

James 4:1-10

"Conflict: It's Cause, It's Consequence & It's Cure"

The contrast that takes place between Ch's 3 & 4 is *radical*. We *left off* w/purity, peace, gentleness, willingness to yield, mercy, good fruits & righteousness. We *launch in* to wars & fights, lust & murder, covetousness & enmity w/God.

Yet as believers it's imperative that hatred be turned to humility, that pride be squelched &/or crushed through prayer & we need to be cleansed of covetousness & committed to Christ...

Of course if we simply zoom out a little bit so as to follow the overall flow we realize that more than anything the radical contrast seems simply to be the result of a bad place to insert a Ch break.

After all James has been speaking to us about 2 different types of wisdom being typified by 2 different ways of life. One resulting from being the friend & follower of God: good conduct & works done in the meekness of wisdom. The other resulting from friendship w/the world: bitter envy, self-seeking ultimately leading to confusion & an ungodly course of action. So you can have a life that's generally peaceful, or generally problematic that's up to you. The question is whether or not you're sowing the seeds of bitter envy & self seeking (resulting in the *breaking of peace*), or are you reaping the fruit of righteousness having sown the seeds of peace, becoming instrumental in *making peace*.

You see the bible is clear, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" Amos 3:3 Initially you & me, we may be in the same place, but if I start going one direction & you start going the other, there's going to be stress, tension, frustration & ultimately a fracturing of our relationship. We can't hold hands (if you will) if we're headed in 2 different directions.

Well, here in our present passage James is going to address what causes these conflicts, the consequences of our conflicts & how to bring healing to conflicts. So let's not be guilty of being hearers only of the word, immediately forgetting it & refusing to adhere to it, but we want to be doers of God's word bringing forth fruit for His glory. Amen?

Look at the 1st ½ of the 1st verse of Ch 4. (Read)

If we were to stop right there it would be interesting to hear how many of us would respond. "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" Perhaps one might answer, "From the fact that my husband is a jerk!" or "From the fact that my wife won't quit nagging me!"

Maybe some would say, “My parents are always demanding of me.” Or “My boss is always stressing me.” Odds are I’d sight any # of people or circumstances surrounding me, but James is about to blow my mind by informing me of the fact that the problem is never *around* me, it’s always *w/in* me.

We move from the untamable tongue of Ch 3 to waging war in Ch 4 (a seemingly obvious progression really)... Unfortunately fighting, warring & murder moved on to the scene straight out of the gates of Eden as there in the field stands Cain & there lies Abel in a pool of his own blood... Why? What’s the cause of this kind of behavior?

Vs 1-3

Where do wars & fights come from among you? They don’t stem from the circumstances that *surround* you but rather the self-centered nature *w/in* you (& *w/in* me). It takes us back to Vs 14 of Ch 3. **That bitter envy & self-seeking in our hearts bringing about a worldly, fleshly, demonic kind of result; strife & division where there ought to be peace & unity. It’s so easy to cast the blame on anything & anyone around us isn’t it? We’re masters at making our attitude, our actions, someone else’s fault.**

Yet James backs us up in a corner & makes us swallow a reality pill. “You’re accountable for your attitude, you’re accountable for your actions & your problems *w/other* people aren’t in them, they’re in you.” Ouch...

Now when we talk about warring & fighting we could certainly apply that to a global scale. They’ve got oil we want it, we’ve got money, they hates us for it, they have weapons of mass destruction, we don’t like that...on & on it goes; we don’t typically fight & war for no gain of our own, somehow & in someway there will be some sort of self benefit or we won’t waste our time.

But we don’t have to look on a global scale to realize that. James says, “Let’s bring it home, let’s look *w/in* the 4 walls of our own home, or *w/in* the church.” He says, “Do you want to know why you have a hard time getting along *w/your* spouse, or why you fight *w/that* person in the church? Because you want your own way & refuse to relent.” The wars, & fights that involve you are the fruit of a self-centered heart *w/in* you.

Ultimately *selfishness* is the *essence* of sin; Satan rebelled against God because of selfishness, he wanted what God had. Eve disobeyed God because she wanted to eat of the fruit & be made wise like God (selfishness was at work there). In Gen Ch 12 Abe lied about his wife so that he might preserve his own life...

