

## **Conflict**

My beloved this morning we return to our study of James by examining chapter 4. I praise God that in our church we are not experiencing the problems and concerns James is addressing. We have had problems in the past and most likely will at some point in the future. This is one the beautiful things about the New Testament letters, they dealt with a variety of conflicts and needs within the early church and instruct us in how to deal with them in our churches today. We recognize people's hearts are only changed by Christ and until people surrender to Christ these conflicts will continue. So, praise God for the instruction we will receive this morning. Fore warned is to be fore armed.

James returns to his questioning the readers of his letter in Jerusalem as he did in verse 13 of chapter 3, **“Who is wise and understanding among you?”** James wanted people to examine if their wisdom was from God above or the world below. James now turns their attention directly upon the conflicts and disputes among the people within the Jerusalem church. He asks, **“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?”** Instead of peace and the fruit of righteousness, there were those in the Jerusalem church manifesting just the opposite: they were full of mutual oppositions and attacks. James began addressing these quarrels and conflicts back in chapter one when he wrote, **“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (Repeat) <sup>21</sup> “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”** (James 1:19-21) The state of unsaved people is prone to anger, anger at ones lack of what the world considers important: money, fame, wealth and power.

James says put away these things for are the filthiness and wickedness of the world and as one is able to set these aside and take in the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, then the Word becomes implanted in their souls and begins to restructure their thoughts, desires and behavior. If one were to ask, “How is the Bible or how is James’ letter relevant to our lives today?” all they have to do is look around, look at the world as it is and they will see these problems. Ungodly behavior results in conflict with others, conflict with self and conflict with God.

### **Conflict With Others**

The words James used for conflict come from the language of warfare and can also be used as powerful imagery for the destructiveness of relationships where violent attitudes have broken out unchecked. Just as a lack of mercy was evidence of people’s sin of the tongue, now their active hostility toward each other is used as evidence that their conflict with others is the result of their conflict with God.

James says these problems of quarrels is between people of the church, we know this by what we read at the end of verse 1 where James says, “among you.” This means between members of the church and this is creating turmoil within the church. This conflict indicates not everyone in the church is truly saved. Conflicts are rooted both within oneself and can come externally from others. In verse 1 James continues with, “Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” Sin is always a condition of the heart – whether your heart seeks the world or God. When the internal war of sin bursts forth to an external act, it creates conflict, strewing its damage to others. Ultimately, this portrays a corrupted view of Christianity to the unsaved world.

I have observed people within the Church of Christ bringing conflict into their lives and into the church by rationalizing and making exceptions to the Word of God. My daughter’s fiancée is not a believer but he has a good degree and will be able to care for her well. I have the opportunity to partner with this person, he is not a believer

but this is a great business opportunity. These attitudes bring conflict into ones life. However, rarely do decisions that to go against the instructions found in the Word of God not bring conflict and war into their life. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth a command inspired by God, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?<sup>15</sup> What accord has Christ with Belial? (*Belial is derived from the Hebrew name for the god of the underworld*) Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?” God says, we are to separate ourselves from unbelievers. God is not saying have nothing to do with unbelievers or do not share the gospel with them or not to be kind. He is saying do not have intimate relationships for these will lead to pain, conflict and will create a hostile environment. If we are obedient to God’s command we will,<sup>17</sup> “Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,<sup>18</sup> and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15, 17-18) One cannot serve two masters and one cannot be loyal to God and the world.

It is not God’s will for conflict to exist within his church. However, his command for unity can only be fulfilled if true believers populate the church. As John recorded the words of Christ, “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.<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) This was of such great concern to Jesus that he prayed to God the Father for not only the 12 disciples but for all future believers saying Fahter, “I do not ask for these only (*the 12*), but also for those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:20-21) The church was to have unity and unity can only come from believing and submitting to Christ and the

eternally unchanging Word of God. Paul instructed the churches in Corinth, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10) The New Testament is replete with instructions for the church to believe only in the Bible as its source of truth and this will bring unity and believers need to avoid having meaningful relationships with unbelievers – I could go on and on, but I think these verses make God’s thoughts plain. Jesus’ commands and the apostle’s teachings are clear and for one to do less is disobedient and disobedience is sin. Violating God’s instructions and commands introduces the sin of conflict among members of the Body of Christ.

