

The Root

James 4:1-5

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I. The Source v.1

- a. Source of - brought about or given by whom; Quarrels and conflicts are due to the struggle for pleasure and for the means of pleasure
 - i. Quarrels - a state of hostility/antagonism, strife, conflict, quarrel
 - 1. Not “fighting for the truth” this, but a disguised form of the evil inclination, the person’s fallen nature.
 - ii. Conflicts - to engage in heated dispute, without use of weapons, fight, quarrel, dispute
- b. Among You
 - i. refer to the inner-community conflicts occasioned by the party spirit of the teachers in the previous section
 - ii. We have here, doubtless, a glimpse of the particular communities with which the writer was acquainted but all communities show substantially the same characteristics.
- c. The Source
 - i. Your Pleasure- state or condition of experiencing pleasure for any reason, pleasure, delight, enjoyment, pleasantness
 - 1. The community conflicts come not from a passion for truth or godly wisdom, but from “your pleasures” or, better, “your desires.”
 - 2. James then identified the source of conflicts: their cravings (*hēdōne*). This term implies the very physical feelings associated with the bodily appetites. The sense is not of the inherent evil of desire but rather the conflict of desires that cannot all be satisfied simultaneously or without one canceling out the other.
 - ii. War
 - 1. Wage War- to engage in a conflict, wage battle, fight: Of the struggles of the passions within the human soul
 - a. The war is between pleasures which have their seat in the bodies of several persons, not between conflicting pleasures throwing an individual into a state of internal strife and confusion. Since the pleasures clash, the persons who take them as their supreme aim are necessarily brought into conflict
 - b. Then there will be none of the present strife. Pleasures war, and cause war. Desire for pleasure, when made the controlling end, leads to violence, for longings then arise

which can only be satisfied by the use of violence, since God, from whom alone come good things (1:17), will not satisfy them.

- c. The terms James used for conflict come from the language of warfare but can also be used as powerful imagery for the destructiveness of relationships where violent attitudes have broken out unchecked. Just as a lack of mercy was evidence of his addressees' sin of favoritism, now their active hostility toward each other is used as evidence of their conflict with God.
2. Members- a part of the human body, member, part, limb
 - a. Yet this interpretation is unlikely, for (1) James has already used μέλος twice for a part of the human body; (2) the normal use of μέλος is for part of a human body (thus Paul must make the metaphorical sense of his argument clear in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12); (3) the form of the argument is a movement from external conflict in the community to its internal basis (an interest of James; cf. 1:13ff.; 3:13ff.)
 - b. James thinks of pleasure as primarily pertaining to the body. Cf. the frequent use of "members" for "body," Rom. 6:13, 19, 7:5, 23, Col. 3:5,
 - c. To this corresponds the position of the church as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:1, 2, Eph. 5:24–28, Rev. 19:7, 21:9). The term is often, as here, applied to individual members of the people of God; cf. Ex. 34:15, Num. 15:39, Ps. 73:27
- iii. You Lust- to have a strong desire to do or secure something desire, long for; expresses craving or desire in Ex. 15:9 and Ps. 78:18, and carries the promise of satisfaction in Pr. 10:24
 - a. ἐπιποθεῖ, "yearns," "yearns over," of the longing affection of the lover. See Lightfoot on Phil. 1:8. Cf. 2 Cor. 9:14, Phil. 1:8, Deut. 13:8, 32:11, Jer. 13:14. In Ezek. 23:5, 7, 9
2. Do Not Have
3. Commit Murder - Possible figurative
 - a. This metaphorical sense of murder would fit well with the tone of the passage: they desire, yet never obtain. They oppress the poor (cf. Jas. 2:14ff.), either by legal oppression or by withholding needed aid, and envy those who are more successful, yet their desires slip between their fingers.
 - b. The final issue of the false choice is flagrant crime. ἡδονή implies ἐπιθυμία; ἐπιθυμία is often unsatisfied; in such a case its outcome, if unrestrained, is to cause the murder of the man who stands in its way.

