

## July 8, 2007

James 4:3-6

Alright good morning. Again it is good to have you back today. To be honest as we study through the book of James there are weeks when I think you won't come back – when God through James is so blunt and challenging and at least for me, hard to hear that I'm not sure you'll be back. So – glad you're back today. Let's go back to our study of **James chapter 4. We'll look at verses 3 through 6 today.**

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 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."*

The starting point we saw last week that ties what James is saying in this chapter to where he was at the end of chapter 3 to the heart of God is that **God values PEACE**. In fact, the asterisk at the end of that in your notes just points to the end of your message map this morning where I put a reference to every letter in the New Testament from Romans to Jude where the Word of God appeals or speaks to peace and unity and oneness in the Church – among believers.

One very obvious reason that the writers of the New Testament spend so much time appealing for peace is because we are much more prone to fight. With our spouses, our kids, our parents, pretty much anyone. Which makes sense because God's Word tells us that is one of Satan's primary plans to attack our relationship with God – by attacking our relationships with each other.

Since conflict is so common, there are all sorts of ideas out there about how to deal with it – count to ten, yell at a pillow, think happy thoughts. But we're never going to have true peace until you go deeper than that and get to the cause. Which is what we saw last week in the first few verses of the chapter. James told us that we have problems with other people because we have a problem within us.

Our desire for pleasure wages war in us when it doesn't get its way. So we fight and quarrel in an attempt to get our way – to get what we want. Desire in and of itself is not sinful, but instead of looking to people to satisfy our desires, we ought to be going to God. James says, "You have not because you ask not." You ought to be going to God about your desires but instead you try and manipulate people into giving you what you want.

So when we have a problem with fights and quarrels, what it means is we have a problem with our prayer life. Either we aren't praying, or when we pray we pray as James says, "with the wrong motive, that you may spend what you get on your own pleasure."

So our sinful conflicts come from a problem within us that comes from a problem in our prayer lives but really, the problem goes deeper – like we said last week, James today is going to take this to another level of awareness. Here's the deal – **your problems in your relationships with other people are because you have a problem in your relationship WITH GOD.**

And that's really a pretty mild way of putting it. James is much more offensive. Look at what he says. He starts verse 4 with "You adulterous people!" Now don't minimize that word or skim past it. That's about as serious as James can make this. Here's what he's talking about.

In verses 2 and 3 he says, you have not because you ask not. When you ask, you don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you might spend what you get on your own pleasure. So he pictures people wanting something or someone that satisfies and then coming to God not because God satisfies, but only to ask him for the means to get something else and then leaving God behind to go get satisfied with this other thing. Then he says – you adulterous people. That comes from what he just described.

We have a great and loving husband – God. But we are in love with someone else or something else and do not find God satisfying. But we can't afford this other man so we go to our husband – to God – in prayer and ask him for the means to get this other lover. That's why James shouts about adultery in verse 4. He is saying that **conflict in our relationships with others is rooted in SPIRITUAL ADULTERY.**

Now that requires some explanation. So he goes on. He says in verse 4 – don't you know. In other words this is something that you ought to know – don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?

The reason James said what he said is because your fights and quarrels proves that your loyalties have shifted. You fight and quarrel with one another because you have chosen to be a friend of the world.

Now we've really got to get this because this is pretty much the heart of this text. Here's what it comes down to. The ultimate reason we have fights and conflicts as believers is that we've made the world's agenda our agenda. That's what it means to be a friend of the world.

**To be a friend is to be on good terms with – to regard kindly – to see with AFFECTION.** The world obviously is not the big blue dot in space, but as John MacArthur describes it, **“the world in scripture is the MAN-centered, Satan-directed system of this life which is HOSTILE to God, to Christ, and to the Christian.”** What you are “friendly” toward are the values, the lifestyle, the ethics, the morals, the institutions of this world as they are established apart from God. **To be a friend of the world is to make the WORLD'S agenda our agenda.**

Now think about that – here is where it gets convicting. It is easy to think of worldliness of being all about externals. I'm not a friend of the world – I don't even go to R rated movies – I don't cuss – I don't hang out in bars – I read my Bible. Listen some of the most worldly people read their Bibles every day. Folks, friendship with the world isn't about externals alone – it is about attitude. Just because you go to church or because you pray before dinner doesn't mean you aren't worldly. It's possible to have all your externals lined up just so and internally to be thinking just like the world thinks. When James talks like this in chapter 4 **he's talking about the way you THINK and what you DESIRE. He's saying that worldly thinking and fights and quarrels go together.** How can he say that just because I have conflict it means I am a friend of the world?

Look back at chapter 3. Remember James described two kinds of wisdom. One from God and one not from God. He stresses that God's wisdom promotes peace. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

So when you fight and quarrel with one another, when you are not peaceable, you know one thing for certain – you are rejecting God's wisdom and you are embracing the world's.

That speaks to us as individuals today – that if you are a cranky person who loves to stir up strife. I don't care if you did memorize Philippians or you've never been to an R movie or you live on some farm and have never been outside your house – you are without a doubt a worldly person.

That speaks to us as families – you could have devotions before breakfast, before lunch, before dinner, and three times in between but if your family is marked by quarrels and fights and conflict, then something is wrong, you are living worldly.

