

Relationships - Ending Wars¹

James 4:1-12

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Jas 4:1-12 *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 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. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. 11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbour?*

1. Introduction

Let's start by looking at verse 1, where James identifies our starting point for today's word.

- From whence come **wars** and **fightings** among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that **war** in your members? (AV)
- What causes **fights** and **quarrels** among you? Don't they come from your desires that **battle** within you. (NIV)

¹ Note: Much of the material for this outline was adapted heavily from The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 2, by Warren W. Wiersbe, pages 366-370

In the AV, 'wars' comes from the word 'polemos' (G4171), which refers to 'an encounter or a series of encounters in battle or war'. The word 'fightings' comes from 'mache' (G3163), which refers to 'striving' or 'quarrelling'. The second use of 'war' comes from a different word 'strateuomai' (G4756), 'to serve in a military campaign'.

To try to set this in today's context:

- James refers to a series of war-like encounters that result in quarrels, originating from our wrong, selfish desires that fight, in us, like a military campaign.
- Yes, there is a military campaign going on inside us and this military campaign causes great damage to us and to the lives of others.

2. Wars, Fights And Quarrels

1. Have you ever heard of:

- a. "The Hundred Years War?"
- b. "The War of the Spanish Succession?"
- c. "The Napoleonic War"

These were actual wars fought between nations, and you can read about them in many history books

2. War is too often a fact of life in spite of treaties, world peace organisations, and even the threat of nuclear weapons

There are not only wars between nations, but there are wars of one kind or another on almost every level of life - wars between phone companies, airline companies ... even wars within or between families.

3. In today's passage, James discusses this important theme of "War"

He describes three types of wars going on in the world but he also tells us how these wars can be stopped.

a. War With Each Other (1, 11,12)

One example is that there is even war:

1) Among Christians (v 1)

1. Surely "brothers" ought to live together in love and harmony - cf. Psalm 133:1 (see also Eph 4:3 ... unity of the Spirit, through the bond of peace).
2. Yet often they don't:

- a. Lot quarrelled with Abraham
 - b. Absalom created a war with his father David
 - c. The disciples of Jesus argued over who would be greatest
 - d. Paul and Barnabas had a great argument over John Mark
3. Even churches in the New Testament had problems, such as:
- a. At Corinth
 - 1) Christians were suing each other in the civil courts
 - 2) They were competing in the public assemblies
 - b. In Galatia - Christians were ‘biting and devouring’ one another
 - c. Even at Philippi - two women were having trouble getting along with each other

2) In his Epistle, James implies several different kinds of possible conflicts among Christians

- 1. Class wars (rich & poor) - 2:1-9
- 2. Employment wars - 5:1-6
- 3. Church fights - 1:19,20; 3:13-18
- 4. Personal wars – Jas 4:1

Notice 4:11,12, where we are admonished not to speak evil of one another, nor to judge (condemn) one another.

So, we can easily be at war with one another. **But why?**

James begins to answer this question by explaining a **second war** that is taking place.

b. War Within Ourselves (vv 1-3)

1) This is the reason that we war with one another (v 1)

- 1. It is the “*war in the heart*” that causes the wars in the church and elsewhere.
- 2. Our desire for things to satisfy our pleasures, like power, possessions, etc., is what makes us fight with others
- 3. Putting it simply, the key problem is “*selfishness*”

2) And these selfish desires lead to:

- 1. **Wrong Actions** (v 2) “*You kill...you quarrel and fight*”, perhaps not literally, but certainly so in God’s sight - cf. 1 John 3:15
- 2. **Wrong Praying** (v 3) The kind of praying that goes unanswered, because the prayers are for selfish motives

This is why people are often at war with one another. Every war or angry disagreement has **people** who are first at war **within themselves**.

So, why are people at war **within themselves**? Once again, James gives us the answer, when he describes yet another war – **a far more dangerous war...**

c. War With God (vv 4-10)

1) Here is the “root cause” of every war, internal or external

The root is rebellion against God, which means that in some way:

- a. those at war with others
- b. are also at war within themselves
- c. because they are **first** at war with God

2) How does a Believer declare war against God?

1. By being friendly with God’s enemies:

Jas 4:4 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

2. James mentions **three enemies** we must not associate with, if we want to be at peace with God:

- a. The **World** (v 4)

- 1) Human society whose standard is contrary to God. That is any conduct, belief, thought, which is anti-God, anti-Christ.
- 2) To be a friend of such makes each one of us an enemy of God and it also makes us a spiritual adulterer or adulteress.

- b. The **Flesh** (1,5)

- 1) The unlawful desires that would lead us away from God
- 2) These desires wage war within us, but we must not give in to them - cf. 1 Pet 2:11
- 3) Such desires are in direct conflict to what the Spirit of God would have us to be and do - cf. 4:5; Gal 5:16-26
- 4) To submit to these unlawful desires (works) of the flesh sets one contrary to God and His Spirit.

- c. The **Devil** (6,7)

Pride is Satan’s greatest temptation, so when we give into pride, we become friends of the devil and enemies of God - 4:6

3. God Enables Us To Enjoy Peace With Himself

1. Submit To God (v 7)

- a. Literally, “get into your proper rank”
- b. When an army Private acts like the General, there is going to be trouble.
- c. Unconditional surrender to God is the only way to victory.
- d. Submission is saying: “Not my will, but Yours be done”

2. Resist The Devil (v 7)

- a. Why? Because he is behind every war that we have.
- b. But if we resist, then he must flee – see Eph 6:14.

3. Draw Near To God (v 8)

- a. And He will draw near to us.
- b. How do we do this?
 - 1) “Cleanse your hands” - Get your sins forgiven.
 - 2) “Purify your hearts” - Be single-minded in your devotion to God (not double-minded, like a spiritual adulterer).

4. Humble Yourself In The Sight Of God (9,10)

- a. It’s possible to submit outwardly and not be humble inwardly
- b. True mourning for our sins (cf. 4:9) is how we can humble ourselves before God
- c. The end result of such humility? God will lift you up - 4:10

4. Conclusion

a. Obedience

1. If we obey these four instructions, then God will draw near to us, cleanse us, and forgive us.
2. Only then will the “Wars” cease.
 - For we will not be at war with God
 - So, we will not be at war within ourselves
 - And, we will not be at war with others.

b. The Result

As Solomon wrote in the Book of Proverbs:

Prov 16:7 When a man' s ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.

Are we careful in making sure **our ways** are pleasing to the Lord?