

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

James 4,

I am going to start off this morning with a history lesson -

In 1969, El Salvador and Honduras went to war.

Even though the war only lasted a few days, over 3,000 people died and 300,000 Salvadorians living in Honduras were displaced from their homes – meaning that they were forced to return to return to El Salvador.

This influx of people eventually led to the long civil war that plagued El Salvador during the 70 and 80's.

Now, this short war is most commonly known as the “soccer war” because the two nations went into war a few days after their national soccer teams had battled each other on the soccer field in an effort to qualify for the World Cup.

What a dumb reason to go to war right???

The soccer game wasn't the real reason that they went to war – the soccer game was simply one of the circumstances that contributed to that war between the two countries.

Because **even before** the two nations battled on the soccer field, there were already underlying factors between the two nations that were the real reason that they went to war.

This is the lesson that James will provide for us this morning.

As believers, we find ourselves in our own “soccer war” or “soccer wars”, and we tend to focus on the circumstance(s) that resulted in the conflict that we are battling.

James is going to say, it is not because of that circumstance that you find yourself in that dumb war – the real reason goes much deeper than that.

Let's pray...

[Psa 133:1-3 NKJV] 1 A Song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant [it is] For brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 [It is] like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. 3 [It is] like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing--Life forevermore.

In this short Psalm, David exhorts God's people to live in unity.

This unity is not exclusive to the Jews; the church is called to live in unity as well.

John 17:20-23 and Ephesians 1:9-10 speak about unity.

Paul says that we are united in Christ

And when we walk in unity, it makes our walk more pleasant.

God pours out His blessings when we are united.

Now the opposite of unity - is conflict –

It has been said that wherever people congregate, there will certainly be conflict.

If I pose the question – ok where do you want to go to eat or what movie we should go see – the result will be some type of conflict.

We encounter conflict at work, in our homes, in our schools and even in our churches.

There is no such thing as a perfect church –

Every epistle that we have in the New Testament addresses some type of conflict within the church.

Prior to James, we were in Paul's epistle to the Galatians. And in it, Paul addresses the conflict within the church that was coming from the Judaizers.

In his epistle to the church in Philippi, Paul addresses the conflict that was occurring between two women in the church.

To the church in Ephesus, Paul had to admonish the Ephesians to cultivate spiritual unity (Eph 4)

And here in chapter four, James addresses conflict within the early church in Jerusalem.

[Jas 4:1-17 NKJV] 1 Where do wars and fights [come] from among you? Do [they] not [come] from your [desires for] pleasure that war in your members?

James uses several Greek words to describe the conflict that was occurring in the early church.

The word for war “polemos” describes the bigger picture, the overall war that is being fought.

We must recognize that some of the conflicts we experience in life are long term and ongoing.

This could be a conflict that we have inside of us (addiction, bitterness, hatred) or it could be an external struggle (a difficult relationship with someone we fight with).

The word for fights, describes the smaller battles that occur within the wars.

These are the individual skirmishes that occur.

Internally, this would be our daily battle with the flesh – with temptation.

I also asked you to make a note of the word war at the end of verse 1.

The word is a military term – it speaks of leading soldiers into battle – you might write in the word strategize next to the word.

So what James is saying is –

that the root cause for our conflicts is our own selfish desires (desires for sinful pleasures) strategizing against one another.

When there is conflict in the church, usually what happens is that one person will be upset at another person and one of them will start to gossip about the other person and start bringing in other church members on their side to go against the other person.

They are strategizing to fulfill their own selfish desires.

That is sin church.

I was recently informed of a church in North Phoenix where some church members had been building a coalition for some time in an effort to try to get the senior Pastor out of there – ultimately dividing the church.

2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

In the book of 2 Samuel 11 – we have the events behind David and Bathsheba.

David lusted after Bathsheba and he entertained his desires and committed adultery.

Did it bring conflict? Of course it did. He had to cover up his sin and had Uriah killed.

It also resulted in more conflict down the road for David.

However, the word lust isn't limited to sexual sin.

We can lust after possessions.

We can lust after position or power.

Turn with me to 3 John 1,

Here, the Apostle John had to deal with another instance of conflict within the church, **[3Jo 1:9-10 NKJV] 9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. (the NLT [3Jo 1:9 NLT] 9 I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us.)10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting [them] out of the church.**

Why wouldn't Diotrephes receive John??? Pride

He lusted after the power, he wanted the power and he saw John as a threat to his power.

