

9.

Faith@Work.kindness

Are your relationships surrendered to God?

Dr. Jim Denison

James 4:1-12

Verse 1. From where wars and fights among you? Do they not come from this, from your lusts warring in your members?

Wars pictures the chronic state or campaign of war; *fights* points to the separate conflicts or battles of the war (Rienecker 390; Robertson 49). In later Greek, "fightings" would be used of philosophical contests and disputes about words, but that is not the context here (Adamson 166). James is dealing more generally with divisions within the church caused by personal desires and ambitions.

Among you shows that these problems exist within the Christian communities to whom James writes. Conflicts within churches are nothing new, and their causes are always the same. *Lusts* translates *hedone*, "pleasure" or "desire." Here it means the "desire for pleasure" which leads to conflict with others (Johnson 276).

Warring means to carry on offensives or campaigns; Peter warns us "to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). *Members* means the place where the passions reside. Here he speaks of our bodies, not church "members."

Verse 2. You desire, and do not have; you murder and are jealous, and are not able to obtain.; you fight and you war, and you do not have because you do not ask.

You desire and do not have is the cause of war--wanting what someone else has, and coveting it enough to fight them for it. *You murder* may be a reference to spiritual "murder" which results from hate and anger (cf. Matthew 5:21-22). Adamson (168) follows Erasmus and others in emending the text to "you are envious" (*phoneuete* to *phthoneite*); Burdick (193) renders the phrase, "you hate and covet." Martin (144), on the other hand, takes the text literally, citing former Zealots among the church's membership.

Verse 3. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, that on your lusts you may spend.

You ask and do not receive may refer generally to prayer, but in this context it may also have a more specific referent: you ask for the privilege of being teachers (3:1) but do not receive it (Moo 184). James explains why: because they want to teach in order to promote themselves.

You ask wrongly means to ask for ourselves, which is "evil" (Robertson 50) or "corrupt" (Adamson 169). *You may spend* expresses the purpose for the asking and indicates its cause or reason (Rienecker 390). The phrase means to squander; cf. the prodigal son who "spent everything" in the far country (Luke 15:14).

Verse 4. Adulterous people, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever then, purposes to be a friend of the world, is shown to be an enemy of God.

Adulterous people was a common OT motif for those who are unfaithful to their vows to God; in this sense, by committing an "affair" with the world (Rienecker 390; Johnson 278). Paul "promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Corinthians 11:2), and called believers the "bride of Christ" (Ephesians 5:23).

Do you know as a question is more probably rendered, "you know." But there is no proverb in the Greco-Roman moral literature like this. Perhaps he has in mind the sentiment behind 1 John 2:15, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (Johnson 278-9).

Friendship here means to love the world and to be loved by it (Rienecker 390). *Purposes* means to will, to choose or desire, to choose one thing before another (Rienecker 390).

Verse 5. Or do you think that vainly the Scripture says, The spirit which has dwelt in us yearns to envy?

The Scripture says is a formula for quoting the OT, though no specific passage reads precisely like this. It may be a "poetical reading" of Exodus 20:5, or a preface to the quote from Proverbs 3:34 in verse 6 (Robertson 51; Adamson discusses the numerous options, 170-2).

The spirit which has dwelt in us refers to the "sinful propensities of the spirit implanted in man" (Adamson 172). *Yearns to envy* relates to coveting, forbidden in the tenth commandment (Ex 20:17). Here James refers to the lustful ambitions of vs. 1-3. God is jealous for us as an expression of his love for us (Exodus 34:14; Zechariah 8:2; Psalm 42:1; 84:2; cf. Martin 149), but our "jealousy" is ungodly and is for ourselves.

Verse 6. But he gives greater grace, therefore it says, God sets against proud ones, but he gives grace to humble ones.

Proud or haughty, sometimes used of the arrogant rich (Rienecker 391). We must forsake pride to receive God's grace (Matthew 18:4, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"; 23:12, "whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted"; 1 Peter 5:5 (quoting Proverbs 3:34), "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"; Martin 152).

He gives grace is in the present tense, a continual commitment on God's part. Augustine said, "God gives what he demands" (in Moo 191). When he requires humility, he gives us the grace to be humble if we will but seek and receive it.

