

Pastor James and Barclay on James 4 Part I

I. MAN'S PLEASURE OR GOD'S WILL? (James 4:1-3)

**4:1-3 Whence come feuds and whence come fights among you? Is this not their source--do they not arise because of these desires for pleasures which carry on their constant warring campaign within your members? You desire but you do not possess; you murder; you covet but you cannot obtain. You fight and war but you do not possess, because you do not ask. You ask but you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, for your only desire is to spend what you receive on your own pleasures.**

*James is setting before his people a basic question--whether their aim in life is to submit to the will of God or to gratify their own desires for the pleasures of this world? He warns that, if pleasure is the policy of life, nothing but strife and hatred and division can possibly follow. He says that the result of the over-mastering search for pleasure is polemoi (Greek #4171) "wars" and machai (Greek #3163) "battles." He means that the feverish search for pleasure issues in long-drawn-out resentments which are like wars, and sudden explosions of enmity which are like battles. The ancient moralists would have thoroughly agreed with him.*

*When we look at human society we so often see a seething mass of hatred and strife. Philo writes, "Consider the continual war which prevails among men even in times of peace, and which exists not only between nations and countries and cities, but also between private houses, or, I might rather say, is present with every individual man; observe the unspeakable raging storm in men's souls that is excited by the violent rush of the affairs of life; and you may well wonder whether anyone can enjoy tranquility in such a storm, and maintain calm amidst the surge of this billowing sea."*

*The root cause of this unceasing and bitter conflict is nothing other than desire. Philo points out that the Ten Commandments culminate in the forbidding of covetousness or desire, for desire is the worst of all the passions of the soul. "Is it not because of this passion that relations are broken, and this natural goodwill changed into desperate enmity? that great and populous countries are desolated by domestic dissensions? and land and sea filled with ever new disasters by naval battles and land campaigns? For the wars famous in tragedy...have all flowed from one source--desire either for money or glory or pleasure. Over these things the human race goes mad." Lucian writes, "All the evils which come upon man--revolutions and wars, stratagems and slaughters--spring from desire. All these things have as their fountain-head the desire for more." Plato writes, "The sole cause of wars and revolutions and battles is nothing other than the body and its desires." Cicero writes, "It is insatiable desires which overturn not only individual*

*men, but whole families, and which even bring down the state. From desires there spring hatred, schisms, discords, seditions and wars." Desire is at the root of all the evils which ruin life and divide men.*

*The New Testament is clear that this overmastering desire for the pleasures of this world is always a threatening danger to the spiritual life. It is the cares and riches and pleasures of this life which combine to choke the good seed (Luke 8:14). A man can become a slave to passions and pleasures and when he does malice and envy and hatred enter into life (Titus 3:3).*

*The ultimate choice in life lies between pleasing oneself and pleasing God; and a world in which men's first aim is to please themselves is a battleground of savagery and division.*