In Joshua 7 Achan (out of selfishness) took from the treasure of Jericho though expressly forbidden by God. Absalom rebelled against David (his own dad) because he wanted to rule the kingdom. **We could site example after example & at the end of the day it would always come back to the same root, self centered desires that stem from w/in us... never the fault of others around us.**

Of course w/each self-centered course of action the impact on others is never beneficial, it's always detrimental, right? When Satan rebelled, it wasn't beneficial, it was detrimental, when Eve (& Adam) sinned, that didn't serve to benefit mankind, it was a tremendous detriment to all the earth... **When Abe lied about Sarah the result was a great plague that came upon the Pharaoh & his house, when Achan took from the treasure of Jericho it cost Israel a tremendous defeat & his entire family was put to death.** When Absalom rebelled against David it divided the kingdom & there was all kinds of bloodshed & loss of life... "Where do wars & fights come from among you?" "Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"

Now when we talk about "pleasure" don't default to the sensual or sexual (though it can certainly include that). It's really just a reference to some sort of self-seeking benefit. Something that will (according to you) make your life easier, get things going your way. Pleasure (in it's proper context) is a great (I would even say) godly experience. What did David say? ***"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."***¹ So the problem doesn't lie w/in the pleasure, it's the self seeking, sin tainted nature behind it... you see. In a biblical vernacular we would say, it's "carnality." It's not of the Spirit, it's of the flesh. **You see if you're right w/God than you'll be right w/one another (that's where James is ultimately going to take us). A problem w/our horizontal relationships (w/one another) indicates a problem w/our vertical relationship (w/God).**

Vs 2-3

What leads to conflict between two people (or groups of people or whatever). Selfish desire, lust... covetousness leads to conflict, anger & animosity (which lead to murder). Here's the point; selfish desires are a *dangerous* thing. They will invariably lead to a wrong course of action, (fighting, warring, murdering). **Oh you may not murder someone physically (though some obviously have), but you might certainly cut them off in your heart personally, they're dead to you. That's what Jesus said... Matt 5:21-22 (through anger you murder that person in your heart).**

¹ The New King James Version, 1982 (Ps 16:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's interesting that, "You shall not covet" is the last of the 10 commandments but it's violation can cause us to break all the other 9... Covetousness can cause a person to murder, to lie, to dishonor one's parents, to commit adultery, place things before God, steal & in some way violate all of God's moral law.

So war (or fighting) on the outside stems from a warring w/oneself on the inside... You know people who are warring on the inside (because of a self centered drive) are always miserable people. They never really enjoy life; because instead of being thankful for what they have, for the blessings God has poured out upon them, they complain about what they don't have & what they want to have. They're always envying what others have (thinking the grass is greener in another pasture). They're always looking for that "magic something" that will change their lives when in reality the problem is in their own heart...

Yet the bible says, *"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have."*²

"You covet and cannot obtain, you fight & war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask." James is saying, "Hey rather than being all discontented & covetous why don't you seek the Lord to meet your needs?" Maybe the reason you don't have peace in your marriage is because you're really not seeking God for it. You see the idea here is that rather than looking to the world, & thinking that the things of this world will make your life all better, turn to the Lord & ask Him to meet the needs of the deepest recesses of your heart. To help you both spiritually & practically if the case need be.

Of course James expects us to say, "Well I did ask & it still isn't done..." He says, "That's because you're asking out of selfish motivation." You're not praying for your wife because you just want to see the life of Christ in her, but because you know your life will be easier on you when she has a more submissive "gentle & quiet" spirit. You're not praying for your husband because you want your marriage to glorify God, but because you know it will be so much better for you should that servant nature of Jesus come alive in him. You're not praying for your child because they need Jesus so desperately but because it embarrasses you when they wind up in jail, or get kicked out of school...you get the idea.

It's been rightly noted that prayer isn't about getting our will done in heaven, but God's will done on earth. It's you & me reporting for duty, not dropping off our punch list off @ God's desk. You see once a person begins to realize that prayer isn't, "Do this for me, or bring me more money, or solve that problem, fix this mess" & God saying, "Yes sir, anything else while I'm at it?"

