

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 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. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 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. 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”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor. James 4:1-12*

A few years ago a Dutch professor took time to calculate the cost of an enemy soldier’s death at different periods of time in history. He estimated that during the reign of Julius Caesar, to kill an enemy soldier cost less than one dollar. At the time of Napoleon, it had considerably inflated to more than \$2,000. At the end of the First World War, it had multiplied several times to reach the figure of some \$17,000 per soldier. During the Second World War, the cost rose to about \$40,000. And in Vietnam, in 1970, to kill an enemy soldier cost \$200,000. And last year the Congressional Budget Office in the United States estimated that the cost of putting one enemy soldier to death in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria had gone over \$1,000,000. Now we hear these numbers and most of us would most likely say that war – both in terms of finances and in terms of the tragedy of the horrific ruin and loss of life – is not worth the cost. Yet, in terms of defining war as an active conflict that has claimed more than 1,000 lives, we as human beings have only been at peace for 268 of the last 3,400 years - which is just 8 percent of recorded history. Over the last 100 years the world has experienced 268 wars; none of us in this room have been alive when there was no war.

The Bible tells us that war is a fact of life for those who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. While our salvation is a free gift of God through Jesus’ death on our behalf for our sins on the cross, our resultant response to the command of Jesus to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him comes with a great cost. Jesus said: *“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:24-26). Our Lord and Savior is telling us here that we step out on his side, war and conflict will become a major issue in our lives. This is why Paul said: *“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm”* (Ephesians 6:12-13) and at end of his life he wrote: *“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called”* (1 Timothy 6:12). The reality is God’s people have always been and always will be pilgrims and strangers here on earth. God’s Word tells us we are runners in a race, we are sheep in a sheepfold, we are branches of a vine - and we are also soldiers engaged in battles of war against spiritual enemies. The Bible tells us that the enemies of our souls are the world, the flesh and the devil. James 3:15 affirms this in that ungodly conduct, *“is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly (world), unspiritual (flesh), and demonic (the devil).”*

The reference to that which “*comes down from above*” is a reference to James 1:13-17 where James tells us that we cannot blame God for our sin or for our temptation to sin - because sin is that which comes from within us because “*each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*” And so what James is telling us is that the spiritual war we will experience in this life is the *war of worldliness* – a war is rooted in that which is “*earthly, unspiritual, demonic*” rather than that which is “*good and perfect . . . from above . . . from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*” In Colossians 1:13-14 we read that Jesus “*has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” But the truth is, more often than not, that our hearts and our minds and our souls are focused on the *kingdom of the fallen world we live in* rather than the *kingdom of our good and perfect God* - which is why, more often than not, that we find ourselves in conflict within ourselves and with each other and with God.

Remember again that James, the brother of Jesus, was writing this letter to a people of God who were struggling with social, relational and spiritual conflict between differing factions within the church. He rebuked his readers for their *worldliness* and he challenged them to humbly seek God’s divine will and wisdom in working out their problems by getting their hearts right with God, so that they could then pursue a *living faith* in Jesus Christ because they were lacking in spiritual maturity. We’ve already seen that a spiritually mature living faith in Jesus is not a natural consequence of growing older or longevity of faith, but rather God defines a spiritual maturity of faith in terms of brokenness, surrender, obedience, sacrifice, commitment, love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. In the first chapter of his letter James revealed to us that when we are spiritually mature in our living faith in Jesus Christ we will possess a patient attitude toward suffering; and in chapter two he told us we will humbly obey to the truth of God’s Word; in chapter three he said we will use our speech, words, and tongue as a means to praise God and to build up/bleed one another. And now in chapter four James begins to flesh out his teaching which he began at the end of chapter three - that we all need to be aware that there is within each of one of us a battle for our souls - a *war of worldliness* - which will distract, dismantle and destroy any attempt of knowing a spiritually mature living faith.

