

# Resolving Conflict

*Epistle of James*

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Please turn with me in your Bible James 4. I'm used to saying James 3. James 4 today. The title of the message this morning is "Resolving Conflict," and we see that James has a great burden about conflict in the body of Christ, so the title of the message resolving conflict, particularly in the body of Christ.

It's clearly a great burden of James in this epistle, that is, relational problems in the church. Remember, James is writing, the Apostle James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, the former leader of the church in Jerusalem, really still the recognized leader of the church in Jerusalem when he writes, but many of those people he had been shepherding in Jerusalem had been dispersed throughout the Mediterranean world because of persecution, and so he writes the letter of James, his letter to those Jewish believers to encourage them in their faith. His concern is that it's easy to be a hearer of the word and not a doer. It's easy to have a profession of faithfulness that's not followed up by actual faithfulness to the things we profess.

So James's burden is that they be doers of the word and we see that part of that is they be doers, that they be consistent with what they say in their relationships. He's very concerned about relationships in the body of Christ, in fact, that's his dominant concern in all of chapter 3 and the first half of chapter 4, the relationships in the body of Christ. We saw that he starts out and you can kind of see this like layers of an onion, he's kind of going deeper into the issue. He basically in chapter 3, verses 1 to 12, is saying, "Look at how your tongue creates great problems in your relationships." You can say it's almost as if he says, "Watch your tongue." Now look at the movement, watch your tongue in chapter 3, 1 to 12, then chapter 3, the last 6 verses, 13 to 18, he says, "Look at your attitudes. Your attitudes are the issue." That's where we saw the issue of jealousy and selfish ambition and how that creates disorder of every kind, problems in relationships. So he says, "First, watch your tongue, watch your words. Now watch your attitudes." In chapter 4, 1 to 10, he's going to say, "Understand your heart. That's the problem."

The word of God is so comprehensive in the way it addresses the needs of the human soul. Even after salvation, it continues to meet all of our needs, addressing every part of man: our words, our attitudes, and the desires of our hearts. So he's going to talk to us in

this section, chapter 4, 1 to 10, about resolving conflict by really understanding our hearts and how our hearts are the root of the fruit of conflict.

Understand your heart. James 4:1 to 10, and we're going to focus this morning on verses 1 and 2, We'll read the entire passage, though.

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit therefore 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 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we thank you for your precious word and our prayer is that your Spirit might help us now, that you might open our spiritual eyes to see and understand your precious law, and that we might see wonderful things that convict and restore. For the glory of our Savior, we pray in his name. Amen.*

Resolving conflict, understanding really what conflict, the root of conflict is, is the first thing he is going to deal with in this passage and he's basically going to keep dealing with our hearts, and it's going to show us that conflict starts in the heart, just as we saw in the passage read earlier in Mark 7 where we saw Jesus says it's not what goes into the man that defiles the man, but it's what comes out of the heart that defiles the man. It's not what you eat and it's not what happens to you. It's not the things that happen to you, the people, the things people do, the things people say. They don't make me do things.

Now we like to say that. We always, it's second nature to blame. This is something that happened, remember Genesis 3 when sin entered the world, blame shifting entered the world. You remember how it happens, God says to Adam, "Where are you?" And he says, "I'm hiding. I was afraid because I was naked." "Who told you that you were naked?" Okay, what's the problem here? Are you going to face this?" "The woman you gave me," he blames the woman, beyond the woman, he blames God. "It's the woman that you gave me. Remember you said it wasn't good for me to be alone. That was the problem.

Everything was good when I was alone. It's your fault, Lord. It's her fault and your fault." Then he says to the woman, "What is this you have done?" She says, "The serpent, he beguiled me. He tricked me." You see, no acceptance of personal responsibility. We don't believe that we are responsible for our sin. It's an intrinsic part of the sin nature and pride in sin.

So we say things like, you know, "I'm sorry I lost my temper, but you really made me mad." That's total blame shifting, isn't it? "You know, I really am kind of embarrassed but the way I acted but it's your fault." That's not confessing sin, is it? That's why you should never, in fact, one of the helpful things in the book "The Peacemaker," the 7 A's of confession, you know, you never use, I don't know how that is an A. Avoid. Okay, it starts with A. The 7 A's. Admit specifically, avoid if/but. I think if and but. "If I offended you, I'm sorry. If you are so sensitive that you would be offended by that, if you're that messed up, I'm sorry." But like I said a moment ago, "I'm really sorry for what I did but," whatever comes after that is going to invalidate the confession.

