

James – Life after Faith
James 4:1-3
“War of the Wants”

1. THE SOURCE OF CONFLICT IN YOUR LIFE
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1. The *New York Times* recently ran an article about a very unique church and its ministry. The church is located just outside of Nashville, and is called *Xtreme Ministries*.

2. 37 year-old John Renken is the pastor, and also the team coach. You see, *Xtreme Ministries* is a church *and* a mixed martial arts academy, where the membership is trained to fight in the popular new sport of MMA.

3. The church’s motto (you can’t make this stuff up) is, “Where Feet, Fist, and Faith Collide.”ⁱ

4. In James chapter 4, Bro. James addresses the kind of fighting church that is not a ministry, but a menace.

5. Sadly, if you have been in the church long enough, you have probably had a brother or sister extend to you the “right fist of fellowship.”

6. Bro. Battle and Sister Strife are often more faithful to church than most of the real members. Unfortunately, when James asks in chapter 4, verse 1, “*From whence come wars and fightings among you?*” it is a legitimate question.

7. As we work through this text, you may be surprised to find that “wars and fighting” in the church have less to do with personalities, politics, or procedures.

8. In fact, James very bluntly informs us that the bickering and battles among us is simply a product of a war of the wants.

9. Walk with me through this text, and see what I mean. As you study this passage, you will find James pointing to three related truths. Notice them with me. First of all, in this text, Bro. James addresses:

I. THE SOURCE OF CONFLICTS IN YOUR LIFE

1. Being a youth pastor before, and now a pastor, on a number of occasions I have found myself trying to mediate, or sometimes referee, between two parties in a conflict.
2. What I have found is that whenever there is a conflict between two people, or two groups of people, inevitably when you ask them what is wrong, they will start by pointing the finger of blame at the other party.
3. You will hear something like, “Well she said this...,” or “He did that...”, and so the battle lines are drawn.
4. In the opening verse of chapter 4, Bro. James teaches us that when it comes to identifying the reason for the conflicts and fights of our life, rather than indicting someone else, we need to inspect ourselves.
5. Notice what James teaches us regarding the source of conflicts in your life. First of all, notice:

A. How he describes these conflicts

1. In verse 1, James asks, “*From whence come wars and fightings among you?*” Notice those two words “wars” and “fightings”.
2. They describe two different aspects of conflict and strife. The word “war” speaks of a drawn-out conflict between two powers, while the word “fightings” speaks of individual battles or skirmishes within that war.
3. Now it would be easy to recognize this kind of war filled with battles in our world. We see that all the time. However, don’t miss that James is asking about these things, “...*among you.*” He is talking to the church.
4. It is sad to say it, but I have seen people and families in churches who, like the Hatfields and McCoys, somewhere for some reason began a feud with one another.
5. Sometimes it’s a cold war, where neither party speaks, and sometimes it is an active war, with battles and skirmishes nearly every Sunday.
6. In John 14:27, Jesus said to his disciples, “*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you...*” With that in mind, you might expect the church to be as calm and peaceful as a funeral home after hours.
7. Unfortunately, just as James describes, there are wars and fightings that break out in the lives and churches of God’s people.

8. Notice something else James teaches us about the source of conflicts in your life. Notice not only how he describes these conflicts, but notice also:

B. How he diagnoses these conflicts

1. James' question in verse 1 is, "Where do these wars and fights come from?" He follows that with another question.

2. Notice verse 1. He asks, "...*come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*" Essentially, James says, "Are the conflicts around you not just a result of the conflict within you?"

3. What does he mean? I think the key is found in that word "lusts". It is translated from a Greek word that gives us our English word "hedonism".

4. Hedonism is the philosophy that life is all about the pursuit of personal pleasure. A hedonist wants first and foremost whatever will bring pleasure to them.

5. Having their way, their will, and their wants is the priority of a hedonist. James says there is a hedonist warring within your body.

