



War & Peace



James 4:1-10

The Question

James begins with a question: “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” (4:1a, *NIV*).

1. In general, what causes conflicts (fights, quarrels, battles, wars) among people?

The Problem

Read James 4:1-3. James, speaking in the context of the church, answers his first question with a second, rhetorical question: “Don’t they come from your desires¹ that battle within you?” (4:1b, *NIV*). The implied answer is “yes.” Another way to translate verse 2 is as follows:

📖 “You desire but do not have, so you kill.² You covet³ but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.” (4:2, *Today’s NIV; consistent with the majority of modern translations*).

2. Based on these verses, how would you answer James’ question: “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” How does your answer compare with the answer to discussion question 1? What are specific examples of this problem?⁴



Personal Reflection: What desires motivate you? Are these desires good or bad? Have these desires caused fights, quarrels, or conflicts in your life?

¹ “desires” – translated from Greek *hēdonē* (from which we get the word “hedonism”). In this context, *hēdonē* denotes sinful, self-indulgent desire.

² “kill” – some believe this means actual murder, or perhaps the hypothetical eventuality of murder; but many believe it is figurative for hate (see 1 John 3:15; Matthew 5:21-22)

³ “covet” – to desire something that belongs to another; to desire something (whether possessions or position) that is not rightfully yours; to envy.

⁴ Self-centered desires cause fights and quarrels. The first three verses of chapter 4 are a continuation of the last part of chapter 3, which talks about selfish ambition and envy. Verse 2 says, “you covet,” which is related to “envy.” And when the self-centered person does not get what he wants, he may become angry and hateful; resulting in arguments, fighting, division, hurting others, neglecting the needs of others, and neglecting God Himself.

3. James writes, “You do not have, because you do not ask God. [Even] when you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (2:2b-3). What do James’ readers need to pray for (1:5; 17-18)? What do we learn about prayer from these verses?



Personal Reflection: As a Christian, do you “ask God?” What do you ask for? Why do you ask God for these things? What are your motivations?

Read James 4:4-5.⁵ Another way to translate verse 5 is as follows:

📖 “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he (God) jealousy longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?” (4:5, *Today’s NIV; NIV footnote*)

4. What are some of the symptoms of “friendship with the world?” Why is it equivalent to “hatred” toward God? Why are “friends of the world” considered “enemies of God?”⁶



📖 *Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Luke 16:13, NIV)*

📖 “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” (1 John 2:15-17, NIV)

Personal Reflection: Do you recognize any symptoms of “friendship with the world” in your life? When someone looks at your life, do they see “friendship with the world” or “devotion to God?”

⁵ “you adulterous people” – when God’s people are unfaithful to Him, it is like a wife (or husband) committing adultery (Jeremiah 3:19-20; Matthew 12:39); “the world” – in this context, the fallen world and everything in it, including the whole system of humanity, which is opposed to God.

⁶ What are the values of the world? Personal achievement, status, position, prestige, power, influence, possessions, pleasure, comfort, self-fulfillment, self-sufficiency, self-gratification, etc. What are the methods of the world? Reliance on self, the ends justify the means, independence from God. Since “the world” is opposed to God, we are opposed to God when we are aligned with the world. We have “joined God’s enemies,” so we become God’s enemy. It doesn’t mean we don’t enter into the world, and be friendly to worldly people, but we don’t let the world influence us so that we are worldly. Jesus said that Christians are *in* the world but are not *of* the world.

The Solution

5. Verses 4-5 indicate that God does not tolerate unfaithfulness to Him. Those who have chosen to be friends of the world have become *enemies* of God, who is the Judge of the universe! This is bad! Read James 4:6. What is the good news? To whom does it apply? To whom does it *not* apply? How would you describe these two kinds of people?⁷

The Required Response

6. Since “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble,” a particular response is required. James gives 10 imperatives (commands). Read James 4:7-10.

Command	Meaning & Practical Application
➤ Submit yourself to God v. 7	Place yourself under God’s authority and lordship. Listen to what He says (through daily reading of the Bible) and then live your life according to God’s instructions.
▪ Resist the devil (and he will flee from you) ▪ Come near to God (and he’ll come near to you) v.7-8	<u>Read Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8-9</u> . Real spiritual forces oppose us. Be alert. Stand firm in the faith (in the victorious Christ). Use the Bible as a weapon. Pray! God is a person. Come near to Him in regular worship, prayer, and devotion.
▪ Wash your hands ▪ Purify your heart v. 8	Two aspects of one action. “Wash your hands” means change your outward behavior (forsake sinful behavior). “Purify your heart” means change your internal attitude by God’s grace. Don’t be double-minded. Be undivided in your mind. Love God with <i>all</i> your mind, soul & heart
▪ Grieve ▪ Mourn ▪ Wail v. 9	When we realize our sin against God, it should bring us sorrow. These go along with repentance – turning away from sin to God. 1 Corinthians 10a: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.” Is there anything you need to repent of?
▪ Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom v. 9	There is nothing wrong with being happy and joyful. The Bible tells us to rejoice “in the Lord” (<i>Phil 4:4</i>). But if we laugh in a boastful, self-satisfied way, with a casual attitude about sin, that’s bad. <i>Jesus</i> : “Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.” (<i>Luke 6:25b</i>)
➤ Humble yourself before God (and he will lift you up) v. 10	Similar to first command (forms an “inclusio”). We need to recognize who God is, and who we are. The Bible tells us. When we do, we will be humbled and submit to Him. God gives grace to the humble – salvation for those who turn to Him, and daily help to live the Christian life. <i>Jesus</i> : “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he humbles himself will be exalted” (<i>Luke 18:14b</i>)

Our world is full of fights, quarrels, and wars. Do you want peace? The most important peace is peace with God. We have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). And as we obey the above commands, the peace of Christ rules in our hearts.

⁷ The “good news” is that God is merciful and gracious. He has offered forgiveness and help to those who are humble – that is, those who know they have need, and know that God is the only One who can help. It is not “good news” for the proud, that is, those who think that they don’t need God’s forgiveness and help.