

Studies in James

Lesson 15

How Fights are Started and Stopped

INTRODUCTION:

- I. By nature, we're generally "fighters."
 - A. We would often rather fight than surrender.
 1. Occasionally, there are things that ARE worth fighting for.
 2. Then, on other occasions, fighting is NOT the appropriate course to take.
 - B. In our next study (next week), we will probe THOSE specific issues.
 1. We'll try to answer the question, "When IS It Right to Fight?"
 - a. When is it appropriate for us to stand our ground, and when is it appropriate to concede – to back off, or walk away?
 - C. However, in THIS lesson, we want to talk about how wars and fights are started in the FIRST place, and then what we can do to STOP them.
 1. James will give us some practical insights regarding how fights are BEGUN, and he provides us with some practical guidelines – inspired guidelines – on how fights and conflicts can be brought to an end.

- II. Unfortunately, our Bibles make a chapter break between James 3:18 and 4:1.
 - A. But James HASN'T actually changed subjects, NOR has he shifted his emphasis.
 - 1. He is STILL dealing with the destructive nature of the tongue.
 - a. And his message builds to a great CRESCENDO in the beginning of chapter four.
 - b. He deals with open CONFLICTS between Christians brought on by the TONGUE in the previous chapter.
 - B. This message is broken down into four parts:
 - 1. First, James presents an indepth ANAYLSIS of the problem – or, to put it another way, he tells us some basic FACTS about the problem of "wars" and "fights" between brethren. **(vs 1a)**
 - 2. Then James gives us some insight into the real CAUSE of these "wars" and "fights," and then proceeds to explain the DISASTEROUS RESULTS of these "wars" and "fights."
 - 3. Third, James offers a real workable SOLUTION to the problem, and provides practical guidelines for STOPPING these conflicts.
 - 4. And finally, James gives us some PRACTICAL INSPIRED PRINCIPLES for avoiding these kinds of conflicts in the future.
 - C. Let's look at the text together:

1. **James 4:1-10** – *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

BODY:

- I. James begins this section of his letter to first century saints by providing an inspired ANALYSIS of the problem.
 - A. First, James presents some initial facts. **(v 1a)**
 1. To begin with, James lets us know who's fighting.
 - a. The words "*among you*" refer to believers – Christians.
 2. Then James moves on to describe the nature of these fights or battles – in fact, he describes these conflicts by the use of two distinct words.
 - a. The first word is "*wars*" (some translations render this word as battles - quarrels)
 - (1). These words suggest a much BROADER kind of confrontation.
 - (a). This word would be referring to some WIDE-SPREAD battle or conflict.
 - (b). It would be some major confrontation between brethren that is WIDE-SPREAD and FAR-REACHING – one that apparently affects a large number of people.
 - b. The second word James uses to describe battles is the word "*fights*" (sometimes translated as conflicts)

(1). This word suggests a much **NARROWER** kind of confrontation.

(a). It would be more like a **SKRIMISH** between a few individuals – an **INDIVIDUAL, PRIVATE** kind of battle.

(c). James is speaking about a confrontation that is **LIMITED** in its scope, and affects only a few.

II. Secondly, James talks about the two major **CAUSES** of these "wars" and "fights."

A. James says the primary **CAUSE** of these "wars" and "fights" is our selfish, self-centered **INNER DESIRES**.

1. **James 4:1b-3** – James asks, *Do they [these wars and fights] not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

2. The Greek term "*lust*" (**v 2**) refers to "desire" or "passion."

a. Although we think of "*lust*" as being a **NEGATIVE KIND OF THING** – the term itself is basically **NEUTRAL**.

- (1). Therefore, when we're talking about DESIRE or PASSION, we ALWAYS need to define the word in its CONTEXT.
 - (2). SOME of our DESIRES may be perfectly legitimate (i.e., health, friendship, family, job, home, education, freedom from oppression).
 - (3). The PROBLEM, however, comes when these desires become FRUSTRATED, and cannot be readily attained.
 - (4). When that happens, we generally begin to FIGHT TO GET OUR WAY -- even if God might be the One who is KEEPING us from fulfilling a desire (because it might not be in His plan for us).
 - (5). That's when our CARNAL nature wants us to FIGHT TO GET OUR WAY – to GET WHAT'S OURS!
3. And notice the EFFECTS of unchecked desires – there are actually FOUR ways we can become affected. **(vs 2-3)**
- a. The FIRST is to be filled with jealous covetousness – all because desires have NOT been fulfilled.
 - (1). This leads to hatred – which leads to murderous thoughts, words, and actions.

