

Authentic Christianity
Conflict
James 4:1-6

November 22, 2020 am

HDBC

Conflict in the human race is not new. When sin was invited into creation by the decision of Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the stage was set for conflict. It began with Adam and Eve each blaming others for their own bad decisions. It culminated with the horrific death of Abel at the hand of his brother, Cain. From the first family to this present hour, quarrels and conflicts have been going on around the world. Kids fight on playgrounds. Gangs go at each other in inner cities. Political parties attack each other verbally. Radical activists turn protests into opportunities to violently attack others. Armies destroy one another on battlefields. Ethnic groups brutally kill each other. Religious groups attack on another, some even using physical violence.

Conflict is tragic but understandable when it is seen in a broken world filled with unconverted people. But it must **never be accepted as normal** among believers. The Bible repeatedly condemns conflict, fighting & quarrelling among followers of Christ and exalts the virtues of love, compassion and forgiveness.

And yet, too often fighting is found in churches and among believers.

A man was stranded on the proverbial deserted island in the Pacific for years. One day a boat came sailing into view, and the man frantically waved and got the skipper's attention. The boat landed on the beach, and the skipper got out to greet the stranded man.

After a while the rescuing sailor asked the castaway, "What are those three huts you've built?" The stranded man replied, "That first hut is my house."

"What's that next hut?" asked the sailor.

"I built that for my church."

"What about the third hut?"

"Oh," the castaway answered solemnly, "that's where I used to go to church."

The purpose is to call us to avoid fighting with each other. But he does not simple tell us to stop fighting. He explains what causes the quarreling and points out how God responds when we fight. **Read the text.**

1. The Problem of Conflict (1a)

Quarrels and conflicts – literally means *wars and fights*.

Quarrels – Ongoing, prolonged disputes; can be translated **war**.

Conflicts – Specific fight or battle. Individual skirmishes.

Both words imply the potential for physical violence. Some believe James is actually addressing situations where believers had attacked each other physically and may have even committed murder. I think he is using this words in a metaphorical way to describe a war of words and attitudes.

Among you – makes it clear that the combat was not with an outside source, but from within.

When I was working on my doctorate I took an entire seminar on Church Conflict. Pretty sad to realize this needed to be addressed. We should not be surprised. There was conflict in the first church of Jerusalem before most of the apostles died.

Let's not be so naïve to think we are immune from it. But let's also take seriously the call to love one another, be in unity with one another. It is our love for one another that will show the watching world that we are Christ-followers.

2. The Causes of Conflict (1b-4)

So, where do quarrels come from? Two sources are mentioned.

1) Love of Self (1-3)

a. Two key words

Pleasure – temporary, superficial, pleasure. Our word, “hedonism” comes from it. It is built on the idea that the chief good in life is pleasure. Describes the gratification of sensual, natural, fleshly desires. It is an uncontrolled desire to fulfil every passion and whim that promises satisfaction. **Eve desiring the forbidden fruit.** Slogan from the sixties, *If it feels good, do it.*

James indicates that these *pleasures* actually wage war in our members. He is not here referring to members of the church but to members of your body. For the unbeliever it is a war between the flesh and conscience. For the believer it is a war between the flesh and the Holy Spirit who leads us to practical righteousness.

Lust - To desire strongly. It can be positive or negative. The context determines it. Here it clearly refers to a desire which is misdirected and sinful. **Achan stealing the gold in Jericho. Judas selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.**

b. Three bad results

Three bad results that come from **love of self**

Lust, leading to murder (2a)

It is rather shocking that James would use the word **murder** in the context of church fights. But he does. Murder is the ultimate end of unsatisfied lust. **David in the OT is the classic example.**

Envy, leading to quarrels (2b)

Envy, jealousy are relationship killers. It is hard to remain in sweet fellowship with others when envy is in your heart. Breaks relationships and leads to conflict. **Ahab wanting the vineyard of Naboth.**

Prayerlessness, leading to emptiness (2c)

Person engaging in warfare with fellow-believers will not be interested in close communion with the God of peace and forgiveness. For this reason, they have no chance to receive what they desire.

James anticipates the fighter's response. **But I do pray.** He hastens to point to **wrong motive** as further reason for his emptiness. Their requests may have been legitimate, but their motives were illegitimate.

