

James

What Is and What Isn't Conflict

February 18, 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. Last Sunday we looked at what conflict is and what it isn't. We then finished with a look at why it is so vital – in relation to conflict – to keep God as the Lord over all you think, do, and say, and to trust Him to be your provider and your protector.
- C. Prayer

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

- 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?
1. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts?
 - a. The first and most important answer to this question is me. Yet most of us look at our opponent in the conflict as the source. After all, they are the one who is acting unkind or uncooperative or unfair or selfish or in some other way making our life difficult. And if they would just stop, there would be no conflict. So isn't it logical that they are the source of the conflict?
 - b. In spite of our logic, God says that if we want to discern the source of a conflict, the first place we are to look is at ourselves.

- c. Now if God says the first place to look is within, why is it so common for us to blame someone other than ourselves as the source of our conflicts? Because:
 - (1) We are self-centered.
 - (2) We are self-deceived – so much so that when we are blaming, we believe what we are saying to be an accurate description of reality.
 - (3) We are full of pride in that we think we are more righteous or godly or good or well-meaning than we really are.
 - (4) We are dishonest with God about ourselves – especially when we are wondering why He isn't fixing the person we are convinced is causing of the conflict. Yet we give no thought to the probability that we need fixing too.
 - (5) And finally, blaming is so common because if the other person is at fault, our solution to the conflict becomes the only sensible and reasonable solution. And who doesn't like getting their own way?
- d. However, when conflict arises, the wise among us will look within first, to see how they are contributing to the conflict.
- 2. The next thing God says is that the source of conflict is our pleasures that wage war in our members. What does He mean? The first part of the answer lies in the word **pleasures**, and the word **pleasures** refers to what we gain from sinning.
 - a. For example, the alcoholic's or drug addict's pleasure might be the buzz or the drug induced courage or the drug-numbing escape from something they believe is too painful to bear.
 - b. The narcissist or prideful person's pleasure could be a publicly affirmed sense of importance, or a sense of superiority.
 - c. The pleasure sought by the one who serves money may be a strong sense of financial security, both for the moment and on into the future. But their pleasure also may be in accumulating coveted earthly possessions and privileges, or some level of fame.
 - d. The angry or jealous person's pleasure might be gaining control of a particular situation or a particular relationship in order to obtain, regain, or maintain something he wants.
 - e. The immoral person's pleasure is the raw ecstasy or the comfort of belonging or the escape from reality or a perpetually heightened sense of sensuality which comes from their immoral activities.
 - f. The insecure person's pleasure is feeling safe in as many situations and relationships as possible.

3. Though we could add many other examples to this list, such as aggressive driving, hoarding, laziness, tardiness, perfectionism, workaholism, stubbornness, and irrational fears, it is probable you beginning to see what God means when He says the source of conflict is our pleasures – that is, what we gain from wanting our own way.
4. God goes on to say that our pleasures **wage war** in our members. In other words, it is not our pleasures alone that drive conflict, it is their war like efforts in seeking fulfillment that drives conflict. And if they went to war once a year or once a decade, conflicts would be rare. But if you are like me, your pleasures are waging war for fulfillment on a “**too often**” basis. For example:
 - a. How often does the alcoholic’s pain scream for attention so that he feels he must numb himself with alcohol?
 - b. How often does the narcissist or prideful person need to feel important or superior to others?
 - c. How much more money does the insecure person need in order to feel financially secure?
 - d. How much more immorality does the immoral person need to commit to feel like his needs have been satisfied?
 - e. How much more hoarding does the hoarder have to do to feel like he has have enough?
 - f. Or how many things have to be perfect for the perfectionist to be happy?
5. Are you getting the picture? Our pleasures cry out for gratification, and after we gratify them they are pleased for a moment or a day, and then they start crying out again. In other words, our pleasures are never satisfied today with yesterdays gratification. They are like hungry teenagers who are constantly looking for something to eat. And this is what God means when He says our pleasures wage war in our members.
6. Now let me summarize what God is saying here. When our pleasures cry out for gratification and someone stands in the way, we begin to fight for what we want. And just this easily we are doing our part in starting or perpetuating conflict – which is why God says to look within first to find the source of any particular conflict.

B. **James 4:2a** . . . You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

1. **You lust and do not have**; so you commit murder.

- a. The word lust here refers to a strong desire whose sense of need for gratification is so strong that it wars against what we know is right and good in order to win the gratification it longs for.
 - b. However, the point God is making here is that our war waging lust loses the battle so that it continues to be unfulfilled, and maybe even unfulfilled, again.
 - c. It is this unsatisfied longing that drives us to do ungodly things in our quest for gratification. And so God says . . .
2. You lust and do not have, **so you commit murder**. But how do we commit murder through our involvement in conflict?
3. Let's look at **Matthew 5:21-22** . . . You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (*As we look at the specifics of these verses, observe the progression of pride.*)
 - a. **Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court** –
 - (1) To be angry with someone in an ungodly way is to be angry in a way that is the opposite of God's anger. Therefore, it is NOT the kind of anger that is free of sin.
 - (a) God's anger is righteous, just, fair, and impartial. Our ungodly anger is unrighteous, unjust, unfair, and partial.
 - (b) Godly anger is a response to someone failing to look out for the good of others. Ungodly anger is my response to someone failing to look out for what I think is good for me.
 - (2) When we have ungodly anger toward someone, it shows we have condemned them as guilty already. The most common response following condemnation is deciding they are untrustworthy. Since they are untrustworthy, we go on to conclude they are unworthy of a meaningful and mutually shared relationship with us. Therefore, we diminish contact with them by pushing them away or pulling away from them.
 - (3) One final note here – being angry with the other party in a conflict is bad for it is an indication we have set ourselves up as judge and jury. However, this kind of anger is not as bad as the next two infractions.

b. Whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court.

