

What Are the Consequences of our Selfishness?

[James 4:1-4](#)

James, Day 17

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet 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 wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- James 4:1-4, ESV

"What difference does it make?" These words can be a legitimate inquiry into the possible consequences of an idea. But they can also be a callous covering for a knowingly selfish and foolish choice, but one we want to make anyway. Parents hear these words often from their children, but if we're honest, we think them in our hearts ourselves too often.

James 3 ended with a compelling picture of the difference between worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. Worldly wisdom is characterized by selfish ambition and bitter jealousy and is unspiritual and demonic. *"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."* (James 3:17) The contrast between these two kinds of wisdom could not be more stark and clear, but what difference does it make?

James 4 opens by telling us in very clear terms what difference it makes. Receiving and living according to God's wisdom is no abstract matter. Why do God's people so often experience quarrels and fights? It is because of our covetous desires. Does that sound like selfish ambition and bitter jealousy? Absolutely! Just because we've turned to chapter 4, don't leave the context of chapter 3 behind. Our passions war within us because we're living according to that worldly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom and not the pure and peaceable wisdom of God.

When James says, *"you murder,"* he means the kind of hating others that Jesus said was murdering them in our hearts. (See Matthew 5:21-22). Verse 3 is then a strong rebuke to the worldly, materialistic perspective of the prosperity Gospel. When God gives good gifts to His children, it's not for our selfish passions, but for His glory and kingdom.

In the end, James says in verse 4 that all of this worldliness in the lives of God's people is spiritual adultery and hatred of God, enmity toward God. What difference does it make? James puts it clearly and bluntly: *"whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* Ouch!

I am too easily tempted to think that my selfishness hurts no one but myself and concerns no one but myself, but God clearly and strongly says otherwise. On a human level, it causes quarrels and fights, leading me to hate my brothers and sisters. More importantly, it is spiritual adultery and, by my worldliness, I make myself an enemy of God.

Lord, have mercy on me for my selfishness and my covetousness. I need Your heavenly wisdom. I need to walk in Your ways of purity and peace, of gentleness and humility. By the power of Your Holy Spirit in me, change my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.