

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 12

April 14, 2002

READ James 4:1-10

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Last time we looked at the characteristics of "wisdom from above". We understood that the wisdom that comes from God is given in peace and results in peace. The gospel brings peace with God and resulting peace among those submitted to the Prince of peace.

But James 4 starts off with a contrasting thought provoking question. Why are there fights and quarrels and arguments in the midst of God's people? Why is it that the ones who profess to have the gospel of peace many times display such faction, enmity, and strife? James makes very clear the source of such strife. It has its source in the unfulfilled desires of the heart. If the desires of our heart that battle within us prevail, and Jesus Christ does not rule in our hearts, then watch out!

What are some of these desires that battle within us? We need to know our enemy. According to verse 2, it is the things that we want that we don't get. The desire is at times for things that others have that we want. This certainly includes material things, but is not limited to what we can see and touch. It can also include ambition for position, power, or importance.

Take a moment and list desires that you have. Be sure to include what you would classify as wholesome, or good desires. The following questions will help you identify the desires of your heart:

- What is it that you want? Complete this sentence – I would like to have _____,
- I would like to be _____
- I would be content and happy if I had _____
- It sure would be nice if _____,
- My dream is to have _____ or to be _____.

Here is a sampling of desires that many people have.

- If I just made \$ 5,000.00 more a year, then I could manage. (For you, it may be \$1,000 more, or \$20,000; the number isn't important).
- I just want my children to be healthy and happy and have a decent life.
- I would just like to have some peace and quiet – some down time.
- I need a vacation!
- If I could just lose 15 pounds, then I would be happy.
- If my husband (or wife) would just do _____ or be _____, then things would be so much better.
- If my kids would just obey me, then we would have some peace around here.
- It sure would be nice to have a car that I could depend on – or – a bigger car – or a nicer house – or a house in the country – or a house closer to the city – or a house instead of an apartment.
- If my boss would just understand me and my situation, then
- If I could get rid of _____ physical condition, then

It is the if/then scenario. It can even include noble, good things.

- If I could have this ministry,
- If I had a more disciplined prayer life,
- If I could memorize scripture better,
- If all of my family was saved,
- If I could get rid of this bad habit.

It can also include just plain old "I wants",

- I want that piece of cake, or that extra cookie, or a decent supper.
- Why does the phone always ring when I lay down to take a nap?
- Can't everyone just leave me alone for 30 minutes?

If what we want rules our heart and drives our actions, then we are headed for trouble. Desires are not wrong or evil within themselves as long as they are not contrary to God's revealed will in His Word. In fact, we are promised in Psalm 37:4 that as we delight in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts.

It is the place of desires that is the issue. Do our desires rule us, or does the Lord? And the place that those desires have in our lives is revealed when we don't get what we want. James says that when these desires rule, that we quarrel, and fight, and covet, and even kill. Oh, I would never kill someone! Jesus says when we are angry with our brother, we commit murder in the eyes of the Lord. With our tongues, we can wound and kill a person so easily. We can defame them, and cause them great loss and destruction.

James goes on at the end of verse 2 and says that we do not have what we desire because we do not ask God. God has not called us to scheme, scrape, manipulate, and fight for what we want. He wants us to be totally dependent and trusting in Him for what we desire. He invites us to ask Him for what we want. Listen to just a sampling of promises given to believers:

Mark 11:22-24

22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever

you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Mt 21:22

22 *If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."*

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

John 14:13-14

13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

John 15:7-8

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

John 16:23-24

23 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

I John 3:21-22

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

I John 5:14-15

14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Mt 7:7-11

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

I am convinced from these promises and this passage in James that we often go without because we do not ask. We need to take our desires to God, and ask Him for the answer, His answer, to meet those desires. But James continues in verse 3.

There are times that we ask God for our desires, and He doesn't answer and give us what we ask for, because we are asking for the wrong reason. We are asking selfishly and purely for our own enjoyment and pleasure. God is not some celestial Santa Clause that just pours out goodies to make us feel good. He will never give us anything that will harm us. His intention is never to incite our selfishness, or feed any desire that would take us away from Him. So when we ask for something from God with a wrong motive, we don't get it. That's a reason that we shouldn't hesitate to ask God for what we want to have. Jesus said in that Matthew 7 passage that if we ask our Father for a piece of bread, He won't give us a stone, or He won't give us a scorpion if we ask for a fish. The passage in I John stated that if we ask according to His will for us, then He hears us and answers us. That's why when we ask, we should always ask with an open ear to hear His will in the matter, and to receive wisdom in the situation that has prompted us to ask, and with a willingness to submit to His wisdom and answer to our request.

