

THE CURE FOR YOUR QUARRELS

JAMES 4:1-10

PASTORAL MOMENT

It is so good to be back here bringing you God's word. It is such an outstanding privilege and blessing to be used of God to proclaim his powerful eternal word to his precious people. As I prepare and come before you I come with a piquant mixture of awe, fear, faith and joy. God speaks, he has always been a speaking God, he always will be a speaking God and he brings his kingdom and relates to his people through speaking his word. And so this morning I am very excited about what he is going to be doing as we continue in the book of James. In light of this, let's pray as we prepare to meet with God through the preaching of His word.

TEXT

James 4:1-10 (ESV)

¹ What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet 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 wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves 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 wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

James has been bringing the truth of God to bear on everyday struggles for three chapters now. He now jumps into the issue of quarrels and conflicts and does some serious damage for the kingdom of God. Thank God for this section of scripture. If you are like me you struggle in the area of personal conflict and quarrels. As a matter of fact, the entire history of mankind from the fall of Adam to today is a history of personal and group conflict and carnage. **In the 20th century as many as 300 million people**

died due to armed conflict of various types 1. One in three women worldwide have suffered from some form of domestic physical abuse. Many psychological maladies such as depression, panic-disorder, bulimia, anxiety etc. can be traced to unresolved or sever interpersonal conflicts.

Conflict is a raw reality for all of us whether we admit it or not. Thank God that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through His word, thank God that James gives us truth to resolve ungodly conflict for our good and God's glory. So let's dig in.

There are three things about quarrels James teaches us in this short section, three things that will change our lives if we understand and embrace them. Here is James prescription for quarrels: 1) Recognize the cause – sin within, 2) repent of the corrupt core – enmity with God, and 3) run to the cure – the immeasurable grace of God.

1. THE CAUSE OF YOUR QUARRELS

1.1. The Question

James starts out in verse one with two rapid fire questions – what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? What is the reason for the flare ups and the long-standing battles in your midst? Have you ever asked someone that question either right after or during a conflict? What do they usually say? If you ask Sally why she hit Billy what does Sally say? Because he made fun of me or he hit me first. Right? And if you ask an adult the same question what do you usually get? Why did you yell at your wife in front of the children? What do you get? She always is telling me what I do wrong! Or something like that. Right? So James starts off this section with the same question we often hear but his answer is as counter culture as the gospel itself. What is his answer? What causes quarrels and fights among you? That's right, it is your passions at war within you.

1.2. Passions within You!

The bible is very clear that the reason for your conflicts, the reason for your anger or impatience, the reason for your harsh words, the reason for the ungodly conflict that goes on in your home or your heart lies within you. Folks, there are so many other explanations out there for why you don't get along with others, why you get in arguments, why you are not happy in a relationship. And you know what the sad reality

¹ Michael White, Historical Atlas of the Twentieth Century, <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat8.htm>

is, we are just like Sally and Billy, we want to blame conflict and strife on everything else but ourselves. But James comes strong and hard against this deception. What causes quarrels – your passions within, in particular your evil desires within you. It is not your family or work environment, it is not your bosses lack of encouragement, as important as that might be, it is not your brother’s annoying personality or your sisters high pitched voice, it is not your wife’s nagging nor your husbands laziness, it is not dysfunctional family upbringing it is not your type A personality, it is not your unmet needs, it is not even the devil or the world around you. It is you!

You are the biggest problem you have and you are the biggest reason you experience contentious relationships and quarrels. The enemy is not on the outside, he is within!

When the London Times invited a number of prominent authors to write essays on what was wrong with the world, G.K. Chesterton wrote,

"Dear Sirs,

I am.

Sincerely Yours, G.K. Chesterton."²

Folks, the scary reality is that your greatest enemy does not lie outside of you but is the enemy of sinful passions within.

Dave Harvey in his excellent book, “When Sinners Say ‘I Do’” says the following:

"After I was saved, and before I was married, I lived under the mad, undaunted delusion that I was spiritually mature. Mine was a rich and largely imaginary kind of holiness. If ignorance is bliss, I was in permanent ecstasy. The infrequent examinations of my seemingly innocent heart revealed little need for improvement. I lived expecting that at any moment God might send chariots to carry me to heaven, Elijah-like. Talk about a guy in need of the doctrine of sin. Then it happened. I got married and became a blameshifter... I can't tell you how many times I thought, "I never had these problems before. This must be my wife's fault."³

² Yancey, Philip. 2001. *Soul Survivor* p. 58.