That speaks to us as a church. We could be the most conservative people in the nation, we could quote the Baptist Faith & Message in our sleep but if we're constantly fighting and bickering with each other, that's proof that we're still worldly.

Please don't minimize this. What James is saying is that when we fight and quarrel with one another, it is a symptom. You are – and this is how James puts it – you are choosing to be a friend of the world and choosing to be an enemy of God. You are making a decision to pursue the world's agenda – the world's wisdom.

And don't fool yourself – the world has an agenda. It has a plan for your life – a philosophy of living. And maybe this will make this more clear this morning – that agenda is self. The pursuit of self. **The world's agenda is the exaltation of SELF.** You know that. We've talked about it many times throughout our study of James. And that kind of thinking stands in direct contradiction to God's.

Listen:

The world says Blessed are the proud in spirit.

Jesus says Blessed are the poor in spirit.

The world says you've got to build yourself up.

Jesus says Whoever humbles himself as a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The world says you've got to look out for number one.

Jesus says a new commandment I am giving you that you love one another even as I have loved you.

The world says live for self.

Jesus says if any man wishes to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

The world says you've only got one life so eat, drink, & be merry.

Jesus says he who loves his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

The world says all pain is bad. Avoid sacrifice at all costs.

Jesus says, he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Folks it makes sense for a non-believer to argue and fight and to exalt himself – that's what he professes to be about in this world. But if you are a Christian- if your faith in Christ is authentic – you have claimed to be about the very opposite. But **when you get involved in fights and quarrels that DISHONOR God and HARM one another, you prove you are living by the world's agenda and not God's.**

And that's what it comes down to. Whose agenda are you going to use to rule your life? The world's or God's? Just be honest about it. Like James said chapter 3, If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast about it or deny the truth.

Let's be really practical here and talk about how this plays out in real life.

Say someone is attacking you at work. He's going behind your back, telling stories about you, saying you aren't a good worker, you are lazy, and to top it off your breath stinks.

What's the world's agenda for that situation? Tear the person down. Attack back. They are making you look bad, you'll show them whose breath stinks!

What's God's agenda? Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you. That doesn't mean you don't try to deal with the situation, but it does mean that your desire is not for the other person's harm but for their good.

Another example. Say you and your kids go out to eat with another family from church and your kids are not respecting you. You tell your son not to play with his food and he throws a piece of meat onto your wife's best friend's good dress. He makes you look foolish in front of your friends.

What's the world's agenda? Your son made you look bad. You lash out at him. You tear him down. You belittle him. Your discipline is about punishment and even revenge more than education.

What's God's agenda? Your son's good. God's giving you an opportunity to disciple your child. You're going to have to discipline him, but here's the key. It's not about you. It's not about the fact he made you look bad. It's about his good. He's disobeying God and missing out on who God wants him to be and you desperately want your child to be right with God because you know that glorifies God and is what is best for your son.

We could go on and on, but the point is that one of the worst mistakes we can make is to think our fights and quarrels with others are just about our fights and quarrels with others. **Your relationships with others are a TEST of your relationship with God.** The two are connected. If you are constantly at odds with others it is because you are fighting with God.

Once again it sounds like James is being pretty harsh here. So he responds to that accusation with verse 5 – which is really a hard verse to translate. He says “ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?”

First of all, he isn't quoting a specific verse but referring to the overall teaching of God's Word. Second – what he says God's Word says is the hard part. Most versions will have a note on this verse that gives you some options in what the wording can be. I lean toward what the New King James Version uses because I think it fits the context and flow the best and that is that “The Spirit – capital s – that God has caused to dwell in us yearns jealously.”

If you are a believer, God has caused his Holy Spirit to live within you. And the Holy Spirit who lives within you is jealous. God is a jealous God. What that means is that **God desires that his people be wholly and unreservedly DEVOTED to Him.** God the Holy Spirit will tolerate no rivals. If you are his bride, you need to be faithful to him. That's why when you choose to live for the world – by the world's wisdom – by the world's agenda – you are making yourself an enemy of God and committing spiritual adultery.

God's Word is so profound. Your problems with others are inextricably linked to a problem with God. Love for God is foundational to everything else. If you do not love God above all else, you will not love your neighbor as yourself. **Any lack of LOVE for a neighbor in word or deed reflects some deficiency in your love for God. And that's why James says that human conflict is rooted in spiritual ADULTERY.**

Now if you're like me – and just being honest – hearing all this – that God is so jealous and friendship with the world is so serious, how can I ever begin to hope to walk in a way that honors Him? I mean I

came to church thinking I had one problem – conflict with other people – now I realize I have two problems – I’m also warring against God. Thanks a lot for that little nugget, Brett.

Don’t be discouraged. God doesn’t reveal our hearts to us just to make us miserable. There’s hope – there’s a solution. Verse 6 gives us a start. But he gives more grace. God stoops down to help us do what we could never do on our own. God’s grace is greater than the power of sin, our selfish natures, the world, or Satan.

But here’s the key. He only gives grace to those who humble themselves before Him. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Folks – if you want to get your relationships with other right, you’ve got to get your relationship with God right. That is where true change begins.

You want peace? You’ve got to humble yourself. Humility is the key. And you are not going to be able to humble yourself before others until you are first humble before God.

What does it mean to humble yourself before God?

You’ll have to come back next week to see.

Let’s pray.