- c. Within our letter, James was very pointed about the death-dealing effects of partiality toward the rich and neglect of the poor. There is a ruthlessness within the hearts of those who are bent on becoming rich, maintaining their wealth and increasing it (1 Tim 6:9). The image of the unmerciful servant probably also applies here as an example of how evil desire becomes murderous.
 - d. Although the creation of new wealth in the modern free-market economy can be an incalculable benefit to the poor, it can also create new forms of poverty and death through the unchecked spirit of competition and the lack of concern for one's fellow human being.
 - e. these rivalries enter into the church and spill out again into the world around is not surprising. Rivalry always wants to supplant. A frustrated rivalry can generate an anger that wants to supplant by killing. The accusation of murder should not be softened here. The malice that can potentially arise within the human heart directs itself at times against the most unlikely victims. In light of his condemnation of the unjust rich in 5:6, "You have condemned and murdered innocent men who were not opposing you," James's charge of murder in 4:2 should be taken seriously.
- iv. You're Envious - to have intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success, be filled w. jealousy, envy
 - a. against those who possess what you wish to take from them. The connection of either barren envy or ungratified covetousness with strife
 - 2. Cannot Obtain - to be successful in achieving or gaining what one seeks, obtain, attain to, reach
 - a. Fight - **to engage in heated dispute, without use of weapons,**
 - b. Quarrel

II. The Ask v. 2b.-3

- a. You Do Not Have
 - i. You Do not Ask- By choosing pleasure as their aim, men cut themselves off from this source, for they do not ask God for gratifications such as these, or, if they do, only find that their prayers, aiming at their own pleasures and not at his service, are unacceptable, and that they ought not to have offered them.

- ii. The distinction is thus not in the things prayed for, but in the purpose with which they are to be used, and for which they are desired—*i. e.* whether pleasure or the service of God.
 - iii. Desire-filled, envious believers do not make requests of God (cf. Phil 4:6) but instead are driven by their self-sufficiency and shame, self-sufficiency in that they do not really trust in God for his provision (cf. the doubter of 1:6) and shame in that they do not correct themselves once they become aware of how bad their attitudes really are
- b. You Ask
- i. Do not receive
 1. Make the service of God your supreme end, and then your desires will be such as God can fulfill in answer to your prayer (cf. Mt. 6:31–33).
 2. Only God can bestow the good gifts they need and should truly desire (cf. 1:17); but they will not ask him (cf. 1:5 the command to ask for the gift of wisdom). In this refusal to humble themselves in prayer, they only show how lacking they are in the most basic traits of Christian wisdom and how driven they are by worldly wisdom (3:15). Instead of asking God, they become so insistent with one another that they quarrel and fight, trying to extract what they envy from the other.
 3. The imperative of prayer (1:5), of asking God for his provision, requires the prior knowledge of our true need. But the kind of asking practiced by some of James’s addressees is futile because it asks only on selfish and envious terms
 - ii. You ask with wrong motives
 1. Wrong Motives - **to being bad in a moral sense, *wrongly, wickedly***; with the selfish purpose of securing pleasure, not of serving God
 - a. So You Spend - **to use up or pay out material or physical resources, *spend, spend freely***. The use of *δαπανᾶω* does not necessarily have a negative connotation, for it simply means “to spend” or “consume” . The point is that the good gift is not desired for sharing with others or godly ends, but simply to gratify desire, the evil *yēšer*. Thus the prayer will not be heard, for the motives are totally selfish and worldly
 - i. In such prayers God is regarded as a mere dispensary of instruments of vice. The language of monetary exchange is brought in by James. God does not answer their prayers not only because they are evil but also because they would just spend his generosity on themselves

- ii. on Pleasures- **state or condition of experiencing pleasure for any reason, *pleasure, delight, enjoyment, pleasantness***

III. The Truth v. 4-5

- a. You Adulteress - the unfaithfulness of Israel to its Husband
 - 1. renegades to your vows.” God is the husband to whom the Christian is joined as wife. The figure arose with reference to Israel as the wife of Jahveh; cf. Is. 54:5, Jer. 3:20, Ezek. 16, 23, Hos. 9:1, Wisd. 3:16, Mt. 12:39, 16:4, Mk. 8:38;
 - 2. Following the context, this charge harkens back to a standard image of covenant relationship between God and his people from the Old Testament. Israel was the wife of the Lord (cf. Isa 54:4–8), and he considered her idolatries as adulteries (cf. Jer 31:21; Hos 3:1; Ezek 23:45). Thus, spiritual adultery is synonymous with being an “enemy
- ii. Friendship with the World - ***friendship, love***
 - 1. Friendship The basis of this thesis is a dualism similar to that of John as this comes to expression especially in 1 Jn. 2:15. Jm. 2:23 is the only v. in the NT which has the title “friend of God”:
 - a. To make pleasure the chief aim is to take up with ἡ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου. To be “a friend of the world” is to be on good terms with the persons and forces and things that are at least indifferent toward God, if not openly hostile to him. It does not imply “conformity to heathen standards of living
 - 2. World - *the world*, and everything that belongs to it, appears as that which is hostile to God, lost in sin, wholly at odds w. anything divine, ruined and depraved
 - 3. Hostility with God
 - a. Hostility
- iii. Friend of the World
 - 1. Enemy of God
- b. Scripture of Purpose
 - i. Purpose
 - ii. Jealousy