

## The Problems Caused by Worldly Wisdom

James 4:1-5

2/20/2000

The book of James, the fourth chapter. We will read together James, chapter 4, verses 1 through 12. James, chapter 4, verses 1 through 12.

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”

In our previous study of chapter 3 of the book of James, we considered the distinction between the man who possessed and practiced the wisdom that was from *beneath*, and the man who possessed and practiced the wisdom that is from *above*. Wisdom that is from above, we saw, produced *righteousness* and *peace* in human relationships. And that wisdom of course was described in verse 17. The wisdom that is from *beneath*, that is, earthly, sensual, and devilish, we saw on the other hand produces envy, strife, confusion, and evil works in human relationships.

And so in chapter 4, James continues to deal with the strife among people that this wisdom from beneath *produces*. In verses 1 through 5 of chapter 4, he speaks of wars, fightings, and killings among the professing people of God; he speaks of unfilled needs and desires; he speaks of *envy* and love for the world; *all* as manifestations of this ungodly wisdom. All ugliness in human relationships, in verses 1 through 5, describes a great deal of the ugliness that can occur in human relationships. All of this ugliness *comes* from one *source*. It comes from ungodly wisdom. And the only solution is to reject this wisdom that is from beneath, and to refuse to function *according* to it, because *nothing good ever* comes out of it.

Now in this chapter, chapter 4, we have the problem described in verses 1 through 5. And in these verses, we see the destructiveness and havoc that sin produces when it is yielded to. Professing Christians are the subject of this passage, and this dismal conduct *among* these professing Christians that is described here is unfortunately all too common in our day and age, and at times it even occurs within our own assembly.

And so these wars, and these fightings, and these killings, and these unfulfilled desires, and this love of the world, and this selfcenteredness, and this envy—these are things that can beset even the people in our own assembly.

Now, did this chapter end at verse 5, we should be in a state of depression, despair, and hopelessness at how bad people can be and at how bad things can get in human relationships. But in verses 6 through 12 of this chapter, we have the solution provided. In verse 6, it begins with that very important and monumental word, “But.” It’s a word of contrast. And after describing this *terrible* behavior that people can and do engage in, in verses 1 through 5, he says, “But”—there is *hope*. And the hope is that God *gives* more grace. And so the hope, the solution that is provided begins with the grace of God that is able to overcome *all* of this behavior when people will *humble* themselves before God.

And so he goes on to describe, in verses 7 through 12, that through humility and confession and repentance and drawing *near* to God and *resisting* the Devil and *controlling* one’s tongue, wars and fightings can *cease*; worldliness can be abandoned; and peace can be restored. So this is where we’re going as we study this chapter.

Now today, God willing, we will look at the problem described, and it will be, I’m afraid, a rather depressing sermon, because we’re dealing with the problem. And then, God willing, next week, we will begin to deal with the *solution* to the problem. But first of all, before we can appreciate the importance and *necessity* of pursuing the solution, we’ve got to understand the depth and the nature of the problem that can occur between people in relationships within the professing community of the people of God.

So in the first place then this evening, let us consider together the description of the problem—the *description* of the problem. Now the problems in the church that James addresses are problems which are both *severe* and *destructive*. And if these problems *continue*, they would completely ruin the church’s testimony and *end* its very existence. Notice how he describes them.

First of all, he describes them as wars and fightings and killings. He describes them as wars and fightings and killings in verses 1 through 2. He says, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” And he’s not presenting this, you see, as a supposition that *could* happen. He’s describing it as something that *has been* happening. He says, Where are these wars and fightings among you *coming* from? “Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.” So in describing the problem that existed, he describes it with these terms of wars and fightings and killings.

Now the word *wars* here does not refer to military wars, though they are similar *to* them. What he is speaking of here is what I'm labeling "social wars." Social wars are wars where a general attitude and condition of hostility towards another person is maintained over an extended period of time. We have in our hearts declared a permanent attitude of *hostility* towards another person. It is a condition of fixed animosity and antagonism towards another. In our minds we have declared war against this person or against this family, and we have withdrawn *any* favorable attitude towards them, and have replaced it with an attitude of ongoing malice.

Now such an inward declaration of war cannot help but break out into open conflict from time to time. And as a result, wars produce *fightings*. Now very often, an outbreak of strife or fighting is the result of an ongoing, inward, declaration of war against a person we are fighting with. And the fight is simply a means to express the inward hostility that we already have towards this person. The one who is at war with another takes constant verbal potshots at them and does what he can to injure him, in his reputation, in his work, in his family, in his friends, in his finances, or anything else that he can think of.

