

# TEMPTATION 4: MISUNDERSTANDING AND TWISTING TRUE WISDOM JAMES 03:13–18

## *Introduction*

What is wisdom, true wisdom? Misunderstanding wisdom is a temptation that attacks all men, but especially teachers. The leaders of this world — politicians, philosophers, preachers and teachers — are all guilty of twisting and adjusting wisdom to mean what they want. But what is true wisdom, the kind of wisdom that brings about the good life — the kind of life and world that we should have? Is there a wisdom that can give us a world in which all men can live in love, joy and peace and have all their needs met, even the need to conquer death and to bring about the fountain of youth? One of the greatest temptations that ever confronts teachers is the temptation to twist true wisdom.

- I. The wise, understanding man or teacher (v. 13).
- II. The false wisdom (vv. 14-16).
- III. The true wisdom (vv. 17-18).

## **I. *James 03:13 Traits of a Wise Man***

There is the wise and understanding man. Note the question, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” The term “wise” (*sophos*) refers to the teacher; *understanding* refers to the expert, the skilled, the scientific or knowledgeable person (A. T. Robertson. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. 6, p. 45). By teacher, of course, is meant anyone among us who teaches the Word of God including ministers and teachers. Within our church, who are the wise teachers and leaders? Who among us

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is knowledgeable or understanding? Let us ask another question. What teacher among us wants to be unwise and ignorant? Are there any? Of course not. The point being stressed is this: “Do you want to be a wise teacher? Do you want to be a teacher of knowledge? Then here is how. You must do some things.”

But note this: some of the teachers to whom James was writing did not understand the meaning of true wisdom and knowledge. Some of them were acting most unwisely and about as empty headed as a person can act, yet they thought they were wise and knowledgeable. Too often the same unwise behaviour has characterized ministers and teachers down through the ages, even today. This is the very reason for this passage: to stir ministers and teachers to think about how wise and knowledgeable they really are. A wise and knowledgeable teacher will demonstrate two traits.

Note the words “let him show” (*deixato*). It is one word in the Greek and it is emphatic, strongly emphasized. This means that the wise teacher will strongly show forth these traits. These two traits will be clearly seen in the wise teacher’s life.

1. There is the trait of good behaviour and conduct. This means that the wise teacher does exactly what he should. Wisdom and knowledge have to do with how a person behaves and conducts himself, not only with knowing facts and being a scholar. A person must take the facts and apply them. This is true in any field or profession, but it is especially true in the field of Biblical teaching. A Biblical teacher must live what he teaches and preaches. He must speak words of...

- morality and purity
- help and encouragement
- ministry and challenge
- hope and life
- righteousness and justice
- strength and edification
- salvation and deliverance

But as he teaches such lessons of life, he must live a life of *good behaviour and conduct*. He must be a good person and live just what he teaches and preaches. He must live a moral and pure, righteous and just life; and he must go out to minister to the needy of his community and world. The wise teacher knows that he cannot teach one thing and do something else.

**Thought 1.** Note a critical fact: in the eyes of Scripture the truly wise and knowledgeable teacher is not a person who has all kinds of facts and theories, speculations and notions in his mind. Rather he is a teacher who is a good person — a moral and just person, a loving and caring person — a person who lives what he knows and teaches — who shows a good behaviour in all his works.

**Mat 7:24-27** “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

**John 7:17** “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

**John 8:31-32** To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

**John 17:3** “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

**Phil 1:27** *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.*

**1 Tim 3:7** *He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.*

**1 Tim 4:12** *Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*

**2 Tim 3:15** *And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

**Heb 13:5** *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*

**James 3:13** *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

**1 Pet 2:12** *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

**1 Pet 3:1-2** *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*

**2 Pet 3:10-13** *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

**Job 28:28** *And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'*

**Hosea 14:09** *Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.*

2. There is the trait of humility. The truly wise and knowledgeable teacher will show “humility” (prauteti). The word means to be gentle, tender, humble, mild, considerate, but strongly so. Humility has the strength to control and discipline, and it does so at the right time.
  - a. Humility has a *humble state of mind*. But this does not mean the teacher is weak, cowardly and bowing. The meek teacher simply loves people and loves peace; therefore, he walks humbly among men regardless of their status and circumstance in life. Associating with the poor and lowly of this earth does not bother the humble teacher. He desires to be a friend to all and to help all as much as possible.
  - b. Humility has a *strong state of mind*. It looks at situations and wants justice and right to be done. It is not a weak mind that ignores and neglects evil and wrong-doing, abuse and suffering.

- => If someone is suffering, humility steps in and does what it can to help.
- => If evil is being done, meekness does what it can to stop and correct it.
- => If evil is running rampant and indulging itself, humility actually strikes out in anger. However, note a crucial point: the anger is always at the right time and against the right thing.

- c. Humility has *strong self-control*. The humble teacher controls his spirit and mind. He controls the lusts of his flesh. He does not give way to ill-temper, retaliation, passion, indulgence or license. The humble teacher dies to himself, to what his flesh (sinful nature) would like to do, and he does the right thing — exactly what God wants done.

In summary, the humble man walks in a meek, tender, but strong state of mind; denies himself, giving utmost consideration to others. He shows a control and righteous anger against injustice and evil. A humble man forgives and lives for others because of what Christ has done for him.

**Gal 6:1** *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*

**Eph 4:1-3** *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

**2 Tim 2:25** *Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.*

**Titus 3:2** *To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.*

**James 1:21** *Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

**James 3:13** *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

**1 Pet 3:4** *Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*

## II. James 03:14-16 False Wisdom

There is the false wisdom and wrong teaching of this world. This is a most tragic picture. It immediately shows us that there are teachers, ministers and laymen alike, who follow the false wisdom of the world.

