

What Causes Our Quarrels?
James 3:13-4:10

A couple had been fighting over the purchase of a new car for weeks. He wanted a truck. She wanted a sports car ... The discussion was getting heated when finally the wife said, “Look, I want something that can go up to 160, and that’s all there is to it!” And then added, “My birthday is coming up, and you better surprise me. Or, it’s going to get mighty lonely for you around here!” When her big day came, the wife woke up early and dashed to the garage, but there was no new car. Angry, she went back into the house looking for her husband, but he was not at home. Frustrated, she went into the bathroom to get dressed. And there, sitting on the floor and wrapped in a red ribbon, was a brand-new scale ... that went up well past 160! ... (I understand that funeral services are pending...)

I’ve done a couple sermons in the past on the first half of James chapter 3 and the influence of the tongue, but today we’re going to examine the section that follows – on conflict (*Domestic Violence Awareness*). We live in a world that’s *filled* with conflict.

The Bible – Old and New Testament - teaches that we are, by nature, *fighters!* ... But James wants us to be disillusioned about conflict; and then liberated from the kind that only brings destruction. There are forms of conflict that are productive; but James isn’t talking about that. He’s talking about the strife of the world leeching its way into the church. James asks in chap. 4, verse 1, “What causes quarrels and fights among you?”

First, we **consider the source of conflict**. James immediately answers his own question with another question, “Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” We all have desires. It may be a desire to achieve, to use our gifts, to express ourselves, to have a voice. Many desires are good. But James’ point is that sometimes these desires within us can go too far. Then war breaks out! When something impedes us

from obtaining what we desire, our natural tendency is to fight until we get our way.

James says in v. 2, “You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.” If someone blocks your desires and goals—watch out! Conflict is coming! When James says here that you “kill,” he’s not talking about literal murder (although it wouldn’t exclude that). Throughout his letter, James makes references to Jesus’ teaching, particularly his Sermon on the Mount. James too pronounces *blessings on the poor*, he mentions how *the merciful will be shown mercy*, how we can *rejoice in trials*, and so on. And here, James is likely drawing on the teaching of Jesus where he equated having anger or hatred toward someone with committing murder in your heart (Matt. 5:21-22). So James is warning us about having such thoughts – that we are susceptible to this when our desires are held back – when we don’t get our way.

The problem is, many of us are unaware that the *inner* battle of our souls is the true source of our *outer* conflicts. It’s always the other person who’s at fault. There wouldn’t be any conflict if the other party would just get his or her act together and be sensible!

The following is a transcript from a transmission off the coast of Newfoundland:

Canadians: please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid collision.

Americans: recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid collision.

Canadians: negative, you will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south.

Americans: This is the AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS LINCOLN, the second largest in the US fleet. We are accompanied by 3 DESTROYERS, 3 CRUISERS AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north or countermeasures will be taken to ensure the safety of this ship and its escort vessels.

Canadians: We’re a lighthouse, you’re call ...

When we have pride in our hearts, we automatically assume that we are in the right. Not only will this lead to anger in your life, but pride will trick you into thinking that you should hold onto your anger. If you're in the midst of a conflict with someone now, I want you to know that the end of your struggle will *begin* at that moment you are able to humble yourself, and take an inside look at your *own* desires that are underlying that conflict ...

In verse 3, we find that if you won't do that, even if you are praying your heart out, you'll never get the results you want. James writes, "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

Many times, in the face of conflict, the last thing we do is pray! Instead of struggling over the issue on our knees before God, we concentrate our energies on better ways to struggle and fight against those who dare to stand in our way to fulfillment ...

You may say to me, "But Pastor, I *am* praying about this conflict." Yet, are our prayers rooted in what James calls "wrong motives?" At its core, is it a self-centered prayer, a prayer that is not truly seeking the glory of God as its chief end, but the meeting of our personal desires? If so, why should we be surprised if it goes unanswered? For if God did answer ... it would just *reinforce* our selfish desires! If our prayers are one-sided in this way: "God make him see the error of his ways ... give her the wisdom to see how she is in the wrong ..." Do you see what's missing? The point is this: *Bowing your head without bowing your heart never accomplishes anything.*

Don't expect conflict in your life to be resolved until you're first willing to take an inside look at your own desires that may be breeding that conflict. Instead of storming off into battle, go before God with an open, submissive heart. Ask Him to search your heart and expose any disordered desires. Openly admit those desires to God and ask Him to

change you before you ever ask Him to change the other person. [Pause] So, first, the source of conflict arises from our own desires battling within us.

Secondly, **conflicts are fueled by Worldliness** (4:4-5). James writes in verse 4, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

James isn’t talking about avoiding people in society in general; he’s not advocating joining a monastery or becoming a recluse. He’s talking about worldliness ... Worldliness is adopting the philosophy of life that says that your personal pleasure is the highest good and primary pursuit in life.

