

“Worldly Prayer”

August 19, 2012

Text: James 4:1-3

**Man has insatiable needs/desires which his heart restlessly
and perpetually seeks to gratify.**

This is not the result of sin—God created man this way.

E.g. He gave him a need to eat from the fruit in the Garden
every day, even before man had sinned.

God gives man such needs so that God Himself can meet
them, causing man to constantly return to his Lord,
saying, “Give me this day my daily bread.”

God’s intention is that man seek His help/blessings, so he
can experience afresh God’s love/goodness, directly
learning that man can never live by bread alone.

But man’s fallen nature perverts those needs/desires into lusts for
idols, causing him to desire the creature rather than the
Creator.

Human lust craves for things selfishly, apart from God,
and even in defiance of Him.

Foolishly, man doesn’t want the ultimate good, that God
has to give him.

He just wants the bait by which God seeks to draw
man to Himself.

Human depravity is so caught-up in its lusts, that man will
fight/murder/wage-war to get what he thinks he
wants/needs.

Worldly wisdom is the Satanic system which teaches man to do exactly that, placing his own welfare above everything else.

Our study of James has shown us that worldly wisdom is fueled by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition that create earth-bound/natural/demonic desire & drives which are strong/compelling.

It justifies such wrong-doing by making man the center of his own universe, teaching him to survive/get-ahead, even if he must fight/victimize others to do so.

By contrast, heavenly wisdom is pure/peaceable/reasonable, gentle/merciful/unwavering/unhypocritical.

In the pure/gentle/peaceful environment of heavenly wisdom, righteousness flourishes, just as God has intended from the beginning.

Heavenly wisdom is based on the principle of trusting, loving and depending on God, rather than self, a discipline which, once learned, sweeps away anxiety/insecurity/hostility.

Men/women who embrace/assimilate heavenly wisdom also have strong desires, but these grow out of their renewed natures.

They desire the things of God, seeking “*first His kingdom and His righteousness*” (Mt 6:33).

Above/beyond all else, they desire to glorify God, because they love/trust Him.

Unlike those who live by worldly wisdom, these folks have no need to feel anxious about tomorrow, knowing God will take care of their tomorrow, just as He has cared for today.

While the lust of worldly wisdom ultimately results in heated conflict, disorder, turmoil and every evil thing;

The passionate/loving desires of heavenly wisdom result in earnest/fervent prayer to God, relating to Him just as He designed/created us to.

And the truly wise receive from God, what they pray for.

In today's text, James will connect human conflicts to unanswered prayer tying them together with a chain having 3 links...

- * Link #1—A general proposition,
- * Link #2—A specific explanation,
- * Link #3—A statement of cause.

We will follow James' logic through these 3 links, then discover in Scripture a wonderful solution to this whole dilemma.

*** Link 1—A General Proposition**

James' general proposition is that quarrels/conflicts/wars among people are all produced by man's sinful flesh.

It would be nice to think that Xns are exceptions to this rule, but unfortunately, we're not.

In the case of nonbelievers, the old man (w/ its inherent sin nature) also adds to the problem.

But for Xns, it's just our flesh.

James will use the pronouns “you”/“your,” referring to the same Xn readers/“*brethren*” he addressed back in 3:10, when he wrote=> “*From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. **My brethren**, these things ought not to be this way.*”

These are also the same folks he’ll again address a few verses from now, saying=> “*Do not speak against one another, **brethren***” (4:11).

Undoubtedly, there were tares mixed-in among the wheat in these churches.

But James writes this to the churches as a whole, including true Xns a/w/a false believers.

The sad truth is that James was writing to Xns who allow worldliness to slip into our thinking processes at times. And when we do, our behavior is no different from that of non-Xns.

James was telling his original readers, and he is now telling us, that our sinful flesh is the cause of all church fights that involve nothing more than personal preferences/grievances.

[**James 4:1**]=> “*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your **pleasures** that wage war in your members?*”

The source of quarrels among Xns is our “pleasures.”

The word is *hedone*, from which we get our word *hedonism*=> the philosophy that pleasure is the chief goal of life.

Man's sinful/selfish heart makes personal pleasure his primary goal.

His flesh and the world tell him, that pleasure may be found in prominence/power/possessions/sensual-pleasure/anything else that strokes his ego, pleases his senses, & makes him feel good.

Most important, pleasure is doing whatever he pleases, unrestrained by God's will or God's Word.

II Tim 3:4 says that in the great apostasy of the last days, men will be "*lovers of **pleasure** rather than lovers of **God**,*" because a person can't be both.