He didn't want to lose it.

So he started to talk about John and started to slander John.

He started to strategize to fulfill his own selfish desires and bring conflict within the church.

I asked you to make a note of murder and covet –

James is not implying that those in the early church were murdering one another.

"Murder" is what Jesus said we do if we harbor anger and hatred in our hearts.

To covet is wanting something someone else has.

It could be a possession that someone else has, it could be a position that someone else has or it could even be the relationship that someone else has -

And all three of these (lust, murder, coveting) bring about conflict.

The other thing that they produced is an unsatisfied life.

You will always need to lust, murder, and covet more if you yield to the flesh.

You will always be at war with others, fighting.

This is why James says – you do not have and you cannot obtain.

Look at the end of verse two again.

Yet you do not have because you do not ask

Instead of yielding to the flesh, we ought to seek the things that are spiritual; we ought to seek the things that promote spiritual health and growth.

And the way that we seek these things is by asking – through prayer.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend [it] on your pleasures.

We need to take our desires before the Lord in prayer.

We need to remember that prayer is not about changing God's or getting Him to give us what we want – but instead, it is to align our will with His.

And through prayer, we will be able to discern whether or not our desires are in accordance to God's will.

Sometimes we may have good desires but it may be that it's not what God wants at that time.

Now, there will be some who will say to James –

I tried praying and God didn't answer my prayers - .

James says that maybe we prayed for it wrongly.

Sometimes we pray for things in the wrong way, with the wrong motives.

Let me explain,

We can pray for a job promotion and constantly be turned down because the reason that we want the job promotion is so that we can take a nice vacation every year or purchase a new car.

When we pray like this, we are praying that God may satisfy our own fleshly desires by answering our prayers.

We can pray that a loved one or a good friend may come to know the Lord – but our motivation behind it could be wrong – maybe we just want someone else to hang out with at church. Someone to have lunch with after church on Sundays.

Right prayer – wrong motive.

You see, sometimes we don't need to change what we are asking for; we just need to change the motives behind our asking.

Turn with me to Psalm 139 -

[Psa 139:23-24 NKJV] 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if [there is any] wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

Not only are we to ask God to search us – to determine whether or not our motives are pure, but we invite Him to test us – to correct us if we have anything but pure motives.

I also asked you to make a note of the word – **spend**.

I find it interesting that this is the same word that is used in the gospel of Luke as it refers to the prodigal son squandering (spend) the inheritance that he demanded of his father.

So God doesn't answer our prayers with wrong motives sometimes because He knows that we are going to squander them.

4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Here in verse 4, James is referring to those who instead of going before God with their desires, they turn to the world – hoping that the world will satisfy their desires.

These are the adulterers and adulteresses.

In the Old Testament, God the Father depicts Himself as a Husband to Israel.

Turn with me to Jeremiah 3

[Jer 3:6-9 NKJV] 6 The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. 7 "And I said, after she had done all these [things], 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given

her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. 9 "So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. In the New Testament, the church is called the bride of Jesus Christ.

The Children of Israel were to place their trust in God.

However, they played the harlot and committed adultery by worshipping the pagan gods of the nations around them.

They worshipped Baal and Molech –

Those in the church who look to the world – they are committing spiritual adultery as they pursue “friendship with world”

And by friendship with the world, James is referring to those who live their lives focused on the material things that the world has to offer – instead of the spiritual realm.

Turn with me to Genesis 13,

[Gen 13:8-13 NKJV] 8 So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we [are] brethren. 9 "[Is] not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If [you take] the left, then I will go to the right; or, if [you go] to the right, then I will go to the left." 10 And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it

[was] well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. 11 Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched [his] tent even as far as Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom [were] exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.

In the event that we just read, who was focused on the material things that the world has to offer? **Lot**

Lot chose the land looking to satisfy his fleshly desires – the land was flat, a lot of water.

It was green.

It was perfect for his herds.

He was looking at the dollar signs.

And notice that he selected that land even though he was well aware that the men that resided in Sodom were wicked.

Abram however, was happy with whatever land he was going to receive – that is why he allows Lot to choose.

He didn't care that he was going to get stuck with the hilly land or the desert land.

You see, Abram, trusted the promises of God – therefore he trusted that whatever land he got – it was going to be God's will.

And in doing so – he avoided conflict.

Abram's focus was on the spiritual realm and not on what the world has to offer.