But we tend to want to blame other things, we want to blame other people, other circumstances. "I wouldn't have done this but things have been really hard on me. This has been a really hard week." Jesus is saying categorically in Mark 7, it is not what happens to you that is your problem. That's not my problem, what happens to me. I think it is. Jesus says, no, the problem is not what happens to me, the problem is what comes out of me. The illustration is sometimes used of a tube of toothpaste. If you squeeze a tube of toothpaste, what's going to come out? Toothpaste because what's going to come out is what's inside. So circumstances squeeze us, people squeeze us, things that they may do that may be legitimately be sinful things, yes, but they are just squeezing me and what's coming out is what's in my heart. So if something comes out of my heart that's offensive to God, my problem isn't the squeeze that happened, my problem is the heart. James is saying the same thing. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? It is your lust and your desires in your heart. That's our problem. We need to not only watch our tongue like he said in chapter 3, and mind our attitudes, we need to understand our heart so that we can be more repentant and we can look to Christ to cleanse our heart.

So as we look at this this morning, I want to consider this message under 2 main points. We are looking at about resolving conflict, understanding and resolving conflict. So the first point is the stunning reality of conflict. The stunning reality of conflict. I choose that word "stunning" advisedly because, really, conflict isn't that stunning to us, but it ought to be. If we saw biblically, if we thought biblically, it would be stunning that you have conflicts in the church. James is writing to the church and he says, "What is the source of conflicts and quarrels among you?" He realizes they are there. He is not saying if and when. No, they are there. What's the source of it? But it's really striking when you look at this in context.

First of all, to see this, I want us to look at the words carefully. I'm reading the New American Standard translation. It says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" The NIV says, "What is the source of fights and quarrels among you?" Two different words and so it translates fights/quarrels. The ESV says, reverses it, "What is

the source of quarrels and fights?" So the words are very similar, the Greek words underlying these words. I actually like the King James the best. It says, "What are the source of wars and fightings?"

The Greek word that is translated with that first word here, what is the source, whatever your translation says, that first word there, "What is the source of," the NASB says "quarrels." That word "quarrels" could be translated I think best by the word "wars." "What is the source of wars among you?" In fact, I would translate the second word, I know it doesn't connote some things that are gained by these other words. I think the other words they've used are helpful but if you took these words into another context, you would translate it "wars and battles." "What is the source of wars and battles among you?" In fact, the word that I am translating "war" that the NASB translates "quarrels," in Matthew 24 it is translated twice that way when Jesus speaks of the end times, "There will be wars and rumors of war," the same word, "polemos."

And wars and battles. Trench in his book on Greek synonyms talking about these 2 words here, translated in these 2 words here, quarrels/conflicts, fights/quarrels, I'm saying wars/battles. This is how Trench talks about these 2 Greek words. The first word "polemos," and the second word, "make," he says that the first word means the whole course of hostilities. The whole course of hostilities is in the first word translated here in the Greek text. The second word means the actual shock in arms of hostile armies. Now think about that, the whole course of hostilities. You are at war, there is a state of war that exists, and the battle is what happens when 2 warring countries meet in actual conflict. You see the actual shock in arms. I think it's helpful to me to look at these words this way. I don't think "quarrel" does that quite the way that "war" does. "What is the source of wars and conflicts among you?" He's saying, "What is the source of this state of hostility that you find between you and other believers? You have a state of hostility and then because of that, you have battles. You fight. Where do these things come from?"

Now it's also helpful to see that because if you look at this, I want to read it, I want to substitute the words I'm translating into the text, okay, as words for the Greek words here. "What is the source," and listen to this, "What is the source of wars and battles among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain, so you battle and make war." The same Greek word is in verse 2 as in verse 1. In fact, they are inverted. It's a chiasm. You remember the chiastic structure A, B, B, A? The first word is also the last word, and the second word is the third word. So he says, "Hey, where do these wars and battles come from? They come from your lust, they come from your desires, and that's why you battle and war." In the middle he also put that word "make war," the end of verse 1. "Is it not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" That's the word "strategos" which we get our English word "strategy." It comes from the word "strategos" and it means "to soldier." So he's saying, "Is it not the pleasures that soldier among you? Where come the wars and the battles among you? The desires that soldier among you, that's why you battle and war."

