

The Cause and Cure of War James 4:1-6

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When we think of ‘war’ we think of a battlefield with armies and multiple casualties. James says war is going on all the time, inside and outside of us and we have a tendency to minimize it or excuse it.

ILL – **Picture One** - Florida Republican Representative Brian Mast served in the U.S. Army, losing both legs in an IED explosion in 2010 and winning the Bronze Star and Purple Heart before serving Florida’s 18th Congressional District. His maternal grandparents legally immigrated from Mexico to the United States. **Picture Two** - On Friday, Democratic Party and Planned Parenthood volunteer Lawrence Wayne Key called the Representative’s office and allegedly threatened to kill Representative Mast’s children. His rationale: “*If you’re going to separate kids at the border, I’m going to kill his kids. Don’t try to find me because you won’t.*” Thankfully, he was found and now faces federal charges for threatening the “communication of a threat to kidnap or injure a person.”

Mr. Key’s threat didn’t happen in a vacuum but in a politically divided nation in which politicians, late night talk show hosts and tv commentators fuel the flame that leads to further division and even the physical harm of politicians and everyday citizens.

In our former passage, James blamed conflict on our uncontrollable tongues, selfish ambition and bitter jealousy. In today’s passage, he is going to add our inner warring passions, particularly, envy, to the list.

James 4:1-6 - *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet 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 wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

James just told us there are two kinds of wisdom: the world’s wisdom and God’s wisdom. One wisdom divides relationships and the other wisdom enhances relationships. James says that ‘peace,’ not the absence of conflict but the fullness of life, is absent.

First: Conflicts Do Exist:

Genesis 4:3-6 & 8 - *In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.*

V 1a - What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

How do these conflicts exist?

- Cold-Wars / Covert
- Overt
- Passive-Aggressive
- Quick-strikes
- Acute
- Chronic

What conflicts have recently erupted but have now dissipated?

What conflicts presently exist in your life?

Think about these while James talks to us about this issue that affects all of our lives.

Second: Conflicts Exist for a Reason

V 1b - Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you

All significant relationships have conflict. It is inevitable. Conflict means that you are intentionally, actively, engaging another person.

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

Passions = hedonism

Passion is not negative. God may hold us accountable for not enjoying what he has given us.

But passion that is not God-centered is me-centered. There is no other option. Other-person centered passion is 'me' centered passion.

- Don't inconvenience me
- Don't make demands on me
- Don't challenge me
- Don't expose me

- Don't try to change me

Love requires inconvenience, creates demands, challenges, exposes and requires change. Any love that does not demand this of me, is not biblical love, is not true love but self-love which is, in effect, self-hatred.

The problem is that we are walking civil-wars.

Romans 7:15 & 18-19 & 20-23 - For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Our minds and hearts are turned to and tainted by sin. Even after we become Christians, the Holy Spirit is combatting the “flesh,” the old person and his or her way of being, thinking and doing.

If you are unhappy, nothing outside of you will make you happy

Hell is the soul turned in on itself.

Conflicts exist because of the ‘passions’ that exist within us.

Third: Conflict Displays Itself

V 2 - You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

ILL - In 1989, newspapers in Iowa published a sequence of stories that centered on a classic love triangle. Two striking young women found themselves grappling for the same boyfriend. The two girls had grown up together, had gone to school together, and had competed in local beauty contests. Sometimes one would win, sometimes the other. For instance, one girl won the county title of Miss Harvest Queen, while at the local high school her close friend was named Miss Homecoming. But the main competition between these two women flared in the area of romance. It happened that both of them were in love with the same boy, widely regarded in the area as a real “hunk” – promising, and eligible. He had to choose, and he chose Miss Homecoming Queen and they announced their plan to marry. When the other girl heard the news, the green-eyed monster of envy arose in her and poisoned her mind with the thought that her rival had walked off with the prize and would be living the rest of her life filled to the brim with bliss. So she rose up against her friend and killed her! One autumn night in Iowa, Miss Harvest Queen strangled Miss Homecoming with a leather belt.

There is a cause and effect to conflict

The cause is internal, but the effect is external

- Covet – You desire and do not have - *You covet and cannot obtain*
- Envy – I don't want you to have it -

“Envy is resentment of someone else's good, plus the itch to despoil her of it.”
- Cornelius Plantinga

“To be envious is to regret one's failure to achieve good fortune or to regret the successes of others. It is often accompanied by a false sense of entitlement. Instead of working for what they want, envious people may believe they deserve it merely because they want it. Also, in their twisted perspective, they may imagine that the gains of others have been taken from them, so they are filled with resentment. The envious suffer twice, when they don't succeed and when others do.”

- Leslie Flynn

“Envy is rebellion against God's leading in the lives of his children. It's saying that God has no right to bless someone else more than you.”

- Erwin Lutzer

We long for someone to delight in us, take pride in us, to think well of us. When that is taken away, it turns us into killers – sometimes subtle and sometimes overt but nonetheless present.