- b. The SECOND way we are affected is by burning with envy and anger – once again, because our gratification, contentment and happiness were NOT fulfilled.
 - (1). This leads to fights and wars – arguments.
 - c. The THIRD way we are affected is that it all KILLS our prayer-life – we simply stop praying, which is certainly a reason why our desires haven't been met.
 - d. And FOURTH, when we DO pray, we pray with the wrong MOTIVES – all because our INTENTIONS are wrong.
 - (1). We want to spend what we desire, satisfying our own sensual pleasures.
- B. After telling us the causes of these "wars" and "fights" is our selfish, self-centered INNER DESIRES, James tells us RESULTS of these inner desires, namely that we end up actually becoming a "FRIEND" of the world. (v. 4)
- 1. **James 4:4** – *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*
 - 2. The "world" James is describing here can be defined as a WORLD SYSTEM – a whole WORLD PHYLOSOPHY – all of which is built around the belief of man's ability to help himself.

- a. We become determined to WORK OUT OUR OWN PROBLEMS!
 - (1). While this is good in most instances – it can be devastating in others.
 - (2). Especially, when God is trying to say "NO!" – when we're trying to FORCE something to happen that ISN'T in keeping with God's WILL or His PLAN for us.
 - b. When this happens, those of us who find ourselves being guided by the *"world"* will actually end up FIGHTING AGAINST GOD.
 - (1). If we can't get GOD to cooperate with us in getting what we want – we'll run to the *"world"* for ITS help and support.
 - c. And THIS is what is called being a "FRIEND OF THE WORLD."
2. But James warns us that there are TWO BIG EFFECTS of being a friend of the world.
 - a. First, being a friend of the WORLD means being UNFAITHFUL to GOD – in other words, we commit SPIRITUAL ADULTERY.
 - (1). The reading of James 4:4a in the AMPLIFIED NEW TESTAMENT is probably one of the best.

(2). It reads: *"You are like unfaithful wives, having illicit love affairs with the world, and breaking your marriage vow to God!"* **(James 4:4a – Amplified New Testament)**

b. Not only do we become UNFAITHFUL to God, we actually become an ENEMY of God – there is a serious BREACH in our relationship with the Father in heaven.

(1). Listen once again to the way the AMPLIFIED NEW TESTAMENT renders the rest of verse 4.

(2). It reads: *"Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God."*

(James 4:4b -- Amplified New Testament)

(3). But keep in mind this important fact: WE take OUR stand against God – it is US who breaches the relationship – NOT GOD.

III. Next James offers a SOLUTION to the problem.

A. **James 4:5-6** – *Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the*

humble." James says the SOLUTION to the problem comes by doing TWO THINGS:

1. First, we need to recognizing the real SOURCE of our power – the Holy Spirit. **(v 5)**
 - a. James says, God YEARNS (desires) for the Spirit to be received (welcomed) with a jealous love.
 - b. Like any husband, God will NOT share His love with anyone else.
 - (1). He demands SINGLE ALLEGIANCE – not allegiance to Him AND the world at the same time.
 - c. When we DIVIDE our allegiance (trying to love God and the world at the same time), we will LOSE EVERYTHING.
 - d. However, when we give our love EXCLUSIVELY TO GOD, the power and influence of the Holy Spirit is NOT hindered.
2. Second, James says we need to remember the principle: God gives grace to the humble. (v 6)
 - a. HUMILITY is that special quality that will ALWAYS draw God near to our side – whereas PRIDE always drives Him away (makes Him our opponent).
 - b. In other words, God is more GRACIOUS (more willing to shower unmerited favor) to the humble.
 - (1). Why?

- (a). Because THEY know they need God grace and mercy.
 - (b). AND, because they know they CAN'T BE SAVED WITHOUT IT.
- (2). The humble person is ALWAYS dependent on God – always TRUSTING and having complete CONFIDENCE in God.
- c. Furthermore, the idea expressed here suggests God CONTINUALLY gives grace to the humble.
- (1). For example, John tells us God CONTINUALLY cleanses us from our sins by His grace through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- (a). **1 John 1:6-7** – *If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*
 - (b). The tense of the verb here in the Greek suggests a CONTINUAL cleansing from all sin.
 - (c). It's NOT AUTOMATIC, but it's CONTINUAL – it's there every time we need it.

- (d). I think we need to understand THIS about God's grace. We can ABANDON, or WALK AWAY FROM God's grace, but we can't ACCIDENTLY SLIP from it if our life is characterized by a WALK WITH GOD!
- (e). Perhaps we can say, God looks at our life OVERALL rather than at our individual failures.

IV. Finally, James concludes by offering us some PRACTICAL ADVICE for avoiding these kinds of problems in the future.

A. **James 4:7-10** – *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

1. Notice how everything James says here is BRACKETED by the word "HUMBLE" – the word found in VERSE 7 and again in VERSE 10.
 2. Therefore, everything BETWEEN these two occurrences of the word "HUMBLE" describe what it MEANS to be TRULY "humble" and "submit to God" so that He can "exalt you."
- B. James says, for God to exalt you, you must do four things:

1. First, SUMBIT TO GOD.
 - a. This just another way of saying be SUBJECT to God.
 - b. Cease fighting AGAINST God and start seeking to let Him take control of your life.
 - c. SUBMIT yourself to HIS will.

