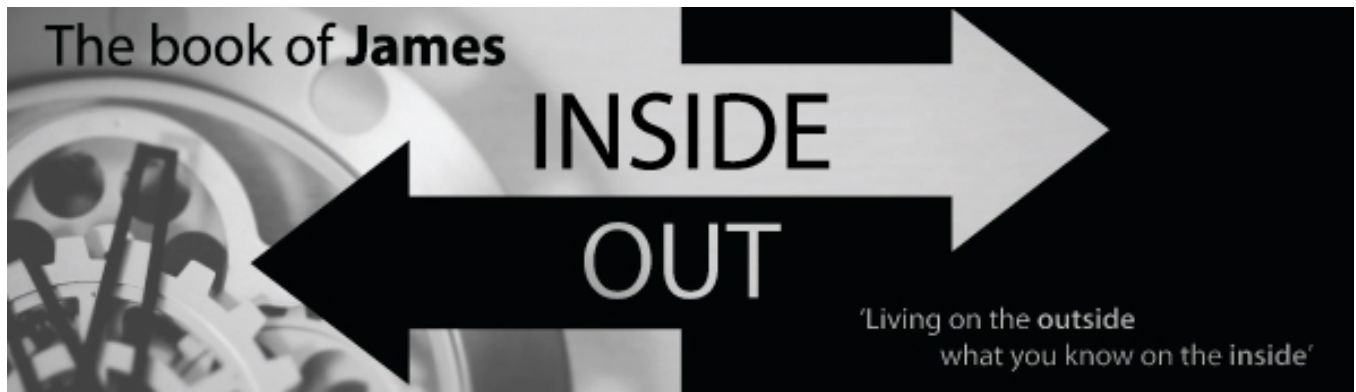


Inside Desires Outside Fights James 4:1-10



When older friend of mine came to visit last year he gave my 3 daughters some marriage advice. Which I thought was a bit premature because they were 10, 6 and 4.

Now when or if my daughters do get married I want to give them some advice about marriage. One of the things I will have to do is interrupt their romantic trance in order to prepare them for an inevitable reality of married life: **relational conflict**. We could do this by a careful examination of James 4.

But James 4 has application far beyond marriage! These truths apply to all Christians—regardless of age, gender, or marital status. That’s because we are all familiar with the harsh reality of relational conflict.

In fact, it is with great confidence that I can predict: you will face relational conflict in your future. Not only your distant future, but your immediate future. Whether between husbands and wives, parents and children, pastors and church members, employers and employees, teachers and students, friends, or relatives, conflict will occur. For as sinners living

Last week we saw that peace comes from godly wisdom. This week we see the result of earthly wisdom is relational conflict.

1. Fights from the inside

Read: 1-2

Serious relational conflict existed among these Christians. This is no flattering portrayal of the early church. Although they were genuinely converted, there was still relational hostility. Notice the plural in verse one: “quarrels”... “fights.” These were not occasional events, but common. It is a chronic condition that James is addressing here.

Where do fights come from? A battle that is going on inside of everyone of us. We want selfish gain. We want earthly pleasure.

We you are fighting don’t go looking for a source somewhere else. It is not your circumstances or even other people.

When you put us together fights result. Unholy anger between people is the same as murder.

Don’t minimise it to a personality clash. Or we just don’t get on. Two selfish people will dig their heels in and blame each other. James is saying that you will not resolve conflict until you correctly identify the source of it. If you blame the other person, you have not yet correctly identified the source. You must look within and see that your own selfishness is at fault. The main enemy isn’t the other person! The main enemy is your own sinful, selfish flesh. If you do not defeat it, it will destroy you!

James says (4:3), “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

That’s selfish praying! That’s trying to use God as Aladdin’s Genie, to pull Him off the shelf when you need Him, rub Him the right way, and then put Him back until the next time. As long as we live in these bodies we must do battle with sin.

Like lawn bowls we have a powerful inclination to sin.

Look into the eyes of God. He's speaking to you.

This is a summary of what he is saying:- "All our desires and passions are like an armed camp within us, ready at a moments notice to declare war against anyone who stands in the way of some personal gratification on which we have set our hearts."

"Cravings underlie conflicts" is an excellent summation of the wisdom found in James 4. Why do we fight? Because we don't get what we want. It's that simple.

2. Means friendship with the world

Read: 4-6

James goes from brothers to adulterers. Why?

