

## ENEMIES OF TRUE RELIGION (4:1-5:6)

### Worldliness (4:1-10)

Building on the immediately preceding mention of strife, James begins now to speak on several topics which may loosely be grouped under the heading “enemies of true religion” – these are things that ought not to be found in any person or group claiming to be governed by true religion. These are “works” that do *not* proceed from true religion, and therefore should *not* be found in any Christian, or in any church. The first of these is worldliness, leading to strife and conflict.

#### *Worldliness Causes Enmity with God and Man*

If the “fruit of righteousness is sown in peace,” 3:18, then how are we to explain the frequent conflict among Christians? Why is there such strife and enmity even in Christian homes, and Christian churches? The answer is given immediately. The source of this conflict is *selfishness* – exemplified in the *self-seeking lusts* that all too often control our thoughts and actions.

We may have some measure of desire to serve and obey God, but at the same time there is another desire campaigning in our members, seeking to direct our hearts and minds: a desire to serve and obey the impulses of envy, greed, covetousness, and lust. These inordinate desires are by their very nature insatiable. They cannot be satisfied, because they are twisted corruptions of God’s will for us. Anyone who steps outside the bounds of God-ordained marriage, and lusts after another, will never be satisfied with one taste of adultery. Anyone who refuses to rest content with what God has provided, and goes to chase after money and riches, will never say, “I have enough.”

James describes this vicious cycle in frightening terms (v2-3). Giving in to these pleasure-seeking desires leads one further and further in a desperate quest for satisfaction, but there is no satisfaction to be found. And it is these frustrated and unfulfilled desires that lead to strife, because they draw us away from God, who is the only true source of satisfaction for His creatures. As we focus more and more on pleasing ourselves, we naturally become less and less inclined to care about others. “Wars and fightings among you” is the only possible result.

The problem is even more serious, however. It is not just *internal*, but also *external* – there is an instigator seeking to promote and provoke these inner lusts, and that instigator is the world around us, organised and ruled by the devil. This world is not neutral, but actively opposed to God (cf. 1 John 2:15-16), so much so that it is utterly impossible to be a friend of the world, and

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at the same time a friend of God. Yet the world tries to seduce and allure us away from God, by exploiting the lusts within us – supplying ammunition, as it were, to that hostile campaign.

### ***Solution: Humbly Submit to God***

Scripture teaches of our sinful tendency to envy, to desire what God has not willed for us, to seek pleasure and satisfaction outside of God's will ("the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy," v5), but it does not teach "in vain," because there is a solution. We are not without hope, because scripture also reveals God's grace (v6a). This grace is given, not to the proud, but to the humble. The solution, then, is to submit humbly to God (v7a), and place ourselves under His authority, subordinating all our desires to His will. Then the problem of verses 1-3 disappears!

Now instead of following the devil, we resist him. Now instead of wandering far from God, we draw nigh to Him. But there is a cost to this closeness with our Creator: we cannot come hypocritically, hiding sin in our hearts; we must be purified without and within, and be loathe to displease Him with our sin. We can afford none of the counterfeit "spirituality" so prevalent today, catering to those who want a "feeling" of being near to God (really nothing more than an emotional high, often produced by sensual music, large crowds, and dim lights), while still holding their cherished sins.

Drawing near to God can be a painful process (v9)! You must let go of your false and idolatrous satisfactions; all the things that once pleased you, but were not of God. You must let your false pleasure and joy in the world be removed by affliction and loss, for your good. You must let your vain laughter be turned to true mourning for sin. But blessed are those who mourn thus, for they will be comforted; they have exchanged false joy for true joy in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. It is good to be afflicted, if it weans us from the world, and teaches us to be humble before God, for then He will lift us up – if we try to lift ourselves up, and promote ourselves, out of envy and strife, we will be abased; but if we humble ourselves before God, He Himself will lift us up; and if He is truly the one uplifting us, then no one can bring us down!