

Series: Great Questions – week 13

CDOBC – beginning on 10/18/09

Title: “Where Does Conflict Come From?”

James 4:1-12 & selected passages ~ February 7, 2010

OBJECTIVE: To help us understand why war has plagued humanity since the beginning of time – and God’s solution to our human conflict.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- AWANA Grand Prix – workshop 2/13 – race day is 2/20
- Youth Babysitting – 2/14
- Creation Workshop – 2/15
- SWCBA Annual Celebration – March 13
- New Sermon Series beginning next Sunday – “The Confident, Loving Church” – Epistles of John

Opening Prayer

Conflict surrounds our everyday life. Conflict seems to be around every corner. The media tries to uncover or generate it – after all, nothing sells like a good feud!

Reality T.V. tries to create conflict – movies romanticize it – and some people live for the adrenaline rush they get in conflict.

In the big picture – the macro sense – we see conflict on the news each evening as we see the pictures of war and hear the statements of various nations that set the stage for more conflict. War has plagued humanity for all its history – and the Bible tells us that a great war will end human history and it will be the entry point of eternity as Jesus will defeat Satan and His earthly army forever.

Smaller picture – Microcosm of conflict is not war, but conflict between people. The person who yells at you or gives you an obscene gesture that you’re #1 because they don’t like how you are driving. The person at school who seems intent on wanting to fight you – for no apparent reason. The person at work who is always doing things to sabotage you and discredit you in front of

others. The neighbor who seems intent on creating conflict between you and them. The athlete whose intensity and competitiveness is uncontrolled, causing conflict beyond the scope of the game. Personally, I like the game of hockey, but I can't stand to watch the N.H.L. I know many love the fighting, but I can't stand it! I guess I see it as conflict that is not even part of the game – and it interferes with the game. I do enjoy watching college hockey or hockey in the Olympics where fighting is not allowed.

The conflict we experience in our families, in our church, in our friendships – why? Why is conflict such a 'normal' part of life? If we can identify why there is so much conflict, can we find a remedy to it and begin to have less conflict?

Turn to James 4

Great debate with the book of James – is he writing to believers or non-believers? I think the book is first of all written to a church – a group of believers – Jewish believers (1:1 – **twelve tribes**). James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church began to experience great persecution – Stephen was martyred – and we read in **Acts 8:1** – “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” So James writes this letter to the Jewish believers who have been scattered throughout the region. The strongest evidence that James is writing to believers is the imperative in **2:1**, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.”

Also, all throughout the book, James uses the term “brothers” – which is a term used when addressing other believers. I don't think this is a term he uses to refer to his “*Jewish brothers*” - primarily because of 2:1 and the clear indication that these “brothers” were Christians. Most of them were probably Jewish,

but the most important bond James has with them is their common faith in Christ.

“Brothers” is used 15x (NIV) in the five chapters – so it’s a very common term in the letter. That James is writing to believers will be important later.

Our problem: vs. 1a

The great question before us today is found in vs. 1 of James 4 – and it actually reveals one of our great problems in life:

“What causes fights and quarrels among you?”

Other translations say, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” KJV

“What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you?” RSV

Most of the modern translations use the word “fights” instead of “wars” – it’s the Greek word *polemos* – from which we get the English word “polemic” which means to have a passionate and strongly worded argument or dispute. The truest sense of the word when used in Scripture seems to be referring to a battle or a war – but the idea of conflict is clearly being addressed. If “war” is what James intended, then he is simply starting with the largest conflict we experience – when nations clash – and then bringing the issue down to the more personal level of quarrels and disagreements between individuals. In other words – when looking at the entire scope of human conflict – what causes all of it? Why do we have wars between nations and why do we have fighting between individuals?

As is most often the case, when the Bible asks a question, it also gives us the answer – which James does in the following verses.

The causes of our problem... vs. 1b-4

James 4:1-12

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?”

Sinful *desires*.

Vs. 1b – The question is rhetorical – it assumes a ‘yes’ answer. The short answer to the cause of wars, fights, and quarreling is the desires we have battling inside of us!

“desires” = *hēdonē* – English word ‘hedonism’ – *the belief that pleasure is the ultimate goal of life.*

The KJV is more accurate here – instead of “battle within you” – it should read “that war in your members” – body parts – your arms, legs, sexual organs, etc. It’s not only a battle of conscience, but the battle is fought through our actions (see also Rom. 6:13). This is true of both the Christian and the non-Christian. Every person has a battle with themselves at some level – and it’s the frustration of losing this battle – the guilt from our failures in life – that drives us to conflict.

But, what desires are battling inside of us? The answer needs some clarification – and so James continues...

Unsatisfied sinful desires – vs. 2

Read vs. 2

² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

We lash out and fight others – we create conflict with others because we don’t get what we want – we don’t get what we think we deserve. The most extreme reaction we have is to kill – to murder. Don’t think that this is too much of a leap here – Jesus clearly taught in His Sermon on the Mount that the sin of anger is the same as murder.

