

**THE DISTRACTION OF ATTRACTION**  
**“THE WARS THEY CAUSE”**  
**James 4:1-3**

**MEN’S CONFERENCE 2011**

**INTRODUCTION:** This is a good time of the year to seek our Lord to ***Renew Your Faith.*** ***O. Chambers*** speaks of our initial conversion, but says, *“We have to be continuously converted all the days of our lives, continually to turn to God as children. If we trust to our wits instead of to God, we produce consequences for which God will hold us responsible. Immediately our bodies are brought into new conditions by the providence of God, we have to see that our natural life obeys the dictates of the Spirit of God. Because we have done it once is no proof that we shall do it again. The relation of the natural to the spiritual is one of continuous conversion, and it is the one thing we object to. There are whole tracts of our lives which have not yet been brought into subjection, and it can only be done by this continuous conversion. Slowly but surely we can claim the whole territory for the Spirit of God.”*

**Distraction** speaks of dividing the attention or that which prevents concentration. That which amuses, entertains, or diverts; amusement; entertainment. Also speaks of division or disorder caused by dissension; tumult.

Word originally meant *“mental disturbance.”*

**Distraction** – a condition or state of mind in which the attention is diverted from an original focus or interest.

Having one's attention drawn away.

**James 1:14, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”**

**Synonyms:** - amusement, complication, confusion, disorder, frenzy, interference, interruption, preoccupation, and beguilement.

**Amusement** – speaks of a “side interest”; passive affection.

***“The Distraction of Attraction”***

The ability to draw attention; something that draws attention. Synonyms are *allure, appeal, attractiveness, bait, captivation, charm, chemistry, come-on, drawing power, enticement, invitation, seduction, solicitation, temptation*

Where **distraction** is passive affection, **attraction** speaks of active motion towards.

Paul challenged the Romans to do just the opposite.

**Romans 6:13, “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”**

**Note the choice**

**Romans 6:16, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”**

**Romans 6:19, “I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.”**

Let’s put this subject in the context of **James 4:1-3** with this hope:

- 1. Renew Your Faith**
- 2. Reclaim God’s Promises**
- 3. Resolve to Correct Unhealthy Habits and Build New Ones**

### **“THE WARS THEY CAUSE”**

In Charles Colson’s book, *The Body*, there is a chapter entitled, “*Extending the Right Fist of Fellowship.*” It tells the story of an event that took place in the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Newton, Massachusetts, when a church conflict actually broke out in a fistfight at the altar of the church.

It was the right hook that got him. Pastor Waite might have stood in front of the communion table trading punches with head deacon Ray Bryan all morning, had not Ray’s fist caught

him on the chin 2 minutes and 15 seconds into the fight. Waite went down for the count at the altar where most members of Emmanuel Baptist had first declared their commitment to Christ.

Within an instant the majority of the congregation converged on the communion table, punching or shoving. The melee soon spilled over to an open space between the organ; Mary Dahl, the Director of Dorcas Society, threw a hymnal; the missile sailed high and wide and splashed down in the baptistery behind the choir. When Ray's right hook finally took the pastor down, someone grabbed the spring flower arrangement from the altar and threw it high in the air in Ray's direction. Water sprinkled everyone in the first two rows on the right side, and a visiting Presbyterian experienced complete immersion when the vase shattered against the wall next to his seat. The fight ended when the police arrived on the scene."

**Proverbs 13:10** says, "**by pride cometh contention.**"

It is pride that makes us lust and covet and envy and murder and fight and war. Pride is to the life of the flesh what humility is to the life of the Spirit.

We cannot miss the connection between **James 3:18** and **James 4**, "**Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**"

In **James 3**, we find documentation for the results of God's wisdom at work in our lives: peace, righteousness, and other godly virtues. However, the wisdom of this world, that is not from above, has a by-product. When it is released in the

church, it will bring about all the evil results we are about to unfold.

## **I. THE SOURCE OF PRESSURE. 1**

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James uses two questions to probe his readers, and the second question answers the first.

#### **A. WHERE?**

##### **1. Conflict with Others.**

###### **“wars and fights”**

**wars** – quarrels; relates to general, prolonged, and serious disputing or combat, war

**fights** – disputes, refers to a particular skirmish or an individual battle

The two words are used of literal wars and figuratively of conflicts and quarrels between people. The reference here probably is a factional bickering within the churches. Also speaks of violent personal relationships, in the extreme, that can result even in murder (2)

##### **2. Conflict With Oneself.**

**“from among you”** – some translate as **“in you.”**

They insist that this is not a struggle between people but a struggle within people. Remember, external struggles are often the symptoms of internal struggles.

A person not at peace with himself can surely not be at peace with others.