And so this attitude of malice towards someone breaks out into fights with this person, and occasionally these wars and these fightings escalate to the point of killings. He mentions in verse 2, "You kill." Now this word is meant to grab the attention of the reader and make him sit up and realize how far sin can go when it is indulged in without *restraint*. These social wars and fightings can indeed, and at times unfortunately *do*, produce literal *murders*. King Saul is a perfect example of this when he, having declared war on David, made every effort he could to actually murder the man.

However, I do not think that it is primarily to *literal* killings that James is speaking; but rather, just as he is speaking of social wars and social fightings, I believe he is speaking here of social killings. What he is speaking of is the final destruction of relationships between people, where they *utterly separate* from one another on a permanent basis.

Death *is* separation. And a social killing is a permanent separation between people, either by driving them out of our lives by our wars and fightings with them, or by their permanent withdrawal of their lives from ours. Because of their hatred for us, they separate us *from* themselves by permanently withdrawing from us, and thus ending the relationship. And so this hatred becomes murderous in the end, and the result is a *permanent separation* of the relationship.

Such social murder among professing Christians is severely condemned in the Scriptures. In First John, chapter 2, verses 9 and 11, it says, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. But he that *hateth* his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." And then in First John 3, verses 14 through 15, it says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

So this hatred of other people that results in an inward declaration of war against them and breaks out in *fightings* against them that ultimately results in the termination of the relationship *with* them is an act of social murder. Now have you ever observed anything like that going on among the people of God? I am sorry to say I've witnessed it on many, many occasions.

This, then, is the first description of the problem that he gives: that of wars and fightings and killings among the people of God. These things happen in *marriages*, don't they? Where there becomes a fixed attitude of hostility that breaks out in fightings, and ultimately results in a *divorce*. And there is a *killing* of the relationship.

The second description that he gives of the problem is not only that of wars, fightings, and killings, but in verse 2, he speaks of the using of wrong methods for the fulfillment of desires—the use of wrong *methods* for the fulfillment of *desires*.

Now the problems that he's addressing here not only involve wars, fightings, and killings, as bad as *that* is, but it also involves the use of *wrong methods* for the fulfillment of desires. Now in verse 2, he says, You lust, or you desire, and *have* not. You therefore kill and desire to have and cannot obtain. Whatever it is these people are *wanting*, they're trying to get it by killing. And it says, You fight and war, yet you have *not*. So the methods that are being employed are that of killing and fighting and warring to get what they want. And yet he says, You have not because you *ask* not. And what he is indicting these people with, in verse 2, is the use of wrong methods for the fulfillment of their *desires*.

Now without commenting for the moment upon the legitimacy of the desires that are spoken of here, it is *clear* that the method used to fulfill them is utterly wrong. And even if the desires that are spoken of in verse 2 *are* proper, the way to fulfill them is not through taking advantage of other people, abusing other people, or achieving them at the *expense* of other people. Fighting and warring and killing of others is *not* the way to get what you want. Verbal, emotional, or physical abuse of other people is *always* the wrong method to get what you want in your relationship with them.

Husbands do this to wives all time. The wife doesn't fulfill their legitimate desires with reference to this or that, and so they go to war with their wives, and they fight with their wives to get them to do this or that, when in fact, love, and kindness, and patience, and instruction, and example, and prayer are far superior methods that actually produce *results*—and actually, enable your desires to be met.

And so the point is, is that sometimes the things we want aren't *wrong*, but the way we go about *getting* them is *atrocious*. We don't get them through wars and fightings and killings. We get them by using spiritual methods. In this case, he prescribes, Why don't you try some prayer? Quit yelling and screaming and fighting and start *praying*. He says, You have not because you *ask* not. He's saying, Your desires are *unfulfilled* because you're using carnal methods to fulfill your desires rather than *spiritual* methods to fulfill your desires. You want someone in a

relationship to do something? Don't use carnal methods to get them to do it—use *spiritual* methods to get them to do it.

Wars and fightings are a wholly unsatisfactory substitute for *prayer* in obtaining the fulfillment of one's legitimate desires. But you see the trouble is, we're not willing to wait on God to accomplish what we want Him to do in someone else's life through prayer. So we try and speed up the process by applying a little emotional and verbal abuse. And then we wonder why things get worse instead of better.

There is a third problem that he describes. In the description of the problem, not only does he describe there being wars and fightings and killings; not only does he describe the use of *wrong methods* for the fulfilling of desires; but then in verse 3, he talks about the problem of ungodly and unsanctified desires. He talks about the problem of *ungodly* and *unsanctified* desires.

