

The War and the Way Out

James 4:1-10

10/18/2025

Announcements:

Intro:

We come to one of the most direct passages in James, if not in the entire New Testament. We've discussed the importance of recognizing self-deception. James has called us to honesty with ourselves about the words we use and the wisdom with which we operate. The fruit of what's taking place in our lives and interpersonal relationships speaks for itself. We either operate from the wisdom above and produce peace, patience, and humility, or we operate from the earthly demonic wisdom around us and reap the fruit of confusion, anger, self-seeking, and bitter envy.

He further demonstrates this reality in chapter 4:

Scripture

James 4:1-10 (NKJV) [1] Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? [2] You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. [4] Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? [6] But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." [7] Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Intro:

Who in here has had conflict? The world has a lot of ideas about why that conflict might be there and where it might be coming from, but if you really want to know the source of the war and the way out, James 4 is the chapter you need.

Main Point

Point 1

Where the War Comes From (1-2)

Scripture

James 4:1-2 (NKJV) [1] Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? [2] You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

Boy, the church back then must have been a different beast... I mean, Christians fighting today? Spouses fighting? Families warring? Friends sparing? Christians walking in bitterness and unforgiveness toward each other??? Well, apparently, even in the church, there are things within our human nature that if not brought under subjection to Christ, will create carnal, damaging conflict. James uses two words for these conflicts:

Wars (πόλεμοι - polemoi): The Greek word "πόλεμοι" (polemoi) refers to conflicts on a larger scale. It implies a more extensive and prolonged state of hostility or conflict, often involving organized groups of people.

Fights (μαχαι - machai): The Greek word "μαχαι" (machai) refers to skirmishes. It suggests individual instances of conflict or fighting, perhaps on a smaller scale.

James speaks in specific terms regarding human conflicts. The thing that causes unjust wars among entire nations is the same thing that causes an individual to unjustly attack another individual. It's the same thing that causes churches to war against other churches, and individual Christians to fight against other Christians.

This brings to two questions: James asks a question, then answers with another question: Where do wars and fights come from among you?

The answer: Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? I like that he answers with a question, because it forces us, the reader, to answer honestly.

Quote

— Pastor Josh

The battles within me ultimately lead to battles around me.

Application

If you see a conflict involving more than one person, whether in a marriage, family, church, small group, or friend circle, etc. At least one (more than likely more) of the parties involved is fueling the fight because of desires for pleasure that war within their members. In other words, their singular nature (flesh) wants to gain something that will bring them pleasure (not just physical pleasure, but the outcome that they want above all else). They are not willing to lay down arms until they get what they want out of the conflict, regardless of the damage it's doing to those around them. It's self-centered, motivated by one's self-interest, and is looking out for numero uno. And we've all done it. If you've found yourself in an ongoing conflict, there's a good chance that you have done this. Instead of fighting for the things that will bring healing and reconciliation, you're only fighting for the things you want.

Charles Spurgeon wisely commented on this part of scripture:

Quote

— Charles Spurgeon

"The quarrels and divisions amongst you are owing to the lusts and evil passions that are in your hearts. If you were more humble and more heavenly-minded, you would not be so contentious."

You see, when two Christians are both walking in the spirit towards one another, there is no opportunity to fight or to war. It's when our self-centered desires to please our own lusts creep in that we start attacking each other.

Application

James is simply trying to communicate that when we become more consumed and concerned about our own pleasure and desires than we are about pleasing God or loving others, we will start to behave sinfully towards those around us.

He continues:

[2] You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war.

James is rebuking the Christian who resorts to the world's means and methods to obtain their desires rather than submitting to the Lord and trusting in His wisdom.

Lust and do not have – This is not just sexual lust. Lust in this context is any inordinate or ungodly desire that consumes you.

You can have a lust for money, for pleasure, or for status. You go and pursue it, and use people as tools to get what you think will please you, not considering them but only seeing a strategy to benefit yourself... and yet the void of endless lust is never filled. James says that you have become nothing more than a covetous, hateful person. The sad thing is that you act on your lust to get what you want, only to discover you never have your lusts satisfied.

You murder and covet – James uses a term to shock his audience and remind them of how devastating their actions and words really are.

He takes the mind back to Matthew 5:21-22, where Jesus told us that if we “hate a brother, then we have murdered them in our heart.”

Instead of using worldly methods that damage others to get what we want, we should rather ask God and trust in His provision and timing.

