

James 4:1–5

What Strife and Spiritual Adultery Have to Do with One Another

Thursday, January 25, 2024 • Read James 4:1–5

Questions from the Scripture text: What do believers have among themselves (v1)? What question does v1 ask about these wars and fights? From what desires do these wars and fights come? Where do these desires war? What happens when we lose the war (v2)? What happens to this lust? What else comes out of their heart? Resulting in what actions? But why don't they have—what would have been the right way to obtain? When they do ask, what happens (v3)? Why? What is amiss about their asking? What does v4 suddenly call them? What is another name for putting our pleasures first? And what would this friendship with the world make us? With what does v5 now back up this point?

Why is strife so bad? James 4:1–5 prepares us for the second serial reading in public worship on the Lord's Day. In these five verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **strife exposes that we have placed desires not only above other people but above God.**

The closing section of chapter 3 strongly emphasized that a teacher in the church should not be a man given to strife: meekness, no bitterness, no envy, no self-seeking, purity, peace, gentleness, willing to yield, full of mercy, and then the double emphasis upon peace in 3:18. Now, in 4:1–5, we see why this is so important. Strife belongs to those who have put their own desires not only above other people, but above God Himself.

Self-seeking against men. The wars and fights are coming among them (v1a), because of desires to indulge themselves (v1b). This means that one battle as already been lost: the war within their members. There is a holy war within each believer, as the Spirit leads his new nature to war against the flesh and its remaining desires (cf. Gal 5:16–18; Rom 8:13; Rom 6:11–14). So when we find in ourselves a quarreling and battling spirit against our brother, and find ourselves in actual quarrels and battles with our brother, we have already lost the first battle: the war within.

And if we are losing that war within, we can expect things just to get worse if we indulge a hostile spirit toward our brother. In v2, desire is joined by murderousness and covetousness, inwardly and outwardly, and yet the flesh continues to be unsatisfied. O miserable man who puts indulging himself above pleasing God and finding pleasure in God! And he makes others miserable as well.

Self-seeking against God. But something worse is happening in the heart of the one who wishes to indulge himself—and not only in his heart but in his life. Whatever it is that he is battling others to have: control, credit, esteem, praise, influence, possessions, relationships, enjoyments... he isn't bringing his desire to the One from Whom all things must come (end of v2). Why not? Quite likely because the thing for which he is asking is something for which he would be rightly embarrassed to ask! Or, as in v3, perhaps he is asking, but he should have been horrified to ask for such a thing or in such a way.

It is a wicked, horrible thing to treat God as a means to our end. Will we, the creature, come to the Almighty and seek to indulge ourselves? Will we ask Him to accommodate the things that please us, rather than learning to desire things that please Him? Even for many good things, we might ask in this wretchedly wrong way. God give us grace by His Spirit, that not only would we desire good things according to His Word (and a good name, and even much in the way of earthly resources, are often good gifts from Him)... but that we would desire them *because He has taught us* that they are good. God give us grace to desire them that we might enjoy His goodness in them, and that we might employ them in His service and for His glory!

Spiritual adultery. Now we are getting to the true vileness of the self-seeking and self-indulgence that is being expressed when believers are quarrelsome and contentious. We were created for the Lord. We were redeemed for the Lord. We were created and redeemed to find Him incomparably pleasant and satisfying, to see and receive all other goods as a part of enjoying Him and His goodness. But when anything in the cosmos ("world," v4, 5) becomes something that we use God to get by "prayer" (if such a prayer can even be called that), or something that we disregard God for altogether, then we are adulterers or adulteresses.

God has given us the great covenant promise, "I will be your God, and you will be My people." He has put this covenant relationship into our mouths in the words of the song of songs, which is about the love of loves, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine, and His banner over me is love." And now, after He has done that, will we find pleasure instead of Him or even apart from Him? Such love of the cosmos is adulterous and even enmity against God (end of v4).