Either he loves God most, or he loves pleasure most, and if pleasure, he really loves himself most of all.

Our pleasures wage war in the "*members*" of our bodies (a reference to our fleshly nature).

This war is fought out between the Law of God in our inner man, & the fleshly nature, associated w/ our unredeemed bodies.

Paul describes it like this in Rom 7=>

*"I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my **flesh**; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not"* (Rom 7:18).

As Paul continues on, he too describes this conflict between him and his flesh, as a war=>

Rom 7:22=> "*For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, / 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**. / Wretched man that I am!
Who will set me free from the body of this death?”*
(Rom 7:22-24).

This vicious internal war makes Xns feel wretched, &
especially so when our flesh wins the war, so we
a/w/a our behavior become characterized as
“fleshly.”

**That had happened to Xns in the churches to which James
was writing, acting on the principles of worldly wisdom.**

Their flesh had been denied the pleasures for which it craved, &
so they had gone to war, allowing their flesh to control their
personalities, a/w/a their relationships w/ other Xns.

The result was “*quarrels and conflicts*” among the people—
isolated, individual conflicts [prob. verbal], and on-going
feuds/wars, that created deep divisions in their fellowship,
damaging the churches’ unity.

This same tragedy had happened in the church at Corinth.

In I Cor 3 Paul wrote=> “*You are still **fleshly**. For since
there is **jealousy** and **strife** among you, are you not
fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? /
For when one says, ‘I am of **Paul**,’ and another, ‘I
am of **Apollos**,’ are you not mere men?” (3:3-4).*

They had whole groups battling it out over who was the better
preacher.

We see such factions/schisms in churches today, and
often the issues are far less significant than that=>

Where to place a drinking fountain, what color the carpet should be, which SS class should get which classrooms.

But these quarrels/conflicts were/are just as frequently between individual personalities who just won't get along.

E.g. Euodia/Syntychē in Philippi, to whom Paul wrote

*“I urge **Euodia** and I urge **Syntychē** to live in harmony in the Lord”* (Phil 4:2).

Here you had 2 Xn women who seem to have been genuine believers, but who had on-going personality conflicts/clashes.

They had each let their flesh corrupt their relationship w/ one another.

They dealt with each other according to the flesh and the wisdom of this world, not the wisdom of heaven.

It was a shame 2000 years ago, and it's still a shame when Xns today fight/quarrel just like the world.

It's a shame when we let the pleasures demanded by our flesh win the war against our inner man, & then spill over into quarrels/conflicts w/ other-Xns.

On the night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed=>

“Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are”
(Jn 17:11).

We say, “No, Jesus, stop praying that! My flesh craves for a knockdown/drag-out fight w/ my brother/sister, so

I'm taking my stand on earthly/natural/demonic wisdom, & I intend to gratify my flesh. I know this could lead to division/disorder & every evil thing in Your church, but I don't care!"

Gal 5=> *"The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please"* (Gal 5:17).

But we have decided to defy the Spirit w/i us, side w/ our flesh against Him, & do what pleases us.

The desire to gratify the flesh, aided/abetted by worldly wisdom, shatters a Xn's peace, a/w/a peace in the Church, among Xns.

Now this general proposition is linked to a specific explanation.

* **Link 2—A Specific Explanation**—men quarrel/fight/murder because they can't obtain/have the things their flesh lusts for.

[Verse 2]=> *"You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel."*

I.e., this is where your quarrels/conflicts are coming from=>

Your flesh feels frustrated, so it goes on the warpath.

Our flesh lusts so passionately for its pleasures that it's willing to fight for them, which explains specifically how/why those pleasures lead back to our conflicts w/ others.

And when it's all said/done, our lusts remain unsatisfied anyway.

James' verbs here are all present tense verbs, meaning that
this vicious cycle happens to us over/over-again.

Man quarrels, alienating others, to gratify his own lust;

He gains nothing from it, but he goes-back and does it all
again—& again.

He lusts for things that he imagines will give him pleasure, and
he feels envy & jealous-resentment towards those who have
such things—but neither his envy nor his envy gain him
anything.

He longs restlessly after things that he dreams will make
him content, but the end result is always/only
frustration/discontentment.

Even if he actually attains the things he's pursuing, he holds them
in his hand to admire them & as he looks their value fades.

They can't deliver the ideal of pleasure that he had
expected and which only God can give, so he comes
to loath them, & begins looking for something else,
hoping that might give him the real pleasure his flesh
craves.

The history of lust's repeated disappointment goes back to
man's first sin, but he never learns from it that lust
cannot be satisfied, nor can it satisfy his soul, or give
the real pleasure he seeks.