- (a) When we get to the place of seeing the person in the conflict as “good-for-nothing,” we have arrived at the place where we consider ourselves superior to them in relation to doing what is right and wrong. Of course, this means we see them as significantly inferior to us when it comes to doing what is right and wrong. And since we believe them to be inferior, we feel justified in despising them, scorning them, and treating them with contempt.
- (b) Though we may not think of this while we are treating our opponent in a conflict with contempt, I suspect most of us know that treating others with contempt does not promote a good relationship with them. The truth is, a contemptuous attitude and behavior not only pushes the one we are scorning away from us, it turns us against them as if they are our enemy. And it leads us to conclude they are someone to be avoided as much as possible.
- (c) Once again, ungodly anger is bad. Treating someone with contempt is worse, but the next infraction is the ultimate evil when it comes to relationship murder.

(2) Whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- (a) When we go so far as to label someone a fool – according to its historical definition – we are deciding the person is so worthless that they are unredeemable. Of course, once a person is unredeemable, there is no logical reason to have any relationship with them whatsoever.
- (b) When we get to the place of not wanting any relationship whatsoever with someone, we have crossed a line with God that makes us so obviously guilty, we are to be sent straight to hell.
- (c) Consider: God set the example for us when it comes to the value we are to place on relationships. While we were still rebelling against Him, He gave His own son in order to offer us forgiveness of sin, reconciliation to Himself, and a restored, meaningful, everlasting relationship with Him. And if He is our God, and this is His way with us, ought it not be our way with each other?

4. So what is the point of **James 4:2** coupled with these words of Christ here in **Matthew 5:21-22**?
 - a. First of all, conflict that is driven by our unsatisfied pleasures most often leads to relationship murder between us and those who stand in our way of gratification.
 - b. Second, the essence of murder is creating distance between you and another person, on purpose, for prideful and selfish reasons. Therefore, just as taking a person's life is murder in God's eyes, so pushing others away, or moving away so as to have little or nothing to do with them anymore, is murder in God's eyes.
- C. Because we live in an imperfect world with imperfect people, the ideal is not always attainable when dealing with others. Therefore, I want to acknowledge that we may not be able to resolve a conflict, which means we may not be able to regain a safe or sane relationship with someone.
 1. However, any decision for distance in a relationship should be made by the other person, not us. If we enforce distance, it ought to be because they have made it clear they do not want a mutually meaningful, safe relationship, not because we don't want relationship with them.
 2. For me, Jesus' story of the prodigal son brings clarity to what I am saying to you now.
 - a. The son did not tell his father he no longer wanted a mutually meaningful, safe relationship with him. But the son's behavior made it clear that there was going to be separation and distance between him and his father.
 - b. Once the son made it clear what he wanted, the father did not pursue him or beg him to come home. Instead, the father accepted his son's decision, and waited at home for his son to change his mind.
 - c. Now it may happen that the one with whom we have a conflict will not go away, yet continues to say by his behavior that he does not want a mutually meaningful, safe relationship. What are we to do?
 - (1) We become the one who has to enforce the distance, but not because we want it that way.
 - (2) And should the other party change their ways, we should be quick to open our arms and heart to restoring the relationship just as the father of the prodigal was when his son came home, repentant and humble.

- d. To help us understand how the father's love shown through, and what the son's repentance and humility looked like, let me read a few verses from the story of the prodigal son. **Luke 15:17-19** . . . But when [the son] came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! [18]'I will get up and **go to my father**, and will say to him, "Father, **I have sinned** against heaven, and in your sight; [19] **I am no longer worthy** to be called your son; **make me as one of your hired men.**"
- D. Not to short change the last phrase in **James 4:2a**, but the reality is, we have covered most of what I would want to say anyway. So I will read what God says and make just a few comments about it.
 - 1. **You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.**
 - a. To be envious is to have a strong desire for what someone else has and you do not have. And because you do not have sufficient power or position to simply obtain what you want, you resort to common earthly power tactics in an effort to get what you want: you fight and quarrel.
 - b. Being envious does not meant your opponent in conflict has what you want – though he may. However, being envious can mean he would be able to get it for you but won't, or he is standing in the way of you getting it for yourself. Typically, the longer your envy goes unfulfilled, the more you will resort to stronger and stronger tactics in order to overpower the other person and obtain what you want.
 - 2. Notice that here again, it is the failure to get what you want that keeps a conflict alive. It is the failure to get what you want that keeps you as a significant part of the source of the conflict. And it is the failure to get what you want that pushes you to increase your power tactics to satisfy your perceived need.

III. Conclusion

- A. What is the source of conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your member? You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel.
- B. Oh that we would treasure God, godliness, and relationships above the gratification of our pleasures and the fulfillment of our envious wants.