

I Believe... So Now What?
(Week 8)
James 4:1-10
"The Source of All Sins"

Introduction

"What is the source of wars and fights among you?"

James 4:1(a)

Everything has an origin. Just look around you. Everything that you can see, taste, touch or even smell had a beginning at some point. The mighty Oak tree grows from one small acorn. The home that you live in was first constructed by the assembling of various raw materials. Even the denim jeans that you're wearing originated from some cotton seeds somewhere. Those of us who are Believers realize that even this vast universe that we live in was spoken into existence by an Awesome God, when He first uttered the words, **"Let there be light!" (Genesis 1:3)**. Yes, everything has a starting point. And today, we are going to examine the "source" of all sin.

If we are completely honest, we must admit that we **all** are sinners. Many may try and make excuses for the reasons that they sin. People blame everything, **but** themselves, these days for their own shortcomings. They blame their "environment", their parents, circumstances, and any number of other things, just so long as they don't actually have to take personal responsibility. Have you ever noticed how a politician never accepts the blame for a mistake, until they have exhausted all other possibilities? We all remember too well a certain president who unequivocally denied having an affair with an intern in the Oval Office, that is until it was proven that he had. Then and only then, did he offer up any pretense of remorse for his moral failures, and only, because he saw no other way to shift the blame or deny the truth.

There is a sin that is the "mother of all other sins". That sin is PRIDE. It is this attitude of "self-importance" that causes all men (and women) to stumble in many ways, as James would say (**James 3:2**). It is self-loving pride that convinces us that we deserve to get everything that our lustful hearts desire. It is pride that whispers in our ears that we are justified in the evil that we have done. It is pride that causes us to compare ourselves to those around us, so that we may feel good about who we are and what we have become. It is pride that boasts of our accomplishments and covets the applause of others for our perceived successes. Pride "spikes the football" in the end zone and lifts its hands for the world to marvel at our own achievements. Conversely, it is pride that becomes enraged and indignant when we fail to "score", because, after all, we deserve nothing but the very best. Pride tells us that we are "worth it". It provides us with the ultimate sense of entitlement. Pride is the source of the **"passions that wage war within us" (James 4:1b)**.

Yes, my friends, pride is by far the worst of all sins, because it is the origin of all sins. If we are to have any hope of redemption, if we are to ever fully embrace the marvelous grace of God, it will only be possible when we get honest with ourselves, and Him, about our own prideful hearts. Pride is the greatest stumbling block to salvation, for in order to ever be saved from sin, we must admit our need to actually **be** saved, and pride is loathe to take that kind of personal responsibility!

As we study through the book of *James*, we, as Believers, should be truly grateful for the hard truths set forth in this epistle, for they are given for our own benefit. The Holy Spirit longs for us to be cleansed from all sin. And in order for that to happen, we must be willing to "come clean", as it were, about our shortcomings. Our pride would like for us to believe that we are doing just fine, but those who refuse to look deep into the truths of God's Word are, in fact, merely deceiving themselves. James wants us to have an honest dialog about just who we are on the inside, so that we may be truly changed by The Spirit of The Living God.

As we look at today's passage, we will have our eyes opened, so that we may see the way to spiritual renewal. In order to be all that God longs for us to be, we must go from Self-Importance to Submission. Simply put, we need to be humbled, before we can ever find grace. Or as Jesus said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs." **Matthew 5:1**

From: Self-Important (vs. 1-5)

“What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they come from your passions that wage war within you? You desire and not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and don’t receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulterous people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. Or do you think it’s without reason that the Scripture says: The spirit He made to dwell in us envies intensely?”

James 4:1-5

In the previous chapter, James makes his case that; those who would be wise must demonstrate their wisdom by living in accordance with the “wisdom from above”, rather than the “wisdom of this world”. He plainly tells us that worldly wisdom is rooted in bitter envy and selfish ambition (**James 3:14**). Or to put it another way, self-serving pridefulness. The worldly person lives simply to obtain whatever makes them “feel good” and always puts their own personal desires above those of everyone else. James is quick to point out that this type of mentality is the reason there is such contention and even bloodshed throughout the world:

“You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war.”

James 4:2

If we stop to consider this for a moment, what he is saying is true. All wars and killings originate with the selfish desires of someone longing to have their own way. A person who is self-consumed will have no qualms about going to great lengths to get what they desire. And, if they are denied the things that they so desperately covet, strife ensues as a result. Just imagine how much more peaceful the world would be if its people learned not only to be content with what they have, but to diligently yearn to meet the needs of others above their own!

The Believer, who seeks first the “Kingdom of Heaven”, has been assured by God Himself that their personal needs will be provided.

“So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things will be provided for you.”

