

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

I'll ask those of you that are able to stand. You can follow along as I read. If not, where you're seated is just fine. We're going to begin in verse 1.

James is writing by the Holy Spirit and asks really two questions in the first verse. **"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"**

You desire [Verse 2] but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

When you ask, [Verse 3] you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

Let's pray, if you would please join with me. Father, wow, here we go! Every word is in Your Word for a reason. So we know this is here for us to exhort, encourage, rebuke if necessary.

But Lord, in order for that to happen, we need for the Holy Spirit to get our attention and hold our attention. That's not up to me.

Lord, just as You get our attention, You then speak into our lives that which You would desire for us to hear, and not only hear but take heed to today.

So Lord, speak, Your servants are listening. We pray in Jesus' name, amen and amen.

You can be seated. Thank you.

So in my notes I say, I want to talk with you today, but that's not really true. Because I don't really want to talk to you today about this.

(Chuckling) I need to talk to you today about some of the reasons as to why it is that we as Christians argue and fight with each other. And perhaps more importantly, what it is that we can do about it, more specifically how it is that we can stop doing it.

In the text that we have before us today, James, again, true to form; I would like to think if you're anything like me, and I suspect that you are, you're coming to appreciate this about James. I mean, he pulls no punches, and rightfully so. But here we go again.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

True to form, he just takes and tackles this touchy, tough topic head on and for good reason. It would seem that this is what was happening. And so he writes by the Spirit about it to address it because this was a problem.

What was the problem?

Well apparently, they were fighting with each other. There were conflicts within the church. By the way, I hope you understand that this is written to Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ, and this was happening within the body of Christ.

There were these arguments and fights and striving, and it was causing a lot of damage, which is why James is inspired by the Holy Spirit to address it.

So in these first three verses, we're provided with no less than four reasons as to why it is that we as brothers and sisters in Christ fight and argue and quarrel and gossip and slander.

Should I keep going? By the way you're looking at me, I should probably stop right there.

James is, by the way, going to later on in the Chapter address slander again as he did prior in the third Chapter about how this tongue can just start like a little spark, a fire that causes so much destruction and damage.

Before we jump in, I just want to bring into the teaching what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians. It's actually as strong, if in some ways not stronger than what James writes here.

He basically says this to them, Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ, if you guys keep doing what you're doing, you're going to destroy each other. You keep fighting and arguing, you're going to devour one another.

And make no mistake about it, Satan cannot destroy the church from without. So what does he do? He joins the church. Not this one, of course, but other... and he destroys from within. He brings about division. It's textbook divide and conquer.

If he can get Christians divided and fighting one another, he can take the rest of the day off. We do his job for him instead of him. He just sits back in his recliner with his remote.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

I know it's too much of a picture, but you get the point. And he just watches the show as it plays out, and you can write the next chapter in that horror novel because it's just a matter of time.

So James is trying, by the Spirit, to not only address it but to get it to stop before it causes irreparable damage. And so he's going to get right to the core of the matter, the heart of the matter.

So first, here's the source of the conflict, and then we're going to address the solution to this problem. So where does it start?

Well, verse 1, we have lustful desires within us. That's where it all starts. Here, James makes it very clear in no uncertain terms that the source of the fights and the quarrels among Christians are those lustful desires.

And interesting, some of your translations render it, "That war within us." There's this battle within our hearts and we lust, we desire to have something.

I think this would be a good time, as good of a time as any, to sort of define what lustful desires are. Lustful desires are those things that we desire that God has forbidden. And it's really important; please don't miss this because many a Christian has been - how do I say it? Has been misled by this.

It's not that God says don't lust or don't sin because I'm God and I said so. Sin is not bad because it's forbidden. Sin is forbidden because it's bad.

In other words, God wants to spare us from the destruction that comes upon us when we sin. I like how one referred to The Ten Commandments as the "Tender Commandments." These are commandments from a loving, tender Heavenly Father that says, "**Thou shall not**" because I love you so much, and I can't stand to see what is going to happen unnecessarily when you disobey Me.

Let's just start with the first two. Don't have any other gods before Me because they're no gods at all and they're not going to be there for you. We saw this on Thursday night in Jeremiah.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

They would make their gods – You know, you're in trouble when you have to make your own god. And then they would have to carry their gods. That's even worse.