Now think about that and let's read this in context. We often forget, especially week to week when we are moving from verse to verse, we forget the verses right before this. Look at 3:17 and 18, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What is the source of wars and battles among you? Is it not your pleasures which soldier and your desires which battle and war?" You see that peace, peace, peace, war, battle, soldier, battle, war. It's stark. It's a stunning contrast.

And what he said in chapter 3 verses 13 to 18 is this, that if you really have true wisdom, if you really understand the word of God, and remember wisdom is applying it to your life, it's knowledge that begins with the fear of God, reverence for the Lord, and it is applying that truth to your life, that wisdom, true wisdom results in meekness. The meekness of wisdom, verse 13, chapter 3. Meekness means, "I have no rights. I'm a slave of Jesus Christ. I have no rights." A meek person is very hard to offend. Then he says that this meek person is going to be marked by purity, peaceableness, gentleness, reasonableness, full of mercy and good fruits, and he is going to be sowing peace everywhere. So if we are Christians, we have access to the wisdom from above and if we are walking in the wisdom from above, we should be sowing peace and be so meek that we are impossible to offend. It should be peace all around us. Why is there war? It is stunning that in light of all Christ has done we would have conflicts in the body of Christ. It is appalling that a Christian husband and wife who both love Jesus would treat each other like we often do. If we saw it from God's viewpoint, that is how we would just be appalled at ourselves and we wouldn't be saying, "We wouldn't have any conflict if you hadn't have given her to me," and she wouldn't be saying, "There wouldn't be any conflict if you hadn't given him to me," we would be saying, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ."

It's something that should not be there. A state of war should not exist in this. It should be completely foreign and unthinkable to us. You think about this, this reality of what peace should mark our relationships, you know, we are to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. If you love God with all your heart, then you will love your neighbor as yourself and John in 1 John 4:19 says, "If you say you love God but you do not love your brother, you are a liar." That's what he says. It's that clear. "For how can a person love God whom they have not seen when they don't love their brother whom they have seen?" The Christian can't stay in this kind of unresolved conflict. Our heart should break over it.

And you see this, I noticed this in a powerful way some time back. I had happened to work on 2 passages fairly close together, Colossians 1 and Ephesians 2, and it hit me for the first time just the way that this is so clear in the text. Colossians 1:21 to 23 speaks of how God has made peace between him and us, that it used to be war but now it's peace because of the blood of the cross. He has made peace. And listen to the words that you hear. Colossians 1:21 to 23, listen to these words. "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds." First of all, verse 20 actually, "through [Christ] to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And

although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death." You hear reconcile, reconcile twice, made peace. You were formerly alienated. Hostile in mind means enemies. You had enmity. The Greek word is enmity. You had enmity toward God. You hated God. You were engaged in evil deeds because you hated God. This is what we were as unbelievers, all of us, and we didn't even know it. That's what we were doing. You know, people like to pretend that they love God when they don't, and you always can find it when you push the right button. You know, when you talk about the sin that they cherish the most and they become enraged, you are seeing their enmity toward God. It is exposed and the reality is we all have that apart from grace, apart from saving grace.

But you hear the words reconcile, make peace. What happened when Christ came is he took away our hostility toward God, God's wrath toward us, and he brought us together and he made peace. We used to be alienated, separated, enemies, and now he has reconciled us through his blood. The exact same words are used in Ephesians 2 but this time to talk about the reconciling power of the cross horizontally, not vertically. The same words are used, the exact same words. The cross of Christ reconciles us this way in the same way it reconciles us that way. So the argument of Scripture is if you say you are reconciled this way, then you've got to be reconciled that way. You can't have one without the other. You can't live with that.

Ephesians 2:12, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." He's talking about Jews and Gentiles, the dividing wall between people groups. "By abolishing in His flesh the enmity," that's the word "hostility" again, "which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity." He has put to death the enmity this way and this way so that the point is, and James is picking up on the same thing, saying, "Look, it is appalling that there would be wars and battles among people who have been brought together in perfect peace through the cross. It is out of place. It cannot stand. We cannot allow it to stand."