The Spirit Who leads us in that battle in our members (v1, cf. Rom 8:13; Gal 5:16–18) is the Spirit Who pours out in our hearts God's inexhaustible love to us (cf. Rom 5:5). And, in our hearts, He yearns jealously for the love between us and God (v5). This is the love that is behind God's demand in the second commandment (cf. Ex 20:5), requiring that we have Him in His way, and not according to our own imaginings that find pleasure in something that is not actually Him.

Are you miserable? Against whom are you most in danger of indulging hostility and even expressing it? How are you training your mind and heart to enjoy all good things as gifts from the Lord and employ them all in service to the Lord?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for giving us every good and perfect gift. Forgive us for when we live to indulge ourselves. Forgive us for how this produces strife within Your dear bride, the Church. Forgive us for the adultery of desiring anything apart from You, enjoying anything apart from enjoying You, or doing anything apart from serving You. Grant that Your Spirit, Who pours out Your love into our hearts, would continue yearning jealously for the love between us and Yourself, we ask through Christ, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP73C "Yet Constantly, I Am with You" or TPH73C "In Sweet Communion, LORD, with Thee"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

James chapter 4, verses 1 through 5. These are God's words Where do whores and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure? That war in your members. You lost. Which you do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight, and Yet, you do not have.

Because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive. Because you ask Miss that, you may spend it on your Pleasures. 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. Or do you think that the scripture says in vain? The spirit who dwells in us. Yearns. Jealously.

Amen, thus sends this reading of God's inspired and denarent word. The Lord here in his kindness to Is coming from telling us about those who should be teachers. And those who should be teachers are Uh, these men of peace. Uh, the ones who do their Works in the meekness of wisdom.

Verse 13 from the last chapter. The ones who put away. And do not exhibit Bitter Envy. And self-seeking. Um, verse 14 and verse 16 from the last chapter, but especially Pure Peaceable, gentle willing to yield, Etc. Over against that character that our teachers should have and therefore, that we should have.

Because one of the things that the scripture teaches is that, when the A student is fully taught, it'll be like as teacher and we have examples in the Bible of those

whom God has made teachers saying, follow me as I follow Christ. Hebrews 13. Verse 7. Remember that we're supposed to follow the faith.

Of Those whom the Lord has given to us to speak the word to us. And follow the outcome especially knowing the outcome of your faith of their faith to follow them. And so he gives us here. Okay, a diagnostic. A question to ask whenever we are not at peace, whenever we are self-seeking whenever we are envious.

Uh, and he takes Uh, our attention off of the person that we're against, this is This is the Trick is not the word that I'm looking for. Um, Maybe deception.

I can't find the word. Well, this is the great thing that escapes our notice when we are in a quarrel or in a fight Uh, whenever you're in a quarrel or Are in a fight. You're usually focused on how bad the other person is and you're not realizing that the bitterness and the anger and the Envy and The Strife in your own heart, did not come from the other person.

It came from your desire to control them, and to control everything. And We're going to see in the second place to control God and so Uh, The first great problem is that we are self-seeking with others or the presenting problem is that we're self-seeking with others, but the root problem is that we're self-seeking with God.

So he says, where do Wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war within your members? 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.

And so, in the In the heart is the remaining fleshliness of Living, according to our desire. And living, according to our desire. When we make our desire, the thing that is great to us. God is no longer great to us and if God is no longer great to us then the one who is made in His Image is no longer special for being made in his image.

And so what happens is the flesh takes its desire and puts it in the place of God. And we're really going to come to that in in the second place. But one of the symptoms Of putting our desire in the place of God, is that every other person then becomes a Potential hindrance, potential obstacle.

Uh, to my desire. And that's where the fighting and the quarreling comes from that's what makes me willing to be murderous in my heart is because I'm coveting and I'm unable to obtain. So if eliminating them as an obstacle to my desire, whatever that desire is. To get to have what I want to get to do.

What? I want to get the feel. Whatever pleasure it is that I want to have the praise or esteem that I want to have the status in the house, or in the community or in the church that I want or simply just to do whatever I will. Uh, notice the, i i i, i And since I covet and I cannot obtain there an obstacle to my obtaining then, I fight.