Not long ago one writer addressed this when he wrote that we as born-again, followers of Jesus Christ “are supposed to be singing from the same hymn book. We are supposed to believe that we came into this world with a sinful nature, and that that sinful nature made us unworthy to enter God’s presence and deserving of God’s wrath. We are supposed to believe that we are absolutely incapable of doing anything to help ourselves, and that we are saved because God had mercy on us and sent his Son to die in our stead and his Holy Spirit to regenerate our dead hearts. We are supposed to love the three persons of the triune God above everything else. We are supposed to have a passion for the worship of God and the service of God. We are supposed to believe that we are to do all we can to advance the cause of God. We are supposed to believe that we are to do all we can to influence our children to love and serve God. We are supposed to believe that we are to do all we can to influence our friends and neighbors for Christ. But as we survey modern-day Christianity, we are compelled to admit that many of those who profess to be believers do not appear to be in agreement. We are supposed to believe these things, but many do not give any evidence of doing so. The sad fact is that many church members appear to be working against the very things they are supposed to value and prize.” In today’s text James addressed the war of worldliness that was holding the church of his day back from doing what they supposed to be doing as followers of Jesus Christ in the body of Christ. James is also addressing us today as we stand in the long shadow of the history of the church that still continues to be affected by spiritual battles and war against our souls. James pointedly speaks to us today about the reality of the war of worldliness that goes on within us between kingdom of the fallen world we live in and the kingdom of our good and perfect God.

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* James 4:1

James opens this section by telling us that our war of worldliness is a war *against each other*. We see this in Lot's conflict with his uncle Abraham and in Absalom's war for his father David and in Jesus' disciples quarrels with each other and in the church divisions we read of the New Testament. The "*fights*" and "*quarrels*" James speaks of clearly involved Christians. The plural form of both words indicates the conflicts were chronic rather than a one-time incident. James asks the question: "*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?*" and then he answers his own question by stating that our outer conflicts are caused by the inner "*war within*" us. In a sense this inner "*war*" within us is like lava that percolates under the earth looking for the right place to surface and erupt with anger and smoldering bitterness. That *lava* here is our "*passions*" that James speaks of which in the original language is the root word for our English word "hedonism" which is the philosophy that the chief purpose of life to satisfy self. Jesus used this same word to describe people "*who hear*" God's Word "*but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature*" (Luke 8:14). The "*passions*" of hedonism spoken of here are those things that are a greater priority and of higher position than God's will in our hearts and lives.

These are the "*passions*" – the sinful desires – that lay within the heart of each and every follower of Jesus Christ. We all have within us a dark alien army that seeks self rather than God. These desires are the remains of our pre-Christian, fallen, sinful nature that is still seeking to control our lives. The apostle Paul spoke of this himself in Romans 7 when he wrote: "*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. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me*" (Romans 7:18-20). Brothers and sisters, as long as we are on earth we will never be freed from the evil influence of sinful selfish desires - *but by the grace of God we can escape their dominion. Remaining sin need not be reigning sin* because Jesus has risen from the dead and he ascended into heaven and he lives within us by the power of His Holy Spirit. Human nature on earth will always be in the grip of self-centeredness and its only by walking in complete surrender to the Holy Spirit can we know moments and seasons of freedom – which will ultimately fully be ours when Jesus returns or when we die and go to heaven.

And so instead of aggressively seeking for self, we should submit ourselves to God and surrender our selfish desires to Him and trust Him in that by the power of the Spirit, God will only give us what He wants for us. Our war of worldliness is a war against each other. Jesus spoke of not only the depth of this war but also the fatal consequences of ignoring the reality of that war in our own lives. In Matthew 5:21-22 he said: "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.*" In John 15:12 Jesus also said: "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*" Brothers and sisters may we be for Jesus and may we be for one another in the war of worldliness within our hearts, minds and souls.

*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. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* James 4:2-3

James repeated use of "*you*" reveals our war of worldliness is not only a war against each other, but also at war *against ourselves*. Selfishness puts us in conflict against ourselves because God created us *not for ourselves* but for him. Genesis 1:27 tells us God created us in His image which means we were created by God to love God and be with God and to live for God for the glory of God.

