

James 4:1-6  
The Danger of Being a Friend of the World - 1

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## Introduction

Another key indicator of true saving faith is one's attitude toward the world. James introduced this subject in the first chapter, saying, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to **keep himself unspotted from the world.**" (1:27). James now goes on to teach the principle that "friendship with the world is hostility towards God". As God's children, He calls us to live dynamically different from the world. **Those living for the things of this world, declare that they are not living for the things of God.** Friendship with the world results in personal conflict—with others (4:1a), with oneself (vv. 1b–3), and, most important, with God (vv. 4–6).

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## James 4:1-6

Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires* for pleasure that war in your members? <sup>2</sup> You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup> Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? <sup>6</sup> But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

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## Conflict with Others

James 4:1a

Where do wars and fights *come* from among you?

James asks the **question** “Where do wars and fights *come* from among you?” The word “**war**” involves prolonged, and serious disputing or combat. “**Fights**” refers to a specific fight or battle. Both terms are used here metaphorically of violent personal relationships, which, in the extreme, can result even in murder (v. 2).

“**Among you**” indicates that these combative relationships were between members of the churches to whom James wrote. Perhaps some of the people who attended these churches were not saved and therefore enemies of God. Others may still be trying to live for the things of this world which puts them in conflict with each other. These are those to whom James is addressing

Conflict in the church is not God’s will or design. Rather, Jesus gave us the commandment to love one another.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? <sup>2</sup> You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

**Friendship with the world not only creates conflict with other people but also conflict within the person himself.** The sources of external conflicts among people invariably arise from internal conflicts within each person.

It is like **wallpaper** which cannot mask the imperfections of the wall.

Today we see the **evidences of internal conflict**. There is an increase of impatience, frustration, anger, and hostility in society. It is evidenced in the home, street gangs, and school violence. Anger on the highways has earned its own term "road rage". To treat the host of ills, there are psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors and therapists. These treat the problems of violence, addictions, abuse and suicidal tendencies.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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Let's pause a minute and take a look at ourselves and society. We pursue pleasure. Look at the culture shock many American's go through when they go to a 3<sup>rd</sup> world country. People want to maintain a certain lifestyle and are filled with anxiety when it is threatened. Take a look at our world, with its unemployment. Things are out of our control, and people are fearful of losing what they have. This is evidenced in such simple things as hoarding toilet paper. People are going to make sure they have the things they need to maintain their level of comfort and security, even if it means that others go without.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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This is not just a problem for the wealthy (we all are wealthy by world standards) who practice the religion of **materialism**. Materialism is where people put their faith and trust in themselves and the things of this world by amassing as much of it for themselves as they can.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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The poor are not exempt from the temptation to quarrel and fight in order to obtain the pleasures of this world. This is evident in the high rate of violent crime that plagues our nation. Conflict is the **symptom** of selfishness that characterizes both rich and poor, and we **cannot blame** our environment or society for our quarrelsome behavior. **The problem comes from within...**

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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Let's build some foundation to help understand what James is going to be teaching.

### **Man's problem with worldly desire is twofold:**

**First**, people never seem to be **content** with the good gifts God has given them.

**Second**, they seek worldly pleasure through **any means necessary**. They seek them through illegitimate means—through deception, theft or injury—rather than by seeking them from the great Giver of all good things.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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**Blessed is the man, who like Paul, has learned the secret of godly contentment.**

### **Philippians 4:11**

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content

1 Timothy 6:6-10

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. <sup>8</sup> And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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In these verses, James points out three causes of internal conflict: uncontrolled desire, unfulfilled desire, and selfish desire.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

Do *they* not *come from your desires for pleasure* that war in your members? <sup>2</sup>You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

### Uncontrolled Desire – vs. 1b

The source of internal conflicts comes from one's desires. This word is translated “Lust” in the KJV. It refers to **uncontrolled personal desire to fulfill every passion and whim that promises satisfaction and enjoyment**. The desire to fulfill these lusts comes from selfishness that is opposed to God and His word. Unsaved persons are **slaves to their desires** and are controlled by their passions (cf. 1 Thess. 4:3–5). People who surrender themselves to their lust think that they are expressing personal “freedom” but are showing that they are “slaves of sin”.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

Do *they* not come from your *desires for* pleasure that **war in your members**? <sup>2</sup> You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

### Uncontrolled Desire – vs. 1b

James states that ungodly lusts wage “**war in your members**”. Here James is not referring to the church proper, but to the physical and mental elements of the human body, which contain man’s fallen flesh or humanness (cf. Rom. 1:24; 6:12–13; 7:18, 23). It is the war of the unbeliever’s flesh with his soul and conscience.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

Do *they* not come from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? <sup>2</sup> **You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain.** You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

### Unfulfilled Desire – vs. 2a

When desires for the wrong kinds of pleasure are frustrated and unfulfilled, they also wage external war. The verb “**lust**” used here refers to having a desire or longing of any kind, but the context makes it clear that the desire mentioned here is misdirected, and sinful. When any strong, sinful lust is not gratified, the worldly person is prone to become angry and frustrated. This can even result in murder. Even the Pharisees, who lusted for personal glory and power, murdered the Savior who unmasked their hypocrisy.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

Do *they* not come from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? <sup>2</sup> **You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain.** You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

### Unfulfilled Desire – vs. 2a

When the lusting person cannot achieve his desired goals—whether for reputation, prestige, sexual gratification, money, power, escape through drugs or alcohol, success, possessions, the affections of another person, or whatever—the result is often catastrophic to others and always destructive to oneself.