And I, And so, whenever you are in a quarrel in a fight, And this is, especially when you feel in your heart, the the quarreling, the animosity. You know, sometimes. Uh, Uh, maybe even talk to ourselves about how awful somebody else is. Uh, we need to watch out. Because that bitterness in the heart.

That hostility in the heart. Uh, is coming from. Having put a desire of ours or having put our own desire. In a place that belongs. To God. And so first, he deals with Uh, self-seeking in relation to others, but quickly and you can hear why? Because of the idolatry that is exposed by our self-seeking when it comes to others.

How quickly he connects that to our self-seeking. When it comes to God. Uh, even at the end of verse 2, he's already making that transition. Yet you do not have. Because you do not ask. And, This is already beginning to remind us. Uh, your desire is not God. God is God and you are supposed to desire.

Whatever you learn from him, whatever is according uh to him a good thing to desire. That doesn't mean that you don't desire things like a good name, which he says, are better than riches. And as to be, Enjoyed as a gift from God and employed in the service of God.

Just like if you have the less valuable stuff riches, Those are to be enjoyed as a gift from God and employed in the service. Of God. But this enjoyed and employed. Aspect to whatever, is the object of Desires comes when God is God. And not to this and the desire isn't God.

When a desire is God, that's usually when we refer to it as a lust, although the word in the Greek is the same Uh, but whenever we're talking about a desire that is out of proportion at a place. Doesn't have God above it and God driving it. Uh, then it is appropriate that we refer to that as a lust now.

There's, there's a Uh reason. It's going to say a good reason, but that's a moral judgment. This is very not good. Uh, there is a reason that they have and do not ask. And it's double one. They tried asking and they didn't receive but the other they're embarrassed to ask You ask and do not receive verse 3, because you ask amiss.

That you may spend it on your Pleasures. So now the desire Uh, is Is not just something that other people become a means to obtaining and we treat them not as in the image of God, but as in the service of our desire, But now, God himself becomes in the service of our desire.

Can't we see how perverted how corrupt such praying is? That we come to God, not asking. That we might see his goodness and in his good gifts and he might be glorified that we might enjoy it as a gift from him and employ it in service to him. But asking him to be the servant the mechanism.

Maybe the magic is, is the grievously true and wicked word that properly describes it the Magic by which we obtain the thing that we desire, please Do not treat God, that way seek Grace from him, that he would treat him as your God and that you would want. All of the good things, all of the right things that that he teaches us in his word to desire as a way by which to enjoy him himself.

So that even if you don't get the thing you still have him whom you can enjoy in whatever better things he does give you Express your desire to him. Uh, for those, right, and good things that you will employ in service to Not in service to yourself not in service to your own honor.

Although you seek from God that he would give you favor and give you a good name. But don't we know from scripture that quite often, if you do, what is good others will despise you for it. And that gives you a good name before God, doesn't it? And as a gift from him.

So he says you ask and you do not receive because you ask amiss that you may spend it on your Pleasures and God give us Grace that we would have right hearts with which to pray that even has given us to come and pray. In Jesus name would make us be doubly.

Careful extra careful about what we pray. Jesus has given us his name. By which to come ask. Oh, let us only ask with the sort of desire uh with for the sort of thing that we would not be embarrassed to have used Jesus's name to ask for it. It's exactly the opposite.

How many think of the in Jesus name in our praying It's not some. Is some blank check that we can write whatever request we want on it. And if we request it that way, if we use the magic words, then God will serve us and whatever our Our worldly and and fleshly desire was, Then we're not just mistreating God, we're blaspheming Jesus who gave us his name.

To bring our requests, through through, which to bring our requests, but Jesus has given us his name. Through which to bring requests, which means we can ask for the great things that are worthy of Jesus. And even that shapes how we pray or should shape how we pray and maybe you'll get through an entire prayer and you'll get to the end and you'll stay in Jesus name and immediately the spirit will come and say is that really what you want to ask in Jesus name?

Or maybe is that really all that you want to ask in Jesus name? Well, you don't have to end your prayer. You can thank God for the for the Active correction of of his spirit and and try again and add to your prayer. The Adoration that ought to come in.

