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

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 Scripture with a diagnostic question, **“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?”** James now answers that question. The source of interpersonal conflict comes from an internal personal conflict.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

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, therefore 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.

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.**”

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 himself. We are now coming to the third and last cause for our internal conflict.

The third cause is selfish desire (VV. 2-3)

This cause is spelled out for us in the latter half of verse 2 and verse 3. “**You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.**” Then it says, “... **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.**”

As would be expected, worldly, ungodly desire not only is uncontrolled and unfulfilled but it is also selfish, and these selfish desires can be found in the lives of professing believers in various churches. This of course is the very reason that James is writing this section of Scripture to his readers. In addressing this issue of selfish desires in these two sentences James uses “**you**” and

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

“your” six times.

Leading up to his point about selfishness, James first says that worldly believers “do not have because” they what? “Do not ask.” Why would professing believers not ask for what they do not have?

I believe that there are two basic reasons why professing Christians do not ask the Lord for help.

They believe in their personal sufficiency. People in general do not want to admit to anyone that they cannot handle whatever life might throw at them. This can be a wonderful quality when it is being motivated by the desire not to become a burden or nuisance to others. But it is totally unacceptable when it comes to not praying and asking God for help or for His assistance. The motto of our life should not be “When all else fails, try prayer.” There may be good reasons at times why we might not approach a particular person or persons for help or assistance when we feel needy, but this is totally unacceptable when it comes to approaching the Lord in prayer. Why?

Because he has made it very clear to us that this is exactly what he wants us to do. It is not as if we would be imposing on Him or that we might bother Him. In fact quite the opposite is true. The more we come to Him in prayer, the happier He is with us. What does 1 Thess. 5:17 command us? We are to pray without ceasing! The Lord wants us to continually come to him in prayer, not only as an expression of our worship but also as an expression of our need. Listen to Heb. 4:16, “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy in the time of our...” What? “need.”

Before I look to myself or others to meet my needs, I must humbly turn to the Lord. I am not saying that we must not exercise personal responsibility when we are faced with various challenges in our lives, but exercising personal responsibility should not preempt or even precede humbly bringing our need before the Lord in prayer and acknowledging that we need His help (Hos. 7:8-12).

The nation of Israel failed to heed this exhortation frequently. Certainly we see this was true when they faced a threat from the nation of Assyria. How did they respond? They responded poorly.

Listen to what the prophet Hosea said in Hos. 7:8-12, First of all he says that (8)“Ephraim (Another name for the northern kingdom of Israel) mixes himself with the nations (or in other words is being influenced by the heathen). Then Hosea adds“..... Ephraim has become a cake not turned” (in other words Ephraim spiritually had become half baked and good for nothing). Now let us look at V. 9, “Strangers devour his strength, Yet he does not know it; Gray hairs also are sprinkled on him, Yet he does not know it.” Another way to say this would be that the influence of the heathen had sapped Ephraim’s strength and he does not even know how weak and old he is. “(10) Though the pride of Israel (The “pride of Israel” is the Lord Himself) testifies against him (in other words the Lord is continually reminding the northern kingdom of their deteriorating condition), Yet they have neither returned to the Lord their God, Nor have they sought Him, for all this.”

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

What should be our first option when we are being personally challenged? Of course we need to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy in the time of our need.” Ephraim, the northern kingdom of Israel, in the time of their declining and deteriorating condition, did not choose to do this. Rather what did they do?

Look at V. 11, “So Ephraim has become like a silly dove, without sense; They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.” Rather than going to the Lord, Ephraim, the Northern kingdom of Israel, facing this threat from Assyria, sought to solve their problem themselves, first by trying to enlist military help from Egypt against Assyria and when that didn’t work they tried to buy Assyria off. They put far more trust in their own sufficiency than the Lord’s provision.

Let us consider our own lives for a moment. When we first become aware of a particular need in our lives, what is our attitude? “I must take my need humbly before the Lord in prayer and seek His help?” or is it, “When everything else has failed then I will try prayer?”

The third cause for internal conflicts is “selfish desires.” In leading up to his point about selfishness, James says that worldly believers “do not have because you do not ask.” Why would professing believers not ask for what they do not have? I believe the first reason why they do not ask is because they believe in their own sufficiency. But this is not all. They may also not believe in the power of prayer.

They do not believe in the power of prayer. I have seen many professing Christians become discouraged in their early attempts at praying. They ask for certain things and they don’t get any of their hoped-for results and they become discouraged and quit. But this is not the way of Christ. We must approach prayer with a sense of great expectation.

What can we expect to happen if we begin to pray in the fashion advocated by Jesus Christ - I mean really begin to take prayer seriously and begin to labor in it fervently? I can tell you what will happen. Listen to the words of Christ in Matt. 7:7-8, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.” The first thing we can expect is that **God will ALWAYS answer biblical prayer. He won’t just answer it some of the time, but ALL of the time. In God’s own way and in His own time He will respond to biblical praying.**

You and I as evangelical believers have absolutely no right to doubt the veracity of prayer! If I can doubt the veracity of prayer, I can, by the same logic, doubt my salvation!

The Lord is a covenant-keeping God who cannot lie. So rest assured, if you really begin to pray, God will answer! He may not answer as quickly as you desire. He may not answer in exactly the way you have in mind, but bank on it, He will answer.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

It all really boils down to this: Either prayer works or it doesn't! Either God is telling us the truth or He isn't! The world, for the most part, does not believe in prayer; they believe in themselves. And this is the reason why professing Christians who have become contaminated by the world do not pray. And this is exactly what James is telling his readers in the last part of James 4:2.

Let me ask you a question? Would you say that your life is characterized by prayer? If it is then praise the Lord. This indicates that your life is being shaped and molded by the truths that are shared with us in Scriptures. If however your life is not characterized by prayer, I believe that you would have to conclude that your life is being shaped more by the world than by the Word.

There are two basic reasons why professing Christians do not pray. Either they believe in their own sufficiency or they do not believe in prayer, and when Christians are not praying, they look much more like the world than they look like the disciples of Christ.

CONCLUSION

We are presently looking at the seventh test of living faith that James gives us in this epistle. And we have called it “The Friendship with the World test.” Those who have become a friend of this world will find their various relationships characterized by turmoil. They will first experience turmoil in their relationships with others. Secondly, they will find conflict in their relationship with themselves. There are three causes for this internal conflict. The first cause is uncontrolled desire. The second cause is unfulfilled desire. And the third cause is selfish desire. Leading up to his point about selfishness, James first says that worldly believers “do not have because” they what? “do not ask.” **Why would professing believers not ask for what they do not have?** They do not ask because they believe in their own sufficiency or they do not believe in prayer.

WHAT ABOUT YOURSELF? WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF IN NEED, IS YOUR RESPONSE MORE LIKE THE WORLD OR IS IT MORE LIKE SOMEONE POSSESSING SAVING FAITH?