

Our Struggles with the Flesh # 15

James 4: 1-6

Tonight we move into a new chapter in our study and discover that James continues to relate to the thoughts of the previous chapter. He concluded Chapter three with a reminder and challenge to all believers. [Jam.3:18 – And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace](#). Although they faced opposition and great adversity from the world, godly wisdom would lead them in the ways of peace. As they struggled in the faith, the early believers were admonished to seek peace rather than engaging in or promoting conflict. This never reveals weakness, but godly wisdom. It takes more courage to seek peace than to engage in conflict.

As we come to Chapter four it appears that some among the church must've added to the conflict around them. James expected such attitudes and activity from the world, but it was unacceptable among the church. We sense a measure of sternness in his voice. Clearly he is displeased with the activity reported among the church.

I realize we live in a body of flesh. As long as we inhabit this earthly vessel, there will be strife between our spiritual man and the natural man. There will be times when our humanity will reveal itself, and many times this will be in unflattering ways. We must be cautious of such activity and seek to avoid it through the grace and help of God. As we look at the passage before us, I want to examine the [certainties](#) of the text as we consider: [Our Struggles with the Flesh](#).

I. The Tendencies of Humanity (1-3) – In the opening verses of the passage, James addresses the tendencies that are common to man. Regardless of one's spiritual state, we all share the same tendencies. The difference lies in whether we suppress those tendencies or respond to them. Let's consider the tendencies revealed. Consider:

A. Our Disagreements (1a) – [From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?](#) Evidently there had been fighting and disagreement among the church. James challenged them to consider the source of such activity. These were the redeemed of God, born again believers, and yet they were fighting with others, and even among themselves.

- We may not like to admit it, but we all have a tendency to disagree. Some are more disagreeable than others, but we all tend to like things to go our way, and are willing to let others know when they don't. Disagreements are one of the greatest hindrances to the church. There will be times when we do disagree, but we don't have to fight and create havoc because of disagreements. It is possible to disagree and still get along.

B. Our Desires (1b) – From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* The church may not have wanted to admit it, but James confronts the source of their disagreements: the desires and lusts of the flesh. Such activity is born of *lusts: desires or appetites*. When the lusts of the flesh were allowed to surface, they created *war* among the membership. This has the idea of “*waging war against right principles and moral precepts*.” In essence, they disregarded what was true and righteous in an effort to please the desires of the flesh.

- You will have to agree that we too face those tendencies from time to time. The flesh desires things that are contrary to the Spirit, and if we aren't careful we will give into those desires. Churches are in turmoil because of lusts that war against that which is holy and just. If we aren't careful our personal lives will be tumultuous as well because of sinful desires.

C. Our Delusion (2a) – *Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain:* Here James deals with the delusional state of man consumed by fleshly desires. *Ye lust*, “*setting the heart upon something*,” *and have not*. *Ye kill*, “*literally destroy*,” *and desire to have, and cannot obtain*. Their hearts were set on obtaining their desire, in such a way that destruction resulted, and yet they never obtained what they desired. Their efforts never produce the intended result. They never obtain happiness in their endeavors.

- We too have been guilty as well. If we aren't very careful, we will allow our fleshly desires to cloud our vision, causing us to act contrary to the Spirit, and yet in the end we are never satisfied. Desires born of the flesh never find satisfaction and end in devastation and despair.

D. Our Dependence (2b) – *ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not*. What a tragedy revealed here. James knew those who fought among themselves, never obtaining what they really desired because they never asked the Lord. They thought they knew what they wanted. Surely they sought peace and contentment, but it eluded them because they depended on the flesh.

- Many lack what they need and desire because they depend upon themselves rather than seeking God for their needs. The flesh doesn't desire the things of God, but if we are to possess what we truly need, we will have to ask of God.

E. Our Disgrace (3) – *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts*. They weren't always guilty of failing to seek God with their requests, but there were times when they asked only with a desire for things that please the flesh. They had selfishly asked the Lord to provide their fleshly desires. No doubt we too have been guilty of this as well.

I. The Tendencies of Humanity (1-3)

II. The Traits of Humanity (4-5) – Here James deals with the traits that humanity possesses. Keep in mind, the believer is not immune to the desires of the flesh. Notice:

A. Man's Impurity (4a) – *Ye adulterers and adulteresses...* This is strong language, but it is needful. James was well aware of the fleshly desires and fighting that was prevalent among the church. He charged them as adulterers. These may not have been guilty of physical adultery, but they were guilty of spiritual adultery. They had abandoned fellowship with the Lord in an effort to satisfy the flesh. Their lives had become impure before the Lord.

- We too must guard against such behavior. Anytime we allow the desires of the flesh to consume our being, taking priority in our lives, we have committed spiritual adultery and are unclean before the Lord. Such activity must be confessed and forsaken.

B. Man's Enmity (4) – *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* James challenges them with Scripture. They knew that worldly desires were enmity with God. The believer has been delivered from condemnation and enmity with the Lord, but yet their actions resembled those who walked contrary to His ways. They could not possibly be in fellowship with the world and the Lord at the same time. If they embraced the desires of the flesh, their lives would not please the Lord.

- I rejoice that I have been delivered from condemnation, but we must continually die to the flesh, resisting its desires and fellowship with the world. The battle rages within, but if we are to walk with the Lord, we must deny the flesh. *1 John 2:15 – Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

C. Man's Jealousy (5) – *Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?* Again James challenged them with Scripture. He speaks of the sinful nature within humanity. Even after salvation, we face temptation and are prone to sin. The spirit within our flesh is contrary to the Spirit of God. It desires things of the flesh. It is prone to *envy, jealousy; harsh feelings toward the success or happiness of others.*

- Surely we've all experienced jealousy. It is part of our adamic nature. We must seek to restrain such passions through the help of the Lord. Envy never pleases God.

I. The Tendencies of Humanity (1-3)

II. The Traits of Humanity (4-5)

III. The Triumph for Humanity (6) – This has been a sobering passage. James has confronted the tendencies and traits we all have that are contrary to what the Lord desires of us. Thankfully we are not left without hope. We can triumph over the flesh through our Lord. Consider:

A. The Solution (6a) – *But he giveth more grace.* There will be times when we all fail and give in to the lusts of the flesh. As long as we live in these bodies we will deal with temptation and adversity. There is hope when those times come. We can rely upon the grace of God. When the flesh rises up and we are tempted to give in to its desires, God offers more grace. His grace exceeds the lusts of the flesh. We can overcome by His help.

- Our Lord faced every temptation we do and yet He never sinned. We will face nothing that others haven't faced before. Jesus secured our redemption upon the cross. He overcame the curse of sin. When you are challenged in the flesh, seek the grace of God. It is always sufficient!

B. The Satisfaction (6b) – *But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.* The Lord will resist the proud, those who are determined to follow a path contrary to His guidance, but He offers abundant grace to those who humble themselves before Him. We cannot make it alone. We need the Lord's help, and we can rest assured that He will be there for us when we submit to Him.

- I am sure we all struggle with the flesh. We all face temptation in our lives. It is comforting to know that we have a Savior who loved us enough to bear our sin in death. He has already conquered sin and death. We are victorious in Him. There is no need to live in defeat and despair when the grace of our Lord is available to us!

Conclusion: James has dealt with the tendencies and traits that all humanity possesses. These will rise up in us from time to time. We will have to deal with the lusts of the flesh as long as we live in these bodies. Thankfully we do not walk alone. There is grace and help for those who desire it. If you are struggling with the flesh, seek the help of the Lord. If you have never been saved, you cannot overcome in yourself. Look to Jesus and believe on Him!