² The New King James Version. 1982 (Heb 13:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

That's when our prayer lives will begin to be revolutionized. Prayer is how we report for duty, "Father, here I am, I'm Yours, You know me more intimately than I know myself & I desire that You be glorified in my life. Lord, would You do what's best in my given situation, because I don't always know what I think I know." Well now we're beginning to get somewhere, you see? Yes, we're to let our requests be made known to God, but the context should always remain, "nevertheless not my will, but your will be done."

So many times we seek to manipulate God through prayer to fulfill the lusts of our flesh...& when get all mad at God when it doesn't happen. God is not going to indulge our self-centered desires. He uses the word "pleasures" again there at the end of Vs 3. The idea being that of prodigal living; we ask God for things that we can use for our own selfish ends. But the point of prayer isn't to persuade a reluctant God to do our bidding, but rather it's to align ourselves to His will that He might accomplish His purpose through our lives.

Vs 4-5

Now you should know that the better Greek manuscripts don't say, "Adulterers" in the masculine sense, but only "Adulteresses" in the feminine sense. That's because James knows that the root problem is always w/the women even going back to Eve 😊 (that's a joke).

No, the reason it says, "Adulteresses" is because as belonging to Christ we (all) are considered by the scriptures (Rom 7) to be the bride of Christ. This particular reference isn't to physical adultery, but to *spiritual* adultery. Do you realize that the bible considers covetousness part & parcel w/idolatry? Col 3:5, "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."³ When we covet something (or someone) God considers that unfaithfulness to Him, it's saying that He's not enough, we long for something more than what He's able to provide. It's to fall in love w/the things of this world.

What does it mean, "Friendship w/the world?" We're talking about a love affair of the heart w/the things/people of this world, human society apart from God. That's what the bible is referencing when it speaks of the world. It's not that the church shouldn't be in the world it's that the world shouldn't be in the church... It's like it's good for a boat to be in the water, but when the water gets in the boat it's a problem.

Now typically it's not something that happens overnight in the believer's life.

³ The New King James Version, 1982 [Col 3:5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's a slow & very subtle erosion over time. But friendship w/the world leads to loving the world; & loving the world leads to conforming to this world. Now what does the bible say? *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*⁴

Here's what we need to understand; the world is not the friend of God, it's the enemy of God. It was the world who crucified Christ; so consider carefully who you align yourself up with. Because the friend of the world cannot be the friend of God, to the contrary friendship w/the world is *enmity* or "hostility" w/God. Therefore if you're a friend of the world you are an enemy w/God; there's just no two ways about it. Jesus said, *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."*⁵

A.W. Tozer is quoted as saying, "A whole generation of Christians has come up believing that it is possible to accept Christ w/o forsaking the world."

The proverbs said that like this, *"There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness."*⁶ If you want to be a friend of the world, than you choose to make your stand as an enemy of God...

"Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? That is, God is seeking to safeguard a relationship of intimacy; that's why you're so convicted when you compromise holiness in your life. When you begin to drift off course & entertain the flesh, the Spirit of God warns you, convicts you seeks to draw you back to that place of your 1st love relationship w/Christ. He's jealous for you.

Now the bible doesn't say, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously", but certainly that principle is very clearly on display throughout God's Word.

Ok, we've considered the cause of conflict (selfish desires that are w/in us). We've considered the consequences of conflict (warring, fighting; ultimately making ourselves God's enemy), Now lets consider the cure for conflict...

Vs 6-10

Vs 6, "But He gives more grace..." Where sin abounds, grace abounds still more; you will find the resources that you need, the solution to slipping into these patterns of worldliness in the grace of God...

God's grace goes beyond salvation; it also makes for your sanctification; the ability to lead a life that is holy before Him.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ro 12:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Mt 12:30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Pr 30:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

If you are willing to humble yourself before Him, confess your sin, your self centered ambitions & motivations He will give you the grace to overcome/crucify the flesh & lead your life set apart to Him & *His* desires, *His* will for your life.

