

“Spiritual Maturity: Cleansing from Acquiring”

Intro: In Chapter 4 James gets “down and dirty” in helping us to be SPIRITUALLY MATURE. He urges us (yes commands us) to cleanse ourselves from specific toxic sins. Today: from ACQUIRING.

OUR TEXT: JAMES 4: 1-3

- 1** What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?
- 2** You 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.
- 3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

1. AT WAR WITH EACH OTHER (v. 1a)

Psalm 133:1 Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

Lot caused a quarrel with his uncle Abraham over land

Absalom created a war with his father, David

The disciples argued over who was the greatest in the kingdom of God

The Corinthians were suing one another in court (1 Cor. 6:1-8)

The Galatians were “biting and devouring” one another (Gal. 5:15)

Paul admonished the Ephesians to cultivate spiritual unity (Eph. 4)

Two Philippi women, Euodia and Syntyche, could not get along (Phil. 4:2-3)

I remember an early youth choir tour when we were singing “We are one in the bond of love” and could not get the members of this church we were singing to shake our hands

We Christians HIDE this sin with many disguises:

- 1. Spirituality** “God has been speaking to me . . . “
- 2. Good intentions** “I just want what’s best . . .”
- 3. Prayer** “I’ve been praying for you . . .”

No wonder Jesus prayed in *John 17:21 That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.*

James gives the cause of the wars with each other by explaining the war within ourselves.

2. AT WAR WITH SELF (v. 1b)

V. 1 Why do you fight among yourselves? Because you fight within yourself about worldly pleasures.

This is how the apostle Paul explained the war within himself:

Romans 7:23 But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

THE ESSENCE OF SIN IS SELFISHNESS and its ROOT IS PRIDE - ME!

James gets specific about the nature of this selfishness and pride when he says in verse 1 that the “source” is “pleasures” that war within you. The Greek word for “pleasures” is “hedone” from which we derive HEDONISM – the belief that pleasure is the chief good in life.

What was warring within Paul and what wars within us Christians is the battle over whether PLEASURE IS THE CHIEF GOOD (the law of my body) or whether GLORIFYING GOD IS THE CHIEF GOOD (the law of my mind).

Many wrongly see the ultimate good in life as PLEASURE.

God reveals that the ultimate good is GLORIFYING GOD.

Within Christians, this is what causes WAR.

It could be called “the war of the ultimate good.”

The “old nature” wants pleasure – not bad in itself, but it has **3 wrong focuses**:

- 1, **SELF** not **GOD**
2. **ACQUIRING** not **GIVING**
3. **THINGS** not **BLESSINGS** that money can't buy

It is the sin of the 10th commandment - **COVETING**

Exodus 20:17 You shall not covet . . .

It is the sin of **THE LOVE OF MONEY** that Paul warned Timothy about:

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

To this, Solomon wrote this **profound proverb**, so pertinent to our day and materialistic way of life:

Proverbs 23: 4-5 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth; cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.

3. THE PROCESS (pathology) OF PLEASURE SEEKING (v. 2a)

1. **We want** (lust-coveting). 2. **We don't or can't get** (frustration). 3. **We fight** (even murder!).

Ex. David wanting Bathsheba and killing Uriah, her husband.

Ex. A male butterfly will ignore a living female butterfly for a larger painted cardboard one.

The “cardboard pleasures” of this age often woo we Christians

Do we find satisfaction? No - never that is lasting.\

Solomon wanted us to avoid hedonism rather than have to experience it firsthand.

Therefore, he wrote about his futile attempts to obtain pleasure in his book of Ecclesiastes:

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus, I considered all my activities which my hand had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

IV. THE RUINING OF OUR PRAYER LIFE (v. 2b-3)

1. **We pray less** (for our pleasure drives us to self, not God)

“you have not because you ask not”

2. **We pray with wrong motives** to which, Solomon wrote:

Proverbs 21:2 Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the motives.

