

What Causes Quarrels and Fights Among You?

James / James 4:1–12

Introduction

In this morning's sermon text James asks and answers two questions:

1. In verses 1-5 James asks, "Where does the violence of sin come from?"
2. In verses 6-10 James answers the question, "What is the solution?"

Where Does the Violence of Sin Come From? (vv. 1-5)

In verse 1 James asks the question, "**What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?**" In these first 5 verses he offers two answers to this question: First the depraved hearts and second friendship with the world.

From Your Depraved Hearts (vv. 1-3)

Continuing in verse 1 through verse 3 James explains that the depravity of their hearts is the reason there is so much disorder in their communities. Their "**passions are at war within them**". Their desires are warped; leading them to commit wicked acts. They are filled with covetous desires; leading them to fight and quarrel.

Desire

The first problem James points out is that the desires of his audience are wrong. These wicked desires lead them to sinful violence.

James writes to want to see God's righteousness established in their midst. When James condemns their desires he shows that they have been warped by their desire to take matters into their own hands.

Abraham's desire to see God's promise of offspring fulfilled in his life was a good desire. However, this desire became warped and he attempted to bring it to fulfillment in his own resources by taking Hagar.

James condemns his readers' attempts to reach for God's blessings through earthly wisdom that he described as "**unspiritual**" and "**demonic**" in the last chapter.

Covetousness

The second problem is sin of covetousness.

James' audience is likely being persecuted by the Jewish community in Jerusalem. They would have had good reason to covet what the Jews had.

Even though the Jews were under the rule of the Roman empire, they had a large degree of political and economic freedom within the empire. The Jews in Jerusalem wealth and political power that they could wield against the early Christian church.

It is likely that James's readers coveted this power and wealth. One of the problems with covetousness is the wicked ways that it manifests itself. There is a reason why the 10th commandment, "Do not Covet", is placed alongside the commandments against murder, adultery, theft, and false witness.

So often, it is *because* someone covets what God *has not* given to them that they murder, commit adultery, steal, or bearing false witness.

Covetousness, like so many other sins, slowly boils underneath the surface of your life until it breaks out in an unquenchable fire.

Prayer

These wicked desires and covetousness explain why the prayers of James's audience are hindered in verse 3. "**You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.**"

Instead of praying for patience in the midst of their suffering, they pray for God to give them power to destroy their enemies.

James writes against the sin of desiring to place oneself in God's position; doling out justice as you see fit, rather than waiting for God to act in his righteousness.

James' audience wants the harvest of righteousness without the work of cultivating the soil and the watering the crops that produce righteousness.

From Your Imitation of and Friendship with the World (vv. 4-5)

The second reason why there are quarrels and violence in their midst is explained in verses 4-5. Imitation of and friendship with the world also brings disruption to their communities.

James doesn't pull any punches. He tells his hearers that they are an "***adulterous people!***"

In the OT, the prophets declared that Israel was an adulterous people because of their *idolatry*. This was because Israel wasn't *faithful* to YHWH when they turned to the other gods of the nations.

Here, James is calling his Christian audience an "***adulterous people***" because they have given their hearts over to a different kind of idol. These idols weren't the idols of the pagans. Rather, these idols are the things their persecutors possess: comfort, security, and peace. Their persecutors *obtained these things through the demonic practices of violence and political scheming*.

Refusing to compromise, James tells them that there are two radically opposed options before them: friendship with God or friendship with the world.

Friendship with the world looks like the "unspiritual" and "demonic" practices of turning to the world's ways to accomplish one's goals. James calls them to abandon this friendship with the world.

James's entire letter is an attempt to reframe the situation for his audience. He doesn't want them to see their suffering as an obstacle to reaping the "***Harvest of righteousness***".

Rather, he wants them to see their suffering as *the way God will bring about the "Harvest of righteousness"*.

This can seem counter-intuitive but this reality is present in many parts of your life. Think of all the *obstacles* in front of you. Obstacles in your relationships, your finances, your work, and your sanctification.

