

James

What Is and What Isn't Conflict

February 12, 2012

I. Introduction

A. **James 4:1-10** . . . What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? [2] You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. [4] You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? [6] But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [7] Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

B. We have been talking about the two sources of wisdom – the wisdom that comes from above and the wisdom that comes from below. As we look at this next section of James, I urge you to keep in mind that earthly wisdom promotes selfishness, and produces dissension which leads to damaged and broken relationships. Heavenly wisdom promotes love – love for God, love for others, love for what is right and good – and heavenly wisdom produces peace, which leads to healthy and harmonious relationships. I also urge you to keep in mind that the fruit of our lives reveals the source of our wisdom.

C. Today, I want to talk about Conflict – what it is and what it isn't. Then I want to talk about the necessity of keeping God in the supreme position of Lord, over our lives, if we want to deal with conflict in a godly manner.

D. Prayer

II. Peace and Conflict, Wisdom and Conflict, Pride and Conflict

A. A Closer Look At Conflict

1. What is conflict?

- a. At its most basic level, conflict is an active (ongoing) disagreement or dispute between people or groups of people with opposing opinions, values, or beliefs. It is rare that conflict at this basic level breaks a relationship, but it is likely it will do at least some damage to the relationship if the conflict continues unresolved.
- b. Beyond your basic conflicts, there are more serious conflicts that lead to such things as:
 - (1) adversarial arguing which pits you against each other and usually becomes derogatory,
 - (2) contention or verbal fighting,
 - (3) high degrees of frustration,
 - (4) exaggerated accusations,
 - (5) harsh criticism,
 - (6) bringing in reinforcements (*so and so agrees with me*),
 - (7) anger and abusive speech,
 - (8) denial, defensiveness, tears, and acting like a victim.
 - (9) This type of conflict not only results in damaged relationships, it easily leads to broken relationships.

2. What drives conflict?

- a. On the surface, conflict is driven by our methods, such as our patterns of either-or thinking, our argumentative and verbally unkind or even abusive patterns of speaking, our longing to flee any hint of anger and fighting, our willingness to quickly appease without considering the cost of what we have agreed to, and our competitive, "I've got to win" approach to conflict resolution.
- b. On the surface, conflict is driven by our wanting to be heard far more than we are willing to listen. It is driven by our differing views of reality and the resulting differing solutions. And it is driven by our tendency to bring in secondary issues instead of focusing on the conflict at hand.
 - (1) There is no question about a secondary issue needing to be dealt with, but bringing it into the current conflict resolution process only disrupts your focus and impedes the process.
 - (2) Suggestion: when secondary issues are raised, do not dismiss them outright, write them down and come back to them at another time. Finish the conflict at hand first.

- c. I suspect it is obvious to us all that these surface methods I've just describe work directly against conflict resolution by adding fuel to the fire rather than extinguishing the fire.
 - d. However, the methods we use when dealing with conflict come from some place, and that place is our heart. This means that even though our bad methods keep conflict alive, the driving force for the methods we use comes from deep within us.
 - e. So what is it that really drives ongoing, unresolved conflict? The things that are in our heart, such as selfishness, pride, impatience, the felt-need to control, a demand for respect, an unhealthy longing for acceptance and love, fear of rejection, trading justice for double-standards, discontentment, resentment, unkindness, unforgiveness, and self-rule – because we do not trust God enough to rest in His care and submit to His rule.
- 3. Let me sum up what I have been saying about conflict: Conflict is an active, ongoing dispute that is not being resolved in a mutually agreeable manner. Conflict is driven, first and foremost, by what is in our heart, and in a secondary way by our methods.
- 4. To help you discern your heart condition in any conflict:
 - a. Observe your methods and the fruit of your methods.
 - b. Ask yourself if you are purposefully working toward a mutually agreeable solution, or if you are working toward the solution you want.

B. A look at what conflict isn't?

- 1. My purpose for looking at what does not represent conflict is to help us discern when to use good conflict resolution methods and when to hold the line and stand for what is right and good. To help in defining what conflict isn't, I will lean heavily on God's word.
- 2. We are not in an average, ordinary active conflict with another person or group of people when the issue is of a moral nature, or life threatening nature, or when we are being threatened with physical violence, or are being asked to do something or approve of something that is contrary to God's commands, or of a nature which threatens the safety of the community, or something that threatens the purity of the Church – such as the overt practice of known sin.
- 3. We are not in conflict when we are being persecuted for righteousness sake – be our persecutors unbelievers or people from the religious community.