Main Point

Point 2

Why the War Continues (2-3)

Scripture

James 4:2-3 (NKJV) [2b] Yet you do not have because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

James indicates that wars and fights continue because of an improper posture before God regarding the things that we want. James says that instead of resorting to carnal methods that create conflict to get what we want, we should rather go straight to God with our desires, struggles, frustrations, and unmet expectations. I learn several things:

A. God desires to give us what we need.

The first truth should greatly encourage us all: God wants to give us what we need, and all we have to do is ask Him. We don't serve a God who withholds what is good from His children:

Scripture

Matthew 7:11 (NKJV) [11] If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Scripture

[James 1:17] (NKJV) [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Scripture

[Psalm 84:11] (NKJV) [11] For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.

Scripture

1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV) [14] Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. [15] And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

This is incredibly encouraging! But the last two points should give us a check in our hearts!

B. God will not always give us what we want.

C. We don't always want what God wants.

That thing you're fighting for, hurting others for, manipulating and lying to get, why don't you just ask God for it? "Well, Josh, Becasue it's sinful? Wrong? Selfish?" Wow... then why are you fighting so hard to get it?

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

What if God doesn't give you what you want because your tainted motive will cause greater damage if you received it?

Context: Remember, the context is important. This is in the context of the things that cause us to fight with each other. What if God won't answer your prayer until your prayer is refined to only be about God's glory rather than your pleasure?

Illustration

I keep praying that God would change that person, and He's not doing anything! What if God isn't answering your prayer becasue if he changed that person tomorrow, it would be the perfect excuse for you to never look into the mirror of what He wants to change in you? What if He is refining your prayer to, "Lord, change me and change them to the extent that we can glorify you and do what's right in your sight."

Main Point

Point 3

Which Enemy are You Fighting (4-5)

Scripture

James 4:4-5 (NKJV) [4] Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

One of the greatest problems fueling wars and fights among us is that we are making the wrong enemy and befriending the foe!

We are all in a war, and we all have an enemy: The enemy should be the devil, our fleshly, sinful desires, and the system of the godless world. Instead, we make ourselves enemies of God, enemies of each other, and friends with all the things that are seeking our destruction!

Adulterers and adulteresses!

He's not talking about people who are being unfaithful to their spouses (although they might be included), he's talking about Christians who are being unfaithful to God by loving the sinful things of this world. The world: The system of the world, not the people of the world.

Scripture

1 John 2:16 (NKJV) [16] For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

To love the world and become a friend of the world is not about loving people in the world or being friendly toward them. It's talking about marrying yourself to sinful, earthly things that are vying and competing with God for the place of affection and worship in your life.

If you're living in drunkenness, you have made a friend with one of God's enemies. If you're living in sexual immorality, you have made a friend with one of God's enemies. If you're operating in deceit, cheating, lying, and manipulation, you have made a friend with God's enemies. If you're stealing to get what you want, you have made a friend of one of God's enemies. And if you decide to join yourself to God's enemies, you voluntarily place yourself on the opposite end of God's friendship.

God is Jealous - [5] Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

Illustration

Not human jealousy (envy). God is not envious OF us, He is jealous OVER us. Jealousy is an extremely powerful emotion. Wives, imagine going on a date with your husband and he starts talking about his day. He met this great-looking gal at the store. He took her to lunch, and they spent hours just talking. He then drove her home and helped her fix her broken sink. How do you feel? Happy for this poor woman? No! Jealous over your husband. Especially since he never talks to you for 3 hours or fixes your sink. This is how the Holy Spirit loves us. He has sealed us, Jesus redeemed us, the Father accepted us, and we belong to Him. We are His bride, His children, and His friends. When we embrace the world, love it, partake in it, and marinate in it, He is rightfully jealous.

Application

Friends, we must always guard against legalism... that is, thinking there is something we can do to add to what Jesus has already done for us, or thinking that God will love us more or less depending on our performance or perfection. However, on the other hand, we must be cautious not to make excuses for sin or worldliness in our lives. The bride of Christ can't expect to grow in grace by binge-watching 8 hours of a raunchy Netflix show and spending 10 minutes a week meditating on the Scripture. The Spirit is jealous. The bride of Christ can't expect to be met with a depth of God's presence if they are willing to spend four hours watching a football game but won't spend one hour a month in prayer. Our flesh is drawn to pleasures, but they aren't all spiritually helpful. Constant scrolling to meet our dopamine desires, addictions to fill our voids, unhealthy relationships to feed our need for acceptance... these are the things that are robbing our peace, joy, and satisfaction in Christ. We want God's blessing, God's favor, joy and peace, provision and abundance. But whose side have we placed ourselves on? We will find ourselves constantly at war with each other and the Lord if we aren't rooting out the sin, secularism, and worldliness that have a foothold in our lives.