Is it not the case that each of these obstacles is *the very path you must walk* in order to achieve growth in these areas? Obstacles aren't *really* obstacles. They are tests of maturity.

God is Jealous!

James concludes this by offering hope to his readers and to you. Verse 5 concludes by stating that God “**yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us**”.

James harkens back to all the places in the OT where God is said to be a “jealous God.” Despite the fact that Israel was often wayward and idolatrous in the OT, God still called to them through his prophets.

The same call is made to you this morning. Have you turned from God toward idols? Have you sought to fulfill the desires of your heart through coveting all manner of things that God has not given you?

God is jealous for you! He calls you to return to him in Christ! And this is exactly the solution that James offers in verses 6-10.

What is the Solution? (vv. 6-10)

In verses 1-5 James answers the question to why there are quarrels and fights in his reader’s communities.

In verses 6-10 James answer the question, “What is the solution to all this sin?”

His answer is...

Repentance and Humility before God (6-10)

Verse 6 begins with hope for all sinners, “**But God gives more grace.**”

Grace is given to all those who turn in humility from their sins and repent. James paraphrases Proverbs 3:34 by stating, “**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**”

In verses 7-10 James outlines what humble repentance looks like:

Submission to God (v. 7a)

In verse 7 James writes to, “**Submit yourselves therefore to God.**”

If you are to deal with the sinful desires of their hearts and abandon your friendship with the world you must submit yourself to God.

Resist the Devil (v. 7b)

The second half of verse 7 presents the next aspect of repentance, “**resist the devil and he will flee from you.**”

After Jesus received John’s baptism of repentance, he resisted the Devil in the wilderness. Jesus’ resistance was straightforward. He commanded the Devil to “Be Gone” and Satan left him.

In your own repentance you are called to resist the Devil. Go to God in the prayer Jesus taught us and pray, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

Draw Near to God and Cleanse Yourself (v. 8)

In verse 8 James alludes to priestly language of the OT commanding, “**Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**”

In the OT Testament drawing near to God was something that only the priests did. One of the glories of the New Covenant is that all believers are baptized into the royal priesthood.

As you turn from your sins in repentance you can draw near to God. Not only that, God draws near to you and you are not consumed by his holiness. The blood of Jesus covers your sin. Even your most murderous desires and actions are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

In [Psalm 24:3-4](#) David writes, “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart”

You are called to ascend the “Hill of the Lord”. Jesus has gone before you. As you turn from your wicked ways in repentance, you are cleansing your hands and purifying your hearts.

Mourn and Weep and Humble Yourself Before the Lord (vv. 9-10)

Verse 9 and 10 show that repentance looks like actual sorrow and mourning over one’s sin.

Like David in [Psalm 51](#), the repentant man weeps and mourns for his sin.

This weeping and mourning is nothing more than *humility*. Verse 10 states, **“Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”**

This is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. Saints like Abraham, Joseph, David, and Elijah were humbled before they were exalted by God.

This pattern is most clearly seen in Jesus, whose entire ministry moved from humility to exaltation.

Humility and repentance are the keys to solving the disorder of the prideful violence that characterized James’s audience.

Conclusion: Jesus Will Judge the World (vv. 11-12)

Verses 11-12 will serve as our conclusion.

James returns to the sins of the tongue (***Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.***)

When you speak evil against one another you are doing what James condemned in [James 3:9](#) “cursing people who are made in the likeness of God.” When you do this you place yourself in the position of Judge.

But James says that ***“There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?”***

The anger expressed in evil words against your fellow image-bearers can never produce the righteousness of God. These sins show how you want to make yourself the lawgiver and judge. They show how you want to be in the place of God and you want to use God to help you accomplish your ambitions.

But James reminds them and us, there is only one lawgiver and judge.

Let us all acknowledge Jesus as our lawgiver and judge and the one who is able to save. Commending ourselves to his care to bring a harvest of righteousness in our midst as we turn from our wicked desires and covetousness in repentance.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!