

Round Top Church Christian Fellowship

Sermon Series in James

James 4

Three Pillars of Separation ~ Hedonism, Pleasure, Vanity

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(All Scripture is from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.)

In the previous chapter, James gives instruction concerning the use of the tongue. He is pointing to how people talk to each other. In James 4, James gets more serious and pointed with his letter, as if he had not already been direct. He identifies quarrels, fights, hatred, passions at war, and murder (may be a metaphor for a hateful heart as in Matthew 5:21-23) to be on-going in the lives of the recipients of his letter. We need to keep in mind that the primary audience to whom James is writing are Jews who are converting or have converted to follow the teachings of Jesus. We should constantly keep in mind that the primary first century audience that the New Testament letters are addressed is Jews. In addition, we need to keep in mind that God knew this letter would become part of the New Testament and be circulated throughout the world till the end of time. The impact of these words go way beyond the first century. James identifies the heart-condition of some of the people who will read his letter in his life-time, but he also identifies the heart-condition of man in general throughout history.

We will first examine the text and then make some observations.

James 4:1

What causes **quarrels** and what causes **fights** among you?

Is it not this,

that your **passions are at war within you?**

Passions <Strong's 2237> ἡδονή (hedone)

Meaning: pleasure; Origin: from hedomai (to be glad); Usage: **pleasure(1), pleasures(4)**.

KJV ~ Lust; NRSV ~ cravings as in Titus 3:3; Luke 8:14; 2 Peter 2:13

Passion in Greek (**hedone**) is used for the word **pleasure** in describing people who are debauched and pursue life in the opposite direction God has designed for them.

James 4: 2 **[four sins]**

You **desire** and do not have,
so you murder.

You **covet** and cannot obtain,
so you **fight** and quarrel.

You do not have, because **you do not ask.**

3 You ask and do not receive,
because **you ask wrongly,**
to spend it on your passions.

James 4:4 You adulterous people!

[Northern Israel destroyed in 722 BC / Judah (Babylon Captivity 586 BC)]

Do you not know that friendship with the world
is enmity with God?

Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world
makes himself an enemy of God.

5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose

that the Scripture says,

"He yearns jealously [grieves] over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

[See Gal. 2:20; Spirit or Christ in you . . . and]

Psalm 51:11 Do not cast me away from Thy presence, **And do not take** Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Eph. 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

1 Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

2 Cor. 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Lev 26:12; Eze 37:27; Exo 29:45; Jer 32:38

Jer 31:33 "I will put My law within them,

Eze 36:27 "And I will put My Spirit within you

Eze 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;

Grieves

Ephesians 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Isaiah 63:10 But they rebelled And **grieved** His Holy Spirit; Therefore, He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them.

James 4:6 But he gives more grace. [To Who; is God a universalist?]

Therefore it says,

"God opposes the proud but gives **grace to the humble.**"

Eph. 1:7-8 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight

[Four elements to receiving God's Grace]

7 **Submit** yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 **Draw near to God**, and he will draw near to you. [How?]

¹ Cleanse your hands, you sinners,
and ² purify your hearts, you double-minded.

9 Be wretched and ³ mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

10 **Humble yourselves** before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

[Matthew 5:3]

11 **Do not speak evil against one another**, brothers.

The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

12 There is only one lawgiver and judge,
he who is able to save and to destroy.
But who are you to judge your neighbor?

13 Come now, you who **say**,
"Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town
and spend a year there
and trade and make a profit"--

14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.
What is your life?
For you are a mist
that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

[Ecclesiastes]

15 Instead you ought to **say**, [\[How to fix the problem\]](#)
"If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

16 As it is,
you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

17 So whoever knows the right thing to do
and fails to do it,
for him it is sin.

We see a parallel with James 4 and Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes.

Many of us are familiar with Solomon's words in the book Ecclesiastes. No doubt that James is also, being a Jewish man. Solomon was the last of the three kings of the United Monarchy (about 1020 - 900 BC: Saul, David and Solomon). Therefore, Solomon writing about one thousand years before James has a similar message concerning our labors and the motives we have. We are tasked by God and His Word to work to support ourselves and not be reliant upon welfare or entitlements. Of course, we are also tasked to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. Here are Solomon's words that the Lord directed him to write.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-3

1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with **pleasure**;

enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was **vanity**.

2 I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of **pleasure**, "What use is it?"

3 I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—
my heart still guiding me with wisdom-- and how to lay hold
on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man
to do under heaven during the **few days of their life**.

