

James 4:1-10

James chapter 4 addresses the root cause of conflict:

James 4:1: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

Although this seems like a new topic, it's actually building on something that was covered earlier. In the first chapter of this letter James explained where temptation comes from:

James 1:13-14: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

The source of temptation is *desire*. The reason we can be tempted is because we want things! Satan uses our desires against us by tempting us to sin so that we can get the things we want. As it turns out, conflict comes from this very same source. Just as temptation stems from desire, conflict also stems from desire. The reason we fight with people is to get the things we want.

One of the themes of the Bible is that we must learn to control our desires. Not all desire is evil, but many desires don't come from God. Jesus warned us that we can either serve Him or serve the world:

Matthew 6:24: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and

despise the other: Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

If we desire the things of God then we'll be about the Father's business. We will seek His will, His Word, and His decrees – and we will have godly desires. That doesn't mean we can't be tempted, but it does mean that the devil's opportunity to tempt us is more limited. If the only thing we desire is to honor and glorify God then many things won't appeal to us.

The apostle John taught that we can either love God or love the world, but not both:

I John 2:15-17: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

These verses should make us pause and re-evaluate our life. What are our priorities? What things do we desire? Does our heart belong to God or to the world? Are we about the Father's business or our own business? What things really matter to us? If we made a list of everything we wanted in life, what would we find on that list? There are a great many things that people desire – and few of them have anything to do with God or His Kingdom.

Our desire for things that don't matter can get us into all kinds of trouble:

James 4:2: “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.”

It may seem like James is going a bit overboard. What

child of God would ever murder someone to get the object of their heart's desire? It may seem unthinkable (and perhaps it ought to be unthinkable), but it has happened. Do you remember what King David did when he wanted to hide his sin with Bathsheba? He arranged for the murder of her husband:

2 Samuel 11:14-17: “And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die. And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.”

David – a man after God's own heart! – actually *murdered* someone to hide his sin. David was drawn away by his own lusts, and enticed, and that lust brought forth sin – and it led him to murder one of his own servants. That's the terrible power of sin. Not only does it tempt those who do *not* know God, but it also tempts those who *do* know God! People may think that they're above such things and would never stoop to such a terrible act, but the truth is the only difference between us and David is the grace of God. David sought God with all his heart; he loved the Lord and served him with great passion. Yet sin found its way into his life and caused great destruction. After his sin with Bathsheba his life was never the same: his own son Absalom led a rebellion against him and tried to kill him.

Don't think that you're immune to sin or are somehow above being tempted. Many pastors have seen their ministries ruined by sin. Temptation is very real and it's something we must take seriously. If we don't get the better of sin then sin will get the

better of us. Sin has led men as great as King David to murder.

Why do people fight? In order to get things that they want but don't have. Why do people lack things? Because they don't ask for them. Jesus said that if we want something we should ask for it:

Matthew 7:7-11: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

When Israel was in the wilderness after being freed from slavery in Egypt there were times when they lacked food or water. However, instead of asking God for help they just complained about their situation. They could have asked God to supply their needs but instead they accused Moses of wanting to kill them:

Exodus 16:2-3: “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

If Israel had cried out to God then He would have supplied their needs. God had just delivered Israel out of Egypt with a

mighty hand! He had punished their enemies and displayed His great power. The Lord had clearly demonstrated His great love and care for them! Yet Israel refused to ask God for help. Instead they just complained about their situation.

James said that wars and fights come from our lusts. When the Israelites desired food in the wilderness, they didn't ask God for it; instead they descended into conflict. Their desire for food and water (which wasn't evil) led to conflict. Instead of seeking God they murmured against Moses.

The Lord knows what we need before we even ask for it. He's not cruel or heartless! As Jesus said, even pagans know better than to give their children a poisonous viper when they asked for fish to eat. Do we really think God is going to rain down fire and brimstone from Heaven when we humbly ask Him for our daily bread? Why do people doubt our Father's ability to bless us with good things?

It's true that God doesn't always grant our requests. There was a time when the apostle Paul begged God for something and the Lord turned him down. However, God didn't do this because He was heartless or because He secretly enjoyed seeing Paul suffer. There was a good reason for it:

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I

strong.”

God gave Paul a tremendous amount of divine revelation – so much that he risked being exalted above measure. In order to keep Paul humble God gave him a thorn in the flesh. When Paul asked God to remove it, He refused – but He didn't leave him empty-handed. Instead He gave Paul the grace to endure.

The thorn in the flesh wasn't given out of malice. It was actually a blessing. It's true that it was a difficult blessing, but it was a blessing all the same. Jesus told us that everyone who asks receives, and we can see that illustrated here. Paul didn't receive what he asked for but he also didn't go away empty-handed. Instead God gave him *grace*. After this incident Paul said that he would *rejoice* in his infirmities so that the power of Christ could rest upon him!

If you ask you *will* receive. You may not receive what you expected to receive, but never doubt the goodness or love of God. He knows far better than we do how to give good gifts to those who ask Him!

Sometimes, though, our requests are simply bad:

James 4:3: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”

When we ask God to fulfill our sinful desires we shouldn't be surprised when He tells us no. If King David had asked God to kill Uriah to hide his sin with Bathsheba, do you think God would have listened to him? Of course not! God isn't going to honor that kind of request. That whole idea is ridiculous – but how many of our prayers are along those lines? How many times do we ask God to glorify ourselves, or build our own kingdom, or fulfill our sinful desires? How many times are our requests about God, and how many times are they just about ourselves?

God isn't a magical genie who exists to give us anything we want. If we ask amiss then we will *not* receive. God has no

interest in fulfilling our sinful desires or turning our heart away from Him:

James 4:4: “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.”