We are married to God. This means that when we turn away from Christ and embrace the world, we are sinning against His great love that bought us out of the slave market of sin. You're the bride of Christ, and to engage in selfish conflict is to commit spiritual adultery. Face the seriousness of your sin! When we pursue stuff for our own pleasure rather than God we are cheating on the God of the universe. We are having an affair. This is summarised in v.4. James is saying we have intimacy with the world.

God is a Jealous God we are told in Exodus 34:14. As a husband I am jealous for the affections of my wife. And anyone who seeks to take her affection will be met with the greatest of opposition. In this same way the God who we are in a covenant relationship and anything that takes our affections from him will be met with divine opposition.

Can you imagine a couple that gets married, and a month later the husband tells his wife, "I'm going out tonight with my old girlfriend"? "I love you, but I want to keep in touch with her, too!" Needless to say, that marriage is in big trouble! When you get married, you vow to forsake all others and be devoted exclusively to your spouse.

In the same way, when you come to Christ as Savior and Lord, you say goodbye to the world. It used to be your companion and friend. You spent many hours running with it. But you can't bring it into your marriage to Jesus Christ. He tolerates no rivals. You are either friends with the world and an enemy of God, or friends with God and an enemy of the world. And how frightening to make yourself the *enemy* of the living God!

James is saying that we must give total allegiance to God. He is a righteously jealous Husband who tolerates no rivals. We cannot flirt with sin and follow Christ, too. We cannot live for self and yet make claim of being Christians. We cannot claim to be the bride of Christ and then run to the worldly "man next door" for comfort in our trials and counsel with our problems. James is saying that if we are having conflicts in our relationships, the place to begin is to turn from all spiritual adultery and be exclusively devoted to God. Living for self and seeking pleasure apart from God is to commit spiritual adultery.

3. Humble yourself

Read: 7-10

James wants us to have **Intimacy with God**. James hits a flurry of passionate pleas. This could be a summary of the whole letter. But these words in James are written primarily to believers. It is easy even for believers to drift away from the Lord. James' point is, "Guess who moved?" It wasn't God! If you're engaging in continuing quarrels and conflicts, you are *not* close to God. You've drifted. He is calling you to draw near to Him, with the promise that He is ready and waiting to draw near to you.

SUBMIT to God. Put yourself under his authority and do what he says.

It is like the heading. James uses a string of words to describe what that looks like.

Resist the devil. Stand against him. Oppose him by not giving into his temptations. His lies.

Come near to God. How? Repent. Heartfelt repentance.

We have lost the practise of mourning over sin. When was the last time you mourned over sin?

When you shed tears over sin. When you are truly repentant, you accept full responsibility for your sin. You don't excuse it as a shortcoming or oversight. You mourn over how you have offended God, disgraced His name, and hurt your brother or sister in Christ

There are three possible responses to sin. 1. Guilt. You feel bad and take no action. 2. You feel condemned and so hopeless. You think there is no way God accepts you. 3. You are convicted. You are convinced of sin. You recognise your for what it is. You own it. You confess it. Then you are drawn to the cross of Jesus to find forgiveness.

Humble yourselves. Do away with pride. Thinking you are god when you are not.

Sin is like chicken pox where you see the symptoms of an internal disease on the outside. You can try and cover the spots you get when you have chicken pox but it doesn't fix the problem that is in the blood. So we try and cover our sin but it doesn't fix the problem that is in the heart.

There is a way forward. There is hope for our problem of sin evident in relationship conflict. Look at the promise of **hope**. The **GRACE**. You see it in verses 6, 7, 8 and 10.

Don't sit passively and wait for resolution in a conflict to happen spontaneously. James gives ten active commands in machinegun fashion in these four verses: Submit to God! Resist the devil! Draw near to God! Cleanse your hands! Purify your heart! Grieve! Mourn! Weep! Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into gloom! Humble yourself! God's way to resolve conflicts is to submit to Him, resist the devil, and repent of all sin.

On the cross, the Son of God resolved the most serious conflict: the conflict between a holy God and wicked sinners. It has been settled, completely and forever, through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The ultimate relational conflict has been totally resolved. Our sin is worse than we think, but God's grace is greater than our sin.

Because that infinitely serious conflict with God has been resolved, there is hope for resolving every human relational conflict. When we have humbled ourselves before God through repentance, we are then equipped by grace to seek interpersonal resolution. With our sins against God forgiven, we can begin to find reconciliation with others.