Now in verse 2, he says, You have not because you ask not. He's saying, You're using the *wrong* methods to go about getting what you want in your relationship with this other person, whoever they might be. He says, You need to start *praying*. But then people say, Well, I *have* prayed. Well verse 3 addresses that. You *ask* and *receive not* because you ask amiss. You have a wrong end, and you have a wrong motive, in order that *you* might consume it upon your *lusts*. In other words, you're not praying for right things and right goals. You're praying so that you can have your own selfish covetous desires for personal pleasure furthered.

We have just spoken of the use of spiritual methods to obtain the fulfillment of legitimate desires, and foremost among those spiritual methods is that of prayer. But even prayer is not going to work if what we are praying for is *illegitimate* in and of itself. Listen. God answers prayer that *is* in accordance with His will. And His will is His *word*. And if we are asking *contrary* to His will that is revealed in His word in order that our own evil desires might be *accomplished*, then we will not receive what we ask for. When we pray for selfish ends out of covetous motives, for the sake of selfglorification, with a goal of mere personal pleasure or selfsatisfaction, then we can expect no answer to our prayers. None whatsoever.

Biblical prayer, prayer that God answers, is prayer for the accomplishment of *His* purposes. It is prayer to further the advance of *His* kingdom. And it is prayer that seeks the praise of *His* glory. And you see, these people who are fighting and warring and killing are very selfcentered people. They are thinking of Me, Myself, and I, instead of thinking of God and His purposes and His glory, and what would be best for *that* person—not what would be best for *me* if I could get that person to just do this and this and this. But rather, what does that person really need and how would *God* be glorified in that, and how can that be *biblically* accomplished? And you see, when you start praying in *that* pattern, God answers those prayers and brings those requests to pass.

Psalm 115, and verse 1, is the proper attitude we should have in prayers. Psalm 115, verse 1, says, "Not unto *us*, O Lord, not unto us, but unto *thy* name give glory, for *thy* mercy, and for *thy* truth's sake." And you see, the trouble with these prayers that he is speaking of here in verse 3 is that they're very selfish prayers. They are not prayers for the glory of God and furtherance of

*His* purposes in that person's life so that that person might become more like *Jesus*, but simply that I want that person to change so that they will please me. And you see, the very word that is used in verse 3, "lusts," is the word from which we get our word "hedonism." It's the word for pleasure. And those of you who have the New King James, it's translated "pleasure."

You see, this person is concerned with one thing—not *that* person's best interest, not God's glory, just my pleasure—what's going to make *me* feel good, and what's going to please me and suit my own little agenda. And so ungodly and unsanctified desires are a third problem that he identifies that exists among the people of God.

There is a fourth problem described, and that is friendship with the world. Having described the problem of wars, fightings, and killings, the problems of using wrong methods for the fulfilling of legitimate desires, having seen the ungodly and sanctified desires, now he speaks of the problem of friendship with the world, verse 4.

He says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses." Notice that he addresses both men and women here. He's egalitarian. He doesn't say that worldliness is just a problem with men or just a problem with women. He distributes the blame *equally* across the spectrum of gender. He says, "know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world *is* the enemy of God." That's pretty strong language. I don't know about you, but I don't want God to be my enemy. Anyone who sets himself at enmity against God and fights with God is a fool and a loser.

Now in this passage, James is saying that God *views* His people as being *married* to Himself. And of course, this concept is abundantly illustrated in Ephesians 5, wherein Christ is declared to be the *bridegroom*, and the Church is declared to be His bride. And the point that he's making is this: Since the Christian is in such an intimate and exclusive covenantal relationship to Christ that it can be likened to a marriage, to therefore show loyalty and friendship and affection to that which is *contrary* to Christ, to that which is *opposed* to Christ, and to that which is an *enemy* of Christ is to be unfaithful to Christ and our covenantal relationship with Him to *such* a degree that it can be likened unto adultery.

It is inconsistent in the extreme to claim Christ as your husband and at the same time be friends with His enemies. To be friends with the enemy of your husband is an act of gross unfaithfulness, an act of gross treason, and makes you into the enemy of your husband as well. Because if you are friends with someone's enemy, you then become *his* enemy as well. So what God is saying is that the *friend* of my enemy is also my enemy. That's what He's saying. The friend of my enemy is also my enemy.

