

Practical Christianity; How to Fight Right!

We're all fighters by nature, some of you might remember the old Tarrington cigarette commercials said, *I'd rather fight than switch*. We fight on the highway as we drive, in business with competition; and *even among Christians*. I guarantee, in this sanctuary there's at least one person who has a beef with someone else.

Today as we continue through the letter from James, we'll hear another principle that will show us how much we've allowed God's grace to penetrate into our lives. **Now the purpose of James letter was to help people understand, that at some point, we must start trusting God by taking steps of faith by acting on the promises and principles found in God's word.** But we don't always trust God, and because of that, sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between a Christian and the rest of the world. That's why we're having this sermon series, "Practical Christianity," to learn how to trust God more.

Today we're talking about how we can trust God when we face conflicts with other people and the problems connected with fighting when we should **not** fight. So as I read today's scripture, listen to how James talks about our problem of **not** wanting to surrender; especially when God wants us to. And then James will explain how we can solve this problem by trusting God.

Let's turn to James 4:1-12.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, 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 he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us^[b]? ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

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. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

¹¹ Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister^[d] or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 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?

The Cause: Did you see how James opens up this scripture by asking, “*What causes fights and quarrels among you?*” That sets the tone for this scripture, and then he answers his own question by giving us **two reasons why we have fights and quarrels.**

1. The first basic cause of fights and quarrels is our inner desire.

Look at verse 1, “*Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?*” The Greek term for pleasures means “desire or passion.” It’s a neutral term that, depending on what you’re talking about, can be something good or something evil.

For example, a desire to achieve or express your emotions is a **good thing** if done in an appropriate and healthy manner. The desire to find a place in the church where you can use your spiritual gifts and abilities is another **good desire**. **In fact**, people without these desires could be called sick or lethargic, when a child is like this, we take them to a doctor because we want our children to have **good desires**.

But James explains, when these desires can’t be expressed or go unfulfilled... what happens? Frustration mounts and an eruption is coming. This is the conflict that creates the tendency to struggle and fight. So, we wage war, and intending on fighting until we get our own way... until we are free to express our desires.

Someone once said, be careful looking down a dark well, because you usually see yourself looking back at yourself! My point, “The source of our problems – is **us.**”

The problem isn't the other guy, or even the **frustration** - - it's us. Like the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah said, *"All we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone to his or her own way."* When we don't get our own way, we get mad and down deep we growl, "Don't you **dare** keep me from getting what I want; if you do, I'll fight and take you down."

James then tells us about 3 things that happen when this hostile desire is allowed to keep burning in our lives:

- **The first is murderous thoughts.**

When we let our unfiltered, hostile desires run wild, sometimes we want to kill that person. We may not actually murder them, but how often do we butcher people with our thoughts and how often so we dream up different ways to assassinate the character of someone who infuriates us and keeps us from getting our own way. Now we can say, "Well I may want to kill them, but at least I don't do it," but the truth is, when these thoughts fill our minds, we go on to the second effect:

- **Second, hostile desire causes fights and quarrels.**

Or in other-words we wound and hurt people, we maim them with our words and attitudes. Then in the middle of our battle, something else happens.

- **Third, hostile desires produce a failure to pray.**

Why don't we pray? Because when we're fighting, we'd rather battle things out and win on our own! We don't want to stop and ask God for help. That's why James says in verse 2, *"You do not have, because you do not ask God."*

We don't have because **we don't want God's answer**, we don't want to wait, we don't want to surrender... we want it **now!**

I can already hear someone thinking, **"Hey, I prayed for help and I still didn't get an answer to my prayers!"** To that James answered in **verse 3**, *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on pleasures."*

One Bible commentator explained, *"Their requests were legitimate, but the reason for making the prayers was inappropriate. They wanted only to satisfy their own cravings, pamper their own passions. God's glory, God's service, consideration for other people – none of these things entered into their thinking. Such prayers are an insult to God."* You see, hostile desires leads people **not** to pray – WHY - because real prayer allows God to rescue us His way!