Verse 7. Be subject, therefore, to God; oppose the devil, and he will flee from you.

Oppose is an imperative call to urgent action (Rienecker 391), better translated "as you oppose the devil . . ." (Martin 152).

He will flee from you, showing James' confidence that the devil can be resisted successfully. Peter likewise encourages us to "Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:9); Paul assures us that if we "put on the full armor of God," then "when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). Moo (193) is right: "Whatever power Satan may have, the Christian can be absolutely certain that he has been given the ability to overcome that power."

Verse 8. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse hands, sinners, and purify hearts, two-souled ones.

Draw near to God, as priests draw near to him in the sanctuary (Exodus 19:22; Robertson 52). Before Christ, none could obey this directive. At Sinai, the people were told not to "approach" God (Exodus 19:21), for only the priests (Exodus 19:22) and Moses (Ex 24:2) were permitted in his presence (Johnson 284). The context includes worship, but is probably more personal in nature, as God responds in kind: *he will draw near to you*. Such divine intimacy is the result of resisting the devil; the negative leads to the positive.

Cleanse hands shows us how to resist the devil. James has in mind a ritualistic or religious sense (Exodus 30:19-21; Mark 7:3, 19; Robertson 52), symbolizing our deeds (Adamson 174-5); *hearts* symbolize our thoughts, attitudes, motives. *Sinners* are nonetheless allowed and even invited to "draw near to God," by his grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Two-souled ones recalls the "double-minded man" of 1:8, "unstable in all he does."

Verse 9. Be distressed and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned to mourning, and the joy to shame.

Be distressed means to feel miserable or afflicted, referring to the inner attitude of repentance (Rienecker 391; Robertson 53). This is how we "cleanse our hands" before God.

Mourn points to grief which cannot be hidden (Rienecker 391), the kind of repentance and remorse for sin which leads to transformation: "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10). *Laughter* in this context means "the laughter of a fool who rejects God as the One who determines reality and

believes man to be an autonomous being" (Rienecker 391). *Shame* is dejection, downcast, dismay, the condition of one with eyes cast down like the publican (Luke 17:13; Rienecker 391).

Verse 10. Be humbled before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Humbled is reflexive, "humble yourself." *Before the Lord* indicates both the cause and location of our humility--we are not humbled unless we compare ourselves with our perfect Father (Matthew 5:48); we are to be humbled *before* him, in his presence, offering our humility and repentance to him in contrition. Otherwise he must humble us (Hosea 5:5; 7:10; 14:9; Isaiah 2:11; 3:17; 5:15; 10:33; 13:11; 25:11; Lamatians 1:5; Ezekiel 17:24; 21:31; Johnson 286).

He will exalt you is a promise that God will act so in the future. Peter offers the same assurance: "Humble yourselves, then, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

Verse 11. Do not speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother, and judges his brother, speaks against law, and judges law. But if you judge law, you are not a doer of law, but a judge.

Do not could be translated, "Stop speaking...." James returns for the third time to the subject of the tongue (1:26; 3:1-12).

Speak against is to defame or slander (Johnson 293), usually applied to harsh words about a person who is absent (Rienecker 392; Burdick 196). The Bible consistently condemns such behavior:

- "Do not go about spreading slander among your people" (Leviticus 19:16).
- "You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son. These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face" (Psalm 50:19-21).
- "Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence" (Psalm 101:5).
- "A fool's mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts" (Proverbs 18:7-8).

Verse 12. One is the Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; who are you who judges the other?

Able to save and to destroy shows that these responsibilities belong to God alone:

- "I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39).
- "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6).

- "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).
- "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Hebrews 5:7).

Theological applications

A biblical 12-step program for handling lust:

Expect to be tempted: "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Romans 13:12-14).

- In this fallen world, expect sexual temptation to be hard and constant.
- Sex sells; thus it is everywhere. Purity is a daily battle.
- In fact, the longer you resist, the harder it will become, because Satan will become more subtle, and you'll become proud of your purity.