³ Dave Harvey, “When Sinners Say ‘I Do’”, Shepherd Press, 2007, p. 69

This is so sadly true for me and I believe all of us. We refuse to face the obvious, the reasons for our conflict lie not in our spouse or anything outside, they lie within. Dave goes on in his book to say, ***"Have you ever considered why there are no accounts of Jesus slamming a door in angry frustration or inflicting the 'silent treatment' on someone who hurt him? Why didn't Jesus get irritated or bitter or hostile? The simple but astounding answer is that when his engine was heated by circumstances, what was in his heart came out: love, mercy, compassion, kindness. Christ didn't respond sinfully to circumstances in his life – even an undeserved, humiliating, torturous death – because the engine of his heart was pure. What was in his heart spilled over. It was love!"***⁴

Folks, your greatest enemy, your greatest reason for quarrels, the cause of your angst and stress is not outside of yourself, it is the sin within. We must face this fact if we are to experience any cure. So resist the impulse right now to find a scriptural loophole to this truth and let it sink in and let the word of God speak and finish it's work. Don't stunt its progress by bailing out now. I promise there is real help at the end of all this. But first you gotta face the facts.

2. THE CORE OF YOUR QUARRELING

James goes on to characterize these passions that dwell within. He says, ***"you desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel."***

2.1. Desiring & Coveting

These passions within are passions to get something you want. It doesn't say anything about the objects of the desires. I would guess that is because the objects aren't the problem. The things desired aren't necessarily wrong things. The folks James is writing to are not folks who are desiring outright evil. It isn't that they want to rule the world and commit genocide. No, in reality it is probably stuff like a nice home, a regular income, stable and respectful friends, an agreeable and loving spouse. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves. The sin is not in the thing it is in the nature of the desiring. John Calvin says the problem is not mere desire but "inordinate"

⁴ Dave Harvey, "When Sinners Say 'I Do'", Shepherd Press, 2007, p. 71

desire⁵ – a desire that becomes a false god, an idol, for us. As James makes clear, these are not healthy desires submitted to God but overinflated desires elevated the level of God-replacements.

2.2. Not Asking

He says that these desires are not answered because they do not ask. Often the legitimate desire unmet morphs into an idol. Sometimes the solution is simply to ask and receive from God. He is so amazingly gracious he will answer many of our prayers for things we desire even if our motives are not entirely pure. So, folks often don't have for the simple reason that they don't ask. So, ask and you will receive. God loves us and loves to lavish gifts on us. He himself said it is more blessed to give than to receive. I have found that true – I enjoy Christmas and birthdays not because I get stuff but I love watching happy faces and glowing eyes when they receive something from me. That is what God is like. So ask Him.

2.3. Wrong Motives

But often God will withhold answering a request for something that will serve as an idol in our lives. Something that we want because at the core we don't want God we want the thing. So James says, ***“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”*** The goal of our request is not the fulfillment of legitimate desire but to spend it on our sinful passions – to fulfill the desire to find happiness and life and self-determination without God. Sin at its core is cosmic rebellion against the legitimate Kingship of God. And so we often ask in order to spend what we get on our passions.

2.4. Spiritual Adultery, Friendship & Enmity

And here James says something that we might find offensive. For those of us who desire and covet and ask God in order to live life apart from God he has this to say – “You Adulterers!” You know when I hear that I kinda feel like Prince Humperdinck in the Princess Bride when Westley called him a wart-hog-faced buffoon and he says “That may be the first time in my life a man has dared insult me.” Now James is not seeking to insult us but to wake us up. You see, to live life to have stuff apart from God being at the center is to live as a friend of the world. Worldliness is essentially, at its core, the pursuit of happiness on our own terms without God. And so James rightly calls those who do this adulterers. You see, God is the rightful center of the universe and he has

⁵ John Calvin, Institutes, ed. Battles, John Knox Press, 1960, p. 604.

made us for himself, he has loved us intensely and has made us to be loved and enjoy him forever, we belong to him, just as a married man belongs to his wife. And if that married man or married woman sought to find relationship and intimacy and happiness apart from their spouse, we would rightly call them an adulterer. And so when we desire things to spend them on our passions, to live happily apart from God, the bible calls us adulterers. Does that describe you? Sadly, it is often an apt description of me.

I can turn just about anything into an idol. Video games, books, food, working out, sports, sleep, home improvements, music are all on my list of potential idols. I find that in many ways I move from one idol to the next. Thank God that there is much time in between of fellowship and delight in God, but I all too quickly gravitate toward idolatry which is spiritual adultery. John Calvin has said that our hearts are “a perpetual factory of idols.”⁶ Just yesterday I found myself salivating over the offer Comcast now has , \$99 a month for internet, phone and digital cable. The problem isn’t digital cable, it is just my heart that thinks that if I can only have digital cable then I will be happy, just think, all the movies I want, all the ESPN I want, all the History Channel I want. I had pictures of my family in harmonious bliss watching glorious programs together living in perfect peace and joy. What’s wrong with this picture? No God. Do you ever do that? Can you relate??