In Isaiah 43:7 God declares: *“Everyone who is called by my name . . . whom I formed and made . . . I created for my glory.”* God created us so that the focus of our lives would be God and not ourselves. And so selfishness is the self-destructive war of worldliness against ourselves between kingdom of the fallen world we live in and the kingdom of our good and perfect God. James speaks of the selfish self-destructive attitudes and behaviors that reflect this war against ourselves. The *“murder”* we read of here is not so much physical murder as the murderous attitude of anger, bitterness, hatred and contempt Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:21-22. When we *“covet”* we destructively pursue self-gratification in places or people or possessions or positions rather than in the God who created us for Himself, which causes us to *“fight and quarrel”* within ourselves, and with each other and others.

James tells us that this self-destructive war against ourselves continues to rise up within us because we do ask the good and perfect God who is above for what He wants us to have, and when we do ask Him we tend to ask with selfish motives: *“You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”* The story is told of a little boy who had the habit of sucking his thumb and his parents told him he needed to stop. And so one evening in his bedtime prayer he was heard to say, "O God, help me to stop sucking my thumb." And after a pause he then said, "never mind, God, because I don't want to stop sucking my thumb." We waste our breath when we ask God and pray for things which are against God's Word and God's will.

Jesus revealed to us how we can ask God for things with pure motives when he ended his prayer to His good and perfect Father who is above by saying: *“Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done”* (Luke 22:42). In Matthew 7:7-11 Jesus told us how to ask for good and perfect things from our good and perfect God who is above: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him.”* Our war of worldliness is not only a war against each other, but also at war against ourselves. We were created by God to love God, to be with God, to live for God in the will of God, for the glory of God.

*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. 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”?*  
James 4:4-5

Our war of worldliness is not only a war against each other and ourselves, but also a war *against God*. James gives evidence of how strongly God feels about our war of worldliness when we choose the kingdoms of the fallen world we live in over the kingdom of our good and perfect God, when he proclaimed: *“You adulterous people!”* James is not accusing us of breaking the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Exodus 14:20: *“You shall not commit adultery”*) but rather he is referring to the *spiritual* adultery God's people commit when choose to love the people and things of the world more than God. The image of adultery against God is a reality of a unique truth. When a married person commits adultery, he or she betrays a sweet, intimate, trusting relationship. To have relationship with someone other than your marriage partner is to commit the ultimate betrayal of loyalty, trust, and intimacy. In the the kingdom of this world we live in the adulterer does not break the law when he or she commits adultery, but what they do break is their husband or wife's heart. In Christ, in the kingdom of God, we do break the Law of God as well as break God's heart when we commit adultery. When we love someone or something or ourselves more than we love God we commit spiritual adultery and we break God's law and God's heart. James calls us *“adulterous”* when we do so, and he sets the blame on our *“friendship with the world.”* Friendship here describes a deliberate choice on our part to defy God and rebel against God and follow the ways of the *“world.”*

The English word “*world*” here in the word *kosmos* in original Greek - but unlike the English translation of the word *kosmos* does not refer to the physical earth or universe, but rather the human-centered, godless value system and morals of fallen mankind. The goals of the kingdom of the world we live in are self-glory, self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, self-satisfaction, self-entitlement, self-governing, and every other form of self-serving, all of which amounts to hostility toward God. The “*world*” here speaks of life on earth organized and managed by fallen human beings that denies God’s sovereign authority over human relationships, institutions, activities, cultures, and pastimes organized without reference to God’s approval or God’s will. Paul about this “*world*” in Ephesians 2:2 when he talked about “*following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.*” And so James is telling us that whenever we follow or are influenced by and pursue or embrace the values of “*the world*” we are at war with God because we are enemies of God: “*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.*”

As followers of Jesus we are called to love the people in the world but we are not the world itself. We who profess our love for God must not court spiritually adulterous relationships with the heroes of the world nor should we embrace the goals of the world as our goals. When we wed ourselves to the systems and beliefs of the world we allow the world to plant seeds of enmity against God in our hearts. Like James, Paul warned the Colossian church against doing so when he wrote to them “*that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority*” (Colossians 2:2-10).