Jesus name and the sorts of things that you should ask in Jesus name. Because it's one thing to be self-seeking with man and end up in fights and quarrels and having That Among Us how much more Dreadful? If we are self-seeking with God, You ask and do not receive because you ask a mes.

That you may spend, and spend it on your Pleasures adulterers and adulteresses. Do you not know? That friendship with the world. Is enmity with God. This isn't like. If you're nice to unbelievers. This is Desiring fleshly things, Earthly things, and seeing God only as A means by which uh, or not only a seeing God at all as a means by which you may obtain your desires.

He says, whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world. Makes himself. An enemy of God. And so, This this occurs both in our praying, Like verse 3 describes and it often occurs even in our prayerlessness, our thoughtlessness of God, Our hearts and Minds being aflame, with all of the other things that we desire.

When are actually created to be and redeemed to be those whose hearts and minds are aflame with how we desire God, and how we're so grateful that he desired us. And there's this Mutual affection and this Mutual delight that is does the design of all of God's Redemption. You know, it's Dreadful when a husband or a wife on Earth, commit adultery.

Against one another. You know, they had made those vows, they had entered into that marriage. They wanted to be, or were intended to be promised to be at very least. They were promised to be. One another's, one another's. Mutual comfort and pleasure companion. One flash. One shared life together as long as they both should live and then One or the other or both their hearts are full of somebody else.

And that adultery. Uh, is Dreadful. How much worse though? If God created us out of love for us, And redeemed us out of love for us. Desire to have us as his very own. Desire to give himself as our very own. So that he gives us. Wonderful Covenant promises.

Um, I will be your God and you will be my people. And the expression of the affection of that, in the Song of songs, I am my beloveds and he is mine and his manner over me is love. But what a broken? Thing is a Christian. Who professes Christ with his lips.

And he has that vow. And he's made those promises. And yet, what his heart is full of is Earthly things. The good that God enables him to do the good that God enables him to have. He's not enjoying it as a gift from his beloved. Is not employing it in service to his beloved No, he's enjoying the thing in itself and he's serving the thing in itself or serving himself by use of the thing.

That's adultery against God, isn't it? And so, Uh, if you take versus, uh, one through four together, one through five together. Uh again he uses the language of jealousy which is language of marriage. In verse five, reminding us how much God desires and Delights in Those whom he is redeemed in Jesus.

Why would God give Jesus to die for you? Sophia why would God give Jesus to die for you because he loves you. And he wants you to be his and he wants to be yours and he is jealous for that with the proper jealousy of a husband. Well, it's Dreadful when we're adulterous against God.

And we make him. Our enemy. As the end of verse 4 says, And so, let us be let us be careful. Let us watch out. Uh, Our hearts are full of the bitterness and envy and our mouths. Are full of the quarreling and the fighting. Because that is a warning sign.

That is a warning sign that we have put a desire in the place of God. Uh, and we are. Uh, acting as adulterers or adulteresses. And, Making ourselves God's enemy or May the Holy Spirit. Not let us set our desires in that place, but give us instead. To know and to love.

The Lord is our God as our desire to enjoy. Every good thing he gives us every to ask for whatever, good things, his word. Instructs us. Our proper. Things to ask, for permissible, things to ask for that. We might enjoy him in it and that we might employ it in his service.

Amen, let's pray.

Father, thank you. Thank you for being ever. So gentle. That when we are acting this way towards us. Your response this way towards you. Your response. Father, forgive us. And thank you that. When we are acting this way towards you, your response has been to give us your fatherly instruction in your word.

That your Same Spirit who communicates to us your love and your jealousy. For. Has given us these words to correct us and instruct us grant that his ministry would continue. That your word would penetrate and permeate our hearts. Pray, Lord that You would Grant to us a Uh, but at which we might meditate with profit upon these five verses So, that our heart and mind to you, may be Well, shaped with you as our great desire and Delight.

Thank you for creating, and redeeming us for this purpose. Bring it to its fulfillment. We pray by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, in whose name, we ask it. Amen.