When we neglect to ask God for what we need, and scheme and plan and manipulate and fight to get what we want, we are acting like the world. We have become unfaithful to God and have chosen to trust in our own strength, wisdom and ability to get what we want. We are committing spiritual adultery. God has saved us, purchased us with the very life blood of His Son, and He owns us. We belong to Him. We are His possession. And He is a jealous God, and will not share us with the world. When we choose to go the way of the world, we are saying with our actions and our desires that we don't need God, and can depend on ourselves or someone else. James says such friendship with the world is hatred toward God. In fact, those whose lives are characterized by this attitude are showing themselves to be God's enemy – unsaved and lost.

Turn to the Matthew 6:19-34.

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

What is to be the treasure and desire of our hearts? It is the Lord and His Kingdom. This is to be the motivation for our requests and petitions. The world puts its hope in earthly wealth and riches, but our true treasure is unseen, is eternal, and is in heaven. Our true treasure is the Lord Himself.

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'. 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Verse 32 is key – the pagans, the world, the unbelievers, the unsaved run after material security, and pursue the larger bank account, and the better job, and financial security and "freedom". And if you carefully look at the rest of this passage, God is not against His people having material things, but He certainly is against us seeking them. Our priority, attention, and pursuit must be the Kingdom of God. If that is our true treasure, then material things become simply a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. When we live with Kingdom priorities, today becomes very important. Yesterday is past and forgiven, and tomorrow is in the hands of a sovereign God. Worry becomes a sin of unfaithfulness to God.

It is a proud independent attitude that James is rebuking. I am glad that verse 6 is thrown into the midst of James 4. We desperately need God's grace to deal with this sinful tendency to act like and befriend the world system. The promises that follow are a great encouragement. If we will forsake our independence, selfishness, self sufficiency, and humble ourselves, and submit ourselves to God, God ceases to be our enemy and becomes our helper. We need to recognize, confess, and forsake our spiritual adultery. We need to submit our desires to God's will. We need to start to seek His will and desire for our lives, and be willing to submit our will and desire to Him. But what about the devil? When our lives are submitted to God, we just need to stand our ground, and the devil will literally run from us, not because we are anything within ourselves, but because God is our friend and is on our side.

When we truly recognize our unfaithfulness to God, it will turn our laughter and joy into gloom and wailing and mourning. The response should be similar to the husband who forsook his faithful wife and becomes aware of his awful sin. Being downcast and depressed is an appropriate response when we recognize our true condition. The contrast is apparent. A light-hearted, laughing, independent, self-sufficient proud person who directs his own life without regard to God, and looks down on those who cannot seem to get it together, is God's enemy. The person who sees his own deficiency, weakness, frailty, and desperate need of God, and cries out to God to be merciful to him, a sinner, is God's friend, and God will send His grace and help to such a person. We

need to ask God to open our eyes to our true condition. Drawing near to God will cause us to change our view of ourselves. We will see our defilement and weakness. We will see that we have no hope apart from His grace and help. It will transform our view of others. We will see that we are no different, that we are all sinners in need of God's forgiveness and help. Drawing near to God will rid us of our criticism and judgment. It will humble us. It will cause us to be desperate. It will make our hearts heavy, and serious, and depressed. But it will drive us into the arms of a loving heavenly Father who stands ready to forgive, cleanse, heal, comfort, restore, and lift us up. Jesus invites those burdened and heavy laden with their sin to come to Him, and that He would take their burden, and give them rest, and replace that burden with His yoke, which is easy and light. Only Christ can provide what we need. We need cleansing. We need a change of heart. We need a change of affections. We need God's peace to calm the raging storm of desires in our hearts. In closing, listen to the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 57:15-21

15 For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. ¹⁶ I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me—the breath of man that I have created. ¹⁷ I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways ¹⁸ I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, ¹⁹ creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near," says the LORD. "And I will heal them."²⁰ But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud.²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."