There's more going on in this verse than it seems. James wrote this book to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1) – in other words, to Israel. The nation of Israel had a long history of disobedience. God sent them prophets to warn them to repent but they didn't listen. They refused to stop worshipping idols. Because of this God promised to send terrible judgment upon them:

Ezekiel 6:13: “Then shall ye know that I am the Lord, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols.”

Since Israel worshiped idols on every high hill and under every green tree, God said He would pile up their dead bodies in those same places. In God's eyes Israel was guilty of adultery because they had forsaken their love for Lord and given their heart to false gods. God condemned them for committing adultery with their idols on every high hill and green tree:

Jeremiah 13:27: “I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, and thine abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?”

Jeremiah 2:20: “For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.”

Jeremiah 3:6: “The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.”

What did the Israelites do upon every high mountain and under every green tree? They served idols and worshiped false gods. That's the adultery she committed.

James is pointing out that when believers seek the things of the world, they're also guilty of adultery. This is because they've given their heart to a false god and are just as guilty as ancient Israel. We're faced with a choice: we can be friends with God or friends with the world. We can love God or love the world. *But we can't love both.*

The people who James was writing to had chosen to side with the world. Their desires tempted them to sin, and to get what they wanted they fought with one other. They abandoned God and lusted after the things of the world, and that led to trouble in the church. James was reminding them that lusting after the things of the world is a form of adultery, and God takes that very seriously.

There are many people who have decided to abandon God to become friends with the world. In order to win the praise of the world, some churches have stopped condemning all sorts of sins that this world loves. Those churches have chosen to seek the praise of the world instead of the praise of God, so they praise that which is evil and condemn that which is good.

Many individuals do this as well. Some pastors compromise what the Bible says (or refuse to preach certain parts

of it) because they know that people don't like its message. Rather than standing up for the Word they stand up for sin. That may win them the friendship of the world but it also earns them the enmity of God.

Jesus Himself said that the world will hate you if you follow Him:

John 15:19: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

That's the choice we must make. Whose side are we on? It's impossible to be neutral. If we stand up for what's right then the world will us you. People may win friends through compromise but the cost is very high. Is it really worth losing your soul? Do you want to be God's enemy?

James said that we have a natural inclination to the things of the world:

James 4:5: “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”

We have a sin nature – but the power of God is far greater. God hasn't left us helpless in our struggle against the flesh! He's given us a powerful weapon – the weapon of His grace:

James 4:6: “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

This is the same thing that Paul said when he talked about our struggle with sin:

Romans 5:20-21: “Moreover the law entered,

that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Where sin abounded, grace abounded *even more*. Where sin reigned to death, grace reigns *through righteousness* unto eternal life. God hasn't left us defenseless against the enemy! He hasn't sent us into a fight that we can't win. The Lord has given us His grace, and His grace is very powerful indeed.

God doesn't give His grace to everyone, though. James points out that while God gives grace to the humble, He resists the proud. This is because God hates pride:

Psalm 12:3: “The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things:”

Psalm 119:21: “Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.”

Psalm 138:6: “Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.”

Proverbs 15:25: “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.”

Proverbs 16:5: “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.”

Proverbs 21:4: “An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.”

Do you see how much the Lord hates pride? A proud heart is an abomination to the Lord. God hates pride so much that He has cursed those who are proud and will destroy both them and their house. God doesn't even want to get near the proud! We're told that He knows them "afar off" – which means He keeps His distance from them. If you want to have a relationship with God then you must not be proud. Instead you must humble yourself before God and be lowly. You must come to Him as a bankrupt sinner and beg Him for His forgiveness and grace.

In other words, you must submit to God:

James 4:7: "Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

That's the difference between the proud and the humble. The proud make much of themselves while the humble make much of God. The proud praise and honor themselves but the humble praise and honor God. The proud look to their own strength while the humble look to God for strength. The proud look to themselves for deliverance and the humble look to God for salvation. The proud do as they please but the humble obey God.

If you want to please God then you must obey Him. You must submit yourself to Him. There are many people in this world who don't care about the Word of God. They have no interest in obeying the Scriptures or following God's commands. Instead they have decided to do whatever is right in their own eyes – but that is an abomination to God. If we want to be saved then we *must* humble ourselves before Him! We *must* obey Him and submit ourselves to all of His commands. Our lives must be about *His* will, not ours.

How do we overcome evil? By resisting it. How do we make the devil flee? By resisting him. That means we must *fight back*. We must refuse to submit to sin and refuse to give sin free reign in our lives. We must refuse to follow the lusts of the flesh

or seek your own will. If we fight against the devil then he will flee from us. If we draw near to God then He will draw near to us:

James 4:8: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”

The question is this: do people *want* to draw near to God, or are they too busy trying to make friends with the world? Do they want to glorify God or would they rather glorify themselves? Do people desire the things of God or things of the world? If you truly want to draw near to God then cleanse your hands and purify your hearts. Repent of your sins and ask forgiveness for them. Stop being double-minded! Stop seeking both the things of the world and the things of God. Become single-minded in the pursuit of God's glory and in service to His kingdom. Take advantage of His grace and serve righteousness instead of sin. If you draw near to God then He *will* draw near to you. That's a promise! If you humble yourself before God and seek Him then He will lift you up:

James 4:9-10: “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

If you turn away from your pride and sin and earnestly seek the Lord then He will lift you up. God will humble those who exalt themselves but He will exalt those who humble themselves. If you weep over your wickedness and cry out to God for forgiveness and grace then you will find it.

If you do this then things will change. You will find yourself closer to God. Temptations won't seem as tempting as they once did. You'll discover a love for righteousness and for God's Word. You will find less conflict and more love. If you truly want to change then this is the only way to do it. God resists

the proud but gives grace to the humble.