2. Second, RESIST THE DEVIL.
 - a. Stand FIRM against the devil.
 - b. James says if we RESIST him, he will flee from us.
 - c. Perhaps, like Jesus, we ALSO need to say, "Get behind me Satan!"
 - (1). **1 Corinthians 10:13** – *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*
 - (a). Three things are taught here: First, the temptations we face are NOT UNIQUE (someone, somewhere is ALSO facing this same temptation); second, God limits the power of Satan and will NOT allow you to be tempted more than you're CAPABLE OF BEARING; and third, God ALWAYS provides SOME

way of escape – we simply need to LOOK for it, and TAKE it when we find it.

(2). **1 John 5:18** – *We know that whoever is born of God does not sin [does not HABITUALLY sin – doesn't LIVE in sin]; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.*

(a). Satan can't TOUCH us UNLESS we put ourselves within his reach.

(b). If there is some temptation YOU can't seem to resist, then you AREN'T keeping yourself out of Satan's reach – your giving IN to SOMETHING that keeps you WITHIN Satan's reach.

3. Third, James says we need to DRAW NEAR TO GOD.

a. Come close to God and He will come close to you.

b. Realize that you're a sinner:

(1). Be willing to confront the fact that your hands have been soiled by sin.

(2). Be willing to admit that you need to purify your heart from spiritual adultery.

(3). Be willing to confess to God that you have been disloyal, wavering individuals with divided loyalties.

- c. As you draw near to God, be deeply grieved over your disloyalty.
 - (1). Experience Godly sorrow that leads to repentance. (2 Cor. 7:10)
 - (2). Let your LAUGHTER be turned to GRIEF, and your JOY to heartfelt SHAME and SORROW for your sins.
- 4. Finally, James tells us we need to CLEANSE our HANDS, and PURIFY our HEARTS.
 - a. Don't stop with sorrow, go on to ACTIVELY deal with anything that has caused enmity between you and God.
 - b. The apostle Paul put it this way: He said there are things we should NOT DO, followed by things we need to DO!
 - (1). **Romans 6:13** – *"Do NOT PRESENT your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but PRESENT yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."*

CONCLUSION:

- I. So, how do we STOP fights before they even START?
 - A. First, ANALYZE THE PROBLEM (Check two things):
 - 1. We need to check our own inner desires.

- a. Make certain our own carnal nature doesn't come to the surface.
2. We ALSO need to check our motivation.
 - a. Are we being motivated by a "friendship with the world," or a "friendship with God?"
 - b. If it appears that God isn't helping us with what we want, do we take matters into our own hands?
- B. Second, to STOP fights before they even START, we need to UNDERSTAND THE SOLUTION (Remember two things):
 1. First, we need to remember that the SOURCE of our power is the Holy Spirit.
 - a. We need to understand that the power and influence of the Holy Spirit can only work when we have a SINGLE ALLEGIANCE – an allegiance to GOD.
 2. And second, we need to remember the principle: God gives grace to the humble.
 - a. HUMILITY is the one quality that will ALWAYS draw God near, while PRIDE drives Him away.
- C. And finally, to STOP fights before they get STARTED, you need to Humble yourself (Four ways):
 1. By submitting to God.
 2. By resisting the devil.

3. By drawing near to God.
 4. And by, cleansing your hands and purifying your hearts.
- II. It's virtually IMPOSSIBLE for a fight to get started when one side doesn't want to fight.
- A. And even if a confrontation arises, it won't last long.
 1. There won't be anything to keep fueling it.
 - B. But, is it ever RIGHT TO FIGHT?
 1. Next week, we'll answer the question "WHEN IS IT RIGHT TO FIGHT?"
- III. Take a close look at your life right now.
- A. Is YOUR life characterized by these four qualities of humility – one who is constantly:
 1. Submitting to God?
 2. Resisting the devil?
 3. Drawing near to God?
 4. Cleansing your hands and purifying your hearts?
 - B. If NOT, then there is a serious problem – you are NOT a FRIEND of God, but rather a FRIEND of the WORLD, and because you're a FRIEND of the WORLD, that makes you an ENEMY of God.

1. Don't think for a **MOMENT** that you can go to heaven being a friend of the world and an enemy of God.
2. Do you need to put the **FRIENDSHIP** (the intimate **LOVE**) of the world behind you and **TRULY** become a **FRIEND** of God?
3. If the answer to that question is "Yes," then you can do this one of two ways:
 - a. For those who have never obeyed the gospel of Christ...
 - b. For those of you who **HAVE** obeyed the gospel of Christ, but have gone **BACK** into the world (if not completely, at least within your heart)...