You may need a lot of grace, “He gives more grace...” God “resists” or “opposes” or “battles against” the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The cure for conflict is a humble spirit before the Lord upon which He pours out His grace. *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.”*⁷ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

God is so good to us, yet how often we respond in rebellion against Him. Satan wants you to be proud, self sufficient, do it how you want to do it, independent, & all that. God wants you to be *completely dependent* upon His grace. **The same Holy Spirit who convicts you of your compromise w/the world will also grant you the grace to serve God as you should; but that grace is given through the conduit of humility...**

Vs 7

In these final few Vs James just unloads a list of imperatives, commands that put us in our proper context. He says, “Therefore, (because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble) submit to God.” This word “submit” is a military term, it means “Get into your proper rank.” **When a buck private tries to set himself in the place of the general there’s gonna be trouble! We need to fall in line under God’s command. Unconditional surrender is the only way to complete victory. If you’re keeping back any area of your life from God there will always be battles, that’s why it’s so hard for uncommitted Christians to live w/either themselves or anyone else.** They won’t give the whole of themselves to God & it makes them miserable (too much of the world to be content in Christ & too much of the Lord to be satisfied w/the world).

Btw we might add that the way we resist the devil is through submitting to God. The word “resist” here is to “take a stand against”, (we’re talking Eph 6:10 & following) so we’re to submit to God, but take our stand against the devil (I might also add that you’re either going to resist the devil or you’ll resist the Lord but it won’t go both ways...)

“Draw near to God & He will draw near to you” this is all w/in the context of breaking off a love affair w/the world. Humble yourself before God, stand against the devil, draw near to God, cleanse your hands & purify your hearts...

⁷ The New King James Version, 1982 (Ps 51:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Listen, the wolf doesn't lay hold of the sheep who's near to the shepherd, but rather the one who's straying on the fringes of the fold, of the flock.

We're to wash our hands, purify our hearts; this has to do w/practical sanctification. Repentance, turning away from those things that are leading us away from the Lord. The word "purify" here means to make chaste, it's speaking of a moral purity basically paralleling the idea of spiritual adultery back in Vs 4. We're not to be double-minded; our problem is having that divided heart that is torn between the world & the Lord. That's why David prayed, *"Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name."*⁸ A divided heart will destroy your life...

Vs 9

Now James isn't seeking to say that our lives as believers should be doom & gloom & that to smile is to sin. *Jesus imparts fullness of joy...The idea here is that of, are we taking pleasure in & perhaps laughing over our sin when we ought to be ashamed of ourselves, broken & weeping before God over how our sin has separated us from Him?* We need to see our sin as God sees it...Write it down, look it up later; Luke 18:13-14.

Hey, humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, & He will lift you up. Better to humble yourself than to be humbled by God. If you exalt yourself you will be humbled, but if you humble yourself God will lift you up.

Now we're out of time but I want you to see that to have conflict w/another brother or sister is to be in conflict w/God. When we're in our place of proper submission to God there will be a mutual humility that brings reconciliation w/one another. But when we're letting pride, & self-seeking rule us we lock horns & refuse to relent... Conflict resolution rests on a renewed humility *before* & submission *to* God, draw near to Him, turn from your sin, purify your heart... be true to the Lord & you won't be at war w/others... The bible says, *"The work of righteousness will be peace, And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever."*⁹

So put the government of your life on His shoulders, (submit to God) and let Him be the Prince of Peace in your life (Isa. 9:6). Amen? Amen.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 86:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Is 32:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Prayer Points:

God what a timely message in the midst of such a self seeking society of which we are all a part. We don't want to be the generation, pure in our own eyes yet unwashed from our filth. Teach us to lead lives of submission to You, holy & pure. As your word says,

*"Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,"*¹⁰ Lord increase our strength, that we might be ever faithful to You...

(Perhaps speak to believers about cleansing their hands, purifying their hearts).

If you've not been made clean; you've not given your heart to Christ, than I want to invite you even now to consider Jesus who has loved you, died on the cross & given Himself for You. God wants to forgive your sin, give you a new heart & a new life in Him, but you've got to come to that place of unconditional surrender. Believe on the Lord J.C. give the whole of your heart to Him, & you will be saved.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 24:3-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.