

*I was in my mid to late 20's before I ever joined a club (of any sort), that **wasn't** associated with the church. I'd grown up in the church, and so my family were always **very** involved in all **sorts** of community activities to do with that. And I'd been running youth groups and youth camps, for years...*

But my parents weren't big on sport (you see) – as far as Dad was concerned, sport was something that interfered with work. And so I hadn't grown up in soccer clubs, or footy clubs, or cricket or tennis clubs...

My only experience of community organisations, was the church.

But when I was 28, I joined the Dalby Pistol Club. And I really enjoyed it. A bunch of blokes (and one lady), all with similar interests, and on the surface, it all seemed like everyone, was gettin' on like a house-on-fire...

But as I spent more time with these folk, and I got to know them better, and as I got a little bit more involved with the committee side of the running of the club, I began to see another side, to some of them. And I soon realised that someone who they'd smile and laugh and joke with, well, when that other person wasn't around, they'd talk about them behind their backs, and run 'em down...

It was awful. I still enjoyed the shoots, and I still liked these blokes, but there was an ugly side to some of them... And sometimes there'd be disagreements, and arguments, and it seemed to me, that it was mainly because just a few people, always wanted to get their own way, with the running of the club (and usually the disagreements seemed to me, to be over such insignificant matters)...

*And I started to reflect on this, and I began to compare it to some **churches** I'd been a member of in the past. And I realised, that there were times, that in the church, some people would behave in a very similar way. Some people would always want to get their **own** way, in the running of the church (usually in the little, insignificant things), and, when they didn't, there would be arguments and fights, and they'd run people down (behind their backs)....*

And it was then that I realised, that this sort of behaviour in the church – well, I **always** knew that it was wrong... - but what I didn't know (until then), was that it's something which is pretty common behaviour in all sorts of community organisations...

And when that sort of stuff, is present in a church, well that's just a sign that the world is getting into the church, because that's **not** how disciples of Jesus, should behave.

In today's reading, James is warning us of the symptoms of when worldliness gets into the church. And these are **some** of the symptoms

- broken relationships
- a broken prayer-life,
- unfulfilled desires;
- pride;
- greed; and
- a constant quest for self-gratification...

Last week, we studied this same reading. (It's not often I spend 2 weeks on the one passage, but there's a lot in it)... And the message last week, was about "the war within" – the battle inside of us, between worldliness and Godliness. And about how "If we take on the ways of the world, we actually become an enemy of God". James describes it as being "double-minded". – Wanting to be a Christian, and to have the benefits of being saved, but wanting to live in the ways of the world. And James delivers a pretty stinging rebuke: ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

And, if you didn't get to hear the message last week, it'd be a good one to download and listen to. It's very challenging "Am I being double-minded?" "Am I trying to live as a worldly Christian?" "How can I humble myself before God, and get right with Him again?"

So, that was last week's message, but we didn't really get to go into the **symptoms** of this double-mindedness – The symptoms of the world getting into the church.

And, you know when I talk about "the church", I'm talking about a bunch of Christians who meet together. Alright, so we are a church here, because we are gathered together in the name of Christ.

1. So, the first symptom of the world getting into the church:
Broken relationships.

Jesus said: ^{John 13:34} **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.** ³⁵ **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

That's Godliness. And I pray that the world will look at this church, and say "Wow, they must be disciples of Jesus. Look at they way they love one another. Look at the way the care for one another..."

But when **worldliness** gets into the church, it all goes pear-shaped. Instead of love, there's bitterness. Back in 3:13, James says: ¹³ **Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.** ¹⁴ **But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.** ¹⁵ **This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.** ¹⁶ **For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.** ¹⁷ **But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.** ¹⁸ **And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

It's like chalk and cheese, isn't it? **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** vs. pure, merciful peace... And this jealousy and selfish ambition, (that we've probably all seen, some time in the church), is what fractures relationships in the church.

*At the moment, Australia is conducting a "Royal Commission into institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse." And some of the stories that we've heard, about abuse which has been committed within church organisations... (not **just** church organisations, but including church organisations) – simply awful...*

And some people hear these stories, and say "Well, that just confirms what I've always said about the church..." And they use it as an excuse to turn their backs on God, as if God and Christianity is the cause of it... Well, that couldn't be further from the truth. Godly discipleship has **never** been the cause of such abuse. It's Satanic; Demonic; Evil – the world, has gotten into the church. Double-mindedness. People who claim to be Christians, but do whatever they like, to satisfy the cravings of their sinful nature.

And in doing so, they've made themselves enemies of God.

And broken relationships – even speaking evil against one another – well, it's not the way of Christ. And therefore, it is not the way for disciples of Christ.

Jesus told us, that the greatest commandment, is to love The Lord our God, with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and all of our mind... ^{Matthew 22:39} **And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.**

And to speak evil against one another, breaks that law...
Broken relationships, are a symptom of the world getting into the church.

2. A second symptom, is a broken prayer life.

We either stop praying altogether, or when we pray, we don't get answers to our prayers, because we're not asking for the right thing.

How's **your** prayer life?

- Do you pray once a week?
- once a day?
- Or maybe, a few times a day?
- Do you pray, maybe just when you've got a major decision to make?
- Or when you're in strife?
- Or do you only pray, when someone you love, is really sick or dying?
- Or do you live a life of prayer? Where you spend the whole day with God, and when you're out working in the paddock, or driving the car or the tractor, you can just talk to Him... And you're acutely aware of His presence, and you listen to Him....