Matthew 6:31-33

God will not allow His children to go without what they need to live. He is a good Father. In fact, He is the best Father. What kind of Father doesn’t take care of His own children? Therefore, Christians should fully rely on God to take care of their needs. When we live according to the “wisdom from above”, there is no need for strife, for our God is “striving” on our behalf.

Now, we all know that there is a big difference between “needs” and “wants” do we not? As I was studying this passage this week, I became very convicted about a sin in my life that I didn’t even realize that I had been committing. When I have a need, I am accustomed to going to God and asking Him to meet it. I mean, this is commanded in Scripture is it not? In the “Model Prayer” that Jesus has given us He specifically tells us that we should pray for our needs:

“Give us today, our daily bread...”

Matthew 6:11

But, do you know what I learned about myself this week? While I regularly will pray about my needs, I rarely, **if ever**, go to God concerning my wants. Can I get a witness? I don’t go to God and ask Him whether or not I should buy that new hunting rifle, or that fancy new fishing rod that is on sale at Bass Pro Shop! And, would you like to know why I don’t? Because I’m afraid that He will tell me that I don’t

need it, that's why! I'm just being honest here. Am I the only one? I will never forget the first time that I went on a mission trip to Guatemala. I saw how poor the people were who lived there, and after I got back home, I remember feeling a little guilty every time I went inside my comfortable air conditioned house or drove my nice four-wheel drive pickup. After all, there were so many in the world who had next to nothing, and here I was with all kinds of material "stuff", most of which, frankly, I could do without.

But, do you know what happened after I had been back home for a while? The guilt faded, and I resumed my selfish ways! I'm just being honest here. I think sometimes we deceive ourselves into believing that we actually deserve all the things that we have. I mean, after all, we worked hard for them didn't we? I wonder how much less we might actually have, if we prayed about our wants before we offered up the old visa card? Now, I know what you're thinking... "Preacher, you have stopped preaching and started meddling!" But honestly, I am simply asking the question. How much "stuff" is enough? And how do we handle it when God says "No" to our wishlist? Listen to James:

"You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." James 4:2-3

The word that James uses for "pleasures" in the Greek is "Hedone" (pronounced hay-don-ay), and it is where we get our word "Hedonist", which describes a person who lives solely to gratify their own selfish pleasures. James says that God is not in the business of granting every selfish whim of the hedonistic. He, like any good father, realizes that those who receive everything their hearts desire are actually not good people. We who have raised our own children know full well that there is nothing attractive about a spoiled brat. The people of this world are so consumed with getting everything that they desire, that they are willing to take it at any cost. There is a war that rages within them and is ever driving them to satisfy their own lusts. So much so, that all reason is thrown away in order to satisfy their intense passions. Paul actually gives a description (in his letter to the Romans) regarding those who became idolatrous and sexually depraved to the point that they were willing to satisfy their own lusts even to the point of losing all manner of reasoning:

"For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. Therefore, God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen. For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another." Romans 1:21-27

You see, pride and selfish desire will consume a person to the point that they no longer care about the consequences. They simply take whatever they want in animalistic fashion. Their final end will be destruction, but they are so self-consumed with hedonistic desire that they take no thought for the consequences of their actions. This is indeed a perfect example of a depraved mind consumed by passion.

James goes on to tell us that to be led by the wisdom of this world is in fact to be an **"enemy of God" (vs. 4)**. He calls those who live to please themselves "adulterous". This term would have been all too familiar to his Jewish readers, who had studied the words of the prophets like Jeremiah who had warned them time and again that God looks upon those who choose to walk away from His love and follow the wisdom of this world to be the same as a "cheating spouse". Jesus has given us everything that we could ever possibly need. He is a Good Husband to His Bride (The Church), and to reject His provision and follow after the passions of this world is adulterous. The world and its selfish desire to "have it all" is in direct conflict with God, but that is exactly how the "natural man" thinks:

“Or do you think it’s without reason that the Scripture says: The spirit He made to dwell within us envies intensely?” James 4:5

Some translations have tried to suggest that this verse is actually referring to “The Holy Spirit” that indwells every believer, and therefore, the word “spirit” has been be capitalized (The original text offers no such capitalization). These translations interpret this difficult verse to say that God’s Spirit within us jealously longs for our complete devotion and loyalty. While this is a true statement, I do not believe that this is what James is referencing.

First of all, let me say that there is no verse in scripture that matches James’ statement given here. What he is saying, I believe, is that the general truths of Scripture bear this statement out. And what is the statement? That the spirit of man is naturally envious and self consumed! This actually is in better context with the rest of James’ subject matter. Mankind does “envy intensely”. The lost person wants whatever he wants and is not often willing to take no for an answer. And, there is only one thing to help such a depraved heart to overcome the slavery of his own passions. And what is that you ask? God’s GRACE! We desperately need the grace of God to overcome this all-consuming, self-important nature that resides within each of us.

