

# Why Conflicts Arise in the Church

Sermon 13 in the James series

## James 4:1-6

You know that I am not one for fancy titles that promise more than they deliver. I remember being a teenager during a time of real conflict in the church I was attending.

The Pastor said tonight I am going to preach on “The Biggest Troublemaker in our Church” and then he said, “I am going to name names!”

Now that got my attention.

I think it got a lot of people’s attention, as the Sunday night crowd was larger than usual.

He named names alright – the biggest troublemaker was THE DEVIL!

James starts right out in verse 1 telling us why conflicts arise within the church and my limited experience says that he is right. I have opportunity to deal with conflicts within churches at large from time to time – and almost without fail, the things James points to are present.

And if you doubt this is in a church context -- notice the second person plural “you” in verse 1. He is addressing this to professing believers in the various churches who would receive this letter.

Notice – James is crying against those who are causing dissention and calling out for PEACEMAKERS within the church. To prove that point – let me start reading with 3:17 (through 4:6).

## **READ 3:17-4:6**

### **I. The Source of Quarrels and Fights in the Church 4:1-3**

#### **A. The Structure of James Argument**

Verse 1 is clear enough.

It is verse 2 that is difficult – and different translations deal with it in different ways.

Some see 3 clauses – and some see two.

The KJV, NKJV and NIV – 3 clauses

You lust and do not have.

You murder and covet and cannot obtain.

You fight and war.

The ESV and NASB has two clauses

You desire and do not have, so you murder.

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

It is impossible to know, since it depends on punctuation and word order.

The NKJV has in its favor the fact it is more general in nature.

However, the specific rendering of the newer translations makes a lot of sense, especially with the parallelism that James loves to employ.

Either way – the point is clear enough.

These quarrels come from OUR PASSIONS.

It has become very popular to speak of being PASSIONATE for God.

However, it should be noted – the word translated PASSIONS (ἡδονή -- hedone) – means Pleasure or Passion – dictionary definition – “desire for physical pleasure”.

While it could be argued that some of the Greek philosophers at times used this word in a good sense – not like HEDONISM

– in the NT the word appears 5 times and is always negative – never positive.  
-- Twice in this context – “pleasures” v. 2 and “pleasures, lusts or passions” in v. 4.

## **2 Peter 2:12-13**

<sup>2</sup> But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, <sup>13</sup> and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it **pleasure** to carouse in the daytime. *They are* spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you,

The context Peter is writing about is similar to the one in James.

-- Peter is confronting FALSE TEACHERS within the church.

-- James is confronting FALSE PERSONS within the church – most likely unconverted persons.

Hedonism was a philosophy of the day that we could think of as the polar opposite of Stoicism – and both philosophies are shown to contradict true Christian living.

Turn to Titus 3.

The Bible doesn't really deal with either philosophy in detail, although we might get a glimpse into the idea of Hedonism in **Titus 3** – in which Paul sounds a lot like James where we can see in verse 3 “lusts” and pleasures “hedone” are linked together.

<sup>3</sup> Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. <sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and **pleasures**, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup> not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

<sup>8</sup> This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

## **B. The Implications of James Argument**

It is wrong desires that cause the conflicts in the church.

Primarily -- selfish ambition and envy.

### **3:14-16**

Earthly – sensual – demonic!

Now, this is STRONG LANGUAGE – but James doesn't back down.

MURDERERS – verse 4 Adulterers and adulteresses.

### C. Wrong Motives and Wrong Prayers

-- When dealing with these verses – an explanation for why our prayers go unanswered usually gets the most attention.

-- But don't forget the context.

From the context we just saw – I think we can see there is more here than simply God answering YES, NO, or WAIT.

-- We are talking about serious sin issues and schism.

-- We are talking about sin issues so serious they are likened to MURDER and ADULTERY.

Now I believe James is talking about SPIRITUAL MURDER and SPIRITUAL ADULTERY in both cases.

Spiritual murder being hatred in your heart toward your brother – which if left unchecked can result in physical murder.

Some commentators think physical murder may even be in view – especially in this time frame -- among the fanatical zealot party that helped lead to the disaster of 70 AD.

Spiritual adultery could be being controlled by one's passions to such an extent that one might lust and covet and actually commit physical adultery – but spiritual adultery is HAVING ANY OTHER GOD BEFORE THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD.

With the types of issues that James addresses – we can certainly see that SOME had set themselves up over the living and true God.

They ask and do not receive.

The unanswered question is, “What were they asking for?”  
Maybe they were asking for wisdom?

**3:1** – Some wanted to be teachers – teachers need wisdom.

But how could teachers act in the way James describes?

It could be some of these would be teachers already thought they were wise – so their asking for wisdom was just a sham. **3:13**

**PROVE YOUR WISDOM** by your conduct!

How could they receive the wisdom they were asking for if they had attitudes like James describes? **1:5-8.**

If you want wisdom – if you pray for wisdom -- you need to be willing to receive the wisdom that comes **ONLY** from God's Word!

