

"Strife? Why?"

James 4:1-6

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"1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 2 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. 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. 4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. 5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? 6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." (Jas 4:1-6 AV)

Daniel Doriani, in his commentary on James, calls this passage the "Gospel According to James." The passage speaks of the root of our problems with God and the root of our problems with each other, in our homes, our marriages, our work, our society, and in our churches. We will not have to look at others to see the truth of what James says, because the evidence is found in our own souls and in each individual heart. The root of our problem is the self-centeredness that spawns the evil desires that cause the wars and the strife that we see everywhere. We see the symptoms, the diagnosis of the disease, and the cure.

Doriani highlights a number of things in this passage that are useful and illuminating. He notes five things:

1. First fact and its result: You desire and do not have, so you murder.
2. Second fact and its result: You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.
3. Third fact and its reason: You do not have, because you do not ask.
4. Fourth fact and its result: You do ask, but you do not receive.
5. Summary: Because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions, your own desires, your own envying. Even your prayers serve your selfish desires.

Opening caveat: This message has been a painful message to prepare, and it is a painful one to preach. Very often a minister will find that a sermon is very convicting to himself and it is self-convicting to preach. So it is with this sermon. In its preparation, this minister has discovered things in himself that are convicting. On such occasions, it is a temptation to soften the message, but that would be dishonest and self-serving and the

minister would be guilty of the very thing that the passage warns against: using the ministry to serve his own desires, a frightful sin in the eyes of God.

The sins of old men are different from the sins of young men, but are very often more deeply engraved because of long practice and experience. Hezekiah the king expressed it clearly after the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors and the prophet Isaiah condemn him for showing the messengers all the riches of his house. "The king of Babylon will come and take everything away to Babylon, but it will not happen in your lifetime. "Good," said Hezekiah, "As long as there is peace and truth in my days."

I expect to preach several sermons from these verses which build upon the themes and doctrines already introduced in the three previous chapters.

Here we find it becoming clear what has been hinted at in the previous chapters as James' epistle unfolds. He speaks of the double-mindedness that is the mark of the hypocrite. He conceals his real agenda, lest he be shamed. This leads to hypocrisy for he puts on the face of an actor, and pretends to be something other than he is. He claims to be religious but seeks worldly things and riches. His tongue boasts great things and he seeks the chief seats for himself, for he does not seek the glory of God. He pretends to care for the poor and the widow, but he is only a hearer and not a doer of the law. He is careful to do those commandments that are seen of men, but picks and chooses which commandments to keep, not realizing that if he neglects one commandment in the law, he is guilty of all. He gives favor to the rich and his tongue is taught by the wisdom of the world and not by the wisdom from above. All of this leads to envy and strife and the soil of peace is disturbed and the fruit of righteousness is uprooted.

The evil of envy and strive is born of pride, the very sin of the devil himself, and James turns his heavy artillery upon it in this passage. But let us look at the words.

A. From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

1. Wars and fightings come from within. There is a war going on inside the soul that causes the wars outside the soul.

2. Members: all the parts of the soul. We are a bundle of desires. Prov. 19:21 "There are many devices in the heart of a man." Jer 17:9 "The heart [is] deceitful above all [things], and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

B. 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.

1. Calvin thinks "kill" should be "lust" but most evidence is against it, and kill fits the context of fighting and wars. The lusts results in murder; usually not actual murder, but spiritual murder: hating and fighting.

2. We use all the wisdom that we know naturally in order to arrive at the fulfilling of our desires. We use our tongues that are fired with this wisdom. We may even use prayers and scriptures to fortify our desires.

C. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

1. But, but, but. We do pray. We pray all the time. We ask for everything.

2. But you ask amiss: you do not seek the will of God, you seek God to serve your desires.

Look at Psalm 37:1-9

- a. Don't get burned up. Don't fret. The most dangerous time is in the presence of evil. Vs. 1
- b. Commit them to the Lord. Vs. 2,3
- c. Leave your righteousness in the hands of the Lord. Self-vindication comes from pride. vs. 4-6
- d. Rest: keep sabbath in your soul: most difficult in the presence of evil. Vs. 7-9 His devices are prospering, he is being successful in his evil. The greatest battle is won inside the soul, not outside the soul.

3. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 9:51-56

51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, 52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. 53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? 55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. 56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village. (Lu 9:51-56 AV)

D. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

1. The church is the bride, the spouse, of Jesus Christ. He will brook no rival.

2. You cannot be a friend of the world and be faithful to Jesus Christ. You can love no creature.

3. Abraham gave up the son of the promise; Rahab came aid to the spies against her own country. The church must never be the instrument of seeking earthly goals.

4. A husband cannot have another female friend; the wife cannot have a male friend; "forsaking all others." This disloyalty strikes at the very heart of marriage.

5. The Lord God will not trifle: he is a jealous God, and will not tolerate an idol, no matter how beautiful we paint it.

6. This returns to the theme of double mindedness, for idolatry is the ultimate double-mindedness. Ye cannot serve God and mammon: you will love the one and hate the other, or ye will hold to the one and despise the other.

E. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

1. Calvin says this is the Holy Spirit. It is not the Holy Spirit that is the source of these things. Not the wisdom that is from above.. But I think Calvin is wrong here, but the application would be the same as the following.

2. The fallen soul of man wars against righteousness. The spirit of the flesh wars against God. This envy comes from the pride and sinfulness of man. "Scripture" the whole of scripture, not just one verse. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

F. But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

1. The cure is grace. He is going to develop this theme as he continues.

2. The cure is more grace: this is the reason the rich and poor are to both rejoice; grace raises up the weak and poor, and it abases the rich and proud.

3. It is grace that makes the humble humble. For humility is not a natural condition.

God bless you brothers and sisters. We will continue this later. Amen and Amen. Amen and Amen.

God bless you.