

## James 4

We often wonder how things get so bad in our relationships with one another. We are often at war with people we love, and our hearts break because we are at serious odds with people we seriously love.

How did we get here? How do we get out of here? We will be presented with the idea the humility is the strength that is most often missing from us having peaceful relationships.

### **4:1**

These are not international wars, but wars within our close relationships. These are the ones that hurt the heart and effect every area of our lives.

James suggests to us that they originate from our desires for pleasure.

I am going to suggest, through my many years of counseling, that one of the greatest pleasures we hold dear is the pleasure we feel when we think we are right about something.

When we do, we are willing to war and fight and not give an inch. Or, if we find out we are wrong, we cannot bring ourselves to admit it because we fought so hard for what we thought was right, and vice-versa. Our desire to be right and have others know it lead to wars within the areas of our lives that we are called to care for and nurture through the strength of humility.

### **4:2**

The *murder* here is that spoken of by Jesus in **Matthew 5:21,22**

The word is used to startle us into realizing just how poisonous we can be in our relationships.

*Coveting* doesn't seem nearly as bad yet Paul says that when he realized his guilt in that sin, he also realized that that sin killed him **Romans 7:7**

*Yet you do not have* – is a stark and stunning statement of how utterly futile our efforts are to obtain the peace and happiness we crave apart from God.

*Because you do not ask* – is another startling statement displaying Who the true source is of everything we want and need.

It's the fulfillment and fullness of **Psalms 23:1**

We might state it as a virtual spiritual law: that God does not give unless we ask. If we possess little of God and His Kingdom, almost certainly we have asked little. "Remember this text: Jehovah says to his own Son, 'Ask of me and I will give thee the heaven for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that he may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?" (Spurgeon)

"If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it... Do you know, brothers, what great things are to be had for the asking? Have you ever thought of it? Does it not stimulate you to pray fervently? All heaven

lies before the grasp of the asking man; all the promises of God are rich and inexhaustible, and their fulfillment is to be had by prayer." (Spurgeon)

#### 4:3

Even at the point of our being humble enough to ask, we still have to battle the sin within because we will learn that we have pursued happiness through selfish means, so we understand that we should ask God. But we may still only be asking so that our selfish pleasures will be satisfied through Him. So, James says we ask and don't receive in these instances.

"When a man so prays, he asks God to be his servant, and gratify his desires; nay, worse than that, he wants God to join him in the service of his lusts. He will gratify his lusts, and God shall come and help him to do it. Such prayer is blasphemous, but a large quantity of it is offered, and it must be one of the most God-provoking things that heaven ever beholds." (Spurgeon)

**Spend** is the same verb used to describe the wasteful spending of the Prodigal Son in **Luke 15:14**. Destructive desires persist, even if we pray, because our prayers may be self-centered and self-indulgent.

#### 4:4

This asking out of personal, selfish ambitions seems to anger James. He sees that we have now broken the marriage covenant between us and Jesus, making us adulterers.

This means we have put our trust and understanding in the world and its ways rather than in Jesus and His ways.

Our marriage covenant with Jesus sounds something like **Ruth 1:16,17** and cf. **Romans 7:4**

#### 4:5

Following up on the charge of adultery, James here says that God's love for us is like that of a husband whose heart cannot bear that the heart of his beloved yearns for another. (Deuteronomy 32:16 and 32:21; Exodus 20:5 and 34:14; Zechariah 8:2).

#### 4:6

At last, we are presented with the antidote to our poisonous nature. But it is the very thing that is most contrary to our nature. The antidote is humility.

Humility crawls in on cat's paws and ultimately destroys the last remnant of selfishness that creates the wars and fights that ruin our lives. Sin is such a destructive fire, yet it cannot survive an onslaught of humility.

"Note that contrast; note it always. Observe how weak we are, how strong he is; how proud we are, how condescending he is; how erring we are, and how infallible he is; how changing we are, and how immutable he is; how provoking we are, and how forgiving he is. Observe how in us there is only ill, and how in him there is only good. Yet our ill but draws his goodness forth, and still he blesseth. Oh! What a rich contrast!" (Spurgeon)

“Sin seeks to enter, grace shuts the door; sin tries to get the mastery, but grace, which is stronger than sin, resists, and will not permit it. Sin gets us down at times, and puts its foot on our neck;

grace comes to the rescue... Sin comes up like Noah’s flood, but grace rides over the tops of the mountains like the ark.” (Spurgeon)

“Do you suffer from spiritual poverty? It is your own fault, for he giveth more grace. If you have not got it, it is not because it is not to be had, but because you have not gone for it.” (Spurgeon)

#### 4:7

Humility is a requirement for submission. Every time I counsel someone and use the word ‘submit’ or ‘submission’, I get the word ‘but’ back. We fight against this word when this word is the word of proper relationships in the world and a proper relationship to God.

James begins with a call to be humble before he commands submission.

Submission within its proper contexts are great exercises in humility. Humility is are best defense against wars and fights.

James also assures us that if we resist the devil, he will flee. This is because our resistance is based on our Christianity. And “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

It is a wonder that the world does not submit to God. “I have heard much of the rights of man: but it were well also to consider the rights of God, which are the first, highest, surest, and most solemn rights in the universe, and lie at the base of all other rights... Alas, great God, how art thou a stranger even in the world which thou hast thyself made! Thy creatures, who could not see if thou hadst not given them eyes, look everywhere except to thee. Creatures who could not think if thou hadst not given them minds, think of all things except thee; and beings who could not live if thou didst not keep them in being, forget thee utterly, or if they remember thine existence, and see thy power, are foolhardy enough to become thy foes!” (Spurgeon)  
 “If he were a tyrant, it might be courageous to resist, but since he is a Father, it is ungrateful to rebel.”

#### 4:8

Opposite of the Old Testament command to Moses to not draw any closer and to remove his shoes, here we are invited to draw near to God by the atoning blood of Jesus.

#### **Hebrews 4:14-16**

“Cleanse your hands, purify your heart” **Psalms 24:3,4**

#### 4:9

This is how the prophets of old would command repentance. The idea being that the laughter and joy came from sinful sources.

**4:10**

I love to picture the scene of the prayers of the tax collector compared to the Pharisee here.

**4:11,12**

"To speak evil" comes from the Greek 'katalalia' which describes the sin of those who gather in whispers to pass on private or harmful information about another to destroy their good name without the person there to defend themselves.

This breaks the royal law of doing unto others as we would have done for ourselves.

We are judging the law by putting ourselves in the position as Lawgiver, the only One who can rightfully do this, Who alone has the authority and power to save and destroy.

**4:13,14**

This is a rebuke for those who make plans apart from consulting God, when we are people who do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

Spurgeon said that there are 2 great certainties about things that will come to pass; 1- that God knows, and 2- that we don't.

See **Luke 12:16-21**

**4:15,16**

Paul was keenly aware of the arrogance of making plans apart from God:

**Acts 18:21; I Corinthians 4:19; 16:7**

**4:17**

Here, we are back to chapter 2 about good works always accompany true faith.

**Luke 12:41-48**