1. Note the description of false wisdom and wrong teaching.
  - a. False wisdom and wrong teaching arouse bitter envy and jealousy. There are teachers, ministers and laymen alike, who are envious and jealous of others, of their...
    - church and position
    - preaching and teaching ability
    - charisma and attention
    - leadership and recognition
    - associates and friends

Too many ministers and teachers envy others because of these things. In addition to these, the teacher is often compared with former teachers and the comparison cuts and hurts. Therefore, it is subject to creating a bitter envy against the former teacher.

One other situation needs to be noted as well. When a teacher begins to teach some false doctrine or to live an unholy life, he should be corrected by those who follow the truth of God's Word. When he is,

there is always the temptation for him to react and become bitter against those who remain true to God's Word.

The point is this: false wisdom or wrong teaching arouses bitter envy and jealousy. It stirs up a terrible division and cleavage between the servants of God and churches. No teacher or preacher...

- should ever envy another person's ability, church, position or recognition.
- should ever hold bitter envy against former ministers or teachers.
- should ever react against being corrected because of his novel ideas or wrong behaviour.

Bitterness, envy and jealousy — they are all wrong. They have no place among those who teach the true wisdom of God. They are aroused by a false wisdom and a wrong teaching.

**Mat 20:11-12** *“When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’”*

**1 Cor 13:4** *Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*

**Gal 5:21** *And envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

**Phil 1:15-17** *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.*

**Prov 3:31** Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways.

**Prov 14:21** He who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

**Prov 23:17** Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD.

b. False wisdom and wrong teaching arouse a spirit of selfish ambition in one's heart. The term "selfish ambition" (erithian) means friction or more accurately, selfish ambition. Unfortunately, too many of God's people — teachers and preachers included — are selfishly ambitious. Too many want...

- to be put forward, recognized, acknowledged and honoured.
- to be known as wise and knowledgeable.
- to be seen as the teacher, the preacher, the leader.
- to be the builder, the creator, the founder, the originator of a new or novel idea and position or movement.

In addition to these, there are those who seek to gather cliques or parties around their position or belief. They are ambitious to be the leader and to have people recognize them as the leader, even if it means opposing the minister of God.

Note how restless the soul is in all of this. The soul is not at peace with itself nor with others. It is dissatisfied and ambitious for self, not for the cause of Christ or for the people of Christ. This is the way of false wisdom and wrong teaching: it arouses strife and selfish ambition.

**Phil 2:3-4** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**2 Tim 2:14** Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

**2 Tim 2:24** And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

**Prov 3:30** Do not accuse a man for no reason — when he has done you no harm.

**Prov 17:19** He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.

**Prov 18:6** A fool's lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating.

**Prov 20:3** It is to a man's honour to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

**Prov 25:8** Do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbour puts you to shame?

**Prov 26:21** As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

c. False wisdom and teaching arouse a spirit of boasting. Boasting does not necessarily mean that a person goes about boasting out loud. It refers more to what a person feels within his heart. If a person follows after false wisdom and false teaching, he focuses upon himself. His thoughts are upon...

- preaching a good sermon, not reaching people for Christ.
- being recognized, not building people up.
- securing a position, not ministering to needs.

Very simply, he either seeks or feels pride in his different belief or in the position he holds. He may flaunt it publicly, making his ideas and position known, or he may just hold it silently within. In either case, his belief and position stands opposed to the wisdom and teaching of God's Word. He has allowed false wisdom and wrong teaching to arouse a prideful spirit within him.

**Mat 23:12** *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

**Mark 10:37** *They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”*

**Rom 12:16** *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

**1 Cor 8:2** *The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.*

**Gal 6:3** *If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

**James 3:5-9** *Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.*

**James 4:16** *As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.*

**1 John 2:16** *For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.*

**Rev 3:17** *You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

**Psa 10:3** *He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.*

**Psa 49:6-7** *Those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him.*

**Prov 11:2** *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

**Prov 17:19** *He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.*

**Prov 21:4** *Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!*

**Prov 25:14** *Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.*

**Prov 27:1** *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

**Isa. 14:13-14** *You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”*

**Oba 1:4** *Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD.*

d. False wisdom and wrong teaching arouse a lie against the truth. This means at least two things.

=> First, the false teacher is inconsistent with the Word of God. He is not living and teaching the truth. He is living a lie and teaching a lie — some false doctrine, some false behaviour.

=> Second, the false teacher is inconsistent in what he teaches and does. He teaches the truth, but he does not live the truth.

**Mat 7:21** “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

**Mark 7:6** He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

**Rom 2:21-23** “You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law?”

**Titus 1:16** They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

**1 John 3:18** Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

**Ezek 33:31-32** My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

2. Note the source of false wisdom and wrong teaching: they are not of God, but of the earth, unspiritual and devilish.

a. False wisdom is of the earth: it centres and focuses upon the earth...

- it follows the nature of men — men of the earth — instead of God and His Word.
- it teaches the great ideas and principles of the earth instead of God and His Word.
- it challenges people to seek after the aims of the earth and its leaders instead of the aims of God and His Word.
- it focuses upon life now — life upon the earth — and neglects life eternal.

The point is not that the great ideas and aims of the earth and its leaders are all wrong. They are not. There are some great leaders upon earth just as there are some foolish and evil leaders. And the ideas and aims of great leaders are often for the betterment of man and the earth. Therefore, we are to do all we can to help these leaders. The point is that heavenly wisdom, the wisdom of God and His Word (the Bible) are the basis of true wisdom. Therefore, any wisdom that neglects heavenly wisdom has a serious flaw and shortcoming. No teacher, minister or layman, is to ever forget this. False wisdom and wrong teaching focus only upon the earth and neglect the wisdom from above, of God and His Word.

- b. False wisdom and wrong teaching are natural and unspiritual. They are of man himself, and they focus upon man as an animal and neglect the fact that he is a spiritual being. They concentrate upon man as a physical and mental being. They stress humanism, education, technology, science, health, comfort and peace. They tend toward bettering man’s life on earth and ignore and neglect and deny that man is spirit. They have no belief or at most a hazy belief in life after this world.

