

# SERMON NOTES

## A TEST OF SAVING FAITH: WORLDLINESS CREATES CONFLICT (PART 2)

*James 4:1-6*

---

### Introduction

The situation is similar to the Corinthians church: *“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”* (1 Cor 3:1-3)

### 1. Worldliness creates conflicts with others (4:1a).

- There was much strife, even quarrels, among the believers of his day.
- Christians were divided into various groups, following human leaders and their teachings.
- Apostle Paul: *“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away”* (1 Cor 13:9,10).
- Paul did not claim to know it all; and he would therefore not declare war on the groups of Christians whose interpretations of certain doctrines did not agree with his.
- Conflict in the church is not God’s design (John 13:34,35).
- If conflict is not God’s design, then where do all these quarrels come from?

### 2. Worldliness generates conflict with self (4:1b, 2, 3).

- It is James’ strong conviction that the external manifestations are always the reflections of the inside of a person’s heart (James 1:14). It is about what we are.
- Why conflict within self then?
  - a) It is because of an uncontrolled desire.
    - “Passion” (*heedonai*) means desire for pleasure.
    - The conflict comes because the desire is for worldly pleasures.
    - The struggle of Apostle Paul: *“But I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members”* (Rom 7:23).
    - Also for unbelievers: *“They [the Gentiles or unbelievers] show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them”* (Rom 2:15).

- b) It is because of an unfulfilled desire.
- In order to get the pleasure desired, one must engage in an overt sin and “murder.”
  - Other application (may not be exactly what James has in mind in this passage): one may get the earthly pleasure that he wants in an honest and legal way, but that does not give him pleasure. There is always emptiness in his heart as he ignores his spiritual life and his relationship with God (Ecc 4:2).
  - The lesson: It is pointless to desire earthly pleasure, as it is not going to give us the true pleasure. For happiness and favour before God alone should be the *goal* of every Christian. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.
- c) It is an utterly selfish desire and God does not bless such desire.
- They do not ask because they are seeking selfish earthly pleasure and not seeking to enjoy God.
  - But some might still ask, perhaps thinking of Christ promise to give whatever they ask (Mat 7:7), even with humility (“ask” = to beg). God still rejects them because He looks upon the motive of the heart, not how submissive they are.
  - Three reasons prayer is rejected: (i) “You ask” in Greek middle voice means “to beg for one’s own self (selfish request)”; (ii) “Wrongly” means “in a base way or in a mean way” – you ask in a mean and base way; (iii) “To spend it on your passion,” that is to please the flesh, not the glory of God.

### 3. **Worldliness creates conflict with God (verses 4 to 6).**

The final verdict: These people love the world. A settled conviction in their heart, an emotional attachment to or affection for the world. They are the enemies of God (conflict with God) and adulterous people.

- a) Conflict with God demonstrates a disregard for Scripture.
- James does not quote the Scripture, word by word, but the thought.
  - There are various interpretations.
  - ESV interprets it as “God’s” jealousy over the “human” spirit that he has made to dwell in us.”
  - KJV interprets it as the “human” spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy.
  - If we take ESV translation it means that God deeply desires that our spirits worship Him, and if KJV, then it means the sinful, fallen spirit of man which is responsible for the propensity to sin and to indulge in worldly pleasure.

- Whatever interpretation, the conclusion is: we should not comfort ourselves with the thought that the Scripture does not mean what it says. Its precepts, warnings, and admonitions are not empty words.
- b) But there is always more to follow with wonderful *grace* of God.
- Why envy others, if there is such abundance at the source?
  - When lusts are strong, let us think of a strong God, a mighty Christ (Rom 5:20).
  - It seems that evil springs from within our evil natures, but if there is any good to come to us it has to come from a source outside of ourselves, from God.
  - Our own spirit makes us desire that which is of the world, while the Spirit of God within us makes us desire the things of God.
- c) There is a condition: God only gives His grace to the *humble*.
- Why God opposes the proud?
  - The word “proud” has a picture of one who shows himself above everybody else.
  - Pride comes from the fact that we measure ourselves by earthly standards instead of by God’s standard for us.
  - When the sinner is “humble,” he will confess his true condition and will naturally receive the grace of God.

#### 4. Conclusion

- Worldliness in the church has caused churches to split and disappeared.
- The Lord Jesus warning, “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?*” (Mat. 16:26).
- Ecclesiastes was written when the author was advanced in age.
- He had gone through his youth, enjoying his comfortable, rich and high roller life-style, but found it to be vanity and meaningless.
- Now in his old age, he advised the young not to follow after what he has gone through, but to “*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’*” (Ecc. 12:1). Will the young listen to his advice and not to repeat again his futile effort?
- May the Lord have mercy on us.