

The Sin of Greed

The next bit of advice that James has for his readers concerns the problem that many people in his time had and is still prevalent today. I suppose that the rhetorical question that is being asked by James to all of us is “What in this life is most important to you?” or maybe even “Who in this life is the most important person as far as you’re concerned?” To many, the answers were “possessions” and “ME.”

James says that quarrels between Christians often start with the desire to obtain things to be selfishly used. **“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (4:1)** Desire for more, he says, leads to murder. Selfishness and greed are the culprits. James has already told his readers that God answers selfless prayers—He is the source of **“every good and perfect gift” (1:17)**, and will give wisdom to those who ask Him for it. (1:5) The **“good and perfect”** gifts are spiritual in nature, and are used to demonstrate selfless love and care for others.

The desires of many of James’ readers are purely selfish. When their prayers to God go up, James says they are not answered **because “you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (4:3)** Greed and self-indulgence are characteristics of a person who is worldly, not spiritual. You become a **“friend of the world”** and **“an enemy of God.” (4:4)** No doubt James is channeling his brother, our Lord, when He said in **Luke 16:13**:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

A choice must be made. It’s one or the other. It’s selfishness or selflessness. It’s devotion to God and, in extension, others, or the continual lust for more. John said it well in **I John 2:15-17**:

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

Greed is listed as one of the sins that separate us from God. (**Romans 1:29, 1 Corinthians 5:10-11, 6:10, Ephesians 4:19, 5:3-5, Colossians 3:5**) Jesus said in **Luke 12:15** that we should **“be on (our) guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”** No matter what people think, having a lot of “stuff” is not what’s important. Serving God with your gifts is. Some of the people James is writing to have the mistaken impression that their abundance of goods make them better than everyone else. They are proud, conceited people doing anything they

can to increase their social standing. God wants humble people, being sacrificial
submissive. Only then can we be truly acting in the way God expects.