- c. False wisdom and wrong teaching are devilish or demonic. Such things as pride, self-ambition, bitterness, envy, strife, creating uneasiness and division, and teaching false doctrine are not of God. They are of the evil one, of the devil himself. Any teacher who selfishly seeks to promote self and does these things is following and acting just like the devil himself acts.

**Isa 29:14** *“Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”*

**Jer 4:22** *“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.”*

**Rom 1:22** *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*

**1 Cor 3:19-20** *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”*

**James 3:15** *Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.*

3. Note the terrible effects of false wisdom and wrong teaching. The person who follows the false wisdom of the world, who selfishly seeks position, recognition, wealth and authority — who seeks recognition for some novel idea or doctrine he has — who envies and strives with others — that person is a false teacher and he causes confusion and every evil practice. When that person is a minister or teacher in the church...
- he causes confusion and evil in the church: people become disturbed, divided, form cliques and begin bearing tales. They

become angry and hold feelings against one another and some even leave the church and forsake God.

- he causes confusion and evil within families: various members question, wonder and differ with other family members. They cease to grow and return to the world.
- he causes the weak to return to the world and to forsake God and His Word: the weak forsake Christ as the true Son of God, and Christ alone can save man.
- he causes persons to attach their lives to an earthly religion of ritual, ceremony and morality — all of which die at the grave. The false teacher dooms the person to an eternity apart from the Son of God, even Jesus Christ our Lord who is the Saviour of the world.

The confusion and evil caused by false wisdom and wrong teaching — by teachers who live and teach contrary to God and His Word — are endless. But this much needs to be said: the effects of wrong teaching, of following the false wisdom of this world, should cause every minister and teacher of the church to awaken and examine his life and his beliefs and ministry. The effects should stir many of us to repentance and confession before God.

**1 Cor 2:1-5** *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.*

**1 Cor 14:33** *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints.*

**James 3:16** *For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

**1 Th 2:4-5** *On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness.*

**Ezek 33:11** *Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’*

**Thought 1.** This is a day when humility before God and His Word is needed. Why? Because there is so much false wisdom and wrong teaching being followed. We desperately need to turn back to the worship and ministry of God and His Word alone. We need to get away from worshipping ourselves, from following our own selfish ambitions. We need to get away from seeking position, recognition, new and novel ideas and the human comforts and ease of this life. Our call as ministers and teachers of God is to proclaim His Word and to minister to the needs of people everywhere. The confusion and evil of the world can be corrected only by proclaiming the truth of God and His Word. This we must do. And the first step is to straighten out ourselves first. How? By humbly bowing before God in repentance and confession of our selfish ambition and lack of discipline, complacency and worldliness. We must repent and confess our failure and turn completely away from it. And then we must get up and go forth in the strength of God’s Spirit and proclaim the pure truth of God and His Word — proclaim His Word and nothing else.

**Mat 11:28** *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

**John 7:37** *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”*

**John 15:5** *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

**John 15:16** *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

**Mat 28:19-20** *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

**Acts 1:8** *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

**Acts 9:15** *But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”*

**Rom 1:16** *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

**1 Cor 2:1-5** *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except*

*Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.*

**1 Cor 9:16** *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

**2 Cor 5:19-20** *That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

**1 Th 2:9-13** *Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*

**1 Th 5:14** *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

**2 Tim 4:2** *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

**Heb 4:12** *For the word of God is living active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

**Psa 46:10** *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*

**Isa 1:18** *“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*

**Isa 43:10** *“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.”*

**Isa 55:1-3** *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”*

**Jer 5:14** *Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: “Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.”*

**Hosea 6:1** *“Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.”*

### **III. James 03:17-18 The True Wisdom and Teaching**

There is the true wisdom of God. Note three significant points.

1. The source of true wisdom is God. True wisdom comes from above, not from this world. It comes from God, not from the princes and scholars of this earth. True wisdom does not come from seeking the

knowledge and wisdom of men and of this world; it comes from seeking God — from seeking the knowledge and wisdom of God.

2. The description of true wisdom is clearly stated. What is the wisdom of God? What is this wisdom that is so superior to the wisdom of the princes and scholars of this world? What is this wisdom that the ministers and teachers of God are to be teaching? Scripture says that it is eight things.

a. True wisdom is first of all “pure” (hagne). The word means to be pure from fault and defilement; it means moral purity; to be completely separated from impurity and wrong-doing and set apart unto God. It is not being half good and half bad, but totally pure and clean. A person who has true wisdom lives a clean and pure life.

=> A truly wise person keeps his body pure. He does not damage himself by overeating, drinking, taking drugs, smoking and letting himself become flabby. He disciplines himself in all things and keeps himself fit in order to get maximum use out of life.

=> A truly wise person keeps his relationships pure. He lives a moral and just life, protecting his spouse, children, family, loved ones, the name of Christ and his own testimony and ministry.

=> A truly wise person keeps himself pure before God so that his relationship with God is always open and so that God can use him as much as He wishes.

This is what true wisdom is. It is first pure, and note the word first. Purity is first in importance and the first thing that God gives to a man who seeks true wisdom. A wise teacher, minister and layman alike, is a teacher who lives a pure life and teaches that men must be pure before God.

**Mat 5:8** “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

**1 Tim 1:5** *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

**1 Pet 1:16** *For it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

**1 Pet 1:22** *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

**2 Cor 7:1** *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

b. True wisdom is “peace-loving” (eirenike). The word means to bind together; to join and weave together. It means that a wise teacher is bound, woven and joined together...

- with himself
- with God
- with his fellow man

And the wise teacher does all he can to keep the peace and to make peace where it has been broken, whether between two individuals or two groups, a family, a community or a nation. A wise teacher, a teacher of true wisdom, works to reconcile people to God and to each other. He works to bring men closer to God and to each other.