Now you say, "Well, the church ought to be no place for enmity, hostility, wars and battles, but they are battling with me." You say, "I'm not at war with them but they are at war with me. This other Christian is at war with me. They are hostile toward me and I can't change that." Well, perhaps you can't but you don't have to be at a state of war with them. The good news is the Gospel liberates you from not having to make war with them. It doesn't mean you don't speak the truth, it doesn't mean you don't do what you need to do, confront sin, but it means that you don't have to have, to harbor attitudinally hostility toward them. That's the idea of war, it's an attitude of hostility. Battle, wars and attitudes of hostility. Battle, acts of hostility. Battle is when you, to battle is when you speak harsh unkind words, when you express an angry tone of voice, when we exhibit attitudes

openly in relationship with other people. That's the acts or the battle that comes from that inner hostility and the good news, James says, "Listen, you don't have to have hostile attitudes toward any other Christian. In fact, in reality you don't have to have hostile actions and you should not." This is really convicting. "You should not have an attitude of war against any human being."

Now, "This is crazy, Ty. Look at the world. We live in a world which is opposed to Christ." Yes, we do but the people are not our enemies. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but is against the rulers, the principalities, world forces of wickedness in heavenly places. It's not against the people so the lost folks who hate God, who are even the most extreme in their hatred of God, the Satanist who, in a sense, is knowing hostility toward God, is practicing Satanism and hating the Gospel, you and I should not hate the person. We hate the sin, yes. We hate the evil. We hate the dishonor that they are bringing to Christ. We hate that, but we don't hate the person. We should be kind as we are able to, to the person. Let me show you this in a couple of places.

Let's look at 1 Peter. We'll start with how this shows toward Christians but I'm going to show you how it's real clear about unbelievers too. 1 Peter 3:8 and 9. Now this is talking about in the church. You don't have to participate in a war with another Christian. They can declare war, but you don't have to, and you must not, actually, to be faithful to Christ. "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing." Do you hear that? He's saying that, "Listen, when you are insulted by another believer, don't return insult for insult, give them back a blessing because they were, just like you were, if they love Christ, they belong to him, they profess to know him, then you give them what they are supposed to inherit which is a blessing." There are no more curses for Christians, so we can't curse them. We bless them. Now, that doesn't mean we excuse sin. No, that would be the opposite of love. We confront sin out of love. You see, the attitude, when you confront sin, there is no war in your heart. There is earnest love in your heart. That's the way Jesus deals with us. A shepherd coming after a wandering sheep who even uses the staff to pop the sheep, is loving the sheep.

So when you confront sin, there is no malice in your heart. That's what it means to get the log out of our own eye partly, so that we go, and we get the speck out of our brother's eye. Remember, it doesn't say don't get the speck out. A lot of times people want to miss that. Matthew 7, "Do not judge lest you be judged," and then he goes on to say, "You hypocrites, why do you want to get the speck out of your brother's eye when there is a log in your own eye?" A lot of people read to that point and they think they've settled it, "So you shouldn't be telling me something is wrong with me." Jesus goes on to say, "You hypocrite, first get the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to get the speck out of your brother's eye." Do you see that? You don't have a right not to try to get the speck out. If you love him, you will. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will reprove him. That is so amazing. Leviticus 19:18, look at the context within a verse or 2 of that, it talks about reprove your neighbor. That is, tell him when he's wrong, don't desire his death. Then he goes on to say love your neighbor as yourself.

So the balance is there but the issue is our hearts. The attitude of the heart is to bring blessing, to love, not to fight against the person, we fight against the sin. And strictly speaking when you go to a brother who is in sin, the way we ought to see it is like this, we are trying to convince them that we are standing with Christ pointing out a sin and they are not our enemy. We see the enemy is sin or the deception or the lie they are listening to. That's the enemy and we are trying to get them to look at it from our perspective and say, "That's our problem. What we are both fighting is that. I'm not fighting against you. I love you, that's why I'm coming and having this awkward conversation."

Now, let me show you it's also true with unbelievers. Look at Matthew 5:43 to 48. Matthew 5:43, the Sermon on the Mount. This informs how we should cultivate right attitudes toward unbelievers, even those who hate us. Verse 43, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" That's one of those things that is added to the word of God. The Bible doesn't say to hate your enemy, but this tradition had developed that sort of inferred that you could hate your enemy.

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Even your enemies, those who come against you as enemies, that you can't stop them treating you as an enemy, you can love them. You see, you are not treating them as an enemy even though they are making themselves your enemy.