6. Think about this. James says that the diagnosis for what is causing conflict in your life is not the people around you; it is the passions within you.

7. There is an old, sinful nature within each of us that wants to please the self, and not the Savior. That sinful nature would rather fight than forgive, it loves combat more than cooperation, and it will lash out more than it will reach out.

8. Once, a London newspaper asked several prominent people to write essays on the question, "What's wrong with the world?" Christian writer, G.K. Chesterton sent this response:

"Dear Sirs,

I am.

Sincerely Yours,
G.K. Chesterton

9. If you are looking for the source of the conflicts in your life, look no further than the mirror of God's Word and the depths of your own heart.

10. In this text, James points out not only *the source of conflicts in your life*, but notice also secondly, here the Word of God confronts:

II. THE SIN OF COVETOUSNESS IN YOUR LIFE

1. When God gave His perfect Law in the form of the Ten Commandments, the last of those dealt with the issue of coveting.
2. In Exodus 20:17, God said, *“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.”*
3. At the heart of this passage in James 4, the Word of God is confronting the breaking of the tenth commandment. Notice what the Spirit says here about the sin of covetousness in your life. First of all, notice:

A. What coveting looks like

1. In verse 2, though Bro. James never uses the word, he is describing very clearly the sin of coveting. Verse 2 says, *“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war...”*
2. I like the way the *English Standard Version* translates this particular verse. It says, *“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel...”*
3. Notice the two words “lust” and “desire” in this verse. They speak of craving and envying. Both of these are elements of coveting.
4. What does coveting look like? First of all, it is wanting something you do not have. James says, *“Ye lust, and have not...”*
5. In this sense, coveting is simply the opposite of contentment. It is the desire for more, or for something other than you already have.
6. Coveting is not only wanting something you don't have, but it is also wanting something you cannot get. James says, *“...you desire to have, and cannot obtain...”*
7. Your neighbor pulls in with a new car, and it aggravates you that you cannot afford one. You pass a big, new house, and sulk and pout about living in your little three-bedroom, two-bath home.
8. Shortly after John Kennedy's inaugural speech, the man he beat, Richard Nixon, confessed to one of Kennedy's aides that there were certain things Kennedy had said, that he wished he had said himself.
9. The aide said, “What, like ‘Ask not what your country can do for you...?’ Nixon replied, no, the part about, ‘I do solemnly swear...”

10. Coveting is when we crave what we do not have, or envy what we cannot have. That is what coveting looks like, but notice further:

B. What coveting leads to

1. Look again at verse 2. James says, “*Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war.*”
2. What makes covetousness such a serious sin is what can a lead a person to do when it is not confessed and countered by the Spirit of God.
3. James says, “You lust for things you do not have, so you kill...” The word translated “kill” describes the act of murder.
4. Were the Christians to whom James wrote really killing one another? That certainly could be the case. Many murders have been motivated by envy and jealousy.
5. I think a more likely explanation is that by the word “kill”, James is referring to destruction. Coveting can lead a person to destroy anything that stands in the path of what they want.
6. He also says that because of covetousness and wanting that which we do not have, we will “*fight and war*”.
7. I wonder, how do you respond when you don’t get your way? How do you react when people do don’t do what you want them to do? Do you fight them? Do you engage the war of the wants?
8. The other day I saw a news clip of a group of people fighting over food in the devastated country of Haiti. It was violent, ugly, and sad.
9. Those people were fighting for their survival. When we covet, more often than not we are fighting for nothing more than our own selfishness.
10. There is one more thing James points to in this passage. This text speaks not only to *the source of conflict in your life*, and *the sin of covetousness in your life*, but notice also thirdly that the Word speaks here about:

III. THE STATE OF CONTENTMENT IN YOUR LIFE

1. As I said earlier, coveting is the opposite of contentment. When we are striving and struggling for the things we want, it reveals that we are not satisfied with what we already have.

2. The wars and fights that break out among us happen when someone is discontented, and goes after what ever it is they want.
3. In verse 2 James makes an unexpected connection. He is talking about people craving and lusting, killing and fighting, and then he says, “...yet ye have not, because ye ask not.”
4. The word “ask” is the word used elsewhere to describe requesting something from God in prayer. In other words, James connects a lack of contentment with a person’s prayer life.
5. The reality is; how you pray says a lot about the state of contentment in your life. Let me show you this from the text. Notice first of all, when it comes to your state of contentment, James indicates that:

A. It can be experienced in your prayer life

1. Again, in verse 2, Bro. James says, “You are craving and coveting things, and yet one of the reasons you don’t have them is because you have not ask God for them.”
2. If you are discontented in your life, could it be simply because you are looking for contentment in all the wrong places?
3. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus said, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”
4. Do you realize that there is contentment and satisfaction that comes from seeking God and depending upon Him to give you what you need and to provide for your life?
5. Some of you are busy in the war of the wants, fighting for all the things you think you need to be happy.
6. However, what you really need is to lay down the weapons of your coveting, get on your knees, and ask your Father give you what He sees best.
7. Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft is the richest man in America, with a net worth of \$40 billion dollars. He has three children.
8. Can you imagine one of those kids fighting with somebody in the neighborhood, trying to take away one of their toys? That would be foolish. There is almost nothing that their dad could not provide for them.

9. There is no need to fight and struggle for what you think you want! You have a Father who can provide anything your life needs, and you can experience contentment by praying to Him.

10. The state of contentment in your life can be experienced in your prayer life, but notice also that:

B. It can be exposed in your prayer life

1. Look at what James says in verse 3. *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”*

2. Now think with me. Through prayer, you can find contentment in the things that God gives you.

3. However, if you *are* praying, but God does not answer, it may be a sign that you are not content with what God will give you.

4. James says, “Some of you don’t have because you won’t ask. Others of you don’t have because you ask ‘amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts’.”

5. The word “amiss” means “with the wrong motives”. It describes asking with the wrong *attitude*. But James also speaks of asking with the wrong *ambitions*. He says, *“...that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”*

6. Some people pray, not because they trust God, but because they treat God like a waiter who is supposed to take their order, and give them what they want.

7. For them, God is not the love of their life; He is just another outlet for the lust of their life.

8. John Ward was a member of the British Parliament. After he died, a prayer was found among his papers. The prayer said:

“O Lord, thou knowest that I have mine estates in the City of London, and likewise that I have lately purchased an estate in the county of Essex. I beseech thee to preserve the two counties of Middlesex and Essex from fire and earthquake...As for the rest of the counties, thou mayest deal with them as thou are pleased.”ⁱⁱ

8. Do you see the point James is making? Your prayer life can either be the source of your satisfaction, or it can be the symptom of your selfishness.

9. I wonder, what is the state of contentment in your life? Are you satisfied with what God has saw fit to give you?

10. Is it enough to just take your needs and wants to Him, and let Him provide according to His providence, or are you fighting the war of wants with Him too?

1. This text starts by dealing with the problem of fighting and conflict in the life of God's people. That is sadly a very common problem.

2. I think, however, if we only see this as a passage about conflict, we will have missed the deeper and more critical point – that is the problem of God's people looking for pleasure in other things besides the Lord Jesus.

3. In Jeremiah 2:13, God says, *“For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”*

4. In the New Testament, in John 4:14, Jesus said, *“...whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”*

5. Do you know how to end the war of the wants? Recognize that the only thing worth having is Jesus, and you don't have to fight with anybody to get Him.

ⁱ Schneiderman, R.M., Flock is Now a Fight Team in Some Ministries, 2/1/10, *nytimes.com*, accessed 2/11/10, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/02/us/02fight.html>

ⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, James: Faith that Works, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1991), p. 170