Envy occurs when we are resentful of an advantage someone else has. We look at the job, car, house, wealth, experience, or success of another and resent that they have something we don't. When envy's roots dig deep and are well nourished, it grows into covetousness. This is when we want and desire the advantage of another, such as a friend's car, well-behaved kids, or any kind of success. Such covetousness is what God forbids in the tenth commandment in Deuteronomy 5:21.

ILL – Picture 3 - In 1994, Ice Skater Tanya Harding had fellow competitor, Nancy Kerrigan clubbed on the knee during the World Championships in what became known as “The Whack Heard ‘Round the World” Kerrigan had to pull out of the competition and Harding won but was soon convicted in the plot by her ex-husband Jeff Gillooly to disable Kerrigan so that Harding would get into the Championship.

Opportunities abound for envy in our own lives -

- A friend gets married and you remain unmarried
- Your child is chronically ill while other families appear to be illness free
- A competitor gets the client, the contract, the place on the team
- Your spouse receives a credit you think you deserve

Our envy then turns from things to people.

ILL – The President thought he would win the election and it would satisfy his ego need. He lives like the child whose name was never called in choosing basketball teams or Red Rover. The Democrats are no better. They are envious of his win in an election Hillary Clinton felt she should win. They aren't just angry she lost, they're angry he won and it's become personal.

1 Kings 3:16-17 - ¹⁶ Then two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷ The one woman said, "Oh, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. ¹⁸ Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. And we were alone. There was no one else with us in the house; only we two were in the house. ¹⁹ And this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. ²⁰ And she arose at midnight and took my son from beside me, while your servant slept, and laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. ²¹ When I rose in the morning to nurse my child, behold, he was dead. But when I looked at him closely in the morning, behold, he was not the child that I had borne." ²² But the other woman said, "No, the living child is mine, and the dead child is yours." The first said, "No, the dead child is yours, and the living child is mine." Thus they spoke before the king. ²³ Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; and the other says, 'No; but your son is dead, and my son is the living one.'" ²⁴ And the king said, "Bring me a sword." So a sword was brought before the king. ²⁵ And the king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other." ²⁶ Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death." But the other said, "He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him." ²⁷ Then the king answered and said, "Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother."

Fourth: Conflicts Can Be Profitable

- a) Conflict helps us recognize our truest values.
- b) Conflict reveals our personal passions
- c) Conflict grows us in wisdom
- d) Conflict teaches us a new skill set
- e) Conflict re-centers our ultimate passion

Fifth: Solving Conflict Biblically

Covetousness and envy cause our conflicts and they can be settled biblically.

Psalm 37 –

V 1 - *Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!*

- a) *Trust in the LORD, and do good* 3a
- b) *Befriend faithfulness.* 3b

- c) *Delight yourself in the LORD 4a*
- d) *Commit your way to the LORD 5a*
- e) *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him 7a*
- f) *Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! 7b*
- g) *Refrain from anger and forsake wrath! 8a*

V 8b - Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

Envy says more about me than it does others.

Vs - 2b-4 - You do not have, because you do not ask.³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

James' readers either try to get the life only God can give or ask God for the life they think they deserve and are unhappy and angry without –

God calls this self-centeredness, 'adultery,' (a love affair with yourself or the world) 'friendship with the world' and 'enmity with God.'

What? Yes, it's true! Envy puts me, not God or others at the center of my life.

It can only be solved when we "humble ourselves" (v 10) "drawing near to God" (v 8) who gives "more grace" (v 6) to rightly love and not envy.

The answer is to love God more than self or others.

Love self and people correctly by loving God first and most

Conclusion:

James is convinced that self-centeredness is the cause of our conflict with God and other people. The cure is Christ; knowing him, loving him by centering our lives on him. In this way, his Spirit, enables us to love as we should.

What are you going to do about this TODAY?

This requires the acknowledgement that

- a) I love self the most
- b) I don't love God first
- c) Repentance
- d) The daily practice of prayer, Bible memorization and practicing Christianity
- e)

Community Groups:

1 – What is the source of conflict, according to James? Covetousness and envy; personal passions.

2 – Think about the types of conflict listed in the first sermon point.

2 – What conflicts recently erupted in my life?

3 – What conflicts presently exist in my life?

4 – How have I exacerbated those conflicts?

5 – How might my own passions have played a part in this conflict?

6 – Do I make any of these demands?

- Don't inconvenience me
- Don't make demands on me
- Don't challenge me
- Don't expose me
- Don't try to change me

7 – What is the source of those demands?

8 – In what specific areas do I see Romans 7 being played out in my life?

9 – What does this mean? “Hell is the soul turned in on itself.”

10 – Is there any area in which I am covetous or envious?

11 – How did the woman in 1 Kings 3 demonstrate envy?

12 – How can conflict be profitable?

13 – List the ways God encourages me to solve envy in Psalm 37

14 – How does loving God first and most, ensure I love myself and people correctly?