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Why? "So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The mark of grace is the ability to love our enemies, to love them even though they are hating us. It doesn't mean that we ignore but we speak the truth. We tell the person who is committed to an ungodly lifestyle and wants us to shut up about telling them the truth, we love them enough to tell them the truth and say, "Listen, it's not about what I think or what you think, it's about what God says." Like I said last week, you remember the illustration of the weed eater. You know, you've got to use the weed eater the way it's designed by the manufacturer to be used. If it says a gas/oil mix, put a gas/oil mix in it. You ignore the operator's, the manufacturer's instructions at your own peril. God says that we are to live this way. He made us male and female to live this way. One man, one woman together for life. Ignore that at your own peril. Love people enough to tell them that, but we love them, and if we are not loving them, if we are warring, it's something that has no place in the life of the Christian.

Now another example of this. One last example. I would mention you can look up Romans 12:17 to 21 which says do not take vengeance, leave room for the wrath of God. I want to look at 2 Timothy 2:24 to 26 where Timothy is told how he is to deal with false teachers, even enemies of the Gospel who were deceiving other believers. He said,



"Listen, you call them out. You point out where they are wrong. You are clear about the fact that they are in error but don't hate the person. Hate the error, hate the evil, don't hate the person." 2 Timothy 2:24, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." One of the things that helps us is to realize they are the captive of Satan. That's why they are a false teacher. So we can have compassion even as we speak the truth.

Now, that's the astonishing reality of conflict. The second point this morning that we will hit briefly and do more on next time is the astonishing source. I said the stunning reality, the astonishing source. That's his question, "What is the source of quarrels, of wars and battles? What's the source? Where does it come from?" In fact, it's emphatic in the Greek, it says literally, "Where do wars come from?" And it says again, "Where do battles come from?" The adverb "where" is there twice. Where wars, where battles? And isn't it from this place, your pleasures, your desires? That's where they come.

So the stunning source or the astonishing source of conflict is your heart. You do or say hurtful things because of the sinful desires of your heart. We want something that we don't get, therefore, we become hostile. When you feel hostility welling up inside of you at any time, you know there is a reason, something that I want, I'm not getting. I was thinking about this, how this is just such an easy thing on a daily basis to experience. Somebody asks you for something very reasonable, but you had something else you wanted to do right now and for some reason you are feeling really irritated about being asked about that. Why? Because they are infringing on something I want.

For me, one of the desires I have that is kind of a ruling desire, basically saying there are desires in our hearts that basically tend to rule us, they make us think and feel ways we don't want to think and feel, and they make us do things. Now, I wouldn't say make us, we are doing it, but we are yielding to these desires. Freely yielding to these sinful desires. Sometimes the desires we yield to aren't sinful in themselves. You know, we have sinful desires. We desire to do things that are outside of God's will, clearly, but there are also things that we desire that are good. It's not that we want something that's wrong, we want something that's right, but we want it too much so that we are willing to sin.

This is one I was thinking about myself. For me a ruling desire for me that I have to work against is the desire for comfort and ease. There is nothing wrong with comfort and ease in its appropriate place. I mean, that's part of, we have to sleep, we have to rest. Only God doesn't sleep and rest. We have to sleep, we have to rest, and it's appropriate to get through with a job and rejoice that you're done and you're like, "Man." I remember my favorite feeling in college was December, the last final exam in December. Some of you remember that. Feeling, especially if you didn't do badly on it, but if you did badly on it, it still was the last one. Papers are in, exams are done. That flurry of activity for those last few weeks is over and you are going home for the holidays. Man, that is it.

Well, think our lives could be like that. We all want ease and comfort at some level but some of us want it too much and so what will happen is I'm wanting ease and comfort and somebody else wants something from me that's not going to be easy or comfortable. "How dare you want something that is not what I want?" That's it right there. And the way the Bible sees it, we're going to see James says basically you are adulterers because you are worshipping false gods. That's why he says that in verse 4, you adulteresses. Friendship with the world, to want things like the world wants and let them control you is being a spiritual adulteress. You're not being faithful to your Savior.

So when we see those things and we understand that, it helps us repent more specifically and correctly. You know, we recognize, like I said, that I want ease and comfort and something getting in the way and, therefore, what's coming out of me is an attitude of hostility and I'm just kind of irritated and maybe I don't say anything but there is a state, war has been declared. Now, a lot of times the steam gets out after a while and we don't follow through on it, but what happens is these things are happening all the time. People are trampling on our desires that we are not crucifying, and we are having underlying hostility that erupts into battles. Remember, a battle is what happens when 2 warring armies come together and in our lives what happens is my ruling desires run into your ruling desires, conflict. But if we were meek, if we were really walking in wisdom, we would be meek, and it would just be peace when we come together, and that's what it ought to be. I mean, it's just wisdom lived out. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Jesus says that, "If any man would come after me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me. He who loves his life will lose it. He who loses his life for my sake will find it." You basically disown yourself and you become a slave of Jesus Christ. James began his letter, "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." That's the favorite way that the apostles had to refer to themselves, as a slave. Our translations kind of pretty it up with bondservant. Literally in the Greek it means slave. A slave of Jesus Christ.