James 4: 1-3 (My paraphrase)

1. Where does all the infighting among believers come from? It comes from the battle waging inside each believer for things that are not God authorized.
2. You know how it works: you lust for something but don’t have it, so you finagle to get it, often not caring who in your path gets hurt (or even killed). If you can’t have it, you get jealous and pick fights over it. You don’t even think to ask God if it’s what He wants for you.
3. And when you do ask, you don’t get it from God because you ask for all the wrong reasons. What you want is self-indulgence rather than wanting to please God.

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CONFESSION for the sin of wanting to acquire more

Dear heavenly Father, giver of all good things and giver of more than I could ever deserve: I confess that I struggle with my old nature that seeks pleasures – things that often are not in my best interest. I confess that these inner struggles with wanting to acquire make me selfishness and cause me to quarrel with those around me. Cleanse me, Father, from this sin. Help me to grow in spiritual maturity and to seek You above all else. Amen.

2. CONTENTMENT with what you have acquired

Dear heavenly Father, giver of all I need: help me to be truly content in You and with all You have given me. Like the apostle Paul, may I learn the secret of contentment which is found in You, Jesus. May my continual desire to thank you for what I have leave no room to selfishly crave for more. Amen.

3. COMMITMENT to seek God's will for acquiring

Dear heavenly Father who has said in Your Word that You want to give me the desires of my heart: I commit to You that I will seek your will and Your permission for the things that I would desire and acquire. Help me grow to be so like Jesus that my desires for pleasure and for things would align completely with Your desires for me. Amen.

JAMES, Chapter 1 (My Paraphrase)

1. To my Jewish brothers of all twelve tribes, wherever you might be after having been forced out of your homeland – this letter is from James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling and by choice. Dear brothers:

Confidence in Trials

2-4. Take a different perspective at the many trials you face, seeing the positive in them, rather than the negative. One, your faith is being proven and strengthened. And two, you are

But is not an academic lesson, but is profoundly PRACTICAL – teaching us the “how to” in making Godly DECISIONS. WISDOM is not the ability to understand circumstances - God may or may not reveal the “why” of why developing endurance for the long haul of life. Don't balk at being tested, but hang in there, letting the tests accomplish their Godly purpose: your maturity, that you may be spiritually “buff” without flabbiness or weakness of character.

5. Remember, if you need wisdom (and who doesn't?), just ask God, who gives it abundantly and without making you feel bad for asking. Just ask, and Godly wisdom will indeed be given to you.

6-8. But you have to ask really believing the answer will come. No doubting allowed! Because if you doubt, you are acting just like the waves of the sea blown around by the wind – up one minute with your belief and down the next with your doubts. This kind of supposed “faith” won't get you anything from God. He doesn't accept on-again, off-again faith, which by the way, indicates instability in other areas of life.

Confidence in Status

9-10. Hey, believing brother - how about this for God's “upside down” perspective on wisdom? If your earthly status is on the “humble” side, be proud that you are standing rich and tall in God's spiritual kingdom. And if your earthly status is on the “well off” side, be proud that in God's kingdom you are just a spiritual beggar. After all, your earthly status is about as secure as flowering grass in the heat of the sun.

11. See the picture? Just like the sun rises, so does your status. Then comes the “Santa Annas” of life – and just like the grass withers and the flower falls, so does

your status wither and fall. What once appeared beautiful is no more. Our status, and the futile pursuits of achieving it, will soon fade away.

12. So what's worth achieving? - persevering through the trials of life and proving your Godly character through it all. This is how you will receive the true "crown of life" – God's heavenly reward – which He promises to each one of His lovers.

Confidence in Temptation

13-16. I don't ever want to hear you saying, "I am being tempted by God." One, evil can never tempt a perfect God. And two, a perfect God could never lower Himself to tempt any one. Rather, it's really you that brings on temptation by your own luring lustfulness. Sin comes when you give in to temptation by acting on your lust. And when that sin gets full sway in your life it kills your relationship with God. My dear, believing friends whom I love - don't be sucked in by temptation!