**Rom 12:18** *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

**Heb 12:14** *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

**James 3:17** *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

**2 Pet 3:14** *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

- c. True wisdom is “considerate” (epieikes). The word is difficult to translate into English. It is translated by others as gentleness, forbearance, reasonableness, consideration, agreeableness, courtesy, patience and softness. There is the tendency to say that either forbearance or gentleness is the better translation. It means that there is *something better than mere justice* – a gracious gentleness. The wise teacher is to be gentle and forbearing in dealing with other people.

**Thought 1.** The point is well-taken: we must be gentle and forbearing in dealing with people. The last thing that we must do is to criticize, condemn, censor, neglect and ignore people. We must reach out to the world with the gospel, and must treat people with a *loving gentleness*. We must be gentle, having absolutely nothing to do with harshness. Too many of us are harsh and critical or neglectful and withdrawn. Too many of us are wrapped in the cloak of religion having nothing to do with reaching out to the lost. The desperate need of the hour is for us to reach out with the gospel in a spirit of *love and gentleness*.

**Eph 4:2** *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

**Col 3:13** *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

**1 Th 2:7** *But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.*

**2 Tim 2:24** *And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

**Titus 3:2** *To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.*

**James 3:17** *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

- d. True wisdom is “submissive” (eupeithes). The word means reasonable; being willing to listen to reason and to appeal; being willing to change when one is wrong. True wisdom is not stubborn or hard.

=> The wise teacher listens to the voice and reasoning of God and of his fellow believers, and when he is wrong, he changes his behaviour.

**1 Sam 12:7** *Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the LORD as to all the righteous acts performed by the LORD for you and your fathers.*

**Rom 12:1** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.*

**Isa 1:18** *“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*

**Job 13:3** *But I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God.*

- e. True wisdom is full of mercy (eleous). The word means to have feelings of pity, compassion, affection and kindness. It is a desire to succour;

to tenderly draw unto oneself and to care for. Two things are essential in order to have mercy: seeing a need and being able to meet that need. God sees our need and feels for us (Eph. 2:1-3). Therefore, He acts; He has mercy upon us.

Note: mercy does not discriminate; it knows no discrimination at all. It has pity upon all, both saint and *sinner*. The wise teacher, the teacher of the true wisdom, reaches out to help those in need, no matter how low they are or how far they have fallen. The teacher who lives and shows true wisdom is the teacher who is moved with compassion – moved so much that he reaches out to help every human being who has a problem and need.

**Mat 5:7** “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*”

**Luke 6:36** “*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*”

**Luke 10:34** *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.*

**Job 29:15-16** *I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger.*

**Isa 50:4** *The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.*

**Prov 31:20** *She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.*

**Micah 6:8** *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

f. True wisdom is full of good fruit (karpon agathon). This means that the wise teacher actually reaches out and helps those in trouble. He does not experience feelings of compassion and then push them out of his mind. He acts; he meets needs; he helps the suffering, the shut-in, the prisoner, the widow and widower, the orphan, the single parent and the single parent child, the grieving, the poor, the destitute, the homeless, the hungry, the sinner, the backslidden, the lost and the wicked.

The teacher of true wisdom reaches out and leads his followers to reach out to the needy of their community, city, state, nation and world. The wise teacher does all he can to meet the desperate of our world. In fact, he gives all he is and has — every dime he has — sacrificing everything beyond the needs of his own family — to meet the needs of the lost and destitute of our world. The teacher of true wisdom is totally committed to good deeds and works in order to reach people for Christ and to help them through all the problems and troubles of life.

**Mat 25:35-36** ‘*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*’

**Gal 5:22-23** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

**Gal 6:2** *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

**Gal 6:10** *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

**Eph 5:9** *For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.*

**Titus 2:7** *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.*

**Heb 10:24-25** *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

g True wisdom is impartial (adiakritos). This word in the Greek actually means two things.

=> The wise teacher is impartial; he shows no partiality or favouritism to anyone.

**1 Tim 5:21** *“I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism.”*

**James 2:4** *Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

**Lev 19:15** *“Do not prevent justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great but judge your neighbour fairly.”*

**Job 13:10** *“He would surely call you to account if you secretly showed partiality.”*

=> The wise teacher is undivided in his convictions and judgments. He knows the truth, exactly what God’s Word says, and he will not entertain false ideas or teachings. He is totally committed and undivided in following and teaching God’s Word.

**1 Cor 2:2** *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

**1 Cor 9:16** *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

**Gal 1:7-11** *Which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.*

**Phil 3:14** *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

h. True wisdom is “sincere” (anupokritos). This means to be free from insincerity, hypocrisy, play-acting and wearing a mask. The teacher of true wisdom does not try to fake people out; he does not teach one thing and do another thing. He does not claim to be a teacher of God and teach something else other than God’s Word; he does not claim to be a teacher of God and live an impure and unrighteous life nor an undisciplined and complacent life.

**2 Cor 1:12** *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.*

**2 Cor 2:17** *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.*

**Phil 1:9-10** *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.*

**Titus 2:7** *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness. And soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

**1 John 3:18** *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

3. The effect of true wisdom is a harvest of righteousness, a life and world of righteousness. But note how righteousness is brought about: by making peace. Righteousness — men living like they should, men treating each other and treating God like they should — can never come about unless we are at peace with each other and with God. This means something of critical importance: *the greatest need that man has is for peace* — peace with each other and peace with God. The true teacher will work and work for peace, struggle and struggle to get men to make peace with each other and with God. Just picture the scene:
- => men at peace with each other
  - => men at peace with God
  - => a world of peace

The result would be a community and a world of righteousness — men and women living like they should — everyone experiencing and living a life of love, joy, peace, of caring and looking after each other. All things would be right, exactly like they should be. The world would

be a world of righteousness, a world just like the world for which God longs. How can we ever have such a world? Only by the teachers of God — ministers and laymen alike — becoming teachers of true wisdom, teachers who make peace and who lead people to make peace with God and with each other.