The word "**desire**" translates from a Greek word from which we get our word "**zealous**". It is more than a passing desire or whim. **It means a jealous desire.** When people harbor such fierce desires, but cannot obtain what they covet, they fight and quarrel. Marital conflicts, family conflicts, job conflicts, national conflicts—all these are the result of unsatisfied personal lust and envying. The Greek of verse 2 literally reads: "You lust and do not have. You kill. And you are envious and cannot obtain. So you fight and quarrel."

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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### Selfish Desire – vs. 2b-3

As would be expected, worldly, **ungodly desire not only is uncontrolled and unfulfilled but also is selfish.**

James states that these selfish fighting people do not have because they do not ask. Perhaps they do not even think of asking God for help because they consider themselves self-sufficient. They believe that all their needs and wants can be met by human means through their own wisdom, power, and diligence. **They do not believe that the Father is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).**

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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### Selfish Desire – vs. 2b-3

Many do ask God for things, all sorts of things. But, as James continues to explain, they ask and do not receive, because they **ask with wrong motives**, so that they may spend it on their pleasures. They do not ask for things for God's goodness and grace to be magnified or for the sake of His glory and honor. They do not ask in order to be able to fulfill His perfect and divine will but to fulfill their own sinful and selfish wills.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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### Selfish Desire – vs. 2b-3

**“Ask”** is the same verb used in 1:5–6 and carries the idea of **pleading, begging, imploring**. But in the earlier passage James is obviously speaking of and to genuine believers, whom he admonishes: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind..” In 4:2–3, the asking is done or not done by those who are double-minded.

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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### Selfish Desire – vs. 2b-3

“**Amiss**” carries the basic meaning of **bad, evil, or wicked** in the Greek. It speaks of the **motives** of a person. It means that God is unable to answer their requests because they are asking with evil motives.

The wrong motivation is the desire to spend God’s gifts on one’s own lusts. The Greek word for “**spend**” means to completely use up or squander and was used by Jesus to describe the prodigal son’s wasteful squandering of his inheritance (Luke 15:13). The lusts mentioned here refer back to verses 1 and 2. These are the pleasures which God cannot honor. Yet worldly people live for such lusts. They live for the thrill of the moment, unsuccessfully trying to fulfill and gratify their fleshly lusts and intentions

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## Conflict with Self

James 4:1b-3

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### Selfish Desire – vs. 2b-3

This is the problem.

This **lust and envy are the root cause of many sins**. When a person is prevented from obtaining their desire by legitimate means they often resort to deceit, theft or quarreling.

**Yet earthly pleasures never satisfy**. Once we obtain the thing we desired, we want more, or else we want something different. The craving never ceases. The emptiness can never be filled with the pleasures of this life. It can only be filled with God Himself—He must come into our hearts and abide there. Once we have tasted God's goodness, earthly pleasures seem hollow and unsavory in comparison.

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## So What

Think about these things:

- Recognize that the covetous desire for earthly pleasures is a great evil, and is the root cause of many sins: quarreling, deception, theft, adultery, murder and rebellion against God.
- Pray for the things you need in this life, rather than resorting to sinful means to obtain them.
- If you find there are selfish requests you cannot justify before God, then pray instead for forgiveness and repentance, and for the grace to overcome such selfish desires.
- Set godliness and contentment as two of your primary goals in life. Learn to submit to God's wise, loving sovereignty in all things, and to be content with whatever He has ordained for you.

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## So What

Think about these things:

- Be aware that fleshly desires give rise to conflicts. For the Christian, this ought to be an *inner* conflict, as the Spirit wars against the flesh. We need to actively *oppose* our fleshly desires.
- Recognize that there is both an "old" and "new" you. The "new" you is Christ living in you, and is the "real" you. Consider the "old" you to have died with Christ on the cross.
- Learn to "walk by the Spirit" and to be "led by the Spirit". Saturate yourself with the Scriptures and sound Bible teaching as you learn to fill your life with prayer and good works, reflecting often upon God's glories. Examine your heart and life, considering how you might better serve Him.
- Seek from God the grace we need to overcome our fleshly desires as you submit to your heavenly Father in humble, loving obedience.

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## So What

We have looked at Godly and worldly wisdom. The real foundation of our lives will be evidenced by how we live, the choices we make, and the goals we seek to obtain.

We tend to view ourselves differently than those who are watching. The person we tend to deceive the most is ourselves. We each need to carefully evaluate our lives. Are we really living in the light of God's truth?

I do have to say that I believe our church functions well. We are not filled with disputes, but we must be aware that this is one of Satan's favorite tactics for destroying churches.

I encourage you to pick up the phone and call some of our church friends. Check on those who might need help. Let's pray for each other and put our focus on pleasing God more than pleasing self!