How's your prayer life?

V2 says: ²... You do not have, because you do not ask.

How often do we not ask? Sometimes I wonder, if our faith, just isn't big enough. We only ask for things that we know are possible. But God is ready to do the **impossible**. Only He doesn't because we haven't asked for it.

But, when you **do** pray, what do you ask for?

Do you know what the No1 prayer in our church is? I either hear it (or pray it) almost every Sunday.... Do you want to guess? "Rain". As soon as the season is no longer perfect, we start asking for rain... Now, don't get me wrong. It's **right** for us to pray for rain. The Lord is the **only** provider of rain. He has a monopoly... But I don't think we should be asking Him for rain, so we can turn an average season into a 'bumper' season.

So, what **should** we be praying for? Well, the disciples asked Jesus that very question. And He taught them the Lord's prayer.

What's the first thing Jesus taught them to ask for?

Matthew 6:9–13 (ESV)

⁹ "Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

Alright, so it starts out with praise. But we haven't asked for anything yet...

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

And there it is: Our first request, should be for God's kingdom to grow, and for His will to be done... And do you know what happens when we pray that??? God's going to say "Excellent!!! I've been waiting for you to pray that. Do I have a plan for you?"... You realise, The Lord's Prayer, is a dangerous prayer to pray... To pray "Your will be done" includes, "God, Your will be done in my life"... I give up **my** will, to be subject to **Your** will...

But is that how we **do** pray? Is **this** the focus of our prayer life – for us to be praising God, and to be asking for His kingdom to come, and for His will to be done????

I suspect, in many of us, it's not. We often jump ahead to the next bit, don't we? ¹¹ **Give us this day our daily bread,**". Only, more often we ask, "Give me a truckload of bread". Give me a happy life and a happy wife and happy kids. Give me a new car and a nice house. A better job. Make me cows fat, and good prices. Give me a low dollar when I want to export stuff, and a high dollar when I want to import stuff. Give me health and wealth and well being.

"I'm not asking for much, Lord. I'm just asking for enough to be comfortable."

Do you know something I've learned, folks? God has no interest in my comfort. Or yours. At least not from an earthly perspective. **He** is our comfort – not the things we have. The Holy Spirit – well, one of His names is "The Comforter"

And we feel we need all of these things, to be comfortable.
As if that's important.

So, are we praying for the right things?

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

“Guilty as charged.”

What's my **motivation** in prayer?

Am I asking for “daily bread”? Or am I asking for something
else? Do you know what daily bread is? – Enough food that I
don't starve today, and enough clothes so I don't freeze to
death tonight. That's daily bread. It's enough to get by on, as
we serve the lord with our lives.

So, am I praying rightly or wrongly? I guess it boils down to,
“What's the motivation of my prayer?” Am I asking for
things to fulfil my worldly passions? Or am I truly seeking
God's will, and seeking to understand **His** eternal purposes,
and fervently seeking for these things to be fulfilled?

Is my prayer life dominated by worldliness? Or Godliness?

What about the prayers that we pray together as a church?
Are **they** dominated by worldliness? Or Godliness?

I'd better move on. I'm running out of time, fast.

The remaining 4, I'm going to group together:

- unfulfilled desires;
- pride;
- greed; and
- a constant quest for self-gratification...

We desire, but we do not have. Why? Because we're tempted and enticed, by **much** of what the world has to offer.

Worldliness is very desirable, but it doesn't fit with a Godly life.

I don't think I have any doubt as to what James would say about the prosperity theology that gets preached in many western churches today – you know, “God wants you to be rich. He wants to bless you with an abundance...” If there was ever the world, bursting into the church – there it is...

Greed. The world has taught us to want more and more and more. There is never enough.

A constant quest for self-gratification. Happiness and enjoyment, is something we've come to expect. We demand it. Right from childhood, our desire (and our expectation), is to be entertained – to have everything, I want provided for me, is almost considered “a right”...

“Hedonism” is the word for it. “Hedonism”, is the quest for pleasure.

And all of these things, are symptoms of the world getting into the church. It's a war. Our passions are at war within us. The way of the Spirit, and the way of the world.

Who's going to win the war?

Well, who do you reckon's going to win?

James says, "Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world, makes himself an enemy of God."

Now, if we were to go to war against God, who do you think's going to lose???? Dum Dummm.... Us, of course.

It's only pride that sets us against God.

I've got a friend who engineers weapons systems for military helicopters. And he has a saying "It's not rocket science... Which is a pity, because I can do rocket science..." And he does – he can design missile propulsion and all sorts of stuff...

Well, friends, this isn't rocket science... it's not hard to understand. Satan wants us to be under his spell, and to be captivated by his desires, because that makes us very ineffective as Christians. Satan wants to distract us from the eternal, and to focus us on the here and the now, and all the earthly pleasures that this world has to offer. And generally, he's pretty effective in what he does...

But God wants us more. God loves us so much, that He sent His son, to rescue us from the Kingdom of Darkness. And our walk into Godliness, begins, as we humble ourselves before God. When we give up all of the hopes and dreams, that this world has been pulling us to...

And we say “Enough of this!”. And as we draw near to God, He draws near to us...

Worldliness might seem like a web that entangles us, and captures us, never to let us go. But there is a way out. Resist Satan, and draw near to God. Let's pray.