**John 14:27** *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

**John 16:33** *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

**Rom 14:17** *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

**Eph 2:13-14** *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,*

**Col 1:20** *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

**1 Cor 15:54** *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*

**Phil 1:11** *Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*

**Heb 10:12** *But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ■*

# THE CAUSES OF TEMPTATION AND WRONGDOING

## JAMES 04:01–06

### *Introduction*

As human being, we are always facing temptations and trials, and all too often we find ourselves yielding and doing wrong. This passage begins a new division in the Book of James, the all-important discussion on temptations and trials and how to conquer them. But before we can conquer them, we must understand what causes them. Just what is it that causes temptation and wrongdoing? This passage says that the causes are fourfold.

- I. Lust, evil desires: the passion for pleasure and gratification that rages within the body (v. 1).
- II. Distrust: seeking something and never trusting God or asking God for it (v. 2).
- III. Praying amiss: praying with the wrong motive (v. 3).
- IV. Worldliness: friendship with the world (v. 4).
- V. Conclusion: the cure (vv. 5-6).

### **I. *James 04:01 Lust, Evil Desires***

What is the cause of temptation and wrongdoing? First, it is lust, evil desires — the passion for pleasure and gratification that rages within us. The words “lust” or “evil desires” (hedonon) mean to crave pleasure; to crave gratification. This Scripture says that desires for pleasure and gratification fight within our bodies. The picture is that of constant warfare, of our bodies’ craving, yearning, pulling, urging and grasping after whatever will satisfy our desires. The battle of wanting and desiring rages on and on within our bodies. Every person knows what it is to experience

this warfare, to have his flesh (sinful nature) continually yearning after something. Desires or cravings are strong and difficult to control. In fact, few people control them completely. Some people may curb their desires in what are called the gross and visible sins such as vengeance and murder, but they gratify their desires in the so-called “acceptable” or less visible things such as overeating and selfishness, in buying and hoarding more than what is needed, and in looking when they should not look.

The point is this: man is a walking civil war; desires and lusts wage a battle within him, constantly seeking gratification and pleasure. Man wants to lift the restraint, to abandon inhibitions and enjoy the pleasure of the evil indulgence. It may be the lust for...

- more and more food
- more alcoholic beverages
- more illegal drugs
- unhealthy or illicit sex
- more possessions
- more money
- more property
- more recognition
- more popularity
- more authority
- more vengeance

As stated, our desires or lusts wage a war within us, seeking endless pleasure and gratification. Now note the result of our desires or lusts: it is fights and quarrels. Remember: the greatest need that man has is for peace. (See note, pt. 3, Jas. 3:17-18.) Just imagine what the world would be like if men lived in peace with each other and with God. There would be no restlessness or uneasiness within the human soul and no fights or quarrels between men. There would be no sin or evil committed against others — wife, husband, neighbour or anyone else — because all men would be at peace with God as well as with each other. The greatest need man has is for peace. Yet, when we look at the world, what we see is anything but peace.

=> Peace is not what exists between men, but fights and quarrels.

=> Peace is not what exists between men and God, because desires or lusts fight a war within men's bodies — desires or lusts that explode into evil and destructive behaviour.

Where do these fights and quarrels come from? What causes them? Unless we know, we can never deal with them or conquer them. Therefore, we must heed Scripture: they come from desires or lusts — the passion for pleasure and gratification that rages within the human body.

**Thought 1.** William Barclay quotes several of the great thinkers of past history who recognized this point, the point that lust and desire lie at the very root of man's problems. These are well worth our noting. (Each man's statements are stated in separate paragraphs for easier reading):

*“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 which is 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 which divide men.”*

=> *William Barclay himself says, “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 lusts 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 world which is a battleground of savagery and division” (The Letters of James and Peter, p. 116).*

### JAMES 04:01-03 LUST, DESIRE

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. **James 04:01-03***

The word is used three times in verses 1-3. In verses 1 and 3 the word *hedonon* is used. It means out of your sinful, sensual pleasures. In verse 2 the word is *epithumeite* which means a yearning passion for (A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. 6, p. 49). (See *Lust*, Jn. 8:44.)

Note that desire, lust, a yearning passion for is not always evil. In verse 5 the Spirit “envies intensely.” In Luke 22:15 Christ desires (yearns) to eat the Passover with the apostles. What is it that distinguishes a good desire from an evil desire? At least two major things.

1. Motive: if one desires the necessities of life, his desire is good. The necessities — food, clothing, shelter, love, care — are essential for the fullness of life. When a man seeks God for these things, God provides the necessities.
2. Greed: desiring food is good, but if one desires food to *spend it on his pleasures*, that is, he desires food and food and food, it is wrong passion. It becomes sinful, sensual pleasure. Desiring love is good, but if one desires love to *spend it on his pleasures*, that is, he desires love and love and love, it is wrong passion (1 Th. 4:5). □

## II. James 04:02 *Distrust; Not Relying on God*

*What is the cause of temptation and wrongdoing? Second, it is distrust. The statement of this verse, “You do not have, because you do not ask God,” means that man does not trust God nor call upon God. He just does not know God in a personal way, know Him to the point that he can ask and call upon God to meet his needs. Man does not have this kind of meaningful trust in God. Man basically distrusts God.*

1. First, note this: the word for lust or desire is a different word (want) than the word for lust or desire in verses one and three (see *Lust, Desire*, Jas. 4:1-3). The word in this verse means a yearning desire or passion. Sometimes the desire is good; sometimes it is bad. For example, to desire food is good, but to desire food and more food is bad. This is the very point of this verse.

Note: we do not have our desires met because we do not trust and depend upon God to fulfil our desires. There is nothing wrong with our basic desires; they are to be met. But they are to be met by our trusting and depending upon God, acknowledging Him as the Source and Provider of every good and perfect gift. It is when we ignore, neglect and deny God that our desires run loose and wild. It is when God is shoved aside that we begin to desire and desire to the point that we lie, steal, cheat, fight, kill and quarrel to gratify our desires and pleasures.

2. Second, note this: there are different levels of desires and lusts. Three levels are given in this verse.
  - => You want something but do not get it.
  - => You kill and covet, but cannot have what you want.
  - => You quarrel and fight, but you do not have, because you do not ask God.
- a. Some desire and desire, and they do not have. They do little to fulfil their deepest desires. They think little, plan little, work little and do little beyond indulging the basic desires for comfort and ease. They have broader and deeper desires, but they are just unwilling to do what is necessary to fulfil these desires. And most tragic of all, they do not sincerely call upon God to help them in meeting any of their desires, not even the desires for the basic necessities of life. They desire and desire, but they do not have because of their own lack of initiative and because of their distrust in God.

- b. Some desire and desire so much that they lie, steal, cheat and kill to gratify and possess their desires. The desire may be to get such things as some person, position, recognition, land, power or anything else on this earth. But no matter what it is, and no matter how much of it is gotten and possessed, it does not satisfy the lust and desire. The lust and desire remain, and the person craves more and more of it. The person just cannot obtain what he is after even if he lies, steals, cheats and kills to get it.
- c. Others desire and desire so much that they are willing to fight and go to war to gratify their desires. They want something so much — some power, some land, some position, some vengeance — that they are willing to throw a whole company or nation of people into a fight or war in order to satisfy their desire and gratify their pleasure. Imagine wanting something so much that one will kill and destroy the life of another person and in the case of war, the lives of millions in order to get it.

***Rom 1:21-32** For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for*

*their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

***Eph 2:3** All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

***James 4:2** You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.*

***1 John 2:15** Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

***Prov 16:26** The labourer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on.*

***Prov 21:10** The wicked man craves evil; his neighbour gets no mercy from him.*

- 3. Third, note this: desire is never satisfied apart from God. A person must trust and call upon God in order to have his desires fulfilled: “You do not have because you do not ask God.” There are three reasons why trusting and calling upon God are necessary for desires to be fulfilled.

a. Man's deepest and most restless craving is spiritual. God has made man a spiritual being, a being who is restless until his spirit is at peace with God. Man may deny, ignore, neglect and reject this fact; nevertheless, the denial of truth does not do away with the truth. God has made man a spiritual being, a being with a soul that craves for spiritual satisfaction:

=> Man craves for God, for the fellowship and communion, the care and security of His presence.

=> Man craves for life, for life that is both abundant and eternal.

=> Man craves for a perfect world.

Man desires these things; deep down within his soul he desires for spiritual satisfaction, and his spirit is restless — ever craving for more and more — until the spirit is satisfied with the knowledge of these things.

b. Man's spiritual desires and cravings cannot be satisfied with physical and material things. Man's experience is this: there is that within man that lusts and craves for more and more. And as more and more is taken, the lust or desire does not diminish; it grows. It craves for still more and more. Man's cravings are never satisfied. They have to be controlled. If man feeds his cravings and continues to feed and feed them, he is eventually consumed by his lusts or desires. The problem is this: man misunderstands that for which his soul is craving. It is an inner craving, a spiritual craving that gnaws away at him. Thus, no physical thing can satisfy that spiritual craving. A physical thing is of the earth, physical; it is not of heaven, spiritual. The spiritual craving can only be satisfied by a spiritual thing, only by the Spirit of God. Physical things only leave man dissatisfied, unfilled, incomplete, still hungering and thirsting after pleasure and self-gratification. (See note, Jn. 4:13-14.) Why? Because it did not come from God. Throughout

history men have desired everything imaginable, and they have used every method from arguing to war to get what they desire. Yet they have never been satisfied within. Why? Because what they desired was never sought from God and did not come from God.

c. Man is not able to control his desires, not completely and not always. Man must have the presence and power of God to control all his lusts and desires. No matter what man may think and claim, history is clear evidence of the uncontrolled desires of men. In fact, any thinking and honest person can testify to his lack of control and discipline over desires and lust. We corrupt our minds, thoughts and bodies and we hurt, disrupt and destroy others by our uncontrolled desires and lust. It is our uncontrolled desires and lusts that are carrying everyone of us to the grave. The only escape — the only victory over the corruption of desires and lusts — is God. We must trust God and call upon God. We must consult with God about our desires and wants...

- talk with Him
- ask His opinion
- ask His will
- ask if the desire is good or bad
- ask if the need is a true need or simply the lust for pleasure or gratification

We must learn to commune and fellowship with God — to walk in Him, live and move in Him, seeking and asking His opinion, will and help every step of every day. This is what God wants from all of us, leaders and citizens alike, ministers and laymen alike — God wants to fellowship and commune with us. He wants our acknowledgement — our worship and honour and praise of Him as the Lord and Father of the universe. Fellowship and communion with God — trusting and calling upon Him — is the only way we can ever fulfil the deepest and innermost desire of our hearts. And once the spiritual craving is

satisfied, all the other desires of our lives will be fulfilled and controlled by the presence and power of God in our hearts. Prayerlessness — not knowing God and not praying to God — is the second cause of temptation and wrongdoing.

**Rom 6:11-13** *“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

**Rom 8:13** *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

**Gal 5:24** *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

**1 Pet 4:2** *As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

**1 John 2:15-17** *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

**Psa 31:19** *How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.*

**Psa 37:3** *Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*

**Psa 37:5** *Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:*

**Psa 62:8** *Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*

**Prov 3:5-6** *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

**Isa 26:3-4** *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.*

### III. James 04:03 *Praying Amiss, with Wrong Motive*

What is the cause of temptation and wrongdoing? Third, it is praying amiss, praying with the wrong motive. *Amiss* simply means to pray wrongly, not to pray right; to pray with the wrong motive. Even when a person trusts God — knows and fellowships with Him on a personal basis and wants God to help meet his needs — he can ask God for help in the wrong way. He can pray amiss, and when he prays amiss, God is unable to help him. What does it mean to pray amiss? What is a wrong prayer? Scripture tells us, and this is the reason our prayers are so often not answered: we ask for things so that we can gratify our lust and pleasure. We ask for the wrong reasons, with the wrong motives. We ask...

- for health to be more comfortable.
- for healing and a longer life to continue our comfortable lives.
- for money to have more.
- for success to be recognized.
- for position to hold authority.
- for the family to be blessed so that we can continue to enjoy their presence.

We ask this and so much more, all because we seek to gratify our own desires more and more. We seek God's blessings so that we can have more comfort, enjoyment, better food and clothes and be accepted and recognized more.

What is the right motive for prayer? How can we pray and know that God will give the desires of our heart? *By asking for the glory of God.* When a person wants something from God, he must want it so that he can glorify God. We must always remember that what God is after is communion and fellowship with us, for us to draw closer and closer to Him, learning more and more about Him and worshipping and serving Him more and more. This is the way God is glorified, by our walking closely to Him and honouring and praising His name. Therefore, if we want anything from God, we must want it so that we can glorify Him — so that we can draw closer to Him and make Him better known to others.

1. If a person wants health, life, strength or a strong testimony, it must be so that he can glorify God.

**Mat 5:16** *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

**1 Cor 6:20** *You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

2. If a person wants to bear fruit in his life and work, or in his church and upon his land, it must be so that he can glorify God.

**John. 15:8** *“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*

**Rom 15:6** *So that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

3. If a person wants the basic necessities of life — food, clothing and shelter, or purpose, meaning and significance, or assurance, confidence and security — or if he wants more position, authority or money, it must be so that he can glorify God and the Lord Jesus Christ in his life and testimony.

**Mat 6:31-33** *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

**2 Th 1:11-12** *With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Eph 4:28** *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

**1 Tim 6:17-19** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

**1 John 5:14-15** *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him.*

#### **IV. James 04:04 Worldliness; Friendship with the World**

What is the cause of temptation and wrongdoing? Fourth, it is worldliness. James uses strong language. He calls them adulterous people. He means two things.

1. Being adulterous means that a person is guilty of spiritual adultery. Jesus Christ holds His relationship with us in the highest regard. Our relationship with Him is to be so close that it can be described only by the closeness and intimacy of marriage. In fact, our relationship with Christ can even be closer and more meaningful than marriage. We are to know, believe and understand Christ just as we are to know, believe and understand our husbands and wives. But with Christ there is far more of a bond and relationship than what we can have with each other as men and women of earth. Jesus Christ actually lives within our bodies in the person of the Holy Spirit. We are to live, move and have our being in Christ and He in us. This is the reason believers are called *the bride of Christ* (2 Cor .11:1-2; Eph. 5:24-28; Rev. 19:7; 21:9). The marriage relationship just comes the closest to describing the bond which Christ has with us.

The point is this: our bond with Christ is so close that when we turn away from Him to the world, it is like committing spiritual adultery. Spiritual adultery means that we turn away from God to the world — that we break our commitment to God and turn to other things; that we follow after the things of the world instead of following after God, things such as...

- money
- position
- popularity
- girls
- possessions
- power
- honour
- boys
- lands
- cars
- recognition
- houses
- clothes
- fame

The picture of spiritual adultery shows us just how meaningful God counts our relationship with Christ: it is a relationship of love, a bond of love that can be the closest bond in all the world. If we turn away from Christ to the world, it cuts His heart with the deepest of pain — a pain beyond description — for He is God and He feels with perfect feelings. We must never forget that our Lord gave His life and died for us. He has done everything He can to save us and to create a relationship with us. And it cost Him unbelievable pain — the pain of the cross — the pain of bearing all the sins of the whole world — the pain of bearing the wrath of God against those sins — the pain of God the Father forsaking and rejecting Him when He bore our sins — such pain that it defies description — and it was all for us. Therefore, we must not hurt Him anymore. We must not crucify Christ anymore. We must not forsake Him for the world. We must not commit spiritual adultery against Him by turning to the world.

**Heb 2:3** *How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*

=> Spiritual adultery is not obeying the commandment of the Lord.

**Judg 2:17** *Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord's commands.*

=> Spiritual adultery is idolatry, the worshipping of other gods.

*1 Chr 5:25* But they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers and prostituted themselves to the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them.

*Ezek 6:9* Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me — how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices.

*Hosea 4:12* Of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.

=> Spiritual adultery is unclean deeds and sinful behaviour.

*Psa 106:39* They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.

=> Spiritual adultery is giving oneself to detestable and vile things.

*Ezek 20:30* Therefore say to the house of Israel: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Will you defile yourselves the way your fathers did and lust after their vile images?’

=> Spiritual adultery is forgetting God and turning one’s back upon Him.

*Ezek 23:35* Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “Since you have forgotten me and thrust me behind your back, you must bear the consequences of your lewdness and prostitution.”

=> Spiritual adultery is refusing to return to God and not acknowledging the Lord.

*Hosea 5:4* “Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD.”

=> Spiritual adultery is forsaking God.

*Hosea 1:2* When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, “Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.”

*Hosea 4:12* Of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.

*Hosea 9:1* Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor.

=> Spiritual adultery is disbelief in Christ.

*Mat 16:4* “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.

=> Spiritual adultery is being ashamed of Christ and His Words.

*Mark 8:38* “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

2. Being adulterous means that a person is actually committing adultery. The people of that day lived in a generation just like all other generations, a generation where immorality and all forms of sexual vices were running rampant. As Jesus said, “This is an adulterous generation” — a generation that is so full of sexual immorality that it

can be characterized as adulterous. Some believers had apparently been caught up in the immorality of the world, living lives of impurity. They are called adulterous because that was just what they were. They were having affairs behind closed doors and in the dark.

3. Note a third thing, the question asked by Scripture: “Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?” What does this mean? Just what Scripture says: the person who is a friend of the world is the enemy of God. What does it mean to be a friend of the world?

=> It means to live for this world and the things of the world: houses, lands, money, position, power, popularity, clothes, recognition and anything else in this world that people focus upon and put before God.

=> It means to seek the things of this world so much that you will deceive, lie, cheat and steal to get them.

= It means to seek the fleshly pleasures and partying of this world.

Everything in this world passes away. This world is physical and material; therefore, it has the seed of corruption in it. Because of this it stands against God. It is not eternal nor holy and righteous like God. Therefore, any person who is a friend of this world stands against God. He stands against all that God is.

=> An impure person is an enemy of God’s purity.

=> An unholy person is an enemy of God’s holiness.

=> A deceptive, lying person is an enemy of God’s truthfulness.

=> A covetous, banking, hoarding person is an enemy of God’s heart that gives sacrificially.

=> A worldly minded person is an enemy of God’s will for man.

On and on the list could go, but the point is clear: the person who is a friend of this world, who focuses upon this world, is an enemy of God.

**Mat 6:24** “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

**Mat 16:26** “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

**Luke 21:34** “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”

**2 Cor 6:17-18** “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty.

**Col 3:2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

**Titus 2:12** It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

**James 4:4** You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

**Mat 15:8** ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’

**Rom 8:7-8** The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

**Eph 2:12** Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

**1 John 2:15-16** Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.

## V. James 04:05–06 Cure: The Holy Spirit

What is the cause of temptation and wrongdoing? This passage has told us there are four causes:

- => Desires: the passion for pleasure and gratification.
- => Distrust: desiring something and never trusting God or asking Him for it.
- => Praying amiss: praying with the wrong motive.
- => Worldliness: friendship with the world.

These are the causes of temptation and wrongdoing. Now, what is the cure for temptation and wrongdoing? There are two cures.

1. Believers must know this: the Spirit of God yearns over us with jealousy. Note that this point is a question: “Do you think?” The point is something that we *must think about and know*. The Holy Spirit who dwells in believers...
  - envies intensely, yearns, desires and longs after us.
  - yearns with envy and jealousy over us.

When does the Holy Spirit yearn over us with jealousy? All the time, but in a special way when temptation confronts us and we do wrong.

The Holy Spirit is always yearning over us and He is always jealous over us. But if we turn away from Christ and become a friend of the world — if we become adulterous — the Spirit of God does not cast us off and turn away from us. He loves us and cares for us and wants to save us. He yearns and longs for us with deep, intense jealousy — yearns and longs for us to return to Christ and give Him our full devotion.

The point is this: the believer is to know that the Spirit of God is exactly like this. When the believer is heavily tempted and does wrong, he is not cast off and rejected and forsaken by God. God still loves the believer — no matter what he does. God yearns and longs for the believer to return to Him — yearns and longs with deep, intense jealousy. When the believer knows this, then he knows the first great cure for temptation and wrongdoing. And he is far more able to repent and return to God. Why? Because he is so deeply loved by God — so much so that God yearns for him with a jealous, envious love. And love attracts and pulls the believer back to God. Scripture clearly declares that God is a jealous God.

**Exo 20:5** You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

**Exo 34:14** Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

**Deu 32:16** They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols.

**Deu 32:21** They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.

**Zec 8:2** *This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.”*

**Thought 1.** God has placed His Spirit into the hearts of believers to lead them through all the temptations and trials of life and to convict and lead them to repentance when they sin. The Holy Spirit yearns and covets souls; He wants no believer to turn away from Christ.

**John 14:26** *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

**John 16:7-11** *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: In regard to sin because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”*

**Rom 08:09-11, 13-14** *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

**1 Cor 3:16** *Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?*

**1 Cor 6:19-20** *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

**Gal 5:16-17** *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

**Gal 5:22-25** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desire. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

**Eph 4:30** *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

**1 Th 5:19** *Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.*

**1 John 2:27** *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

2. Believers must know this: God gives the humble believer grace and more grace, but He opposes the proud. Grace means the favour and blessings of God, any favour and blessing which God gives.

When the believer faces temptation or does wrong, God meets the believer's need, no matter what it is: strength, wisdom, power, perseverance, patience, forgiveness. The believer does not deserve God's grace and blessing, but God loves him. Therefore, God gives him whatever he needs. In fact, God gives more grace, that is, grace upon grace, grace and more grace.

But note a critical fact: not every believer and not every person receives God's grace. God meeting our need is not an automatic thing. Not everyone's needs are met. In fact, the very opposite is true. If a person is proud — if he is stiff-necked, haughty and rebellious against God — God opposes the person. God wants to pour His grace out upon the person, but if the person hardens himself and rebels against God and continues to live on in his sin, God has no choice. God is shut out of the person's life; therefore, grace is rejected. God can do nothing for the person. But note something else as well. God has to oppose the person. He has to consider the person...

- a rebel
- a curser
- an antagonist
- a traitor
- an enemy
- a sinner

God has to stand against the sinner and his evil. God has to oppose and set himself against and eventually put him to the most terrible shame.

But this is the glorious gospel: God gives grace and more grace to the humble. The person who turns to God away from the world and his wrongdoing will receive all the grace from God he will ever need. God will look after and care for him just like a child — loving, nourishing, nurturing, feeding, clothing, sheltering, protecting and giving more and more life to him forever and ever.

**Luke 14:11** *“For everyone who exalts himself will be bumbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

**Heb 4:16** *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

**James 4:6** *But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

**1 Pet 5:5** *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

**Psa 138:6** *Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.*

**Prov 3:34** *He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.*

**Isa 66:2** *“Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the LORD. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” ■*