Young people if you violate these instructions when you seek friends at high school or go to college or seek a husband or wife you invite conflict into your life that will bring pain that may last your entire life. I knew all these levels of pain and only because God saved Joyce and I was unity and peace brought into our lives. However, the scares of the past are still there, but they are now only scars for Christ healed our hearts. Be careful whom you give your heart to. Give your heart first to Christ and then let the Holy Spirit guide you in choosing your relationships. This will avoid you having conflicts with God, others and yourself.

### **Conflict With Self**

James continues explaining the depth of the quarrel and conflict beginning in the second half of verse 1, “Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” For those who claim Christ but at the same time try to hold onto the world not only do they have conflict with others but also there is conflict internally.

First James makes clear the source of conflict is “[passions](#)” or pleasures and this is translated from the Greek word “*hedonon*.” It is from this word that comes the English word “hedonist.” James is saying instead of servant’s heart, instead of considering others more worthy than oneself - this person is seeking their own pleasure even at the expense of others.

Paul wrote to Timothy that there would be people in the church who were not true believers. Writing, “[For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,](#) <sup>3</sup> [heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,](#) <sup>4</sup> [treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,](#) <sup>5</sup> [having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.](#)” (2 Timothy 3:2-5) We are to let the Word of God cast light upon these people, we are to live our lives in submission to God in contrast to these people and we are to avoid having meaningful relationships with these people. Those God has saved are slaves to Christ. Unregenerate people are slaves to their desires and to the prince of this world.

The Apostle Peter in chapter 2 of his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter said that these people think they are exercising freedom to choose but in truth it shows that they are slaves of the corruption of this world. The problem is further compounded by what James writes in verse 2, “[You desire and do not have!](#)” This causes the war to rage within a person. The pleasures one does obtain leaves one unfulfilled and frustrated and always wanting more.

Reading from James’ letter at verse 2, “[You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.](#) <sup>3</sup> [You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.](#) <sup>4</sup> [You adulterous people!](#)” You may get that new truck and the advertisement says it will make you happy. It may for a short time, but happiness is

not the peace or joy that come from belonging to Christ. You may get that person into bed and enjoy some momentary pleasure, but it will be followed by the emptiness of not knowing true love. One experiences true love first through Christ. Turn in your Bible to 1 John chapter 4, which comes after Peter's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter. Reading beginning in verse 16, "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." If one wants to end the internal conflict within their life and end conflict or war with those intertwined with their life, the answer is clear – let the love of God reign in your life, experience God's love through the Holy Spirit that lives within you and only then will you experience true love and understand sacrificial love and be able to love and serve others with peace and joy. If one is at peace with God they are able to know peace in life no matter what their circumstances.

You see it is simple truth – if you make the decision to act lovingly towards someone you will come to love that person, even if, that person was considered unlovable. As one loves others the turmoil, conflict abates and goes away and one begins to experience peace within and with others.

## **Conflict With God**

When ones life is controlled by self-seeking pleasures, the result is envy and disappointment for lacking worldly pleasures and we spend life in conflict with God. People who have been hurt by Christians or the church blame God instead of men.

They forsake the church, which is God's gift to all Christians and is the environment God calls all Christians to live in. When one has "friendship with the world the result is hostility towards God." James says there are 3 characteristics observed in the lives of those who are hostile towards God.

First James writes in verse 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." James uses the example of adultery where a person violates their marriage covenant by being sexually intimate with someone other than his or her spouse. James uses this metaphor knowing the Jewish people would clearly understand he is not talking about sexual but spiritual infidelity toward the one true God. This metaphor is used many times in the Old Testament and the Jewish people were and are Old Testament people. The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea used the Jew's adulterous behavior towards God to convict them and to call them return to God. Some things just do not change; today people still turn their back on God to seek what this world has to offer. And when one gives their person, their mind and their heart to the world they become an enemy of God and their life experiences turmoil.

