

The unfolding of your words gives light.

Faith That Works

An Exposition of the Book of James

¹What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you^a? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members^b? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder^c. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel^d. You do not have because you do not ask^e. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures^f. ⁴You adulteresses^g, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God^h? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of Godⁱ. ⁵Or do you think that the

^a 4:1 **What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you.** This is not a reference to some internal human struggle, but quarrels between people. The question could be paraphrased: “Why do people get into fights with each other?”

^b 4:1 **Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members.** Here is the internal human struggle. Fights come from fleshly desires to have what you want. This is the struggle Paul spoke of in Romans 7:7-25 that brought him to say in verse 24, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

^c 4:2 **You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.** “You” are not personally being accused of murder, but you are part of a race of people prone to take extreme measures (even murder) to get what they want. James again has created a dialogue with an imaginary person to make a point.

^d 4:2 **You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.** This is the word for coveting.

^e 4:2 **You do not have because you do not ask.** Our problem is that we think that the source of real satisfaction is in getting people to do what we want them to do. That is why we do not ask God. Why pray when you can stew, worry or manipulate?

^f 4:3 **You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.** James speaks more of prayer in chapter five, but this statement is key to why many people do not get what they ask for in prayer. They are praying selfishly.

^g 4:4 **You adulteresses.** This language refers to idolatry in the Bible. Spiritual adultery was the repeated charge against idolatrous Israel (see Hosea). That which you think you cannot live without can be an idol you have set up in your heart (Ezekiel 14:1-8).

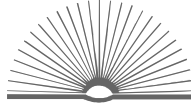
^h 4:4 **do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God.** People have been labeled “worldly” based on fashion, forms of entertainment and diet. While there are external symptoms such as these, James is teaching us that worldliness is a condition caused by the desire to carry on a lasting relationship (“friendship”) with this world. Because God and this world are at odds, you cannot have both.

ⁱ 4:4 **Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.** The word translated “friend” is the common word used of those who are more than casual acquaintances. Abraham is called a “friend of God” (James 2:23). Jesus called Lazarus a “friend” (John 11:11). Likewise, the word for enemy is common, used by Jesus in a parable to describe the relationship between the devil and God’s people (Matthew 13:39). This statement is an extension of God’s demand that we keep company with no other gods.

James 4.01-05
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.
Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.



The unfolding of your words gives light.

Scripture speaks to no purpose^a: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us^b”?^c

^a 4:5 **Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose.** This would be a terrible charge against the word of God—that its words are empty.

^b 4:5 **He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us.** There is more than one way this statement has been understood. The word “spirit” could be translated “Spirit,” referring to the jealous desire of God’s Holy Spirit to have all of us instead of share us with the world. This is not biblically inaccurate, but the only other place James uses the word “spirit,” he is referring to the immaterial part of man (2:26). The NASB gives a footnoted alternative translation which seems to best fit the context of craving worldly alternatives to the living God: “The spirit which He has made to dwell in us lusts with envy.”

^c 4:1-5 What do these statements have in common?

- “I want no more than to have a good relationship with my mother.”
- “I will do whatever it takes to get my children to follow Christ.”
- “I would give anything if my husband were a godly leader in our home.”
- “Today I will offer a sacrifice to Baal so we can have rain on the land.”

They are all the statements of idolaters. Puzzled? Consider the content of all four statements. It is very natural and good to want to relate well with your mother, to want your children to follow Christ, to want your spouse to be godly and to want rain to fall on your crops. The desire is not the problem. Idolatry begins when we think we *must* have those things and when we are willing to do whatever it takes to get them. Idolatry begins when we become angry if we do not get our desires satisfied. Again, the desire is not the problem. Here are some reasons why you should beware of *misplaced* desire:

1. Because it is the source of all conflicts. If you have ever seen someone become sinfully angry you know there is an idol lurking close by.
2. Because it is the root of bad praying. People who effectively pray, “My kingdom come, my will be done...” have usurped God’s authority. They need to repent of their praying.
3. Because it is the launching pad for heart idolatry. We create images in our minds of the way we think things ought to be and then become very dissatisfied when life does not look that way.

James 4.01-05
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.
Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.