The 2nd basic cause of fights and quarrels – Is being like the world:

James explains in verse 4, “...*that friendship with the world is hatred toward God.*” James point is that we often fight when we’re all wrapped up in the world and want things our way; it’s an attitude that’s bent on being hostile or indifferent toward God. So when we’re caught up in fights and quarrels; we are, “Unfaithful people.” We’re unfaithful because when we battle and argue to get our way... when we attack and bicker to get our needs and wants taken care of on our own - we don’t trust God, we’re unfaithful.

But here’s the problem... we live in a world that’s built around our own ability to help ourselves. Almost naturally, we end up shaking our fist in God’s face saying, “Get out of my way!” We push our way to get what we want... and **let** anything get in our way; we will do whatever we can to destroy it. **This** is what is called, “*being carnal or worldly,*” it is handling conflicts by fighting, pushing, and demanding until we get **what** we want, **when** we want it and **how** we want it -- that is being unfaithful to God.

The solution:

We discussed the causes and effects of our fighting and **now** James turns our attention to God’s solution in verse 5. **I think that the New Living Translation explains verse 5 in a way that clearly makes James point, it says, “*What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful?*”**

Let’s look at three principles that can give us victory:

1. The first part of the solution is the power of the Holy Spirit.

When a believer in Jesus Christ trusts in his or her own abilities, they lose every time. However, when we say to the Holy Spirit, “*I’m frustrated, I’m at the end of my rope; Lord I need you now, you take over, you take the controls.*”

At the moment we change from trusting ourselves to trusting the Holy Spirit, **that** is what God says He jealously longs for.

Let me put it this way. When my daughter Kayla was young, some of you remember **Jim Buck who** had a big pick-up and he’d her drive. She held the wheel, but Jim was guiding, and as soon as she hopped out, she ran to Mom and said, “**I drive!**” Now she really didn’t drive – or have control, she held the wheel and thought she was driving, but Jim really had the power.

Here's a good question... how often do we go through a difficult time in life and come out the other end saying, "Man, I handled that well." The Holy Spirit must think, "Look, I had everything under control the whole time, I had the wheel, all you did was come along for the ride." If we trust God, we'll know that God is in control! And this leads us to a principle we all should live by.

2. **Second - Greater grace is given when we submit to the Holy Spirit.**

Verse 6 of the New Living Translation says, "*God gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires.*" As the Scriptures say, "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" **What God is saying is, "If you give me control, I'll see you through your problems, I'll give you the power, (that's the Holy Spirit).** And further more, when you go through this process of submission with me, I will give you **greater** grace."

3. **Then James closes with wise practical counsel.**

Look at the last part of **Verse 6**, again, we're told that God gives greater grace to the humble, and over in **verse 10** we're reminded again to humble ourselves. And what comes in between **describes** how we can humble ourselves, especially when we'd rather fight than surrender.

- **Submit to God.**

Look at **verse 7**, it says quit fighting and **surrender** to the control and power of the Holy Spirit. I remember fighting and wrestling with my older brother Larry, he wouldn't stop turning me into a pretzel until I cried out uncle and I gave up. These are the words any guy loves to hear from an opponent, but so often I wouldn't say it because I knew it gave my brother so much pleasure.

So to be humble to God is to say – I Surrender!

- **Resist the devil.**

Look at **verse 7**, we're to resist the enemy – the devil, he tempts us to want things our way, **and** this also means we're to resist our sinful nature also – it wants things its own way. We face two battle fronts, the enemy and our sinful nature. But there's a promise here, God says "If give in to me and resist the enemy with my power, we will have victory, the enemy will run!"

- **Draw close to God and God will pull you close.**

Look at **verse 8**, “*Come near to God and he will come near to you.*” We’re to stay close to God by developing a loving companionship with him. Here’s a good example, “I was working on a sermon one evening when the door opened up and Kelsey bounced in and came up to me and laid her head on my shoulder. Thinking she was up to something, I asked her – what do you want? And she answered, ‘Nothing, I just want to be near you.’” You see drawing near to God is just like that! Having the attitude, “Lord I want something – I just want to be near you.”

- **Wash up and purify your heart.**

Verse 8, “*Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded.*” James is talking about dealing with the sin in our lives, getting rid of the things that keep us from drawing near to God. In **verse 9** the NIV translation talks about “Grieving, mourning, and wailing.” James is calling us to a genuine sorrow, the kind that comes from becoming aware of how our sin has hurt God.

PRAYER: