

God's Way Through Conflict

Series: The Power of Words and the Grace of God
James 4:1-2
Christopher Patton
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Sermon Summary/Outline:

Introduction

- These two small verses have the potential to radically and fundamentally change the way that you deal with relational conflict in every context of your life—in the family, in the workplace and in the community.
- Apart from having a functional, working understanding of the teaching contained in these few verses we will always process the inevitable relational tension and conflict that we face in unbiblical ways; that is we will never get beyond a surface level understanding of what happens **in our hearts** to produce conflict.
- Here in this passage, James the Lord's brother provides us with a Divine perspective on relational conflict. And in so doing he underscores both the serious nature of relational conflict and the source of relational conflict.

POINT #1: THE SERIOUSNESS OF RELATIONAL CONFLICT

- In this passage, the serious nature of relational conflict is evident in the language that James uses to refer to conflict in both verse 1 and verse 2 where he does not refer to conflict as a simple disagreement or clash of personalities, but as fighting and quarreling.
- The word here translated “fight” in the original language also means battle or combat. And the word translated quarrel can also mean battle, fight, or war.
- We have a tendency to minimize our conflicts, our angry outbursts, our resentful attacks on each other. James helps us see that what is going on is a very ugly and destructive thing, just like battles between nations
- Remember that even the subtle words of manipulative guilt and the cutting sarcastic remarks under your breath to your spouse and the harsh words of rebuke to your child— remember that God sees these words as words

that begin or prolong an unnecessary war of attrition against the ones that you love.

- May God help us to not speak sinful words that tear down and destroy!

POINT #2: THE SOURCE OF RELATIONAL CONFLICT

- James's opening question in verse 1 is "What **causes** quarrels and what **causes** fights among you?" James answers emphatically: "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"
- What does James mean by passions? What does he mean by "Passions at war within you?"
- Essentially, James is saying, "look, what's behind your conflicts with one another is a deeper conflict within your souls" ... and that's why he tells us that we have "passions [or desires] at war within us. James is referring here to the battle that we all face with remaining sin IN OUR HEARTS-- The same battle that Paul details for us in Galatians 5 where he says, "I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things that you want to do." What causes the conflict? It is something within...specifically it is inordinate desire in our hearts.
- As far as James is concerned here's the bottom line: **You quarrel and fight, because you want things so badly that when people erect obstacles to your getting what you want, they withhold from you what you want—its going to be trouble.**
- Sometimes the things we want are evil—but most often we simply want good things too much.
- David Powlison, summarizing John Calvin writes, "**the evil in our desires often lies not in what we want but in the fact that we want it too much. Natural affections become inordinate, ruling cravings. We are meant to be ruled by godly passions and desires...Grasping that the evil lies in the ruling status of the desire, not in the object, is frequently a turning point in self-understanding, in seeing the need for Christ's mercies, and in changing.**"
- Several examples given of wanting things too much:
 - Chris with Dairy Queen Ice Cream producing sinful anger
 - Chris with fear of man – how that is expressed in marriage.
 - Chris with how God has helped him with inordinate desires for comfort/ease.

- Reference CCEF idols of the heart handout.

CONCLUSION

- David Powlison has said, one of the beauties of identifying ruling desires is that they are specific and can therefore enable more specific repentance and specific change...
- There is another beauty of identifying ruling cravings that you need to know about as well. And that is this: the more that the Holy Spirit makes you aware of the sinful cravings that tend to rule **your heart**, the more that you will see your desperate need for a Savior who cleanses our hearts.
- The more that we see and confess that our own inordinate desires and cravings are what causes us to sin, the more we will be amazed by grace—and the more amazed we will be that God sent His son into the world to die for pitiable sinners such as you and me.

PRAY

Questions For Reflection/Discussion:

- 1) Re-read James 4:1-2. How does it affect you to think of relational conflict as “fighting” and “battling” and “going to war” with another person?
- 2) This passage identifies our passions/desires “at war within you” as the source of our conflicts. Read Galatians 5:16-24. What outward sins of speech reveal that there is a “war within” going on and that the flesh, for the moment, has gained the upper hand?
- 3) David Powlison, summarizing John Calvin writes, “the evil in our desires often lies not in what we want but in the fact that we want it too much.” What does that statement mean?
- 4) How do we know if we want something too much? In other words, how do we know if a desire has gained “lordship status?”
- 5) How can knowing that the evil in our desires often lies not in what we want but in the fact that we want it too much—how can that truth help us day in and day out?
- 6) Quickly review CCEF idols of the heart handout ([http://sovgracesermons.info/articles/Typical Idolatry.pdf](http://sovgracesermons.info/articles/Typical%20Idolatry.pdf)). For you, what desires do you have for good things that can sometimes become

inordinate and cause you to sin? How do you respond when you might not get what you want??