A man cannot serve two masters who are in conflict with each other. He has to choose *sides*. That's why Joshua said to the people of God—he said, Choose you this day whom you're going to serve. Either flip or flop. But you can't stay in the middle. And you can't serve both. If Jehovah is God, then serve Him whole hog. And if Balaam, or Baal is god, serve him whole hog. But don't try and have one foot in Jehovah's camp and the other foot in the camp of Baal.

Doesn't work. And so in the same way, we either have to be a friend of God or a friend of the world; but we can't be both. Now the world, as we have previously explained in our study in the book of James, is simply the collective attitudes, motives, speech, and conduct of those who are in rebellion against God. When you take all the people who are in rebellion against God and add together their attitudes, motives, speech, and conduct—that is what the world is—and to acquiesce to, and participate in those attitudes, motives, speech, and conduct is what constitutes *worldliness*. These collective attitudes, motives, speech, and conduct result in a set of values. They result in a world view. They result in a purpose of life that are all directed towards the destruction of godliness.

And so therefore, to seek the approval of such people and to identify oneself with such people by conformity to their attitudes and their motives and their speech and their conduct and their values, is to be unfaithful to God and to become at enmity with God, and to become the enemy of God.

The problem with the people to whom James was writing is that they were more in fear of worldly men than they were of God. They were far more concerned about what unsaved people thought of them than they were about what *God* thought of them. These were people who loved the approval of men more than the approval of God, and these were people who sought to please men *more* than they sought to please God.

Well this, then, was the problem, or *problems*, I should say, that existed among the professing people of God. There were wars and fightings and killings. There was the use of wrong methods for the fulfilling of desires. There were ungodly and unsanctified desires. And there was friendship with the world. That is the description of the problem.

In the second place this evening, let us consider together the *source* of the problem—the *source* of the problem. Now these are terrible problems. *Where* did these problems come from, and *why* do they exist among the professing people of God? Well in short, the source of the problem is the employment of the wisdom that is from *beneath*.

Now if you go back to chapter 3, and verse 15, which is in this immediate context, notice the characteristics of the wisdom that is from beneath. It says, "This wisdom descendeth not from above," so it's from beneath, "but is earthly, sensual, devilish." That is, this wisdom that is from beneath proceeds from the world and the flesh and the devil.

And notice how all three of them are at play in this passage in chapter 4. Obviously, the flesh is at work. In verse 1, he talks about the lusts that war in your members, that is, in your body. Verse 2, he says, You lust and desire to have. Verse 3, You desire to consume it upon your lusts. Verse 5, the disposition within us lusts to envy. The word there for spirit is not speaking of the *human* spirit, per se, but rather is speaking of a disposition or a ruling attitude within us that lusts to envy. And the point is this, is that the desire to fulfill the pleasures and cravings of remaining sin that is in our bodies and the *yielding* to that desire is one of the sources of the problem that breaks forth into this terrible behavior. These fleshly lusts cause us to seek to obtain that which is not

pleasing to God, to do so through the employment of ungodly methods, ungodly treatment of other people, and ungodly prayers.

But there is a second source of the problem. It is not only the flesh, but the world. Obviously, verse 4, the world is at play here. “Know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God?” Clearly, the world is exerting an influence upon these people, and a *persuasion* upon them that is drawing out their affection and their loyalty *away* from Christ and putting it upon those things that are contrary to Him and *opposed* to Him. The world is constantly provoking us to try and meet our legitimate human needs through ungodly means, with the result that we start *opposing God* in our conduct, in our speech, in our motives, in our actions, in our treatment of other people, and as a result, He starts opposing *us*.

There is a third source of the problem. There is not only the flesh at work and the world at work, but the Devil is also at work. That his influence is in operation in the problem described is declared in verse 7, when he says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” And the clear implication is that these people have *not* been resisting the Devil. The Devil has been at work in their wars and fightings and killings. And we would expect this because Satan is constantly tempting us to wars and fightings and killings, to selfish and vain desires, and to love the things of the world, because he is both a liar and a murderer *himself*. He is at *enmity* against God, and his goal is to destroy relationships and to turn God’s own people into traitors to God and friends to His enemies, in order that the work and purposes of God might be frustrated and destroyed. So anytime we see the flesh at work and the world at work, we can count on the fact that the Devil is at work as well.

Now then, any *one* of these influences—the flesh *or* the world *or* the Devil—any one of them by *itself* is powerful enough to *defeat* us and to move us into the most *wretched* of behaviors. But the three of them added together make an overwhelming opponent. And because of these opponents, Christians are capable of some pretty *awful* behavior. And sometimes we have to see just how awful it really is, and how really awful it can get before we are motivated to seek a solution.