Solomon identifies “pleasures” (Mirth, gladness, joy) and describes its value as vanity. Vanity is associated with “vapour, breath.” In other words, pleasures that vanish, that do not remain but for a few days in a person's life. After Solomon opens with this statement, he then expounds upon what his pleasures were in life that will vanish and become under the control of another person. He realizes he cannot take his pleasures with him.

Pleasure ~ **Strong's108057** שמחה simchah {sim-khaw'}

Meaning: 1) joy, mirth, gladness 1a) mirth, gladness, joy, gaiety, pleasure 1b) joy (of God) 1c) glad result, happy issue

Origin: from 08056; TWOT - 2268b; n f

Usage: AV - joy 44, gladness 31, mirth 8, rejoice 3, rejoicing 2

Vanity ~ Strong's 01892 הֶבֶל hebel {heh'bel}

Meaning: 1) vapour, breath 1a) breath, vapour 1b) vanity (fig.) adv 2) vainly

Origin: from 01891; TWOT - 463a; n m

Usage: AV - vanity 61, vain 11, Eccl. 2:17-21

Continued in Ecclesiastes 2:17

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me,
for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

¹⁸ I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun,
seeing that **I must leave it to the man who will come after me,**

¹⁹ and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool?

Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled
and used my wisdom under the sun.

This also is vanity.

²⁰ So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair
over all the toil of my labors under the sun,

²¹ because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and
skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it.

This also is vanity and a great evil.

...

2:26 For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and
joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting,
only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after
wind.

Placing James 4 (work for desired passions) and Solomon's words
(pleasures, vanity) in application for us today, we examine the American
work performance in the past seventy-five years. America was passionate

and sought goals of which some were rightly placed and others missed the mark. We look close at the 15 years or so after the end of WWII that set the ground work for the next twelve years' events. The point will be made that American workers (who were also parents) had lofty goals as a work force, but, understandably, since they had just worked their way to victory in the most deadly and costly war in world history. Lofty material goals in a capitalist society proved to out-weigh other attributes in life. The American working parent out-performed foreign competitors for several reasons. The primary one was that the American industrial complex was intact, and the workforce had not been diminished by war-deaths to the degree in numbers that other countries were affected.

The economic drive was to give their children a better material life than the one in which they had been born, that being the Great Depression. The "American Dream" included home ownership and to many parent's financial standing to send their children to college. They desired that their children have a higher standard of living, at least economically. This was the most driving element of family life; financial achievement. Those of us who grew up in this era lived with the pressure to save to go to school, to have a better life. It was basically pitched that you had to get a college degree or your life was over. You would be doomed to be a dishwasher! The spiritual life of faith was part of the program, but relegated to Sunday mornings and to the faithful Wednesday evenings with holiday observances thrown-in for good measure to the obligations of church and society. No doubt, there were many who not only witnessed their faith, but lived a life

close to the Word of God. However, history in the cultural revolution of the 1960 era would prove that the parental spiritual preparation of young people lacked severely to compete with liberal anti-bible teachings on college campuses. We sent our troops into Germany and the Pacific ‘armed to the teeth’, and we won. American college-bound youth were armed with little to nothing to refute the liberal teaching of the political left. There were many reasons for this to have taken place.

America was the shining city on a hill for the world to see and follow. Americans were focused on life encapsulated in a phrase “The American Dream.” However, this Dream was in fact too tall for many to reach, due to a remaining cast system that pervaded society. There was still a blindness to what lay ahead. This blindness stemmed from not learning all the lessons from the Civil War, nearly a century before. Shadows of inequity still hung over America’s landscape. Historical hindsight is always 20/20, as they say. I see history has revealed America like it does every people. America was designed to be a great and godly country. From the beginning the execution of freedom in America was not handled correctly. It is true that black slave labor was costly to the black population. Often the question is not asked what black slave labor cost white America. Obviously, the cost is the Civil War. State this in another way. Black slavery cost over 600,000 thousand white people their lives in the Civil War. If the question to the leaders of the American founding would have had the question put to them. “You can have slavery, but over 600,000 white Americans will die, what to you vote for? I wonder how that vote

would have been recorded. The leaders responsible for slavery have long died. We should not forget, but we should not hang it around our necks and allow it to drag us down. America painfully grows up through all its mistakes. America was not birthed fully grown. In reality America, or any country will never be fully grown. A country is its people who God calls on to constantly grow in understanding and hopefully mature. Most countries eventually fail because their people fail to learn the lessons of the past.

