

Have you ever bought a new car, a new house, a new computer, or another high priced thing, and you were happy with it, you were proud of your purchase; it made your day? But then someone you knew one upped you. They bought something just like what you just bought but a little bit better, a little bit more expensive? Suddenly, you no longer liked what you had purchased and you envied your neighbor. James writes that this is one of the reasons God does not answer our prayers. We’re going to talk about this tonight and how it affects our walk with God and one another.

OPENING PRAYER

JAMES 4:1-4

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

One of the biggest challenges Christians have is distinguishing their culture from God’s will. Living together and having babies out of wedlock is as common among Christians as it is among unbelievers. There’s hardly any distinction between the two groups in the rate of divorce. The difference in the abuse of drugs and alcohol is negligible.

This is hedonism, that is, doing whatever brings one pleasure in so much as it does not interfere with another person’s happiness. But James wrote, **“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?” (v.1)**

Making one's personal bodily, physical pleasures the driving force in one's life creates all kinds of problems for him and for the church. According to James, my lifestyle must be based on something more than what makes me happy.

He wrote, **“You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel” (v.2a)**. Our pleasures drive us to do bad things. When he says our lusts drive us to **“commit murder”** he's probably thinking in a broad sense. Luther defined the 5th Commandment, “Thou shall not kill,” saying “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.”

Until this point James was addressing the church's internal struggles. But next, he more directly addresses the crisis of faith the people were experiencing. He wrote, **“You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (vv.2b-3)**. This is about unanswered prayers. And there it is again, our **“pleasures,”** those things that move us to do that which is contrary to the will of God.

St. Augustine wrote that if one will misuse what he has prayed for, he will not receive it. Rather, God will pity him.

A man lifts up to the Lord his prayers at church and in his home, but then he sleeps with another man's wife and he cheats on his taxes. And he wonders why his prayers go unanswered. After all, Jesus made all kinds of promises to answer his prayers. But alas, God can only pity the man for his fuzzy thinking about what it means to be a Christian. Such a man may very well be saved, but he will not enjoy the fruits of his salvation in this life.

James wrote, **“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (v.4)**.

“You adulteresses”: The word for adultery in the New Testament comes from a word which means to intermingle two things which do not belong together, like oil and water, which is to say, if you mix oil in water, you adulterate the water.

James is saying we are spiritual adulterers if we try to mix the things of God with the things of the world.

Here's another analogy: Imagine you have a big frosty milkshake, whatever kind you like, chocolate, vanilla, strawberry or peanut butter crunch. It looks absolutely delicious. But in that milkshake there's a tiny chunk of poop. Would you drink it? Of course not! Your milkshake has been adulterated.

So too God will not receive our prayers if they're adulterated with our passions for the things of the world.

So we have our own motives to contend with as regards our relationship to the Lord, but on the other side of the same coin we must consider God's motives. A church father wrote that a man of God will only pray for what is pleasing to God, for that which is "compatible with the divine promises." If he does, God will answer his prayers. On the other hand, if one loves the world, he sins and he's God's enemy. However, if he resists sin, he is the world's enemy.

Which brings me to my final point: In this world, Christians are often fence-sitters: We accept things in our culture which are contrary to the will of God because we're too lazy to think through the conflict, or we're too timid to do or say anything about it.

But according to James, **"whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God,"** which means you can't sit on the fence. Either we're with God or we're with the world. The devil owns the fence!

During Lent let us reflect on the love of Jesus, how he has forgiven us all our sins, and how he has sent down on us the Holy Spirit so that we could know God's will and do it.

During Lent let us scour the Word of God for the Lord's divine promises that we might prayer them with confidence.

And during Lent let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.