To: Submission (vs. 6-10)

“But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before The LORD, and He will exalt you.” James 4:6-10

Before we go an further, let us recap. James has told us that we should be joyous in our trials. We should never show favoritism. We should be obedient to The Word. We should look after the less fortunate and learn to control our tongues! Then, he tells us that, if we are truly wise, then we will follow the wisdom that comes from God, rather than follow after the selfish wisdom of this world. Now in chapter four, he tells us that the reason we have strife is because we live to indulge our own selfish natures. Feeling convicted yet? I know that I have been! None of us can claim perfection, when it comes to living by God’s perfect standards, now can we? Thankfully, James is now ready to give us the remedy for our problematic lives. The solution is... GRACE!

The awful truth is that we ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).*** We absolutely have no one but ourselves to blame for our sins. It is our own desperately prideful hearts that have brought us to this place. But, like any great preacher, James is telling us exactly what we need to do. He is giving us an invitation! The purpose of preaching is to impart truth and encourage those who hear it to respond accordingly. James tells us that the only way that we can ever hope to escape our sinful pride is to humble ourselves and submit to God! By so doing, we will go from Self-Importance to Submission. We must “draw near to God”.

Pride is the greatest barrier to salvation. So how can it be overcome? By humility and brokenness. Once again, hear the words of Christ from The Sermon on The Mount:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”

When we are convicted and broken, because of our sin, we fall down before God and receive grace! I love what James says after he reminds us of the wretched, pitiful, selfish spirit that is within us:

“But God... gives greater grace!”

That, my friends, is the only hope a wretch like me will ever have! Pride will deceive us into believing that we are “ok”, but brokenness and humility will lead us to the cure. This is why James repeatedly warns his readers not to **“deceive themselves” (James 1:16, 22, 26)**. We are most definitely NOT ok. We desperately need the grace of God. I am reminded of Jesus’ words to the Church of Laodicea:

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I’m rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing’, and you don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.”

Revelation 3:15-17

Now do you see how pride will blind a person to the realities of their sinful condition? The church at Laodicea thought they were doing just fine. But they were blinded by pride. Jesus saw them as they truly were. We must hear the message of The Word and be convicted! We need to see ourselves as Christ sees us. We must humble ourselves before The LORD and receive grace; grace that is greater than all our sin.

James tells us that the only way that we can get the devil away from us is to submit ourselves to God (**vs. 7**). Many have wrongly interpreted this verse to say that we are to “fight off” the devil. Please listen to me carefully! Satan isn’t the least bit afraid of **you**! James isn’t telling us to fight Satan in our own strength. He is telling us to submit to God, to draw near to God, and the devil will flee... not because he’s afraid of us, but rather because he is terrified of our Father!

I once saw a nature film where a little bear cub was being stalked by a mountain lion. The cub was cornered, so in desperation, he stood up on his little hind legs trying to make himself look bigger. He growled at the mountain lion, but the big cat wasn’t the least bit impressed. Suddenly the cougar turned and ran away. The cub thought that his “mighty roar” had frightened the cat, but then he turned to see that standing behind him was a massive grizzly! It was the sight of this massive bear with his terrible claws and fangs that had caused the cougar to run away in terror. That is exactly how we are to fight the devil my friends. Draw near to God. Place yourself under His watchful care. Humble yourself before His mighty hand, and the devil doesn’t stand a chance against you.

James goes on to say that we must; **“Draw near to God and cleanse our hands and purify our hearts” (vs. 8)**. This simply means that we turn ourselves over to Him completely. Not only in everything that we do (our hands), but also allow Him to change our motivation for doing it from the inside (our hearts). It is called being “born of The Spirit”, and it all starts by giving up our pridefulness and humbling ourselves before God so that we may receive His grace. The Spirit wants us to take this message seriously. He wants us to be broken and mourn over our sin (vs. 9). He wants us to stop deceiving ourselves. And what will be the result?

“Humble yourselves before The LORD, and He will exalt you.”

I cannot imagine anything greater than being “lifted up” by Jesus Himself! And that is exactly what He promised to do for those who will simply humble themselves. Forgiveness is there for all, just for the asking. But first, we must see ourselves as God sees us. Then, we must be broken and humble ourselves before Him, and we are promised to receive... grace. Let go of your stubborn pride today. Let go of the worldly wisdom that leads to strife and eventually death. Resist the devil’s wisdom and come to Jesus. Come to Jesus... and live.

And **ALL** of God’s people said... **TRUTH!!!**