As James teaches about passions and desires, America *pursued passions and desires* to an unhealthy point at the expense of neglecting the spiritual development of their neighbor. In this case America's neighbors are young people and minorities. The religious upbringing children received was more geared to joining a club and not transforming believing hearts that would withstand the lies and snares of the fallen world that awaited them in college classrooms. In addition, the 'majority' population lagged in recognizing the social, cultural and economic conditions of its minority neighbors.

The American culture was on the right side of WWII; not because they won, but because they decided that mankind was to be free from tyranny. Even though America was on the right side of the war to set others free from oppression, there still existed oppression in many forms within the fifty-state union. The white church, by-in-large, still supported the 'colored' drinking fountain and the back-of-the-bus rules. The irony was that it was the North that won the Civil War, and whose Supreme Court ruled that states could have 'separate but equal' accommodations for non-

white people (*Plessy v Ferguson* 1896). Through the great postwar economic boom, this was public policy that was in place at the beginning of the era; but, by the end of the 1960's, the Civil rights movement was in full-swing and America was on a different course of inclusion. Over time, the members of the majority churches changed with the political times. However, particularly the majority church, should have been leading the way. What has been recorded in history are the names of the minority church leaders that have been remembered. There is a reason for this. It is because they did lead the way while the churches and church leaders in the majority are not remembered as spearheading the Civil Rights movement. We have MLK boulevards across America. Name a street named after a majority church leader. We do have streets and schools named after a Kennedy; however, they represent the government and not the majority church. The point is that the majority churches should have lead the way during this period after WWII. [In a more perfect union, America should have justly dealt with slavery and equality from the inception.] However, majority church members, by-in-large, were pursuing economic gain for themselves, not paying attention to their minority neighbor. Here again, focus is the issue.

The majority population was not focused on the spiritual development of their children or their minority neighbor. This created a powder-keg in America. There was the Civil Rights movement and the cultural revolution of drugs, sex and rock-and-roll taking place at the same time. Throw-in a war in Southeast Asia and you have people in the streets

with one President assassinated, several Civil Right leaders assassinated, one presidential candidate assassinated and another shot, who did not die. All this took place from November of 1963 to May of 1972. By the time the first baby boomers were adults, the peace that their parents had fought so hard seemed a distant past. Their own country was being ripped apart.

Where did all this eventually lead us financially? By the way, many college students graduate today with degrees from their liberal professors that leave them tens of thousands in debt, and to add insult to their economic misery, they cannot get a job that pays enough to pay their living expenses and their college debt.

\$1.26 trillion in total U.S. student loan debt

44.2 million Americans with student loan debt

Student loan delinquency rate of 11.1%

Average monthly student loan payment (for borrower aged 20 to 30 years): \$351

<https://studentloanhero.com/student-loan-debt-statistics/>

America pursued its passion of college education and economic gain which has produced more college graduates and the most powerful economy in the world, but, at the same time, has the highest prison population in the free world and every social ill has plagued our country. Every societal indicator is off-the-chart in the wrong direction from sixty plus million abortions since Roe v Wade to single-children birthing babies

to welfare entitlements. There are those in America that had time to insure civil rights and at the same time decided who should live to receive those civil rights. You must be alive to activate your civil rights.

But, this is a system problem. This is a spiritual problem.

America has amassed great wealth and at the same time great debt. We are by-far the world's richest country, and again, at the same time, hold more debt than any other country. It is no surprise that the most indebted country, the United States, takes the bottom of the NIIP list (*Net International Investment Position*). This is an assessment the International Monetary Fund (IMF) uses. NIIP means the value of its domestically owned assets is less than its liabilities to foreign investors.

<http://www.financialsense.com/contributors/leslie-cuadra/2011/08/31/list-of-worlds-largest-creditor-and-debtor-nations>

Review: The term Baby Boom generation (1946 – 1964) produced twice the number of births than America currently has. This generation was produced by the same people group who won WWII. After WWII, America became the world's most industrious nation, due in-part to the fact that America's industrial complex was intact. The work ethic and the drive to succeed by the American worker was unparalleled in the world. The goal of economic ascendancy was paramount in the mind and heart of the American worker and family. This, in part, was due to the fact that - the parents of the Baby Boomers were born during the Great Depression and had lived through WWII. Their generation had endured hard times and came out on the end of world history that had the victory and the brightest