- a. I am bringing up persecution as something that is not a normal conflict because Jesus told his disciples: “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes” (**Matthew 10:23**).
- b. My point here is that persecution is not the kind of trouble that requires the usual methods of conflict resolution. In fact, God says you can flee from persecution, whereas you are to go to the one with whom you are in conflict and work out your differences.
- 4. To make the picture clearer regarding what conflict isn’t, I want us to look at some Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. And though these examples from the Bible may look somewhat like conflict, they are moral issues, physical violence issues, community good issues, and issues that threaten the purity of the Church. God’s standard solution in each of the following examples is to remove the evil from among you.
 - a. I do think it is important to notice that removing the evil is a community action, not a private action against the one who is doing wrong.
 - b. In the Old Testament, two or three witnesses were required to establish guilt in these kinds of cases before the God-prescribed penalty could be carried out. If there was only one witness, regardless of how dependable the testimony, the God-prescribed penalty was not to be carried out.
 - c. In the New Testament, Jesus taught us to begin with a private conversation when talking to someone who is openly and willfully living contrary to God’s Word (**Matthew 18:15-18**). Then if the offending party does not repent, we are to move to a larger, community based action.
- 5. Old Testament Scriptures:
 - a. **Deuteronomy 13:5** . . . Purge the evil of false prophecy and false teaching from among you.
 - b. **Deuteronomy 17:2-7** . . . Purge the evil of idol worship (which includes greed according to **Colossians 3:5**) from among you.
 - c. **Deuteronomy 17:9-12** . . . Purge the evil person who will not abide by the verdict of the Temple Priests who are acting as the Supreme Court in Israel.
 - d. **Deuteronomy 19:15-21** . . . Purge the evil of any witness who knowingly lies (falsely accuses) so as to gain a favorable verdict against their opponent.

- e. **Deuteronomy 21:18-21** . . . Purge the evil of a son who is willfully rebellious, stubbornly disobedient, unwilling to be disciplined, and undisciplined in his behavior.
 - f. **Deuteronomy 22:20-22** . . . Purge the evil of immorality from among you – whether committed by a male or a female.
 - g. **Deuteronomy 22:23-24** . . . Purge the evil of adultery from among you.
 - h. **Deuteronomy 24:7** . . . Purge the evil of kidnappers from among you.
6. New Testament Scriptures:
- a. **I Corinthians 5:9-13** . . . I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; [10] I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. [11] But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? [13] But those who are outside, God judges. **Remove the wicked man** from among yourselves.
 - b. **Romans 16:17** . . . Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and **turn away from** them.
 - c. **II Thessalonians 3:6** . . . Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **keep away from** every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.
 - d. **II Thessalonians 3:14-15** . . . If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and **do not associate with** him, so that he will be put to shame. [15] Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.
 - e. **Titus 3:10-11** . . . **Reject** a factious man after a first and second warning, [11] knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.
 - f. **II John 1:9-11** . . . Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. [10] If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, **do not receive**

him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; [11] for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

7. My point here is that there is a difference between ordinary conflicts and those situations that are to be dealt with in a that is more like a parent with a child or a judge with a criminal or the community with those who threaten the safety of the community. This is an important distinction, because in our study of **James 4:1-10**, we will be dealing with ordinary conflicts, not this second kind of trouble.

C. As I stated at the beginning, I want to finish our teaching today by looking at a the important issue of who and what is the priority in our lives, or who is the Lord in our lives, or what are the ruling factors when it comes to how we deal with conflict.

1. You can apply this information to every other area of your life – and I hope you do – but today, I am encouraging you to consider this information in relation to what is in your heart and how that directly determines the methods you use when dealing with conflict.

In Relation To Conflict, Who / What Rules Over Your Heart / Methods? <i>(This is not either/or, but who/what is on top)</i>	
God	Self (self-rule)
Righteousness	Flesh, World, Devil
Love	Selfishness
Heavenly Wisdom	Worldly Wisdom
What Are The Results?	
Making a sincere effort to work with rather than against, listen long enough to understand the other side, speak clearly and specifically, and seek a mutually agreeable solution. Telling the truth, but always with love and respect. Inviting rather than forcing or threatening. If stronger,	<p>Arguments, Quarreling, Attacking, Fighting, Hostility, Resort to controlling methods, Verbal abuse, Maybe even physical abuse.</p> <p>Quiet resistance, Trying to appease or in some other way end the discomfort of the resolution process without resolving the con-</p>

serve, if weaker, become fearless, because God is your security and the eternal is more valuable than the temporal.	flict, Feeling mostly innocent, or unjustly attacked, or unfairly condemned, Pull away emotionally, Live in denial,
Forgiveness, restoration, and peace if the conflict is resolved in a mutually agreeable way. Disappointment or sadness if not, while telling the truth about how this will effect the relationship, but always with love and respect.	Ongoing anger or hurt, Resentment, Unforgiveness, Bitterness, Feeling like a victim, Focusing on how unloved you are even though you also are failing to love as you ought, Withholding love or affection as punishment, Continuing to harass or nag.
Reconciliation, Healing of the damaged relationship. Restored trust and deeper love.	Damaged relationships, Emotional distance, Loss of trust and love, Broken relationships.

III. Conclusion

- A. **James 4:1** . . . What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?
Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?
- B. I trust that our considerations today will help us hear what God wants to say to each of us as we make our way through the next ten verses of James 4.