

## **Worldliness: Causes, Consequences, Cure, and Characteristics**

At first glance, James 4 may seem disconnected from the previous parts of the epistle (and its theme), and that a new topic altogether is being introduced and expounded. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The chapter is a continuation of everything previously discussed in the epistle, and is even demonstrating natural conclusions of them.

Let's review what we've previously learned:

1. Being "*brought forth by the word of truth*," and thus becoming a "Christian" is only the *first fruits* of Christianity, 1:18;
2. The expected and required *second fruits* (which *tests, trials, and temptations* help bring to maturity, cf. 1:2-17) are a result of receiving "*the implanted word*," 1:21, but have both *prerequisites*, 1:19-21, and *requisites*, 1:22-27, for attainment;
3. Receiving *the implanted word* produces the *second fruits*, or *effects*, of:
  - a. the *elimination of evil motives* that lead to *partiality* in judgment and treatment of *brethren*, 2:1-11, and
  - b. the replacement of them with *mercy* in both estimation and application of the same, 2:12-13;
4. Failure to reach these *second fruits* through *receiving the implanted word*, conversely, leaves the "Christian" stuck in a state of spiritual infancy in which his faith *has no works*, and is therefore *useless* and ultimately *dead*, 2:14-26 (rather than becoming *perfected*, cf. 1:4,17,25; 2:22; 3:2);
5. In this condition (*immature* and *imperfect*), one ought not to seek to or indeed become a *teacher*, for the *tongue* is yet *unbridled* and capable of great *defilement* and *destruction*, 3:1-12;
6. *True wisdom* is thus contrasted with *earthly, natural, and demonic wisdom*- the first is manifested by *good behavior* in *gentleness*, whereas the latter is demonstrated through *bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, disorder, and evil*, 3:13-18.

So, how does chapter 4 fit in with and continue these things? *Worldliness* is the result of and stems from *earthly wisdom* (3:14-16) rather than *heavenly, true wisdom* (3:13,17-18). But this *worldliness* from *earthly wisdom* has both *internal* and *personal* causes, as well as *external* and *congregational* effects. Here's how and why...

### **vv.1-2a, Causes of Worldliness**

Though *worldliness* surely stems from wisdom that is *earthly, natural, and demonic* rather than *heavenly, supernatural, and divine generally*, it is *specifically* manifested through the *wrong pleasures and motives*, vv.1-3. *Quarrels and conflicts*- whether *internal* and *personal* (as in Rom.7:23 and Gal.5:17), or *external* and *congregational* (as in 2:1-11; 2:15-16; or 3:9-12,14-15) have as their **source** the *wrong pleasures* of v.1, and the *wrong desires and actions* of v.2! Notice the connection between the *thought/emotion* and the *deed*: *lust* → *murder*, and *envy* → *fight*s and *quarrels*. Why? The *wisdom of the world* produces *jealousy and selfish ambition* that lead to *disorder and every evil thing*, cf. 3:14,16! Thus, the *internal* and *personal* conflict/war against *worldly pleasures*, if not overcome, will manifest itself in *external* and *congregational* (or other *relational*) ways. Simply put: Having *worldly pleasure sources and desires* will corrupt congregational fellowship (and personal relationships)!

### **vv.2b-6, Consequences of Worldliness**

There are 3 *consequences* of *worldliness* for the (*first fruits* only) "Christian":

- a. Unproductive Prayer, vv.2b-3. *Worldliness* will cause one to just not pray- either because they realize God will not grant their *improper pleasures/desires*, or because they're too

busy seeking to obtain their desires in *worldly ways*, v.2; cf.1:5. Or, they will pray, but God will refuse to grant their petitions due to *wrong motives for wrong pleasures*, v.3; cf. 1:6-7 (see also 2:4).

- b. Fractured Fellowship, v.4. Notice that the mere *wish*, or *desire* (cf. vv.1,3) for the *pleasures* of the world is sufficient for one to *make himself an enemy of God*. This is true because *spiritual adultery* (unfaithfulness) has taken place, cf. 2Cor.11:2! In such cases, the *desire* is no longer for or of our *spiritual husband* to whom we vowed submission and faithfulness, but our own *selfish pleasures and motivations*, cf. 3:14,16; 4:1-3.
- c. Spiritual Blindness, vv.5-6. In this position of compromised *pleasures, desires, and motives*, worldliness even *blinds* one to spiritual truth, or at least *distorts* the vision of it. God gave mankind of His spirit in creation, and desires that it be devoted to Him in loving subjection that we might produce (*second*) *fruit* to His name's honor and glory. But worldliness, by changing our *desires*, makes us *adulteresses* who only bear fruit for Satan and ourselves! Thus, we *forget*- or become *blind* to our purpose, v.5. But worldliness also causes us to be unable to "see" how *proud* and *obstinate* we have become, cf. vv.1-6. This the *deceitfulness* of worldliness, cf.1Tim.4:1. Through *obstinate pride* worldliness prevents the application of God's grace, of which all are in need, v.6; cf. 2:10-13!

### **vv.7-10, Cure for Worldliness**

- a. *Submission to God and resistance to Satan*, v.7a. Worldliness and its desires and pleasures cause us to *resist* God and His grace, and *submit* to Satan and his sin. We have to reverse our affections (desires and pleasures) and affiliation!
- b. *Draw near to God*, v.8a. Repentance of *direction*.
- c. *Cleanse your hands*, v.8b. Repentance of *action*.
- d. *Purify your hearts*, v.8c. Repentance of *thoughts, desires, and pleasures*.
- e. *Be miserable and mourn and weep*, v.9. Repentance of *emotion*, cf. 2Cor.7:9-10.
- f. *Humble yourselves*, v.10. Repentance of attitude and approach to God.

### **vv.11-17, Benefits of Overcoming Worldliness (second fruits!)**

- a. *Right Relations with Brethren*- no longer *speaking against* or *judging brethren*, and therefore the *law*, vv.11-12;
- b. *Proper Perspective of Life and God*- a return to a humble outlook on life and a correct view of God's sovereignty, vv.13-16; and,
- c. *Renewed Fellowship with God*- through submission rather than obstinacy, and obedience rather than rebellion, v.17; cf.1:22-27.

### **Concluding Questions:**

- **Has *worldliness* prevented your obedience to Christ?**
- **Or, has *worldliness* got you stuck in the *first fruits* of initial obedience, and thus prevented the Word from becoming truly *implanted* in your heart?**
- **If so, the *second fruits* of spiritual maturity can't be attained.**
- **James 4 tells us how to correct these problems- are you willing to do so?**