The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer was well known for his ability to understand our culture. As he looked at western society he concluded that the two primary pursuits of modern man are *personal peace* and *affluence*. I believe he was right. And it’s this pursuit of personal peace and affluence that is at the root of much of the conflict we face in our daily lives. There are certain things the world system is constantly telling us we must have if we’re going to be happy. And therefore, woe to the person who gets in the way of us having it all ... Have you ever heard of the “Yuppies Prayer”? It goes like this:

Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my Cuisinart to keep.
I pray my stocks are on the rise, and that my analyst is wise.
That all the wine I sip is white, that my hot-tub stays water tight.
That my racquetball won’t get too tough, that all my sushi’s fresh enough.
I pray my new iPhone will work, and that my job won’t lose its perks.
That my microwave won’t radiate, and my condo won’t depreciate.
I pray my health club doesn’t close, and that my money market grows.
If I go broke before I wake, I pray my Volvo they won’t take.
Lord let’s do lunch, I don’t know when. I guess that’s all for now. Amen.

James speaks to those who adopt the world's philosophy with very strong words. He calls them adulterous people who hate God and are actually enemies of God. James is saying that you cannot embrace both God and the world's system. You cannot look to both God and the world for happiness and fulfillment. They're antithetical. You have to choose. But many professing Christians try to do both. This is what James means in ch. 1 by the double-minded who are "like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."

Worldliness is saying, "Lord, you are not adequate for me. I'll find the rest of what I need over here. God, I know what is best for me and I know how to get it. Don't call me, I'll call you." Worldliness is built around the human desire to find fulfillment in life apart from God ... Let me use a slightly lighter illustration. When my daughter Lakyn was little, we watched a few *Veggie Tales* movies. In "King George and the Ducky," based on the story of David and Bathsheba, Larry the Cucumber stars as King George and Bob the Tomato is his faithful servant, Lewis ... The privileges of royalty—kingdom expansion, castles, power, treasure—do not appeal to King George. No, King George simply loves his rubber duck. Splishing and splashing, and singing odes to his rubber ducky.

But one day, while standing on the royal balcony, George peers through binoculars, and his eyes grow wide with desire. He spies something wonderful—*another* rubber duck. But it belongs to Billy. Billy's rubber duck looks exactly like King George's rubber duck. Nonetheless, the King covets it, exclaiming, "I want it." Lewis reminds the King that he already *has* a duck, and that the other duck belongs to someone else. "Are you saying I shouldn't have whatever I want?" asks the King. Lewis opens a large wardrobe overflowing with dozens of identical rubber ducks and says, "If I could just jog your memory, you already have quite a few ducks." King George's rationale is simple. He shoots a condescending look at his servant and replies, "Those are yesterday's ducks."

Worldliness is seeking to find fulfillment apart from God. And it can never ever be done with lasting satisfaction. And that lack of satisfaction *fuels* conflict with others.

James' point in all this is that most of our hostility and conflict today takes place because we have adopted the world's perspective toward life. And in doing that, we're ultimately striving against God—not just other human beings – because we're choosing cheap substitutes in place of our Creator! [P] But once we see how the true *source* of our conflicts in life is actually our *inner desires ... fueled by worldliness ...* what then is the way of deliverance? How can we bring about the necessary change that is needed so that the root problem of our conflict is solved? James answers that question too.

The Grace of God is the Antidote to Conflict (4:6). The same God who makes these righteous requirements and demands your undivided allegiance also gives gracious help so that you may be able to do it. But notice, this grace is granted to the *humble* and not to the proud. James writes in v. 6, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James has already stated the centrality of humility in the very first verse of our passage – “Let those who are wise show it by deeds done in humility” (3:13). Now, James brings it back around, saying that when we humble ourselves, we find the grace of God!

You might say, “But grace can be such a *vague* concept! What does that look like in real life?” Well ... *Jesus* was grace in the flesh. He received and forgave people who were in bondage to their own selfish desires. And once their inner desires had been transformed by his grace, their many self-centered conflicts with others came to an end. Zacchaeus went from being a fraudulent tax-collector to an extravagantly generous man. Then there was Simon the Zealot ... do you know who the Zealots were? They were the Jewish revolutionaries who stood up violently against the Romans. It's a safe bet Simon was a man who was drawn to conflict before Jesus changed him forever.

One thing I love about the book of James is that it can never be accused of being a theoretical treatise. No, he says it flat out – this is how we are to live our life in Christ. This is how we are to come before God and deal with the conflicts that rage within us and around us. Some of you are at war with someone else right now. There may be skirmishes going on that very few know about. But underneath, you skirt that person, you stay away, you don't talk to them. Or when you do, perhaps it's with a tone that assaults their dignity.

I want us to hear God's voice today calling us to resolve our conflict. [P] Anger is a natural human response when we are wronged or mistreated. Grace, however, is God's response to the times we have wronged and mistreated Him. Grace is what He displayed for all the world to see on the cross where His Son died. The wrath of God was poured out on Jesus, not you and me; so that now, grace is the response that He demands from us. Exchange you're bitter envy & selfish ambition. Exchange you're anger and vain conceit. Exchange your inner conflict. Exchange it for His grace. We can do it this very moment – let us humble ourselves before our glorious God, that He may lift us up ... by His grace.