17. Everything that is good is a perfect gift, especially given to you from God. "Good" is never by accident. The Giver is always our Heavenly Father, and like a bright light he never wavers or compromises in His delivery of good.

18. God exercised His Divine prerogative when He chose to pull us into truth by the power of His Word. This was so that we Jewish believers could be considered as the first ones to receive His special blessing of spiritual victory.

Confidence in Reactions

19-20. Now I'm going to tell you something you already know, but you must apply it to your reactions. One, be quick to listen to others and especially to God. Two, be slow to voice your opinion. And three, put any tendency to anger on a slow fuse. Pleasing God and getting angry never go well together. The short version: open your ears, close your mouth and chill your anger.

21. You know all that leftover filth of the old life that's still seeps out? Dump it in the spiritual trash can. You know God's Word that He has planted deep inside of you? Humbly receive its wisdom and let it save you from drowning in your own foolish reactions.

Confidence in Religion

22. It is delusional to think that you are religious by merely hearing the Word, believing it, and participating in a few religious activities. Rather, you prove and demonstrate your true religion by living out the Word actively in every area of your life.

23-24. Hearing the Word and not doing it is like looking at yourself in a mirror and not fixing what needs fixing. Why even look if you just go away unchanged and oblivious to the need?

25. God's Word is the perfect rulebook for life, with rules to set you free, not tie you down, and therefore worthy of a long and hard look. If you let them sink in, and turn your thinking into meaningful action and change, your life will surely be blessed for it.

26. Do you think that your religion is healthy? Then put it to the test by whether you can control your tongue. If you can't, not only is your religion worthless but you're deceiving yourself into thinking your religion is OK. It's not.

27. I'll tell you what real religion is about. It's about practicing love and care for those with special needs – like children without parents or women who have lost their husbands. Bottom line, true religion is keeping yourself pure from the wickedness of the world!

JAMES, Chapter 2 (My Paraphrase)

Conviction in Equality

1. Don't you dare call yourself a believer in our amazing Lord and Chosen One, Jesus, if you treat people differently based on their appearance or background.

2-4. Here's a test. If one person walks into to your church service looking like "a million" and another comes in looking like a "bum," will you treat them the same? Or will you give special attention or seating to the one looking great and ignore the other, even making him or her sit in a place where they might not so easily draw attention. If you'd honestly treat them differently, you fail the test. You would be making an ungodly judgment based on unfair distinctions.

5-7. As my brothers in the Lord, I really do love you. So, listen up. Don't we read that God so often has chosen the poor in wealth to be rich in faith and receive His kingdom inheritance? This is exactly what God promises to all who love Him. It doesn't make sense to dishonor the poor person. More often than not, it's the rich one who will give you a hard time, even pulling you into court or using your precious Lord's name in vain.

8-9. The highest law of God's kingdom is this: "Love others as you would want to be loved." If you do this, you're right on. But if you love people differently based on externals, you're practicing sin and guilty of breaking God's #1 law.

10-11. Here's the hard fact. Even if you were to keep all of God's law perfectly, one sin (like favoritism) makes you guilty of all in God's eyes. God forbids adultery, just like he forbids murder. But if you are clean regarding adultery, yet commit murder – you're guilty of adultery, and all the other laws as well. Ouch!

12-13. Now don't be frozen with fear in your words and actions toward others – God's royal law of love is meant to motivate and free you, not condemn you. If you show no mercy, then mercy won't come your way. But if you learn to show mercy in your assessment of others, that demonstration of mercy will trump any judgment that is due you.

Conviction in Works

14. Tell me, fellow Christians, what is “saving faith?” If someone claims to be a Christian by their faith, and yet there is little visible sign of that faith in their actions, it seems to me that kind of faith is useless faith – not “saving faith.”