Man never learns from his own history.

He may chase this or that thing for a while, but he will eventually have to agree with Solomon=> “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity*” (Eccl 1:2).

Man was created to seek God, & only God can satisfy his soul.

Worldly wisdom’s promise to deliver satisfaction apart from God is a treacherous delusion, guaranteed to disappoint—as it leads man further/further away from God, in whom alone is true pleasure/happiness.

Meanwhile, worldly-man finds himself increasingly alone.

Worldly wisdom has taught him that all those around him are rivals with whom he must quarrel/fight to keep them at bay, so they won’t frustrate his quest to satisfy his pleasure-lusts.

If they do frustrate him, they must be dispensed with.

James uses the word “*murder*,” but it’s doubtful that his readers were lit. murdering one another (not that fallen man isn’t literally capable of that).

But more likely, James was referring to polite forms of murder=>

- * The emotional alienation of hatred, X spoke about.
- * The murder of other people’s reputations, through gossip/slander.
- * Engaging in other vengeful acts, just hostile enough to momentarily gratify one’s flesh, w/o landing him in jail.

It may be just a word here, a gesture or facial expression there—just enough to get under their skin.

Worldly wisdom insists that conscience mustn't interfere w/ lust.

Ideals like “Love your neighbor as yourself” or “Trust the Lord & fret not,” must all be put aside, as signs of weakness/naiveté.

Allow the heat of your anger/frustration to drive you and to callous your heart if necessary, so you can claw your way to the top, regardless of who you hurt.

Bring your enemy to his knees financially, and then tell him w/ heartless indifference=>

“Well, you know, business is business.”

* **Link 3—A Basic Cause** (a prayer-disconnect)

This is why quarrels/conflicts (even among Xns) must be traced back to unfulfilled needs/desires, which only God can meet.

[Verse 2b]=> “*You do not have because you do not ask.*”

The basic underlying cause of human conflict is that man fails to pray; & even when he does pray, God doesn't answer.

This disrupts God's original/essential design for His creation, in which He would lovingly meet His creatures' needs, as they asked.

Man's sin preempts/prevents that from happening, creating a fatal flaw in his very existence, due to his sinful nature.

As a result, he becomes a frustrated "have-not," who takes out his fear/frustration on others.

So running back through the links of James' chain of thoughts here=>

- 1) God's provision/blessing of man in response to man's requests is interrupted/cut-off by sin.
- 2) So man doesn't have the things for which his soul yearns.

When he attempts to substitute the gratification of his lusts for those blessings, they don't satisfy, but merely frustrate him.

- 3) The frustration of unsatisfied lusts leads him into conflict w/ other frustrated sinners, resulting in quarrels/wars.

So, considering this whole chain of events together, we see that the basic cause of human conflict goes back to unsprayed and unanswered prayer.

A disruption of God's original design of meeting all man's needs & receiving his gratitude/love in return.

The end of verse 2 says that man doesn't ask God for things.

1st, that's because man's pride resists putting itself at God's mercy.

Heb 7:7 says=> “*The lesser is blessed by the greater.*”

Seeking blessings from God is a tacit admission that He is the greater & we are the lesser, which rubs man’s pride the wrong way, offending his desire to be on-top, and in-charge of his life.

So instead of asking the great Giver of every good/perfect gift for His blessings, man tries instead to satisfy his own needs, by himself.

And he does so, utilizing the wisdom of the world.

“Ask” (in verse 2) is in the mid. voice—ask for oneself—which is exactly what proud/self-reliant man refuses to do.

There’s a 2nd reason why people whose thinking is infiltrated w/ worldly wisdom don’t ask for things from God.

They don’t want what He has to give=> “*whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute*” (Phil 4:8).

Having bought into worldly wisdom, they’ve been deceived into thinking that gratifying the lusts of the flesh, is a pleasure far greater/superior-to these pleasures of God.

David said=> “*In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever*” (Psa 16:11).

But they’re not buying it.

And even a rank heathen should know better than to pray: “God,
give me all the power/pleasure/possessions I crave, so I can
really gratify my own selfish/sinful lusts.”

Believers, a/w/a nonbelievers, fail to ask for things from God;

When we are operating in the flesh, according to the wisdom of
this world, we don’t pray, & we don’t ask, because we
don’t expect Him to answer.

We prefer to get what we want by working for it ourselves,
viewing prayer as less practical/reliable than
personal effort.

Our pride takes over—we become all the more self-reliant,
and all the less reliant on God.

At that point, there’s little difference between us & the non-Xn
who views prayer as just a comforting psychological
exercise, and nothing more.