They wanted only to satisfy their own cravings, pamper their own passions. God's glory, God's service, consideration for other people—none of these things entered into their thinking. Such praying is an insult to God. (Vaughan)

When you are in love with self, you will never be satisfied, for we are made to live in relationship with others. When you are in love with self, there is no room for legitimate, intimate relationships with others.

2) Friendship with the World (4)

Adulteresses. Strong language. To be friends with the world is to reject God. To do so is to cheat on God! Spiritual adultery! Important to understand what he means by **world**.

Kosmos – In this case it does not refer to the physical earth, the world system that ignores the presence and place of God. That which is under the influence of Satan. Self-centered, godless. You are the master of your own universe.

Notice the Results: There are two.

a. Hostility Toward God (4a)

Refers to an act of rebellion against God. Open defiance.

b. Enemy with God (4b)

To have a warm, familiar attitude toward this evil world is to be on good terms with God's enemy. It is to adopt the world's set of values and want what the world wants instead of choosing according to divine standards. Donald Burdick

When you cozy up to the world's system, you have taken a position that makes you an enemy of God. There is no middle ground. Some in our church and every church think they have found a safe place, a comfortable place by adopting the world's perspective and thinking that it is ok with God. It is not.

The causes are conflict are **love of self** and **friendship with world**. Where you find conflict in the church, one or both of those things are present!

3. The Cure for Conflict (5-6)

The cure for conflict among believers is to get our focus off of **self** and off of the **world** and on to **God**. James now offers **God's response** to our conflict.

Note three things for us to remember about God.

1) **God Desires our Allegiance (5)**

Holy Spirit or human spirit? Not sure. Either way the focus is that God has created us to be in fellowship with Him and He desires that fellowship. This is jealousy in its positive form. Zeal, passion.

2) **God Offers Grace (6A)**

This is amazing. His grace is greater than our selfishness and worldliness. Even to those who struggle with love of self and friendship with the world, God offers grace.

3) **God Opposes the Proud (6B)**

Opposed - To be set against. War against. His grace is offered to all, but benefits only those who humble themselves and receive it. This is a military term. It means *to go to war against in full battle array*.

But He gives grace to the humble. Most conflicts can be avoided with a little dose of humility. Not only does humility in and of itself move people away from conflict and toward peace, but it attracts the grace of God, which further moves people away from conflict and toward peace.

*Grace and peace are twin sisters, grace being the firstborn. Where grace abounds, peace thrives. Where grace is stunted, peace shrivels.
Charles F. Stanley in A Touch of His Peace. Christianity Today, Vol.*

There are righteous battles. There are enemies to be resisted and in some cases even conquered. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are not the enemy. When the church puts on its armor and takes up the weapons of war they must always be spiritual in nature and never directed at one another. The fighting is to be done against common enemies and not against one another.

We should fight against sin. Billy Sunday, on sin . . .

Listen, I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot. I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. And I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth, and when I'm old, fistless, footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes home to perdition.

We should fight against injustice. We should fight against abortion.

We should fight against greed, envy, pornography, drug/alcohol addictions.

We should fight against bullying, corruption, child abuse, all that is evil.

There are some times, places and adversaries to oppose. There is a time and place for going to battle.

Your brother or sister in Christ is not your enemy and should never be the target of your weapons. **Christ's death brought us together in unity.** Where there are quarrels and conflicts among us, it is a sign that we are in love with ourselves and are friends with the world. We need to be more in love with God.

In his first book, *Fellowship of the Ring*, J.R.R. Tolkien describes the camaraderie of a diverse group, banded together by a common cause.

Called "the fellowship of the ring," their quest was to destroy the power of the Dark Lord lodged in his ring. Though they differed in nearly every way racially, physically, temperamentally, they are united in their opposition of the Dark Lord.

In a section omitted in the movie, a heated conflict breaks out among the crusaders. Axes are drawn. Bows are bent. Harsh words are spoken. Disaster nearly strikes the small band. When peace at last prevails, a wise counselor observes, "Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him."

Today, the Dark Lord Satan shows his power when there is discord among believers.

Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Ps. 133:1