And so James is *unsparing* in his description of how bad it really gets and what the consequences *are* when the wisdom that is from beneath rules in our lives and we wind up following the flesh and the world and the Devil. Let me tell you, there is nothing good that comes out of following *any* of them *ever*.

*But*—verse 6—*He gives more grace*. That’s our hope. What is our hope? We look at this and we say, Yeah, you know, at times I’m guilty of that stuff. I’ve done some warring and some fighting and some killing. And I certainly am attracted to the world, and the Devil is busy in my life. How can I ever triumph? The answer is, *He*, God, gives more grace. *More* than the power of the world, *more* than the power of the flesh, *more* than the power of the Devil is the *power* of the *grace* of God. There is *more* than enough grace to conquer these three opponents, *but* it is only available to the humble. “Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”



Now what he does in these following verses, which God willing we will consider next Lord's Day, is provide for us a pattern of behavior that produces a *remedy* for the kind of conduct that is listed in the first five verses. He gives us ten imperatives here. He says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God." Imperative number 1. Number 2, "Resist the devil." Number 3, "Draw nigh to God." Number 4, "Cleanse your hands." Number 5, "Purify your hearts." Number 6—I'm losing count here, "Be *afflicted*, and *mourn*, and *weep*: let your *laughter* be turned to mourning, and your *joy* to heaviness." "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." "Speak not evil one of another."

By the implementation of those imperatives—those directives, those commands—we can overcome and avoid *engaging* in the problems that are described in the first five verses. And so, we will begin to consider together these directives and by following them, find ourselves *never participating* in the problems that are described in the first five verses.

You see, those who follow the directives of verses 6 through 12 are those who do not *engage* in wars and fightings and killings. They are those who do not *use* wrong methods to fulfill legitimate desires. They are not those who have ungodly and unsanctified desires in the *first* place. They are those who do not fall into friendship with the world.

Now a lot of people find the directives in verses 6 through 12 rather demanding, onerous, *legalistic*. Listen, what's the alternative? Do you want to live in the pattern of behavior in verses 1 through 5? Is that what you want? You want God as your enemy? You want to be involved in wars and fightings and killings and unanswered prayer and frustrated desires? That's the life of the ungodly. And that can be the life of the professing Christian if he *becomes* ungodly and *abandons* these patterns of sanctification and these responsibilities that are listed in the following verses.

You see, a lot of people don't take their responsibilities and disciplines in the Christian life very seriously, because they don't think it's going to be any big deal if they *don't*. Well I want to tell you, *if* you don't, you're going to find yourself *practicing* verses 1 through 5. And I've seen it happen over and over and over again, where people allow pride to rise up; and where they cease to draw near to God; where they abandon an attitude of submission to His law and His word; where they have a cavalier attitude towards sin; where they let their mouth run in speaking evil of other people. And it's not very long before wars and fightings and killings break out, and God sets Himself against them, and their life becomes an intolerable mess. So this is a very sobering chapter, but at the same time, it's a very encouraging chapter, because there is that word *but* in it. This says you don't have to live this way.

But it's also telling us, folks, there are *no cheap shortcuts away* from and *out of* wars and fightings and killings. One must apply himself to those ten imperatives, and when he does, and *only* when he does, he can find the way out from the world and the flesh and the Devil. Let us pray together.

Father, thank you so much that though we have the potential to be *so bad*, yet Father, we can be so good because you give more grace. We can filled with love, and joy, and peace, and gentleness, and longsuffering, and goodness, and meekness, and all the other fruits of the Spirit if we but humble ourselves in the sight of God.

Oh Father, pride is such a ripoff. It's such a destroyer. Help us for once and for all to stick the sword into the heart of it, and humble ourselves before you and have your grace, that these things would never erupt again in our marriages or in our church. Father, I pray that you might help us to be people who love one another with a pure heart fervently, and who *serve* one another, and who conduct ourselves *unspotted* from the world, and who have an undivided loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Father, may you sanctify our desires and help us to employ spiritual means to obtain them. And Father, may our desires above all else be for *your* glory in the accomplishment of your purposes. Father, deliver us from selfishness and from the mere seeking of our own pleasure. But may the pleasure of the Lord be that which prospers in our hand. Father, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Page 6, paragraph 4: “When you take all the people who are in rebellion against God and add together their attitudes, motives, speech, and conduct—that is what the world is—and to **[gap]** to, and participate in those attitudes, motives, speech, and conduct is what constitutes *worldliness*.” Inserted “acquiesce”.