Secondly, James says one is in conflict with God because of ones disregard for the Word of God, which has given to guide a believers life. The Bible is the foundation of a believer's life. Reading verse 5, "Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us' "? So, God has given the scriptures and the Spirit and by these there is purpose in a believers life. Believers are to seek to know the Word of God as a man seeks to know his wife. On the other hand if one does not have the Spirit of God living within them they can study the Word of God and never truly know it, they will not experience the intimacy of God's love. This theme is found throughout the Old Testament and begins with God speaking to Cain after both Able and Cain brought

sacrifices to God. You can read chapter 4 of Genesis for the complete story. God says to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? <sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:6-7) Sin desires to trap us and entice us and lure us to the world and away from God. Sin is crouching not only at our door as we go out into the world but also at the door of our minds by what we let in. The scriptures program our minds with things that are true and pure and good. On the other hand the world brings into ones mind: want, envy, lust, ambition and on and on.

My beloved if you are not spending time each day - and for me that means at the beginning of each day before the world begins to creep in - then you are not arming yourself for the day’s battle with the world. As Paul instructed the believers in Ephesus, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on **the belt of truth**, (*Is not the belt of truth the eternal truth of the Bible?*) *continuing* and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the **readiness given by the gospel of peace**. (*The gospel of peace is the gospel of Christ found in the New Testament*) Reading in verse 16, **In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;** <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**” (Ephesians 6:13-18) It is the Word of God that equips a believer to step out into the world each day ready to battle sin – both their own temptation to sin and to stand firm against the luring sin of the world. My beloved, it is the Word of God that protects our minds, hearts and souls and this is its primary purpose. The scriptures build in us the desire for the Spirit as opposed to the desires of the world.

Finally, James shows us that one's life is lived in conflict with God by one's pride. Reading from verse 6, "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" You see pride is the dandelion of the soul. Its root goes deep and only a little left behind can quickly sprout again. It will grow in poor soil but it flourishes in good soil. For the danger of pride is that it feeds on goodness. Benjamin Franklin wrote in his autobiography, "There is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility." Oh, I agree with Ben, we can have pride in our ability to be humble. The natural state of our hearts is pride, but through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God gives believers the precious gift of grace to replace pride.

I am sure James had this thought in mind when he wrote verse 5 and it agrees with the the writer of Proverbs, written a thousand years prior, concerning God's relationship with the people he created, "Toward the scornful he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor." (Proverbs 3:34) Peter certainly agreed with James and Proverbs in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter when he penned, "... Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" (1 Peter 5:5)

James paints a picture of a sinner who is proud and belongs to the world even though he is in the church and speaking with Christian language. The heart has not come under the headship of Christ and because they are in truth worldly they are in conflict with God and remain an enemy of God, not sharing in his grace and forfeiting God's gift of divine forgiveness.

If one is truly saved their life gives evidence of having separated themselves from this world because God is working in their soul. It is only because of the Holy Spirit

living within a believer than one is able to love, show grace and mercy, and humble themselves in the service of others. As Jesus said, **“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Matthew 23:12) My beloved, look at your life and observe the lives of those around you and evaluate who you and they really are.

True Christians are not part of the evil world system as John wrote in chapter 17. Believers have been chosen out of the world as he also wrote in chapter 15. They are not conformed to the world as Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, but are sent into the world by Jesus to provide light to expose the world’s moral and spiritual darkness as Matthew recorded. Believers have been crucified to the world as their Lord Jesus and by his power have risen above the world as Paul wrote to the Galatians. By this power John says we have overcome the sins of this world and remain unstained by the world’s sin as James wrote in chapter 1. To be a friend of the world while one claims to be Christian is the height of folly and pride and is not only deceiving of one’s own position but creates conflict and damage in the church of Jesus Christ given to his followers as the community apart from the world and meant to change the world.

My beloved let us individually and as a community pursue Jesus’ command to all believers overcoming pride and bringing us into unity, first with God and then with each other. Jesus commands, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”**<sup>31</sup> **The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”** (Mark 12:30-31) I end our time saying Amen and Amen!