future. They knew that their future resided in their hands. It was at this time the motto "In God we Trust" (1956) was added to currency again. This was to distinguish America as a country of people who recognized God as opposed to the U.S.S.R. who held themselves to be atheist. After all, they are the ones who went through the Great Depression and won, at great sacrifice, the victory in WWII. They did not have the entitlement mentality. For many American's they possessed the mentality that they were on the right side of things. This obviously included being on the right side of God even though the country was still learning to grow as a democracy which meant there still needed to be more inclusion of ALL its citizens sharing in what God had given them, the American Dream. I remember my parents had the goal of making enough money to send their children to college. There was enormous personal energy brought to daily life to gain economic upward mobility. It was not just the goal of making money, but for personal achievement and accomplishing good things in life were also important. This all centered around being a valuable member of family and community. The path was hard work which included saving money especially to send children to college so that they can have a better future than the life they had. Looking back, many families had solid middle class lives. However, what affected their drive was more driven by the world in which they were born and grew-up: The Great Depression and a world at war.

Successful at Work and Faith?

It is with great pride and admiration that we look back at the economic achievements of the generations of the Great Depression and WWII. They knew how to work and raised their children to work. Along with the growth of the population came the growth of the church in America. Wherever you drive in America, you can see church buildings that were built during the late 1940's through the mid 1960's. These are generally red brick structures with white trim.

The buildings were built and the people attended. The country was still divided religiously. The Roman Catholic Church did not have its Vatican II counsel until 1962-1965 (which contains an ecumenical statement). Not to highlight the RCC alone, the other religious groups were in many ways just as sectarian. This led to a population that was willing, but confused on which church door to darken their soul. The population that attended was too often indoctrinated into a sectarian religion that lent to club membership of "do's and don'ts" and not a surrender of the heart to God. Therefore, when the Baby Boom generation that was college-bound, due to the economic efforts of Great Depression-born parents, hit college campuses, the liberal professors were waiting for them. Since many of those in the Baby Boomer generation, who went to church, had only been a *religious-attender* and not a surrendered servant of Christ, their minds and hearts were easily turned to the secular socialist world-view. The conflicting world-views of higher academia have been in contrast the Word of God for many years to this present day. I think Ben Stien documented this well in his documentary "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed 2008." If you get a chance, just asked any college

professor at a major university and they will tell you that they, or many of their colleagues, see it is their job to correct the God-centered worldview or Christian view if found to be present in their students. These are the same professors who send their graduates out overly indebted with a degree that will not land a student a job to support them. These must move back in with their parents.

So this was my experience as a member of the Baby Boom generation. The men (fathers of the Baby Boomers) I knew were all hard-working and economically provided for their families. Their work ethic was not surpassed. Their conversation revolved around work, politics, sports and recreational outings. I cannot remember them talking about their faith. I understand that my experience may be not shared by others, but I see this was the prevalent positioning of men in our society then and now. There were other indicators. Beginning the early 1950's television sets began to sell by the millions. T.V.'s became the media to define American life, including how to function as a family. By the end of the century the seemingly family content shows had given way to every immoral theme under the sun. Starting in the 1950's we can examine the content of what a family was to be like displayed on American T.V. with shows like "Leave It to Beaver" and "I Love Lucy" and "Father Knows Best." All of these shows presented a family that had a solid work ethic and took their own economic responsibility, but not one, that I can remember, placed a life of faith as an importance. Yes, there were episodes where a pastor or priest played a role, but these roles were relegated as a side show and not one of governance for life.

History tells us many things. Hind sight is always clearer. America worked and worked, but to a goal that left behind the highest priority of keeping God first. Some did keep God first, as the “remnant” throughout history has. In fact, this faithful “remnant” has kept America from falling off the historical-cliff for democracies. Yes, the WWII and Great Depression generations placed “In God We Trust” on currency, but to a large extend were not able to pass on to the next generation the same zeal for this view. Yes, there were many families that raised their children to go off to college who maintained their faith and did not succumb to secular humanist values. Labor without the Lord in the center is labor in a tunnel with no light at the end. The digger just continues to search for the light that he thinks he has created. However, man cannot provide his own light of peace. The peace, the fulfillment in life, is in placing the Lord first, and the economics may come. Being rich or poor is no criteria for the Lord. Beyond meeting our basic needs in life, we need to ask ourselves a basic question. Do we have the Lord first in all things including our work? Work may generate personal wealth, or it may generate wealth for someone else. Solomon is correct. Whatever our temporal possessions or achievements are they will be left in the hands of another person after we have gone. For they will be as vapour.

Therefore, our riches are stored up in Heaven.

1 Tim. 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

Luke. 8:14-16 ¹⁴ "And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

¹⁵ "And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

¹⁶ "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, in order that those who come in may see the light.

Matt. 6:19-21 ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

²⁰ "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

²¹ for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.