Wait; you have to carry your god?

My God carries me.

So don't have other gods because they're not gods and they can do nothing for you. And don't make any graven images and bow down and worship them. They are no gods. **"Thou shall have no gods before Me"** because there is no god like Me. "Who is like unto you, O, God?"

Again, in Jeremiah, you'll forgive the reference, but it's really powerful actually. I love it when God does this. He boasts on Himself and basically says, You see the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that in them is? I did that. I did that. They didn't do that. That God that you worship, that you have to carry?

Oh, by the way, it doesn't talk, right? Because you talk to it, but it doesn't talk because it can't. It has no breath. It has no life.

You know throughout the Old Testament, it's a – for lack of a better word, stunning detail in the narrative, but replete throughout the Old Testament, God will declare, "I am the Lord your God that delivered you out of Egypt." The emphasis is on "I" am the Lord Your God.

That is not your god. That golden calf that Aaron said he just happened to spill some gold in the fire and out poofed a golden calf that they started worshipping, that did not deliver you out of Egypt. I did that. **"I am the Lord your God."**

Well, anything that is forbidden is forbidden because it's bad for us. That's why it's forbidden. And God loves us so much, and He wants to spare us of the needless suffering, the painful consequences of our willful disobedience.

So He says, "Don't do that, don't covet." We're going to talk about covetousness next. Don't covet because it will destroy you from the inside out. Envy, jealousy, covetousness; it will eat your lunch and your dinner too, and your breakfast in the morning as well.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

So this is where it all starts. It's that craving, that desire that we have for something that is forbidden. In other words, this is where the fights and the quarrels and the conflict will always start. We desire to have something that we don't have.

And here's the problem. Someone else has what we have. That's the problem. You know what covetousness says? If I can't have it, you can't have it either.

Oh, come on, let's be honest with ourselves. That's the second one in the first part of verse 2. We covet what we cannot have or get. James takes it a step further and explains how that desiring to have something someone else has will result in coveting to get it.

And then when we cannot get what we covet and desire, we resort to quarreling and fighting, thinking that somehow we might be able to get it that way. That's how it works.

You know what's sad?

If you were to ask me what I thought was one of the main reasons that Christians slander other Christians and gossip about other Christians, it's because they are jealous of other Christians. That's what causes the fights, the fighting, the striving, the conflicts.

We have this desire for something; we don't have it, we desire it. And then here's brother so-and-so and sister so-and-so, and they've got it and we're looking at them like, What's up with that?

And then we start coveting what they have and when we can't have what they have and we covet what they have, then that brings us to the third one in the second part of verse 2. We don't ask for it.

Now, stay with me on this because this – It's a familiar verse, right? We quote it often. You have not because you ask not. And we will always couch it in terms of prayer.

And I'll tell you, there's nothing more guilt-producing, you know, guilt the gift that keeps on giving, then when you start bringing up prayer.

I don't pray enough.

Yeah.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

You want to lay a heavy guilt trip on someone? Just talk to them about their prayer life.

[Sighing]

You have not because you ask not.

Oh, I know.

But let's put it back where it belongs in the context in which James writes this. Basically, what James is saying here is that instead of asking God for what we want, We fight and covet to get that which we can just simply ask God for. But we don't do that.

Oh, you want that?

Yeah. I don't have that.

Why don't you have that? Why don't you ask Me for it?

In other words, instead of fighting others to get what you want, why don't you just - what a novel idea – pray and ask God to give you what you want?

You know, I poured over this, I thought through this, and this is the best I got. So here goes.

An unanswered prayer will always be the result of an unasked prayer. I know that's deep. I told you all week, I'm like, Is that right? Does that sound right? Yeah, it is.

I'm sure there are more eloquent ways and better ways to say that, but you got the point, right?

Well, I didn't get the prayer answered. Was the prayer prayed?

Wait, well, maybe you've heard this said, or even yourself said this. Why ask God? He already knows what you need. What's the point?

Oh! You know what I'm talking about, right?

This has with it this idea of: You want something? Why don't you just ask God for it?

Because as we're going to see, "**Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father above.**"

If you ask God for something and it's good, you got it.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

You may not get it when you want it, the way you want it, in the color you want it, but you'll get it if it's good. But if it's not good, God will not give it to you because it would not be good for you.

