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Friendship with the World James 4:1-6 Part Three

We are back once again to the Epistle of James. And we will once again look at **James 4:1-6**.

(1) 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.” In these verses James gives to us one more test of living faith. James gives to us one more test of saving faith. And what is that test? We have called it the “Friendship with the World test.”

Genuine spiritual life and faithful Christian living involve separation from the world and all its countless contaminations. If we can remain unstained by the world, the genuineness of our faith will be clearly evident and we will pass this very important test, which is one of seven different tests that we have already seen in this epistle.

But how can we tell if we have in fact been contaminated by the world? How can we tell if we have in fact become a friend of the world? One of the ways that we can know if we have become a friend of the world is if our various relationships are characterized by turmoil. James, in this particular passage of Scripture, gives to us three different areas of conflict.

The very first area of conflict that James identifies in this passage is “Conflict with others.” Look at **James 4:1, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?.....”** Why do certain churches have conflicts? Why do Christian families have conflicts? It is because they have become contaminated by the world. It is because they have begun to manifest a friendship with the world. We may not be able to avoid conflict with others, whether that is in the church or in our families, but we do not have to contribute to them by thinking as the world thinks or acting like the world acts.

A second area of conflict that James identifies in this passage is conflict with ourselves. Let us read 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? 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 (James 4:1b-3).”** James began this section of Scriptures with a diagnostic question, **“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?”** James now answers that question.

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The source of interpersonal conflict comes from an internal personal conflict. But where does our internal personal conflict come from? James identifies three causes of this internal conflict.

The first cause is uncontrolled desire.

Look at the end of **V. 1** “... **Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?**” Pleasures in and of themselves are not wrong, but James pictures our pleasures as soldiers carrying on a military campaign in the members of our body, seeking to satisfy their cravings. This battle has been going in the human race since the fall of man. It is a battle that we have inherited from Adam. It is presently going on both in the saved and the unsaved. The battle in the unsaved is fought feebly and ineffectively. They truly do not want to see their sin and they are lacking the spiritual resources to fight the battle successfully, herefore the pleasures that are at war in their members will become uncontrolled desires which will fuel their conflicts with others.

In contrast with the unsaved, the saved will fight the battle with their pleasures intensely and effectively. Why? Because they are living their lives to please the Lord and have sufficient resources in Christ to secure the victory when applied to the battle by faith. Therefore, the pleasures that are at war in their members will typically be controlled and will therefore not be fueling their external conflicts.

What are some of the specific pleasures that might be at work in us that might get out of control if we are not careful? The answer is very simple. Any pleasure that we enjoy can become an uncontrolled desire.

Some pleasures are common to us all. Consider the enjoyment that we receive from eating good tasting food. Is enjoying good tasting food wrong? No. But when eating good tasting food begins to interfere with righteousness, it is wrong. How can eating good tasting food interfere with righteousness? Some of you might have noticed that over the past year I have lost some weight. This was a result of a conscious choice. Why? It was because I had a blood test and discovered that my cholesterol level had risen into the high 200's and that my triglycerides had become elevated to over 700. I am not sure whether or not you know this, but in terms of my personal health this was not good. Because of this I became motivated to take some action to change the way I was eating, not because I no longer enjoyed the taste of food but rather because the foods I was eating were destroying my body. If this body belonged to me, I could have continued to eat as I had been eating and that would have been fine, even though it was harming my body. "If" this body belonged to me. But my body does not belong to me. What do the Scriptures teach? The Scriptures tell me in **1Cor. 6:19-20** that this body is the temple of God and that it was bought with a price, the precious blood of Christ. This body does not belong to me but it belongs to Christ and is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore because of my faith and my desire to live a life pleasing to my Lord, I had to change the way I was eating so that I would prove myself to be a faithful steward of this body which He has entrusted to me.

Just so you don't have to worry about me, I am pleased to share with you that my cholesterol and triglyceride levels are now great, and as you may have noticed, as an extra bonus I dropped some weight as well.

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The pleasure I receive from eating good tasting food continues to be with me, but because of my beliefs based upon God's Word I needed by His grace to control it.

Various pleasures that we enjoy are like an army carrying on a military campaign in our members, seeking to satisfy their cravings. The pleasure we derive from eating good tasting food is just one soldier in the army of desires that comprise our lives. Do you get a sense of pleasure from shopping? Is shopping wrong? No. But when shopping begins to interfere with righteousness, it is. When shopping leads to financial irresponsibility, then it is sin. There is not a pleasure that we enjoy that cannot interfere with the performance of righteousness.

Friendship with the world is manifested in our lives when we find ourselves contributing to our conflicts with others. Friendship with the world is manifested when our external conflict with others is being fed from our internal conflict. What are the causes of our internal conflict? The first cause that we have looked at is our "uncontrolled desires." What is the second cause of our internal conflict?

The second cause is unfulfilled desire (V. 2).

This cause is spelled out for us in V. 2, "**You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.**" Successfully feeding our uncontrolled desires certainly can contribute to our conflict with others, but being unsuccessful in feeding our uncontrolled desires can be even more problematic. Look at the first phrase of V. 2 "**You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.....**"

The word "lust" (EPITHUMEO) in this context refers to an inordinate, misdirected, and sinful desire. James does not mention a specific desire that has in fact gone amuck among his readers and has therefore become a lust, most likely because it really does not matter what specific lustful desire it might be that has gone amuck. But just because a particular desire has gotten out of control and has become a "lust" it does not mean that it will be easily satisfied. Look at the very next phrase, "**You lust (have sinful uncontrolled desires) and do not have.**" I may choose to destroy my body with all kinds of tasty foods, but if my wife steps in the way of my wishes and tries to block my fleshly lust by fixing me tofu lasagna, that could easily become a war. If you are a wife, perhaps who has chosen to get some joy from shopping and your husband steps in the way, cancels your credit cards and frustrates your desire to buy things, this could easily become a big problem.