Many times we fail to avoid conflict because we have the mindset of Lot –

This person wronged me or this person cheated me out of this.

And we allow bitterness to build up and in doing so – we never mature because we keep on looking at the green plain – instead of putting our trust in the Lord.

5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

In the Old Testament, the Children of Israel were constantly reminded that God is a jealous God.

When we recognize someone to be jealous, we tend to think of someone who is unable to have something or someone that someone else has.

One could be jealous because that person has a better house or car.

However, the jealousy that God shows is one of sadness knowing that He alone meets our needs, yet we turn to the world instead.

He yearns for us to yield to Him, so that He can lead us, and guide us, and gift us, and empower us.

He sees us as Jesus sees us - as completed, as perfect.

He is focused on changing us, on conforming us into the image of Jesus, on helping us fulfill Jesus' plan for our life.

He yearns to protect us, too.

He knows the consequences of walking with the world as it only leads to destruction and ruin.

As long as we are here on earth, God wants that relationship to be exclusive – we hinder our relationship when we yield to the flesh.

6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

I had made a reference to the story of the prodigal son earlier.

We are pretty familiar with the story of the prodigal son.

The son demanded his inheritance and then he went into the world and indulged the pleasure of his flesh and squandered his inheritance.

In fact, after squandering his inheritance, we find him feeding pigs and willing to eat from the trough that the pigs were eating.

The father patiently waited for his son to return.

And when the son humbled himself and returned to the father – the father was quick to shower him with grace.

The father say, “Well, well, well, looked what the cat brought in”

Or he didn't say – “I told you – you were going to blow it”

He showed grace.

And then Jesus tells us in the parable that they partied.

Now, the gospel of Luke had not been written when James wrote his epistle but the apostles had been teaching many of the parables that Jesus had taught them.

These Jews in the early church would have recognized the connection between the prodigal son and themselves – they themselves were prodigals, chasing after the world to fulfill their flesh.

And what James is stating here in verse six is for them to humble themselves and return to their first love.

And knowing the parable of the prodigal son, they knew that if they did – that the Father would respond with grace.

I want to stress that grace is not earned through humility – if that was the case – it would no longer be grace.

Humility simply puts us in a position to be able to receive it.

[Jas 4:7 NKJV] 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

For those prodigals that had been pursuing friendship with the world – as they receive God's grace – the devil is not going to like it and is going to try to hinder them.

And James here tells them that they must take a stand against him.

As one breaks their friendship with the world, the devil becomes powerless.

This doesn't mean that we are no longer going to be attacked – it means that he will no longer going to be able to overpower us because we have the Holy Spirit residing in us.

[Jas 4:8-9 NKJV] 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 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and [your] joy to gloom.

The solution to backsliding is to "draw near to God." Come immediately, and just as you are.

Like the prodigal son's father, He will immediately "draw near to you."

There you will have your sinning hands "cleanse[d]," and your deceitful "hearts" "purif[ied]."

The cleansing and the purifying happen to you when you draw near.

They are a result, not something you must do to earn God's favor.

You don't clean-up your life before you turn to God.

You turn to Him, and He does the cleaning.

The prodigal son had a plan to clean himself up, to return and be a servant in his father's house, but dad instantly restored him to being his son.

It is important to note: As we draw near to God, we will be convicted of our sin.

So we lament and mourn and weep as appropriate under the conviction of sin, and we are compelled to find cleansing at the cross.

[Jas 4:10 NKJV] 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

When King David committed adultery, he thought he had gotten away with it by getting Uriah killed. He thought he had covered his tracks – yet he was still miserable.

It was until God sent Nathan – that David finally quit fighting against God and admitted he had sinned. Turn with me to Psalm 32

[Psa 32:1-11 NKJV] 1 [A Psalm] of David. A Contemplation. Blessed [is he whose] transgression [is] forgiven, [Whose] sin [is] covered. 2 Blessed [is] the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit [there is] no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah 6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him. 7 You [are] my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. 9 Do not be like the horse [or] like the mule, [Which] have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you. 10 Many sorrows [shall be] to the wicked; But he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him. 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all [you] upright in heart!

Humility is the path to resolving conflict.

Humility will rightly value God above self and therefore the pull of the world system will lose its luster.

Humility will also cause us to pursue godliness in the midst of conflict. It will help us confess our sin before men and God and will also assist us as we strive to continue pleasing God in the midst of inevitable human conflict.

Amen.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