Aren't you glad for those prayers that you prayed that God didn't answer? For those of you that keep a prayer list or a prayer journal, have you ever gone back over those? I don't recommend it for the faint at heart because you will look back over those prayers and go, I prayed – you start apologizing to God for praying that prayer that way.

No wonder He didn't answer it. And then you thank God.

Thank You, God, for not answering that prayer. Had You answered that prayer that way at that time, it would have been catastrophic.

It's like God's going, I know that; I'm God. That's why I didn't do it.

Have you heard that saying, "Prayer changes things?" Of course that's true. Prayer is powerful. But how about this one? Prayer changes the pray-er.

Let me expound on that for just a moment. So when you pray in a certain way, and God hears those prayers, and then for some reason God does not give you what you ask for, at least you asked, but what God's doing is saying, we need to edit the prayer. We need to change the prayer.

There's a situation in my own personal walk with the Lord where there was this real shift where God just really showed me that I needed to pray differently for this specific situation. I was praying; nothing wrong with the prayer, but I needed to kind of pray more specifically in this way.

And as soon as I did [Clapping] changed everything.

And here's the thing. Sometimes, I would even say often times, what we think we want, we really don't want. And by the way, we know that God will always provide anything we need, but we try to switch the tags at the Store of Prayer and we take that "desire" tag and we put it on the "need," and we switch them.

No, God saw that.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

No, trust Me, JD, you don't want Me to answer that prayer that way and give you that. And that's what we're going to see here, last.

In verse 3, when we do ask, we have wrong and selfish motives. So what James says here sort of comes full circle in the sense that we don't receive when we ask God because we don't have the right heart. We might be asking for the right thing but with the wrong motive.

I like how one said it. Sometimes when we pray and God doesn't answer our prayers, it might be that the timing is wrong and God says 'slow,' or I'm wrong and God says 'grow,' or the request is wrong and God says 'no.'

But if I'm right, the request is right, and the timing is right, and my heart is right, God says, 'Here you go.'

When it comes to praying and how prayer changes the pray-er, is it has this way of kind of searching our heart. We're praying, we're asking God to win the lottery, and we promise God we'll tithe on it. I'm just using that as an example.

[Laughter]

I'm so glad you laughed at that one. That's why you didn't win the lottery. First of all, you shouldn't be playing a lottery. That's the first problem, right?

But our heart's wrong. Maybe the timing is wrong. Maybe we're wrong.

And is not like God's up there saying, No! It's not God saying, I'm not going to do that! It's God saying, I can't. I want to, but I can't. I can't grant you that because your heart's not right.

When your heart's right and your motives are pure, oh, man, I just, I mean, anything you want. You ask Me for anything,

Jesus said, and if it brings glory to the Father, you will have that which you ask for. But if your motive is not right and your heart is not right, then God cannot answer that prayer.

I want to bring it in for a close, maybe just a little bit differently today. A couple of questions first.

What situation currently do you have in your life in a relationship with a brother or sister in Christ?

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

I want you to think through this with me. That because it's not right and your heart is not right, your prayers are bouncing off of the ceiling? That, of course, presupposes that you're praying in the first place.

Let's talk about Matthew 5, just real quick. Jesus said that if you are bringing your gifts to the altar, don't bother. Leave and go make it right and settle that matter as fast as you can before it costs you everything. And then once that relationship is right, then you can come back and offer your gift of service at the altar.

Wouldn't you say that it rises to the level of being pretty important in the eyes of the Lord, how we treat one another? Dare I bring the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians into the discussion; how they were treating each other?

They were not discerning the body of Christ, fellow believers, brothers and sisters at the Lord's Supper. And because of it - this is how important it is – how we treat one another, this is how important it is. Some of them were actually falling ill and even some of them were dying. God was taking them home early.

That's pretty serious, right?

One last example. Didn't Jesus say that the way they're going to know that your My disciples is by your love, one for another?

Well, let's flip that over. If it's by our love, one for another that they're going to know we're Jesus' disciples, then wouldn't it stand to reason that our devouring and backbiting and slandering and gossiping and fighting one another will bring that into question?

That's pretty serious, right?

