while there's time.*

*We pray this in His Name, Amen.*

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