How big a problem could it become? Look at what the verse says, "**You lust (have sinful uncontrolled desires) and do not have; so you commit murder.**" The Tofu lasagna could be a cause for murder. The canceled credit cards could be a cause for murder.

Is James inferring that His readers have actually literally murdered one another in an attempt to satisfy unfulfilled desires? Though this is theoretically possible it is highly unlikely. What is more probable is that James is using the word "murder" (PHONEUO) figuratively in the same way **1 John 3:15** uses the word, where it says, "**Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in Him....**"

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The word “murder” is startling and was meant to startle; James sought to force his readers to realize the depth of the evil that was at work in them and that could easily spill out from them in horrendous acts.

When the lusting person cannot achieve his desired goals - whether for reputation, prestige, sexual gratification, money, power, rest, success, possessions, the affection of another person, or whatever - the result is often catastrophic to others and always destructive to oneself.

In **Gen. 19** we read about the men of Sodom and how their sexual desires spun out of control and how those uncontrolled sexual desires, when frustrated, resulted in actions on their part that are truly hard to comprehend. The men of Sodom had approached the home of Lot in order to satisfy their sexual desires with certain men who had come to visit Lot. Lot, in seeking to protect his visitors, went out into the crowd of Sodomites and sought to persuade them to leave. But rather than leaving the Bible tells us that they pressed up against Lot and began to push him toward the door with the intent to break it down. At that moment the two visitors in Lot’s house, who quite fortunately were angels, opened the door pulled Lot into His house shutting the door behind him. And then what happens next is mind-boggling. These angelic visitors blind all of the men who were trying to gain entrance. Did that stop them from trying to get into the house? And the answer is no! The Scriptures tell us that these blinded Sodomites wearied themselves trying to find the door. Uncontrolled desires certainly can create problems, but unfilled uncontrolled desires can result in behaviors that are incredibly heinous and bizarre.

Absalom so lusted to rule Israel that he was willing even to kill his father David to achieve it. Ahithophel, an advisor to both David and Absalom, who was also the grandfather of Bathsheba (**2 Sam. 11:3; 23:34**), with whom David committed adultery and later married after he had her husband, Uriah, killed in battle, Ahithophel was so enraged over that injustice that he joined forces with Absalom in his rebellion against David. But when his counsel was ignored by Absalom, Ahithophel was so frustrated and indignant that he murdered himself by strangulation. You can read this story in **2 Sam. 15-17**.

But James is not yet finished with expounding on this topic of unfilled desires being a cause for conflicts with others. Look at the next phrase of **V. 2** **“and you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.”**

The word for “envious” (ZELOO) connotes an even stronger, more compelling feeling of desire than the word “lust” (EPITHUMEO). It is the word from which we get “zealous” and “zealot” The noun form is rendered “jealously” in **James 3:14**. Hopefully you remember this verse, **“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.”** We find this same noun form in **James 3:16** **“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”** Envy or jealousy is a very strong human emotion, and it is pervasive within our society.

Certainly one biblical story that comes immediately to mind is the story of Joseph. Joseph enjoyed a superior home but the handicap of an indulgent father whose favoritism earned him the ill-will of his older brothers.

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Joseph was a most attractive specimen of young manhood. **Gen. 39:6** tells us Joseph, “**was handsome in form and appearance.**” He very much enjoyed the favoritism of his father and this favoritism was displayed for everyone to see in a gift of a beautiful coat from Jacob to Joseph. Listen to **Gen. 37:3**, “**Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.**” This was not a sort of patchwork quilt, but a long coat bordered with color, the coat worn by the nobility of that day. It was a mark of distinction whose significance was not lost on his jealous brothers, who were most likely already upset with him for his bad report concerning them to their father in **Gen. 37:2**. But the last straw is found in **Gen. 37:5-8**, “**Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. (6) And he said to them, “Please listen to this dream which I have had; (7) for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.” (8) Then his brothers said to him, “Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.**” I would have thought that Joseph would have by then gotten certain vibes of their growing hatred of him, but apparently he was totally oblivious to it all. How do I know this? Because right after we are told of the brothers response to the first dream, we are told that Joseph shares a second dream with them in **Gen. 39:9-11**, “**Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” (10) And he related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?” (11) And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.**”

Jacob certainly was not out of line attempting to stop Joseph from speaking as he was speaking, if for no other reason for his own protection; but it was too late. The jealousy that they had for Joseph was great. They wanted to have the affection and respect that was showered on Joseph by Jacob, showered on them. It is a terrible thing for you not to have what you want, such as tasty food or access to unlimited shopping, but it is far worse when you see others enjoying what you yourself sinfully want or desire, but are continuously denied.

In this case it was not wrong for Joseph’s brothers to desire the affection of their father, but when that desire turned to envy it became an expression of lust. And when their lust over time went unfulfilled, that unfulfilled desire for the affection that Joseph enjoyed from their father became extremely volatile, and it would have in fact led to his death apart from God’s sovereign intervention.

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CONCLUSION

It is a terrible thing to have healthy desires run amuck. It is a terrible thing for the pleasure that we derive from eating tasty things to be allowed to destroy our body. It is a terrible thing for the pleasure of shopping to drive us into financial difficulty. All of it potentially producing turmoil in the relationships around us. But it potentially becomes far worse when those uncontrolled desires are unfulfilled and we begin to view others around us basking in the blessings that we desire but are being denied.

If you have lost control of your natural fleshly desires and they have become uncontrolled and are presently unfulfilled, you must act quickly to avoid potential catastrophe. My challenge to you now is to confess your lust and envy and ask God's forgiveness.