Let’s trace James’ teaching from **Chapters 1-4:**

They were experiencing *class conflicts* between the rich and the poor (**2:1-11**). Rival would-be teachers desiring to be the **“great ones”** (rabbis) **3:1**. They boiled with **“bitter envy”** and **“selfish ambition”** and fell to **“confusion and every evil thing”** (**practice**) **3:14, 16**. They praised God in church at every mention of His name, saying, **“Blessed be He!”**, then verbally cursed their fellow church members (**3:9-10**)

Some of the new believers in those congregations were former Zealots, violent political activists. Because of this, many prominent scholars believe some may have actually become violent in the churches.

James gives the “raw” realities of the situation. Note in verse one James’ use of compressed language, deleting the verbs, so that the question

is, “*From where wars and where fights among you?*” This suggests his immense passion in asking the question.

## B. WHAT?

**“Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?”**

Rhetorical question – obvious answer is yes!

**IMPORTANT** – Why *must* we get to the bottom or the *source* of this pressure? Because if it is left *unchecked*, it leads to:

1. **Murderous thoughts, words, & actions .2**
2. **Arguments .2**
3. **Failure to pray .2**
4. **Prayer accompanied by wrong motives .3**

**“your desires for pleasure”** – James challenges his readers to acknowledge the correctness of his diagnosis. **DESIRE** – Hedone, from which we derive the English word *hedonism*, the belief that pleasure is the chief good in life.

Pleasure is not sinful in and of itself, but what is wrong is a driving desire for pleasure. You can seek it from the wrong source and in the wrong way.

Let's define *desire* (hedonism) – denotes the enjoyment derived from the fulfillment of one's desires or the craving for the pleasures itself. It's the playboy philosophy that makes pleasure mankind's chief end that still wages battle in people's hearts.

It is impossible to overstate the power of this force within people.

*“It (lust/desire) is the ‘atomic energy’ within human personality. It defies precise definition, for ‘lust’ embraces a vast range of desires and yearnings, aspirations, and stirrings, pleasures and emotions. It conveys the suggestion of volcanic potentialities; the terrible capacities inherent in a lion crouched ready to spring upon his prey.”*

Let's define *desire* (hedonism) **AGAIN:** It connotes the gratification of sensual, natural, fleshly desires. It is the uncontrolled personal desire to fulfill every passion and whim that promises sensual satisfaction and enjoyment. It comes from selfishness, which is opposed to God and the Word of God.

**2 Timothy 3:1-5, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving,**

**unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”**

**Remember James 3:15 - World, Flesh, & Devil**

**“This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.”**

**NOTE: Jude 16-19**

**“These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.”**

When people surrender to their *pleasures*, giving themselves over to such as those just mentioned, they do so, as Peter states, under the delusion of expressing personal **“freedom,”** not realizing that, in actuality, they are only manifesting that they are **“slaves”** of

corruption.

**2 Peter 2:18-19, “For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.”**

**“that war in your members”** – speaks of a constant battle going on. Passionate pleasures are like soldiers carrying on a military campaign aimed at satisfaction of their cravings.

*“James is explicit about how this searching for pleasure works misery in one’s life. As a person is victimized by conflicting desire, his or her inner life becomes a battleground. The old nature (flesh), with its self-seeking focus on personal pleasure, battles against the new nature and selfish pleasure-seeking dominates. This in turn fosters a self-focus which naturally diminishes the importance of others and enthrones one’s pleasures as the goal of life. This brings relational war with those around us, especially others in the church. Such narcissistic embrace of one’s own pleasure is the chief end of life, whether it be sensual, materialistic, professional, or positional.”*

Kent Hughes

**Galatians 5:16-17, “I say then: ‘Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.’”**

**QUESTION:** *Is Jesus saying Christians are never to passionately desire pleasure?*

A resounding **NO!** The Christian’s life is not a life of negativism but of affirmation and enjoyment.

### **1. God is the author of all pleasure.**

There is a revealing passage in C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*, when he has the Senior Devil say to his understudy, Wormwood:

*“Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula.”*

**Psalms 37:4, “Delight yourself also in the LORD,  
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.”**

**Psalms 34:8, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is  
good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!”**

**Psalms 16:11, “You will show me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy;  
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”**

**2. God wants us to immerse ourselves in His  
pleasure by immersing ourselves in Him.**

*John Piper, “The chief end of man is to glorify God  
by enjoying Him forever.”*

His desire to be glorified and our desire to be  
satisfied are not irreconcilable.

Problem comes when we seek pleasure from the  
wrong source and in the wrong way.