Know what lust is not;

- Lust is not the desire to sexual intimacy with your wife. This God-given desire is good and godly; the Lord knows that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18), so he made the woman. Now the man is to "be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24); we are told to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28). In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve "were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25).
- Lust is not a momentary physical attraction to a woman. It is not the first look, but the second. It is turning the feeling into a thought and then an action.

Know what lust is:

- "Lust" (*hedone*) is desire for pleasure which contradicts the word and will of God. Oswald Chambers describes lust this way: "I must have it at once,' whether it be the lust of the flesh or the lust of the mind" (March 14 reading).
- Immoral thoughts: "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).
- Sexual relationship with someone other than your spouse: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).
- Any sexual encounter or experience outside marriage: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Understand why it is wrong:

- Your sin will trap you: "You may be sure that your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).
- The sin will only get worse: "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).
 - Think out the conclusions of this thought or temptation: adultery, divorce, shame, children damaged severely. This is where Satan is taking you. He wants to destroy you, not fulfill you!
 - He's like the drug dealer who gives you the first one free, to get you addicted, knowing the result before you do.
- You will suffer: "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished" (Proverbs 6:25-29).
- You will be destroyed: "Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death" (Proverbs. 7:27); "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (Ja 1:14-15).
 - Others will know: "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known" (Luke 12:2). Know that there is no such thing as "secret sin."
- God will judge your sin: "The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him" (Proverbs 15:26); "Knowing their evil thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?'" (Mt 9:4).

Stay close to God:

- "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12.2).
- "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Galatians 5:16-17).
 - The closer we are to God, the harder it is for Satan to distract us from him
 - Richard Dobbins is founder of "Emerge Ministries," working with pastors who have fallen into sexual sin. He states that every single one of these pastors has one thing in common. In the days, weeks, and months leading up to their moral failure, not one of them had maintained a consistent time of daily devotions.
 - The days I miss a deep encounter with God are always the days I'm more tempted, and more likely to listen to temptation

Exercise self-discipline: "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9.27).

Avoid tempting situations:

- "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).
- "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. . . . but now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat" (1 Corinthians 5:9, 11).
- "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).
 - You can't drown if you don't get into the water
 - If your head is made of butter, don't sit near the fire (Luther).

Pray about the temptation immediately:

- "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16).
- "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- Oswald Chambers: "There is no power in the human soul of itself to break the bondage of a disposition formed by yielding. Yield for one second to anything in the nature of lust . . . and though you may hate yourself for having yielded, you are a bondsman to that thing. There is no release in human power at all but only in the Redemption. You must yield yourself in utter humiliation to the only One Who can break the dominating power viz., the Lord Jesus Christ. . . ."

"You find this out in the most ridiculously small ways--'Oh, I can give that habit up when I like.' You cannot, you will find that the habit absolutely dominates you because you yielded to it willingly. It is easy to sing--'He will break every fetter"--and at the same time living a life of obvious slavery to yourself. Yielding to Jesus will break every form of slavery in any human life" (March 14 reading).

- The most effective thing we can do against sexual temptation is to take it to God immediately
- This is especially true if this is a habitual problem. Admit to God that you don't have the strength to defeat this sin, and ask for his help NOW.
- God only allows those temptations he will enable us to defeat. Thus, if I'm being tempted by this, I can know immediately that I can defeat it, with his help.
- But Satan also knows which temptations I cannot defeat on my own; he'll always bring these against me.

- Every time I'm tempted: I cannot defeat this myself, or Satan wouldn't bring it against me; I can defeat this with God's help, or he wouldn't allow it.

Do whatever it takes to refuse now:

- "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:29).
- "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming" (Colossians 3:5-6).
- "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).
- "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 1:11-12).

Ask others to help you: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5.16).

- Accountability relationships are crucial in this area of life.
- Share problems with each other, so you each "have something" on the other; then trust is easier to develop.
- But don't share that which would embarrass your wife, or cause her to wonder what you're saying about her.

Confess sin immediately:

- To God: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).
- To someone we trust: "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

It's easier to sin sexually after we already have; so stop the cycle now.

Refuse guilt after confessing sin: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And *that is what some of you were*. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

It's easier to continue to sin if we think we've already blown it; so claim God's grace now.

Conclusion

"Sin will always take you further than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay."

What is your next step to freedom today?