In Paul’s words we read of how we can keep ourselves from going to war against God. We will not be deluded with the “*plausible arguments*” of the world, nor will we be taken “*captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world*” when we put our faith in “*all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” and then, in the firmness of our “*faith in Christ*” we “*walk*” in Christ, just as we “*received Christ Jesus the Lord . . . rooted and built up in him and established in the faith . . . abounding in thanksgiving*” because “*in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*” Paul affirms that we will not wander nor make war with God when we focus our hearts on the fullness of Jesus Christ. James speaks to us today about the power of God available to us when we do wander and make war against God: “*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?’*” When we do fall into a spiritually adulterous relationship with the “*world*” God “*yearns jealously*” that over the spirit of life that He has given us, which has been polluted by sin and makes war against Him. But we will not see this is a good “*jealously*” in that God lovingly reacts with the power of His grace when our relationship with Him is threatened. James tell us here how God expects us to respond to His grace.

*But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.* James 4:6-10

Immediately after James tells us that God “*yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us*” when we wage war against Him, James then says that God “*gives more grace.*” What this means is that even though we are saved by the grace of God (Ephesians 2: 5, 8), we still need *more of God’s grace* because we are still prone to wander in our walk with God; and we are still prone to wage war against ourselves, each other and God Himself - even after we become children of God through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. The words James uses to describe God’s grace define the biblical concept of *repentance*. In other words, he tells us what the grace of repentance looks like. Repentance begins with the removal of human pride through a deep sense of humility as we see how far we have once again wandered away from God, and the depth to which we have again made war against God and others and ourselves. It is then we share God’s hatred of sin and in seeking to put off our sin, we submit to God and resist the devil - which allows us to draw near to God, so we might receive the grace of God as He cleanses our hands and hearts. When we do humble ourselves before God, He will exalt us “*so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2:7). Repentance is the grace God uses to empower us by His Spirit to make war against worldliness in us - so our hearts will live in the kingdom of our good and perfect God rather than in the kingdom of the fallen world we live in.

*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor.* James 4:11-12

In the light of the speaking of the grace God offers us when we humbly repent, James also warns us not to presume upon God’s grace because we tend to take God’s grace for granted when it comes to ourselves but we are more stingy when it comes to one another. It’s significant that James says “*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers*” in the context of James 3 where he said: “*The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. . . . It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so*” (James 3:6, 8-10).

When James writes: “*Do not speak evil against one another*” he is not forbidding us from confronting a brother or sister in Christ when they have sinned by clearly violating a command or a principle in God’s Word, but rather he is condemning the practice of speaking negatively against one another behind each other’s back. James continues on by condemning the practice of standing in judgment of one another’s intentions and motives. The apostle Paul speaks of this issue in 1 Corinthians 4:2-5 and Jesus also speaks of it in Matthew 7:1-5. The bottom line here is that while we as brothers and sisters in Christ are to be accountable to correct one another when it comes to matters of commands or principles in God’s Word, our task is not to judge each other regarding issues of the heart where only God can judge. James also tells us its also wrong to stand in judgement of one another in matters that are not addressed in the Bible because we when we do go beyond the Scriptures, the standards we are then using are our standards – which then means we are standing in judgment over the standards of God’s Word, which means we are standing in judgement over God Himself. It’s here where James reminds us that God is the “*only lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.*” God is also the good God from above whose every gift is good and perfect gift; He is the Father of lights from above; who sent His only begotten son Jesus Christ into the world to die on a cross on our behalf; so we might be forgiven of our sins and delivered us from the domain of darkness of the world we live in and transferred us into the kingdom of our good and perfect God; who love us and gives us grace so that we might be saved and gives us more grace to repent when we wander in our walk with Him. Jesus paid the high cost of defeating the enemy of our souls. May our hearts and our live reflect grace of God we have given by the good and perfect God who loves us!

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