We behave as if God never alters His course of conduct in
response to the prayers of His people.

Asking God for blessings is the rule of His Kingdom.

It’s what we are supposed to do.

He doesn’t require much of us, but He does tell us we must ask.

E.g., for Eliphaz to escape God’s wrath, he had to ask Job
to pray for him, and Job had to ask/pray God to save
his life.

Elijah had to pray/ask for rain, before God would give it,
even though God had always intended to send it.

In Rev 8, just before the 7 angels blow the trumpets to begin the Tribulation in earnest, there's a strange silence in heaven, that lasts ½ hour.

Even Seraphim stop saying, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.*" What's heaven (the hub of all spiritual activity) waiting for?

Rev 8:3 tells us=> "*Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the **prayers** of all the **saints** upon the golden altar which was before the throne. / And the smoke of the incense, with the **prayers** of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand*" (Rev 8:3-4).

The prayers of the saints, mixed with the fragrance of X's meritorious sacrifice, rise up for God's pleasure/enjoyment.

And that sets God's redemptive plan back into motion.

I.e., even Heaven waits for the saints' prayers to reach God.

Jesus told His disciples=> "***Ask**, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full*" (Jn 16:24).

And yet even Jesus Himself, is told by the Father to ask, in Psa 2=> "***Ask** of Me, and I will surely give the nations as **Thine** inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as **Thy** possession*" (Psa 2:8).

God has created men to ask Him for His blessings—even His own Son.

No church (including this church) will ever be blessed by God until its people bow before Him and ask for His blessings, in prayer.

People will only be converted, and lives will only be transformed by the Holy Spirit's power, as we pray/ask God for it.

That is the best, most powerful, ministry you can have to this church.

A church that seeks true growth must start on its knees by praying for God to bless it.

Churches can do many less unimportant things w/o prayer=>

Building new buildings, organizing choirs/bands,
developing new programs/ministries.

And none of these will produce results having any eternal consequence at all.

But true spiritual gain comes only in answer to humble prayer/asking, because the H.S. will not be brought near, by human methodology—only by humble hearts, seeking Him.

If the H.S. does not empower our ministry, what is the point?

We can accomplish nothing apart from Him.

No one will be saved, & no one will really grow spiritually.

[Verse 3]=> *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

Here we have a 2nd reason, why man is not blessed by God=>

Even when he does pray to God, his prayers don't qualify as the kind of prayers He is willing to answer.

Why? Worldly people pray worldly prayers, w/ wrong, worldly motives, seeking their own selfish pleasures, out of their worldly wisdom.

They don't pray w/ any humble desire to glorify God so that His goodness will be magnified, & His will be done.

They may even pray worldly prayers for their church, asking God's blessing just so they can feel superior to other churches.

The worldly/fleshly person (whether he's a Xn/non-Xn) prays for his own will to be done, and for his flesh to be gratified w/ its own sinful pleasures.

The worldly, fleshly, self-centered desires of his sinful heart have contaminated even his prayers to God.

Psa 66:18=> *"If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear."*

In Mt 7 Jesus said=> *"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. / For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened"* (Mt 7:7-8).

But everyone of us has had the experience of asking God for things which He hasn't given us, so how are we to interpret Jesus' words here?

In the context, X is talking about pearls of revealed truth,
that we aren't to cast before swine=>

Things that are true/honorable/right/pure/lovely.

Jesus said that if we keep on asking/seeking/knocking for
God's help in understanding/applying that truth to
ourselves, He will open it up to our hearts.

These are the things taught to us by godly wisdom, that are
always according to the will of God.

We are to pray for, & according to, God's will.

1 Jn 5=> *"This is the confidence which we have before
Him, that, if we ask anything **according to His will**,
He hears us"* (1 Jn 5:14).

Even Jesus prayed, *"Not My will, but Thine be done."*

Someone: Should I pray for God to save my loved-one?

Yes, 1 Tim 2:1 tells us to pray for all men, then adds=>

*"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our
Savior, / who desires all men to be saved and to come
to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim 2:3-4).

*** The Final Solution**

**We have seen that the cause of conflict between people, is
ultimately man's broken down relationship w/ God, in
which the lifeline of prayer by which he asks/receives
from Him has been severely damaged.**

The obvious solution is to restore the lifeline of prayer, which can
only happen as man gives up his worldly wisdom and

embraces God's heavenly wisdom, in all its purity,
peacefulness, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy,
good fruits, and absence of hypocrisy (Jms 3:17).

If a man/woman's broken relationship w/ God hasn't been
reconciled through faith in His Son, Jesus X, that's where it
must begin.

