

Epistle of James

Chapter 4

Slow to wrath: resolving conflict in humility and in submission to God (4:1-10)

1. James calls believers to take personal responsibility for conflicts, especially in the church
2. The ultimate source of wars and fights are the sinful desires of each person in the battle.
3. Human lust and the unbridled pursuit of pleasure is the root cause of conflict.
 - a. *Hedonon* is craving pleasure in the flesh and seeking gratification for it
 - b. Humans seem to be constantly battling their own flesh with its desires and cravings.
 - c. This internal struggle for control and for gratification often spills out into the rest of the human relationships we have causing battles, fights, and wars.
4. As humans, we lust for many things, but we will never have all that we lust for. This is an indication that we are thinking incorrectly about pleasures and gratifications and need to turn to God in full dependance on His provisions for our lives.
5. Committing murder is sin, but even so, any satisfaction received would not resolve our covetous desires or fulfill all of our lustful cravings.
6. Fighting and waring, in any sense of the word, fail to produce true satisfaction for what our flesh desires.
7. Believers do not have victory over the flesh and all its cravings because we do not ask God in proper humility or in full submission to Him.
 - a. We often ask God for things that He will not give to us because doing so would harm us and damage our relationship with Him.
 - b. In reality, much of what we ask God to fulfill for us is requested for our own pleasures which would not be edifying to us. Thus, He does not give us what we ask for.
8. Adulterers and adulteresses!
 - a. It seems unlikely that James is charging everyone in his audience to have committed adultery in the flesh.
 - b. Rather, James is charging us, as believers, with committing adultery in our relationship with God.
 - c. Friendship with the world is equated to committing adultery and therefore puts us in enmity with God. We made God our enemies by befriending the world. God, however, did not make us His enemies; He remains unchanged in His offer of grace and mercy to those who will receive it.
 - d. All people have a critical choice to make: 1) being a friend of the world or 2) being submitted to God. This has always been the choice for humanity, and making the wrong choice has eternal consequences.
9. God is perfectly righteous in His uncompromising jealousy for us.
 - a. Believers receive the Holy Spirit upon confession of faith in Christ.
 - b. God, the Holy Spirit, dwells in us and yearns jealously for our full and undivided loyalty to Christ.
 - c. Even when we fail to hear and obey God as we should, He still offers us His perfect grace.

- d. Pride vs. humility
 - i. God resists the proud because He hates pride. The more we push God away in our pride, the more He resists us in all that we do.
 - ii. Fortunately, God gives abundant grace to the humble.
 - iii. If we are not receiving blessings from God, it is a good indication that we need to check on the condition of our humility before Him.
10. Submit to God.
- a. In all things, in all circumstance, and at all times: submit completely to God in love and complete trust in Him.
 - b. God resists the devil. Therefore, we must also resist the devil.
 - c. When we do resist our adversary in submission to God, he will flee from us.
11. Draw near to God.
- a. God will draw near to us as we draw near to Him. We must take this action for God was never responsible for drawing away from us in the first place.
 - b. Drawing near to God demands that we cleanse our sinful hands which have shed innocent blood.
 - c. We must seek to purify our hearts from any and all unbelief and let the fullness of Christ come in and cleanse our hearts in His holy blood.
 - d. In coming to God, we must repent of being double-minded and double-hearted. God will not permit us to come into His presence with our idolatrous and adulterous hearts.
 - e. We are called to lament, mourn and weep over how we have transgressed against God in the flesh, in our minds and in our hearts.
 - f. We must exchange our sinful enjoyment of the pleasures of the world for true mourning and gloom for our sinful actions.
 - g. These steps are all part of the process of showing our humility before the Lord.
 - h. We must trust in God enough to be humbled to the lowest point so that He can then lift us up. If we are holding back from Him whose things He wants us to give up, then He cannot lift us up.
 - i. We must never steal God's glory by seeking to exalt ourselves in His sight. Humility is the key to gaining victory in Christ and being lifted up by the Lord of the universe.

Slow to wrath: proper judgment of wrongdoing avoids the speaking of evil (4:11-12)

1. Believers have no right to speak evil of another brother in Christ.
 - a. Evil is equivalent to slander to or to falsely incriminate someone by our words.
 - b. Injuring a person's otherwise good name for our own personal gain is sin.
 - c. Speaking evil results in placing the one speaking into the status of being an unjust judge.
 - d. False accusations against the person not only damages the person, but also damages the law as it is used improperly to obtain some personal gain.
 - e. Speaking evil itself violates God's law, so the moment the person who does so speaks evil of another, he has put himself under the law's judgment. By so doing, the accuser becomes guilty of the very law he used to injure another believer.
 - f. Cherry-picking from the law makes us an immoral judge who has exempted himself from the law used to punish others.
2. There is only one true and just lawgiver – the Lord God.

- a. Because He is the Lawgiver and the Judge, God is able to save those who humbly come to Him and to destroy those who resist Him in their pride.
- b. Since God is the perfect Lawgiver and perfect judge, who are we to judge one another in our sinful pursuits of pleasure and self-gratification?
- c. Note that this does not mean that believers are not permitted to speak the truth in love or even to properly and righteously judge as we are commanded to do.
 - i. Eph. 4:15
 - ii. John 7:24
 - iii. 1 Cor. 5:12-6:6

Slow to wrath: boasting is arrogant and fails to honor God (4:13-17)

1. God has not called us to be self-sufficient or to simply forget Him until a “real” need arises.
 - a. It is foolish for any mortal and finite human being to claim to know what “tomorrow” will hold for us.
 - b. In all honesty, not one of us knows what will happen tomorrow (but God does).
 - c. Our mortal lives are nothing more than a vapor in comparison to the reality of God and eternity.
 - d. Seeing the big picture of human existence is that we merely appear for a very little time on the earth, and then our life vanishes away. There is a far bigger reality that we need to be concerned with beyond this vaporous life.
2. A believer’s response in all things ought to reveal our total dependence on God.
 - a. If the Lord wills we shall live and then do this or that as He allows.
 - b. Having the proper attitude towards reliance on God shows our humility and our submission to always allow Him to have authority over all we do in life.
3. All other responses are merely boasting out of arrogance.
 - a. Boasting is sin.
 - b. Knowing what to do (submitting to God), but then not doing it is sin.
4. Therefore, be swift to hear James’ admonition against self-reliance and then humbly and slowly speak words of truth that bring honor and glory to Him.