Folks, there is no neutral ground here – to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God and to be a friend of God is to be an enemy of the world. The two are opposed to each other. Thank God that he does something about this!

3. THE CURE FOR YOUR QUARRELS

The cure for our quarrels, the cure for this corrupt core in us is found only in God. So just as James finishes characterizing us as adulterous he starts into the cure.

3.1.A Jealous God

First, he says in verse 5, “*do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?”* Now this is a paraphrase from a number of places in scripture such as Exodus 20:5 as well as a reflection of God being like a jealous husband toward his people. Folks, God is very jealous for your heart. And this jealousy comes from his

⁶ John Calvin, Institutes, Book I, Ch XI, 8, Battle Ed., John Knox Press, 1960, 1:108

great love. This is a good trait. It is so appropriate for a husband to be jealous for his wife's heart. And it is even more appropriate for God to be jealous for your heart. He is a jealous God and he wants you to find your life and joy and love in him alone – he yearns jealously for your soul. That is part of the cure for our adultery and quarreling – God is jealous for us – thank God!

3.2. A Gracious God

Not only that but verse 6 says, “***But he gives more grace***” Some translations render it, “***But he gives us a greater grace***” (*NASB*). That is, his grace is greater than our sin and rebellion.

Last week Peg and I celebrated our 20th anniversary down on Grand Cayman Island. We had one of the most wonderful trips of our married life. I can't thank God enough for the girl of my dreams and her love for God, for me and our children. The entire week was a gift from God, from the free Oceanside villa to the airline tickets to the spending money you guys gave us for the week. And amidst this wonderful week, as I read my bible and meditated on some theological writings of my friend Jonathan Edwards, I felt God spoke something very profound to me. That is, that his grace, his free and abundant giving of undeserved favor, isn't something that is secondary about him, that is, it isn't something he is forced to do because he made some promises in the OT. He isn't a father who spoke too soon about getting his daughter a pony and then finds himself stuck with a large bill to the horse farm. No, God is gracious at the very core of his being and all of creation and all of the gospel is an expression of who he is at the very core. He is gracious, he delights to give of himself and bless and fill us with life. He indeed gives greater grace – greater than your sin, greater than your adulteries, greater than your weaknesses and doubt. He gives greater grace and he begs us to turn from cheap alternatives and run to him.

3.3. A Reasonable Response

And so James says, “***submit yourselves therefore to God.***” In light of this amazing grace and this amazing God come under his benevolent and righteous rule. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands of sinful actions. Purify your hearts of sinful motives. Stop seeking laughter and joy apart from God, let this worldly laughter and joy turn to humble mourning over your broken condition and sinful life. Cry the tears of one who sees the wretched condition of his heart. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be

comforted! Let the misery of your adulteries against a loving gracious God break your heart. This is the one whom he is eager to help – he who is humble and broken in heart! Stop pursuing life apart from God. Recognize the root of your conflicts and unhappiness and the brokenness of your lifestyle apart from God. Run to the God of infinite amazing grace!

You see, his grace is not only seen in providing you food and clothing and shelter, friends, family and fun day in and day out but it is seen most dramatically in what he did for you in His Son. ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”*** John 3:16 tells us, and Romans 6:23 says ***“the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** 1 John 4:10 says, ***“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loves us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*** God so loved you that he chose to punish his most precious Son for your sins instead of you so that, if you believe and receive this gift, might be forgiven and enjoy his love and presence forever. Jesus died the death you deserved so that you might have the life he deserves. And he is calling you once again to this life – a life of dependence on him, a life living and growing in His love, a life full of his grace.

3.4. An Incredible Promise

James 4:10 gives us this incredible promise – ***“humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”*** What an amazing promise – when we humble ourselves before him he promises grace, he promises to lift us up and exalt us with eternal life and blessing in him.

Folks, do you struggle with fights and quarrels? I do. Know that the cause of your quarrels don't lie without but within your own heart. Know that at the core you are seeking life apart from God as a friend of the world. Recognize this and repent and find your life in Him – in His greater grace. Next time you find yourself tempted to quarrel remember this. Instead of arguing and defending recognize what is going on in your heart and instead humble yourself before God and look to Him – to His Son for forgiveness and life, look to Him to exalt you and give you the grace you need to live your life with him.

Let's pray!