If that describes you, I pray the H.S. will draw you to Jesus
as your Lord/Savior today.

The key is asking God for the things He wants to give us, because
we have truly come to value/desire them ourselves.

Godly wisdom is teaching us to think as God thinks, &
we are learning to pray out of that mindset as the H.S.
w/i us, instructs us.

When our thinking is coming into line w/ His; when we
wholeheartedly seek His will & His glory
first/foremost; our prayers become strong in faith.

In Mk 11, Jesus said=> *"All things for which you **pray** and **ask**,
believe that you have received them & they shall be granted
you. / And whenever you stand praying, **forgive**, if you have
anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in
heaven may forgive you your transgressions"* (11:24-25).

Effectual prayers come out of godly wisdom that humbly
seeks to settle matters between us/fellow-believers.

Those are the godly-wise prayers that God honors/answers.

Meanwhile, until that happens, God is too good a Father to give
us things for which we ask, that would actually do us harm.

But we do have the comforting assurance in Rom 8:26 that

*“The **Spirit** also helps our weakness; for we **do not know** how to **pray** as we should but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”*

Brothers/sisters, if we ask for God’s blessings out-of and according to godly wisdom, He will pour out His blessings in abundance.

All of heaven can be had by those who ask, because I Cor 3 says

“all things belong to you / & you belong to Christ” (3:22f).

If our hearts are right, God will give us even more than we ask for.

* David asked for long life, & God gave him that a/w/a the promise that his throne would be established forever. Realizing how good God had been to him, David just sat down before the Lord, overwhelmed by His kindness/generosity.

* Mt 9:2, a paralytic was brought to X for healing.

Jesus said=> *“Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven.”*

The hadn’t even asked for that, but God gave it to him anyway, a/w/a healing.

Our God is a loving God of amazing grace/generosity, who waits for His people to ask for His gifts, so He can bless them abundantly, beyond all that we can ever ask/think.

Our responsibility is to ask out of godly wisdom, having rejected the wisdom of this world, & embraced both the will/wisdom of God.

“Worldly Prayer”

August 19, 2012

Text: James 4:1-3

1. Worldly wisdom is the Satanic system which teaches man to place his [8 own] welfare above everything else.

Mt 6:33

In today’s text James will connect human conflicts to unanswered prayer, using a chain having 3 links...

*** Link 1—A General Proposition**

2. James’ general proposition is that quarrels, conflicts, and wars among people are all produced by man’s sinful flesh.

Jms 3:10; 4:11

[James 4:1]

II Tim 3:4

3. Our pleasures wage war in the “*members*” of our bodies (a reference to our [16 fleshly] nature).

Rom 7:18, 22-24

4. That had happened to Christians in the churches to which James was writing, acting on the principles of [16 worldly] wisdom.

I Cor 3:3-4; Phil 4:2; Jn 17:11; Gal 5:17

5. The desire to gratify the flesh, aided and abetted by worldly wisdom, shatters a Christian’s peace and peace in the [14 Church] among Christians.

*** Link 2—A Specific Explanation**

[Verse 2]

6. Our flesh lusts so passionately for its pleasures that it’s willing to fight for them, which explains specifically how and why those pleasures lead to our [20 conflicts] with others.

Eccl 1:2

7. Man was created to seek God, and only God can [16 satisfy] his soul.

*** Link 3—A Basic Cause**

[Verse 2b]

8. The basic underlying cause of human conflict is that man fails to pray; and even when he does pray, God [16 doesn’t] answer.

9. Man doesn't ask God for things because man's pride resists putting itself at [12 God's] mercy.

Heb 7:7

10. There is a second reason why people whose thinking is infiltrated with worldly wisdom don't ask for things from God; they don't [10 want] what He has to give.

Phil 4:8

11. Asking God for blessings is the [10 rule] of His Kingdom.

Rev 8:3-4; Jn 16:24; Psa 2:8

[Verse 3]

12. Here we have a second reason why man is not blessed by God: Even when he does pray to God, his prayers don't [16 qualify] as the kind of prayers God is willing to answer.

Mt 7:7-8; I Jn 5:14

* **The Final Solution**

13. The cause of conflict between people is man's broken relationship with God in which the lifeline by which he asks and receives from Him has been severed; the obvious solution is to [16 restore] the lifeline of prayer.

Jms 3:17; Mk 11:24-25; Rom 8:26; I Cor 3:22-23; Mt 9:2

14. Our God is a loving God of amazing grace, who waits for His people to ask for His gifts so He can [12 bless] them abundantly.