15-16. For example, if a believing brother lacks some basic necessity such as clothing or food and you essentially tell him “blessings on you, I hope you’ll be okay!” and don’t make an effort to meet his need, I say your supposed faith is a sham.

17. The principle is this: Faith, if it isn’t backed up by action, is dead faith.

18. Now, I can just hear someone say, “Some Christians are more private and some are more outgoing in expressing their faith.” Well, if you’re one of those “private in your faith” types, I dare you to prove your faith without any action, while I prove my faith to others by living it out in action.

19-20. You believe that God is one? That’s good, but think of this: the demons, as they shudder, believe the same (and they’re not believers!). Can’t you admit that believing alone without actions to back it up means nothing?

21-23 After all, haven’t we heard Father Abraham was “justified by faith” when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? His faith and works “teamed up” so that his behavior proved his belief to be authentic. This was the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Remember, this faith matched with action resulted in Abraham being called the friend of God.

24. So here’s the principle said another way: A man is made right with God by action that demonstrates inward faith, and not by action less faith.

25. Another example would be Rahab, who was once a harlot. But she too was justified, (that is, made right with God) by her works. Remember, she received and hid the spies (Joshua and Caleb) and then let them exit by a safe way.

26. To say the principle a final way: Just like a body without a spirit is lifeless, so also faith without demonstrative action is lifeless.

JAMES, Chapter 3 (My Paraphrase)

Control of Giftedness

1-2. Think long and hard about whether God has called you to be a teacher of His Holy Word. Why? First of all, God will give teachers a stricter judgment when it comes to handling His Word. Secondly, we are all sinners. (And this implies that a teacher will be rightly held to a higher standard by his students, as well.) And thirdly, teaching uses many words and therefore leads to certain stumbling. Only a perfectly controlled tongue could give a perfectly controlled teacher.

Control of Tongue

3-4 A little bit in a horse's mouth brings its whole body to obedience. Note too that great ships can hold their course in a strong wind when directed by just a small rudder controlled by the will of the captain.

5-6 Likewise, our little tongue boasts of grandiose things. It's like a tiny spark starting a huge, out of control forest fire. Our tongue is like a fire in many ways, a showcase for evil as it burns and ignites. Just like raging fire defiles all in its path, the tongue's out of control wagging defiles our entire person. Like flames, our words can chart a fiery course, fueled by the very fires of hell.

7-8 Every kind of dangerous and poisonous wild animal, whether beast, bird, reptile or sea creature, can be and has been tamed to some degree. But no one can tame his tongue from danger and poison. It just won't stop wagging and making trouble.

9-10 Think of the inconsistency: out of the tongue comes both blessing of our Lord Heavenly Father and cursing of men, made in God's image. What hypocrisy that the same mouth both blesses and curses. Fellow Christians, this is plain wrong!

11-12 A fountain can't give both fresh and bitter water. Neither can a fig tree produce olives, or a vine give figs. And the ocean will never give us fresh water. Think about it!

Control of Wisdom

13 Come on, be smarter than that! Do you want to be considered wise? Then let your behavior show your wisdom and your gentle consideration of others prove your wisdom.

14-16 The two biggest opponents to Godly wisdom are bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. If these creep into your heart don't be arrogant and call them what they're not. They only bring the wisdom of this world, wisdom of your natural self and wisdom of the demons. Where you find jealousy and selfish ambition you will find disorder and evil cropping up everywhere.

17 Here are the sure signs of Godly wisdom: first and foremost, it is always uncontaminated in its morally purity. A Godly decision then fosters healthy relationships, is considerate of the implications to others, makes good sense, is accompanied by additional blessings, shows consistency and impartiality in its implementation and rings true in its authenticity. It just plain acts and feels right.

18 Long and short, if you plant seeds of consideration for God and others you will eventually reap a harvest of what is right in the eyes of God and others. Now that's how to control wisdom!

JAMES, Chapter 4 (My Paraphrase)

Cleansing of Acquiring