**Jeremiah 2:13, “For My people have committed  
two evils:  
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living  
waters,  
And hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns  
that can hold no water.”**

## II. THE SPECIFICS OF THE PROBLEM. 2-3

Effects of unchecked desires:

### A. PROGRESSIVE FRUSTRATION. 2

Do not have, cannot obtain, do not have, do not receive

Note “you” and “your” used 8 times

These statements remind us that the natural heart of man is never contented. Satisfaction in the things of this world is like a mirage, seemingly within our reach, but always eluding us, leaving us fretful and fighting like spoiled children.

When one’s body, mind, and spirit are not fully yielded to God, life becomes one vicious circle of seeking but never satisfying. A desire for wrong things, prompted by wrong motives at work in our members, wages ceaseless warfare against everything and everyone that stand in the way of their gratification. And when we get what we thought we wanted, we are left still empty, unsatisfied, and seeking.

**“You lust and do not have”** – burn with evil desire, you crave intensely; strong passion for something. Speaks here of inordinate, misdirected, and sinful. James does not mention a specific object of desire, doubtless because the particular object does not matter as far as his point here is concerned. When any strong,

sinful lust is not gratified, the worldly person is prone to lash out in angry frustration.

Sinful pleasure is never able to produce all its promises.

## **B. PERPETUAL DISSATISFACTION. 2**

### **‘You murder and covet and cannot obtain’**

**Matthew 5:21-22, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."**

**1 John 3:15, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."**

**“covet”** – filled with covetousness; envy of position or rank; bitter personal ambition. It is a hot desire to possess something for self-gratification.

**“cannot obtain”** – repeated inability; frustration fills the life with selfish desire.

**Answer:** Make the service of God your supreme aim and your desires will be fulfilled.

The desire James mentions can lead to **homicide** or **suicide**.

*“Even the Pharisees, who lusted for the personal satisfaction of having a reputation for virtue and holiness, murdered the Savior Who unmasked their hypocrisy.”*

John MacArthur

**“murder”** – includes murderous hatred, extremely destructive behavior, whether for sexual gratification, money, power, or whatever, results in hurt to others and oneself.

### C. PRIORITY DISPLAYED. 2

**“You fight and war, yet you do not have because you do not ask”** – picture like children who go into tantrums when they cannot have their way (bitter quarrels)

**REMEMBER:** Rather fight than surrender.

**“ask”** – the resource to conquer conflicts; speaks of their neglect of prayer. This is limited to things within the will of God.

**James 1:5-6, “ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is**

**like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”**

Theme here in verse 2, *unoffered prayer*. When you can't obtain what you selfishly want, you fight and quarrel; speaks to marital conflicts, family conflicts, job conflicts, national conflicts, all of these are the results of unsatisfied personal lust and envying.

Instead of turning to God as the giver of every perfect gift (**James 1:17**), they tried to get what they wanted through their own schemes.

### **Death to Sensitivity!**

This person considers themselves self-sufficient, fully able to take care of themselves. They believe that all their needs and wants can be met by human means through their own wisdom, power, and diligence.

### **David Jeremiah's summary of James 4:2:**

*“The steps of the process are simple and terrible. A man allows himself to desire something. That thing begins to dominate his thoughts; he finds himself involuntarily thinking about it in his waking hours and dreaming of it when he sleeps. It begins to be what is aptly called a ruling- passion. He begins to form imaginary schemes to obtain it; and these schemes may well involve ways of eliminating those who stand in his way. Far long enough all this may go on in his mind. Then one day the imaginings may blaze into action; and he may find himself taking the*

*terrible steps necessary to obtain his desire. Every crime in the world has come from desire which was first only a feeling in the heart, but which being nourished long enough, comes in the end to action.”*

#### **D. PLEASURE DRIVEN PETITIONS. 3**

**James 4:3, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”**

Verse 2, no asking; verse 3, asking is done with wrong motive

**Verse 2 - Prayerlessness**

**Verse 3 - Selfishness**

**1 John 5:14, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”**

**“ask amiss”** – asking wrongly, evilly, basely; self-centered prayers

Prayer can be a cloak to hide our real desire. Instead of seeking God’s will in prayer sometimes people tell God what He is supposed to do, and then get angry when He does not obey us. The prayer that seeks to satisfy one’s own pleasure is an insult to God.

**“you may spend it on your own pleasures”** – waste; same word used of the Prodigal Son in **Luke 15:13-14**.

**“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.”**

Means to completely use up or squander and was used for squandering. This text reminds us of the futility of trying to fulfill and gratify their fleshy lusts and intentions.

**ANSWER:** Pursue God with all you have, every genuine pleasure is from His hand.

I am sure that we shall be eternally thankful in heaven for our unanswered prayers, therefore, we should not pervert true biblical prayer by asking for those things that pander to our fleshy desires.

If whatever we ask for from God we are willing to dedicate to Him, we may very well be certain that He will answer.

**Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”**