Matt. 5:21-22

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Selfish sinful desires – vs. 3

3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (*hēdonē* – same word as in vs. 1)

The sinful, unmet desires are ultimately selfish and will lead us to hostilities with another. We covet – our desires are so strong that we will attack others when what we desire is not realized.

James then describes that in our frustration we often turn to God and ask Him through prayer to satisfy our desires – to give us what we want – but our motive is completely selfish and wrong. He states that these prayers are motivated by a desire to quench our passions (NIV “pleasures” – same Gr. Word as vs. 1 – “*hēdonē*”) – not to serve and honor God – so God’s response to our prayers is to be silent – His response is to not give us what we request – which can add more to our frustrations and anger.

Love for the world vs. 4

JAS 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

James is taking off his gloves and rolling up his sleeves...
“Adulterous people” is a reference to a group that has betrayed and walked away from their commitment. They are not loyal

to God alone – they are in love with another. The rest of the sentence tells us what they are in love with...they are in love with the world! “friend” is the Greek word *philia*. It’s one of the common words for love in the N.T. *Agape* is the highest form of love – a love of volition or will – a love that is not necessarily connected to emotions. *Agape* is the love we are to practice to others – no matter if we like them! No matter what our feeling are toward them – we are called to love them. *Philia* – like *phileo* – is a similar love – but a love that has more emotional involvement. This is the word behind “friendship” in vs. 4. Other uses of *philia*:

Matt. 11:19 (The Pharisees said about Jesus)

“Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a *friend* of tax collectors and sinners.”

Luke 12:4

“I tell you, my *friends*, do not be afraid...”

Luke 23:12

“That day Herod and Pilate became *friends*--before this they had been enemies.”

John 13:13-14

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his *friends*.¹⁴ You are my *friends* if you do what I command.”

So, when James says, “...that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?”, this is a serious issue. The use of this word indicates a strong connection – a strong bond. This kind of love and commitment to the world is not befitting a Christian – in fact, it’s in opposition to the things of God – to the ways and purposes of God. As a Christian, you will be in conflict with God if you have a friendship with the world!

“world” – *kosmos* – is not limited to the physical things in this life – but to the way of thinking – to the value system of the world – which is contrary to the mind of Christ.

This may be the most difficult and controversial part of the passage today. In vs. 4 it says: “Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” I stated earlier that James wrote this letter to Jewish believers who had been scattered throughout the region due to persecution. It seems that the churches that formed throughout the region were struggling on many levels – primarily, how to relate their faith in Christ to everyday life. Since the Law of Moses was not their ultimate guide for life – they were no longer following all of its commands regarding sacrifice and ritual because the ultimate sacrifice had been made in the person of Jesus. Since that was true, how should they live? How should they treat others? The Law of Moses used to guide their behavior – what guides their behavior now – as followers of Christ? Their question is the same as many here in this room may have today...how does Christ want me to live?

By the nature of James’ letter, we know that there were many struggles with the churches, and specifically, with much fighting and quarreling within the church. James attributes these things to our sinful desires, and to a friendship with the world. He then says a shocking thing – that “Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” vs. 4b

Can a believer really be an “enemy of God”?

Almost all of the time in Scripture, when someone is stated to be an enemy of God, they are an unbeliever. Some take the position that James is writing to unbelievers in the church

here – and that a believer cannot be an “enemy of God”. However, I think the context is addressing Christians. What he is describing here is something many Christians struggle with – a love for the temporal...for the world. Factions, fighting, arguments, disagreements with other believers in the church. Even the following verse points to believers (vs. 5-6) – “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that *the spirit he caused to live in us* envies intensely? ⁶ But *he gives us more grace.*”

That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble."

These two phrases (vs. 5-6) can only be applied to believers – the spirit living in us – more grace (*as opposed to our first ‘dose’ of grace at salvation*).

Can a non-Christian act as an enemy of God? Yes.

Can a Christian act as an enemy of God? Yes.

The scariest part about these verses is that they can describe a Christian! How severely we can oppose the things of God while claiming the name of Christ!

In a technical sense, it is true that in Scripture – a believer is never called an enemy of God – but the idea is not foreign.

One of the passages that I think supports my position here is **Matthew 16:23** – Peter’s great confession – and then what follows his great confession.

“Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!"

And this following his great confession! Who is more an enemy of God than Satan? Peter wasn’t Satan – but he was acting on Satan’s behalf – opposing the plan of God.

2 Peter 2:7 - Lot was a friend of the world – “if he rescued Lot, a righteous man...”

Rom. 12:2 “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Col. 3:2 “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Summarize:

Our problem – *wars, fights, quarrels*

The causes of our problem – *our sinful desires and love for the world*

The solution / application... vs. 5-12

JAS 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you **double-minded**. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (**Repentance**)

JAS 4:11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. (**speak kindly**) ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?”

1. Don't be “double minded”
2. Repent from letting sinful desires and love for the world control your life.
3. Speak kind, encouraging words about / to each other

Grace and forgiveness needs to be applied...in abundance!

Close in prayer / transition to communion