In other words, how we treat one another will impact every arena of our lives, especially when it comes to our prayer life. So I'm having conflict in this relationship.

Can I ask you this last question in closing?

What arguments, what conflict would end if I would but stop coveting and start asking God for what it is that I want?

Because again, that's the source of the conflict. There's something I want; I don't have it.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

So instead of fighting man for it, why don't I instead pray and ask God for it? That's the context of this.

What conflict, what relationship would be repaired if I did that?

This is where being a doer of God's Word is of paramount importance.

See, the last thing we need, the last you need, bless your hearts, is another sermon. I can stand up here and I can preach another sermon, and that's all it is.

But when you leave here and the Holy Spirit doesn't let you take what you heard here and start that process of applying it to your life, we wasted our time. This has all been a waste of time.

How do you stop the conflict? How do you stop the fighting? How do you stop the striving?

Start praying.

One last thing. I think it's also Matthew 5; I could be wrong. You know when Jesus said, "Pray for your enemies, those who despitefully use you and speak evil of you."

Really? Pray for my enemies? I'm having a hard enough time praying for my friends.

You want me to pray for my enemies? Okay, I'll pray for them.

[Laughter]

God's not going to answer that prayer, by the way. Spoiler alert. Don't bother. Don't try. I tried. Trust me, it doesn't work.

Why?

Well, apparently they're your enemy because of a conflict. That's why they're your enemy. That's why you guys are enemies. Why don't you start praying for them and watch what happens? You cannot stay angry at someone or be an enemy of someone for very long that you're praying for.

Because see, your heart begins to change towards them when you start praying for them.

And all of a sudden you now have a vested interest in God blessing them. And now they're no longer an enemy.

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

I'm not coveting them anymore. I'm not fighting with them anymore. I started praying for them and I've solved the whole problem.

I wonder how many churches would still be churches today had the Christians in that church simply prayed. You've heard the expression, "A church that prays together stays together?" That applies across the board, by the way, in the marriage relationship, the family relationship.

Because see, prayer is so powerful that it changes us when we pray and it changes the whole dynamic. I can stand here, as is my privilege to – Why don't you go ahead and stand up and we will have Kaponu come up.

It is a privilege certainly, to be able to stand up here every week, and I have such a privilege of being the pastor of this amazing church. I don't know how many years; it's been a lot of years now. 2004 we started the Bible study. 2005 was the official year that we started our first Sunday morning service.

And I am so thankful to God that we have not tasted from this cup of church conflicts and church splits. And all the glory goes to God. And I do want to say thank you, by the way. I often say if I wasn't the pastor of this church, this is where I would go to church.

No, seriously. You guys are so loving. You guys are the real deal and you make the pastorate a joy. I want you to know that; I hope you know that. And not a lot of pastors can say that.

You know that – true story. Churches have split over things as petty as someone getting a bigger slice of cheesecake than someone else. Now I know cheesecake is, you know, I could see that.

[Laughter]

You know, when it comes to cheesecake, because we all love cheesecake, right? Don't buy me cheesecake. Seriously.

The color of the carpet that was decided on split a church. The color of the carpet. Don't look at the color of our carpet. I hope you like it. Little things like that.

How petty. How petty. How petty are we? And the world is watching, right?

James 4:1-3 – May 29, 2022
Why Christians Argue With One Another
J.D. Farag

And the world is asking two questions of the Christian.

Number 1, are you real? Is it real?

And number 2, does it work?

And they want it to be real and they want it to work because if it's real and it works then it gives them hope. Are we the real deal?

Do they look at us and say, man, those guys are, they're fighting each other, talking stink about each other? Or do they look at us and say, man, these guys really love each other, wow!

Father in Heaven, I once again did my best with the text. I trust of the Holy Spirit will take it from here and again, begin that process of just building it into our lives, applying it to our lives, blessing it to our hearts. Lord, we want this to be real in our lives.

We never want to be numbered amongst those of whom it can be said, man, look, they just fight with each other all the time.

Lord, forgive us for the quarreling, the coveting, and all that comes packaged with it.

Lord, thank You that we can come to You and pray and ask You for anything, and if it's good and brings You glory, You'll give to us that which we ask for. Thank You Lord, in Jesus' name, amen.