

James Series - Chapter 4
The Problem and the Cure
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(Acknowledge those in the oasis, online, and the children)

This morning we are continuing our study on the book of James, written by James, the brother of Jesus. It is a practical handbook for Christian living in a world that is hostile toward Christian values.

I have entitled my message THE PROBLEM AND THE CURE. Whenever we run into a problem, we usually want to find the fix. I tell my team, “Don’t just tell me the problem, tell me some ways we can remedy the problem. Give me some creative solutions.”

- Right now, nations around the world are frantically trying to find a cure for the Covid-19 virus.

James identifies the sin issue behind many of our problems and then points us to the cure.

Today we are looking at chapter four. There are only 17 verses in this chapter so let’s read them and then I will make some comments on them.

Read Chapter 4 – put verses on the screen (NIV)

In this passage James is concerned about the disunity among brothers and sisters in the church. Not only were they dealing with an antagonistic world that disliked Christians, they were having conflicts in their relationships within the church community as well.

In chapter two James challenges us to put our faith into action. In other words, James is telling them and us if we confess to be a Christian, we should not be acting this way toward each other. Stop it. Be respectful of each other.

It is sad that most of the problems in churches are not from the unbelieving world attacking us but from Christians attacking each other. This should not be. So, James confronts it head on. He says:

1. Our selfish desires are the root of most conflicts. Vs 1- 6

“You want something but don’t get it.” We want things our way. We want everyone to agree with us. We think our way is the right way. We put our happiness and our desires above others. And when we don’t get our way we get upset.

Someone takes my parking space, someone doesn’t embrace my great idea, someone says something I don’t agree with, someone else gets the promotion

- So, I get upset and fight back and engage in character assassination with my tongue. James calls it killing the other person.
- Pastor Brian Coles talked about the power of life and death in our tongue last week.

Or maybe I get real spiritual about it and pray for the person. That sounds good but James says even our prayers are often selfish. We ask God to change the other person, so they think like I do, agree with me and do what pleases me.

James says the problem is plain selfishness and God is not going to answer selfish prayers.

Jesus taught us to pray with a surrendered will. *“Not my will but God’s will be done”*.

If things don’t go my way, and it’s not a sin issue, then I humbly accept it and learn to work with it with a good attitude. That is a sign of Christian maturity!

ILLUSTRATION

Over the years we have made many decisions that people had various ideas on, such as to build or not to build, to stay in the denomination or leave, hiring and staff changes. Difficult and emotional decisions. I so appreciate this church and the way people were willing to lay aside their preferences for the common good.

I remember when planning the schedule for one of our Hopewell Network Conferences one of our network pastors wanted to do something and he felt quite strongly about it. We decided not to go that direction and I could tell he was hurt. But instead of withdrawing his support, pouting and criticizing, he dropped the issue and fully supported the team’s direction. I was really impressed. When I grow up, I want to be like him.

Most church conflicts and marriage conflicts are about selfish motives. It’s usually not because of doctrinal issues or that two people are incompatible. Whenever our focus becomes our needs, our rights, our way, our pleasure, conflict will develop.

Philippians 2:3-4 Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. NLT

KIDS – This speaks to how we are to treat our brothers and sisters and friends we play with. We are to be kind and care about their feelings too. Not always insist on doing things our way. God is pleased when we are kind to others.

So, when ungodly attitudes go unchecked, we not only have disunity, but we then begin to judge each other in our hearts and James says that is really bad.

2. In our self-righteousness, we judge others in our hearts which displeases and displaces God. Vs. 11-12

Judging other people’s hearts is God’s job and not ours. James says when we judge others, we are acting like we are God and taking his seat.

Just because someone doesn't agree with me it doesn't give me the right to judge them. I can disagree with someone's actions or beliefs and say what I believe with strong conviction, without judging and making disparaging remarks about them.

Romans 14:12-13 Therefore, each person must answer for himself and give a personal account of his own life before God. So stop being critical and condemning of other believers, but instead determine to never deliberately cause a brother or sister to stumble and fall because of your actions. TPT

This is some good counsel so the enemy can't divide us in this difficult season.

James then gives us the remedy or cure to this age-old problem of selfishness and pride.

3. The cure is sincere repentance and drawing close to God in our walk. Vs.7-10

James says the cure or key to resisting what the enemy is trying to do is to submit to God and draw close to him. We then have the power to resist the devil and he will lose his hold on us and flee from us.

We need to resist. Not go along with his tactics. Often, we aren't fighting people but the devil who is working behind the scenes to divide us. He is the accuser of God's people. Let's resist him.

James also cautions us about being causal about our sins. Surrendering to God includes sincere repentance. "*Grieve, change your laughter to mourning.*" He says - understand how your selfishness has grieved the Holy Spirit within you and hurt other people.

Self-centered living is sinful living. James call us adulterers. We say we love God and then we live like worldly people. We are two timing God. He calls us to repent of this kind of living. Don't try to be both a friend of the world and a friend of God. God will resist you. You have to choose.

James then gives us three wonderful promises:

- **If we will put God first in our lives and submit to his will, we will be able to resist the Devil and he will run from us.**
- **If we will draw near to God, he will draw near to us.**
- **If we humble ourselves, he will lift us up with his grace.**

James closes this chapter with the admonition to:

4. Live with a healthy dependence on the Lord each day. Vs. 13-16

James is not saying we shouldn't make careful plans or set goals. He is saying we need to keep God in our plans. Often, we make our plans and then ask God to bless them.

It's better to include God in the original planning process. Asking God to direct our thinking and planning. Asking him what his will is in each situation.

James is saying there needs to be tentativeness about our planning for tomorrow. We can make our plans, but God is still sovereign. He can still change things. We have no guarantee of tomorrow.

- As a reminder at times it is good to say. *“The Lord willing, I plan to do...”*

5. Now go do the right thing! Vs.17

- If the Holy Spirit prompts you to help someone – do it
- If He prompts you to encourage someone - do it
- If the Holy Spirit prompts you to ask forgiveness of someone – do it
- If He stirs you to take a moment to pray in the middle of the day for a situation – do it

Conclusion:

Closing Prayer Blessing:

Lord forgive us, for we fall short so often in loving each other the way we should.

We confess our selfishness and desire to change and control other people.

We judge others by a harsher standard than we judge ourselves.

We think of our concerns more than we do the concerns of others.

Too often instead of resisting the devil we have cooperated with him in undermining others.

Our tongue has caused pain and not always produced life in others.

Forgive us and help us to change. We are truly sorry for grieving you and hurting others.

Purify our hearts.

We humble ourselves and choose to draw near to you once again.

We let go of our friendship with the world and will be loyal only to you.

We surrender our lives afresh this day to following you and being like you to those in our church and those we live with and work with.

Help us to do the right thing as we go from here.

In Jesus Name, Amen