I think there are other applications we can make too:

You want to simply satisfy your own pleasures – don't expect God to answer those prayers.

Certainly these verses cannot be favorites of the "Health, Wealth and Prosperity crowd."

## **II. Friends and Enemies of God 4:4**

Adulterers and Adulteresses.

This is one of the most strongly worded calls to repentance in all of the NT.

-- You have to go back to the preaching of John the Baptist

-- Or the preaching of Christ to the Jewish religious leaders to find this type of language.

These people are **UNFAITHFUL** to **GOD**.

By their friendship with the world – they have become enemies of God.

The term "adulteress" is important in this context.

It is feminine and shows that James is making an OT allusion.

The unfaithful covenant people of Israel were often likened to a woman who is unfaithful to her husband. The woman being Israel and God being the husband.

Turn to Jeremiah chapter 3.

The Book of Hosea is the ultimate example of Israel's sinfulness being portrayed as spiritual adultery.

This is a reoccurring theme in the OT.

**Jeremiah 3:1, 6-10, 20, the call to repentance 21-25.**

This is the spirit in which James writes.

What James would think of as FRIENDSHIP and how we use the word in our culture can be two very different things.

We have a tendency to think of "friendship" very casually.  
You might have 200 or more "friends" on Facebook.

Some young people I know distinguish carefully between their "friends" which might be only a handful – and their acquaintances – which is similar to the way James would think.

In the Hellenistic world – being friends involved sharing of all things.  
A unity that was spiritual and physical.

In this context, you can see how evil FRIENDSHIP with the world would be.

Douglas Moo points out at least 4 ways they were being unfaithful to God by their friendship with the world.

1. They were discriminating against people – 2:1-13
2. They were speaking negatively about one another 3:1-12
3. They were exhibiting "bitter envy" and "selfish ambition" 3:13-18
4. They were pursuing their own destructive pleasure 4:1-3

### **III. He Gives more Grace 4:5-6**

Understand verse 4 makes verse 5 more understandable.

Our God is a jealous God – in the best sense of the word.

In the 10 Commandments God says:

<sup>3</sup>Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup>Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

<sup>5</sup>Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: **for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

<sup>6</sup>And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

How can God say HE is a JEALOUS God.  
Isn't jealousy a sin?

In us – it usually is.  
We usually get jealous because we think we are being deprived.

But there is a good kind of jealousy.  
Husbands – what if someone is trying to entice your wife.  
That is destructive to you AND to her.

God will have no other gods – because where else could we turn.  
Any other place we would go would lead to our destruction.  
It would be WRONG for God NOT to jealously guard us.

And He will jealously guard His own.  
But false believers – pretenders – will fall away.

He gives more grace.

To the proud? No.  
To the self-sufficient? No.

He gives more grace – to those who have the Christian grace of humility.

**1 Peter 5:5-7**

Peter and James are of one mind here again.  
Certainly we can see how closely their themes and exhortations align.

## **READ**

Both are alluding to Proverbs 3:34 in the LXX.

Verse 7 is connected – in the same sentence – with verse 6.

-- We show our humility by not working things out our own way – but in trusting WHOLLY in Him.

-- We can trust Him wholly because He absolutely cares for us!

Back to James.

He gives more grace.

To those who are in grace – He is continually giving MORE grace.

If you are outside of Christ

If you have never trusted the Savior

If you are hoping YOUR GOOD WORKS will please God in the final day

– the best you can hope for is COMMON GRACE.

HE makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

The sun shines on both today

But the day of wrath is coming.

He resists the proud.

He opposes the proud.

The proud are those who REFUSE to acknowledge their need  
and REFUSE to come to Christ – the ONLY Savior of sinners.

This whole idea of HUMILITY is expanded upon in the next few verses that we will consider next week.

For now – consider what it means to have God RESIST you.

Consider what it means to have God for your ENEMY.



That's not popular language in today's Christianity.

Look again at verse 4.

A friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

And as terrible as that is – consider again – for the humble  
Consider the promise that is ours.

For those who do not live their life thinking they are fine by comparing themselves with others (like the Pharisee who prayed – Lord I thank you I am not like other men – or THIS PUBLICAN).

For those willing to bow before the Lord  
For those who do not think too highly of themselves  
For those who trust in CHRIST and CHRIST alone

He gives more grace.

Grace, grace and MORE grace.

Grace is a wonderful thing.

It is exactly what we need.

It is exactly what God gives to His children.

Let's look to the Lord in prayer.

PRAY

HYMN 615 (appropriate Thanksgiving hymn)

Special Thanksgiving service this evening.

Benediction: Those simple but powerful words in 4:6  
“But He giveth more grace”.