So when you come to God, you become a slave of Jesus Christ. A slave has no will of his own. He has no right to reputation, no right to honor, no right to input on what's going to happen on a daily basis. He's got no rights. If a slave is thinking correctly, he's not going to get offended by anybody. Now when you and I get offended, what has happened? We are not living as consistently with who we are. We are acting like we are somebody, but we belong to Christ. We were bought with his blood and the reality is the most wonderful place in the world is to live as a slave of Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus said, "Oh, how happy are the meek." Remember, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn." Third, "Blessed are the meek." The meek person who knows that he doesn't own anything. A meek person lets go. A meek person has no rights. They realize that before God, this is who I am. I have no rights. So a meek person is really impossible to offend. Jesus was meek. When he was reviled, he did not revile again. But what did he say? "Blessed are the meek." Remember what they get? Remember how it is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek who let go of their rights, for they shall inherit," what? "The earth." You let go of everything and your rights and you get everything in return.

If you love your life, you lose it. If you lose your life for my sake, you find it. This is the way of the Gospel. This is the way of the cross. This is the way of freedom and joy. When you are meek, you are a slave to Jesus Christ and you are a slave to no one else. If you are not a slave of Jesus Christ, you are a slave in a sense to everyone else. "I want my peace. I want my comfort. You are getting in my way. You are messing up my life. You are messing up my attitude. You are totally wrecking my day. I'm a slave of Jesus Christ. You can come and trample on me." I mean, I might notice it. "You're being kind of rude, I think here, but I'm not overwhelmed by it." In fact, when I'm really thinking biblically, I'm rejoicing. I'm saying, "Boy, I can't believe I'm able to deal with this the way I am now. You are changing me into the image of Christ. What freedom there is. What joy there is."

That's what James is saying. The reality is that when you see that it's your heart that seems like at first glance, "Oh my goodness, it's all my fault." Yeah, well it is. But the good news is if it's all your fault, then all you've got to do is look to Christ and everything can change. You can't change people around you. If you're going to spend the rest of your life trying to get people around you to do what you want them to do, prepare for misery. But if you're going to let God transform you from the inside out, prepare for joy and fullness and blessing. That's true freedom and James is saying that should be what is indicative of all believers and that's what ought to be the attitude in the body of Christ. It all comes from seeing who we are before God and Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 15, the love of Christ constrains us. This is how we lay down our rights. The love of Christ constrains us, that if one died for all, then we who live ought no longer live for ourselves but for the one who loved us and gave himself for us. That's it. Looking at the cross, looking at the great sacrifice and the great payment of Jesus, looking at how he left everything, the glory of heaven, and he gave everything for us. He loved us like that. That is enough for me, and knowing that, then I can let go of everything else, and when I let go of everything else, I find that I have everything I could ever want in him. James says this is the way it ought to be. May God help us to be like that.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the Gospel, the good news that you save sinners, that you are rich in mercy, that you look at us in our self-inflicted misery, our sinfulness, our foolishness, our unbelief, and you have loved us with such a great love. We thank you for the blood of Christ which not only cleanses us in your presence forever, makes us holy to stand in holiness, it also, the blood of Christ continues to empower us to live holy lives, that we can actually live out the things that we believe. We can be changed on a daily basis by your power, by your grace, by your Spirit, to look more and more like Jesus.*

*Father, we pray that you would grant full repentance in all the areas that we need to repent. We pray that you would open our hearts to trust more fully in Christ. We pray for those that are here that don't know you in a saving way, that they might repent and place their faith in Christ today; stop living for themselves and realize that true life is found at*

*the foot of the cross in surrendering to Jesus. His yoke is easy and his burden is light and you will find rest for your souls. And Father, for those that belong to you, may we turn from the false gods and pleasures that we worship. May we stop lusting and envying and desiring things that either we should not desire at all or that we desire too much. May we only want to please you. May we only want to have you. And may we find in you freedom and joy. And we pray this in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.*