Main Point

Point 4

How the War is Won (6-10)

Scripture

James 4:6 (NKJV) [6] But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Quote

— Pastor Josh

“When it comes to the wars within us and the wars around us, humility is the only thing that provides a clear path to victory.”

Any heart that humbly confesses its need for God will not be turned away. God will not respond to humility with resounding judgment or harshness, but with grace! God knows we are sinners. Our rebellion and sin don't surprise him. When someone says to God, “You won't believe what that boy of yours did,” God will respond, “Oh yes, I do, I know him.”

Scripture

Psalms 103:14 (NKJV) [14] For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

Here is a one-liner application you need to remember, leaving this place today:

“If you are not perfect, you need to stay humble.”

You begin to boast, get prideful in your spirituality, think you know it all, refuse to apologize, resist repentance, and do whatever you want, and God will resist you.

Custom

Resist – Antitasso – to range in battle against; to oppose.

Application

How would you like God to take a defensive stance against you? How would you like to have God's grace and favor opposed to you? Just stay prideful. Just deny that there are things you need to change. Just don't repent. Just stay the same! But if you're sane, then humble yourself, ask for grace and forgiveness; ask for help, strength, and wisdom. If you do this, God will shower his undeserved riches on you... Grace.

Quote

— CS Lewis

“As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”

Scripture

James 4:7-10 (NKJV) [7] Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

In closing, James gives nine imperatives (active verbs, commands) that will bring us back into alignment with God when we've strayed.

Submit to God - Submit means to align oneself under authority. If God says it, you do it. It's a reasoning on pride and the insistence that it must be done my way. As Richard Baxter used to pray, "Lord, what You will, where You will, when You will." Make that your motto! Resist the Devil - If you want the devil to run, you'd best put your foot down and not allow him to move you. This is a direct connection with submission to God. If you try to resist the devil without submitting to God, that's an armwrestling match you won't win. Draw near to God - Notice the parallel, "Resist the devil" and he'll flee, but "draw near to God" and He'll draw near to you! Keep your face toward God, and your back toward the devil. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded - where there is sin, there is double-mindedness. Or as someone once put it, "You can't ride two horses with one rear end." Sin comes from our hands but originates in our hearts. That's why we must cleanse our hands from committing sin and purify our hearts from loving sin. The first deals with what you do. The second deals with what you want. Most people focus on behavioral sin and miss the fact that James is addressing the root-level desires that fuel the behavior. A double-minded man is not split in his morals — he is split in his loyalties. He wants God... but also wants the world. He wants holiness... but also wants self-rule. His heart is divided. Cleaning the hands implies stopping the outward practice of sin, but to deal with the root, you must also purify the heart (loyalties and affections). If cleansing the hands is turning from sin, cleansing the heart is turning to God. Not just: "Lord, I lied." But: "Lord, I wanted approval more than truth." Not just: "Lord, I lusted." But: "Lord, I wanted someone other than You to satisfy me." Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. - There is a time for laughter, joy, and light-heartedness. In His presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore. But when there's an undealt with sin in your life, you shouldn't be laughing it off; you should be weeping it out. In other words: Take repentance seriously. Some in here today are laughing about things they should be crying about! They are rejoicing in nothing they should be mourning about.

Scripture

Joel 2:12-13 (NKJV) [12] "Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." [13] So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness...

[10] Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. This is a promise. Promote yourself and you'll rise as high as you can go. Humble yourself, and God will raise you to a place only He can lift you!

Custom

Church, James isn't merely warning us about conflict — he is calling us out of it. The way back isn't complicated, but it is costly: I must lay down whatever I've been clinging to that has made me a friend of the world and an enemy of God. I must trade my pride for humility, my excuses for confession, my self-rule for submission, and my outward "clean hands" for an inward single-hearted devotion to Jesus. Some of us today don't need a new circumstance; we need a new posture. The war won't stop until the heart bows low. But here is the good news: "He gives more grace." In other words, however deep the battle has gone, grace goes deeper still. Whatever pride has resisted Him, mercy stands ready to welcome you the moment you turn. The enemy wants you to believe that repentance will shrink you. James tells us it's actually the only way you're lifted up. God doesn't humiliate the humble; He heals them, restores them, resets them, raises them. So here is the invitation: Before you walk out of this room, take sides. Not against your brother. Not against your spouse. Not against "that person" you've been blaming. Take sides with God and against your sin. Draw near... really near. Not with lip service but with a heart that says, "Lord, I'm done fighting You. Win this war within me." If you will humble yourself in His sight, He will lift you up; not someday in theory, but here, now, in the place where battle finally gives way to peace.