

STRIFE AND UNREST

TEXT: JAMES 4:1-4

Introduction:

1. I am going to speak this evening about strife and unrest.
2. Frank E. Gaebelin said James is "putting his finger upon the cause of war on a national as well as international scale. He knew nothing of psychology as we have it, yet with the timeless pertinence peculiar to Scripture his diagnosis could hardly have been more psychologically up-to-date" (*Faith That Lives*).
3. There certainly is much strife and unrest in the world, but James is speaking to Christians. He says in James 4:1, "From whence come wars and fightings among you?"
4. Here we see a striking contrast with James 3:18, which speaks of the fruit of righteousness being sown in peace.
5. James 3:10 says, "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."
6. We ought to bless, not to curse.
7. But worldly strife and unrest is often a problem among Christians.
8. James goes on to explain that strife and unrest is caused by lust, i.e., worldly desires that "war" in our "members" (4:1).
9. James is referring to "members" of the human body.
10. The apostle Paul uses this same word frequently in Romans 6 & 7. Romans 7:5 says, "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."
11. "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:23).
12. Strife springs up in men's hearts in the lust and cravings within, and this results in "wars and fightings" (James 4:1).
13. This is what our Lord said in Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."
14. F.B. Meyer said that "the one aim of Christianity is to put Christ where man puts self."
15. Whenever worldly lusts and pleasures dominate, conflicts and disputes -- "wars and fightings" -- are inevitable.

16. These "lusts" which James refers to are part of our old nature. The apostle Paul calls them "deceitful lusts." Ephesians 4:22-24 says, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."
17. Galatians 5:16 and 17 says, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."
18. So the key is "walking in the Spirit," and not yielding to the flesh.
19. The self-life is walking in the flesh. This results in strife and unrest.

I. THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD CAN NEVER SATISFY (4:1)

1. Earlier, James said in 1:8, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."
2. Yet, many Christians still crave the things of this world, which can never satisfy the soul.
3. *Only Jesus can satisfy your soul.
Yes, only He can change your heart
And make you whole.
He'll give you peace you never knew,
Sweet joy and love and Heaven, too.
For only Jesus can satisfy your soul. -- Lanny Wolfe*
4. First Peter 2:11 says, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."
5. So these "wars and fightings" come from "fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."
6. Lehman Strauss said, "In our day an insatiable thirst for pleasure is destroying our thirst for the things of God, and these sinful, selfish gratifications are responsible for the strife among Christians" (*James, Your Brother*).
7. The selfish heart of man is never satisfied. Haggai 1:5 and 6 says, "Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."
8. That is why Jesus told the woman at the well, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again" (John 4:13).

9. James 4:2 says, "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not."
10. "Have not...cannot obtain...have not" -- the things of this world can never satisfy. The insatiable lust for worldly pleasure drowns out the desire for Bible reading, and Bible preaching, and prayer meeting, and soulwinning, etc.
11. John D. Rockefeller was a very rich man. One day a journalist asked him saying "how many millions are enough?" Mr. Rockefeller replied, "one more than what you have."
12. In other words, "There is never enough."
13. Eventually John D. Rockefeller died. Some one wrote a letter to the local news paper wanting to know how much money did Mr. Rockefeller leave behind. The news paper editor answered: "he left it all."

II. PRAYERLESSNESS BRINGS UNREST (4:2, 3)

1. I mentioned that worldly lusts crowd out the desire to pray. James 4:2b says, "ye have not, because ye ask not."
2. The hymnwriter said, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."
3. Our Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9, 10).
4. John R. Rice said, "Prayer in the Bible is asking. And if you are not asking, you are not praying."
5. Often times Christians pray the wrong way. James 4:3 says, they "ask amiss."
6. Some think they have found a contradiction in the Bible. God promises to answer all our prayers. Our Lord said in Matthew 21:22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Yet they say some prayers go unanswered.
7. But there is no contradiction. James 4:3 says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."
8. If a Christian prays selfishly, he is out of the will of God and he is not on praying ground. First John 5:14 says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."
9. It is never God's will for us to ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts (James 4:3).

III. WORLDLINESS BRINGS UNREST (4:4)

1. Worldliness always brings strife and unrest because "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (4:4).
2. When Scripture refers to "the world" in this context, it is referring to the secular, godless world that is controlled by Satan, "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4).
3. First John 2:15 and 16 says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."
4. Romans 12:2 says, "Be not conformed to this world," but sadly, many Christians are conformed to this world.
5. James 4:4 says worldliness is spiritual adultery (4:4). Can there be peace and harmony in the home when a husband is unfaithful to his wife, or a wife is unfaithful to her husband?
6. In like manner, there can be no peace and harmony in a Christian's life when he is enamored with the things of this world.
7. James is employing language from the Old Testament. Hosea 1:2 says, "the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD."
8. Hosea 4:12 says, "the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God."
9. Isaiah and the other prophets also used similar terminology. And so did the Lord Jesus, who said in Matthew 16:4, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign."
10. The attractions and allurements of this present evil world will always be a snare for Christians. The apostle Paul said, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (II Tim. 4:10).

CONCLUSION:

1. Usually, when preachers deal with this subject (and unfortunately, very few preachers preach against worldliness these days), they hit hard on television, Hollywood movies, immodest dress, drinking, smoking, dancing, rock music, and so on.
2. But these are the symptoms – James gets to the heart of the problem; James deals with the disease.
3. If a person is running a fever, the doctor is not just concerned with getting the person's temperature down – he wants to find out why he has a fever.
4. Likewise, when we see Christians acting worldly, or dressing worldly, or listening to worldly music, or associating with worldly people – we need to ask: Why?

5. James does that here in chapter 4. Worldliness brings unrest. It hinders our faith. It keeps us from getting close to God, and it keeps us from growing spiritually.
6. Next week, Lord willing, we will look at the cure for worldliness (4:8).