

**James**  
**War and Peace: Learning to Deal with Conflict, Part 1**  
**James 4:1-10**  
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A number of years ago, a group of academics and historians studied the world's history, and released this remarkable and startling conclusion: that if you were to start at 3,600 B.C. and move to the present, the world has known less than 292 years of peace. The rest of all those thousands of years, the world has been riddled with war. There've been over 14,000 wars, these academics discovered, in which some 3.6 billion people have died. One particular man, by the name of Quincy, Professor Quincy, in his book, *The Study of War*, examines just the period between 1480 A.D. and 1941. During those 461 years nations were involved in the following numbers of major wars, just during those 460 years. Great Britain, 78 major wars; France, 71; Spain, 64; Russia, 61; Austria, 52; Germany, 23; and the U.S., of course, (because of its relative youth, in terms of the age of nations), 13; China, 11; and Japan, 9.

It's amazing to see how the history of the world is a history of war. This has always been true of humanity, starting at the very first murder in Genesis 4, running through human history, all the way to Revelation 21, when at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, Christ will ultimately demolish all of His enemies: Satan, and all of those who oppose Him. And for the first time, from that time forward in history, in eternity, there will be no war. Sadly, our world is absolutely filled with fighting, and not just at the level of nations. No part of human life and experience is free from sinful conflict, whether it's in the work place, where there is subtle infighting, or subtle antagonism, whether it's conflicts separating the best of friends and the relationship of friendship, or whether it's in the home. Conflict, for many, is a regular part of life in their home. It goes on between siblings, between parents and children, and all too commonly between spouses. In fact, you may be sitting here this morning, and your marriage could better be described as a war, as a series of battles. You know it. Your kids know it. And God certainly knows it.

Conflict. Conflict even finds a place to hide in the church. Perhaps, you've heard me, in the past, describe the most egregious example of conflict in the church, that I personally experienced. When I was growing up in a Southern Baptist Church, I remember sitting out in the congregation, one Wednesday night for a business meeting, which was always a source of either

entertainment, or dismay, depending on what exactly happened. But I remember sitting there, that Sunday night or that Wednesday night, rather, and watching the chairman of the deacons and the husband of the pianist stand mouth to mouth in the front of the church, yelling at each other, and come that close to fist to cuffs.

Even good biblical churches, which that one was not, are not exempt from conflict. I remember, when I was at Grace, hearing John MacArthur, on a number of occasions, describe that shortly after he arrived at Grace Church a senior citizens' class, that'd been relocated to another location, (God forbid), had staged a sit-in on the patio. They refused to go to their classroom, their new classroom, or to the worship service. So, all morning, they sat on the patio, staging a protest in conflict with the leadership of the church.

Conflict in the church is so common that caricatures of fighting in churches is a part of our culture: like the young father, who overheard his daughter and her friends fighting and arguing in the backyard, and he went out to mediate the conflict, and his daughter said, "Dad, it's O.K. We're just playing church!" Conflict, in every part of life, is a reality in the world in which we live. I can guarantee you, this morning, that either you are currently engaged in conflict, or you know someone who is. It's pandemic. But have you ever wondered "why?" Or more importantly, have you ever truly tried to discern how it is that we ought to deal with conflict?

Well, as we return to the letter that James wrote to those who had, at one time, been a part of his church in Jerusalem, but who'd been scattered because of persecution, James explains how it is that we are to deal with this inevitable reality of conflict. We find this in the first paragraph of James 4, James 4:1-10. Let me read it for you. James writes:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You're envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. And you ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, *it* says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." Submit 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 miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you.”

Now that is a difficult passage! It’s a hard one to really get our arms around. And we’re going to do that, over the next several weeks. Today, because we have the privilege of commemorating the Lord’s Supper together, we only have a chance to get started in studying this, really life-transforming passage. Because what he speaks of, the theme of this paragraph, is completely applicable to every single one of us here. We will learn, from this passage, that there are very specific steps that we must take to learn how to deal with interpersonal conflict. And surprisingly (listen carefully) surprisingly, these steps have nothing to do with resolving the cause of the conflict. Instead, James directs us to take a long, hard look at ourselves first. In fact, nothing in these ten verses allows us to point the finger at somebody else as the cause for the conflict in our lives. Instead, James, as it were, points his finger at us. But he doesn’t just rebuke us, as Scripture does. This paragraph contains several imminently practical steps for dealing with conflict in our lives.

The first step that we’ll look at together this morning, begin to look at together, the first step for dealing with conflict is found in verses 1-3. It’s: identify the true source of conflict. Identify the true source! Now you may not remember, because it’s been several weeks

By the way, I want to say a great “thank you” to both Carey Hardy and Dr. Bruce Ware for ministering the Word of God to you in by absence. I heard wonderful things about their ministry.

But, it’s been a couple of weeks since we’ve been in James. So, let me just refresh your memory. We finished in James 3:1 with James, rather, telling us that true, godly wisdom is not characterized by selfish ambition and jealousy. In fact, look at verse 17: “The wisdom that God gives is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable.” And in verse 18, he goes on to stress and emphasize the fact that peace and righteousness always co-exist together. Think about that for a moment. Peace and righteousness always co-exist. Where there is righteousness, there will be peace. And where there is no peace, there cannot be there is not true righteousness. So, that immediately raises an obvious question: “What is the source of the wars and quarrels, the

conflicts and conflagrations, the arguments and the antagonisms that can often exist, even between Christians?”

Look at verse 1, literally, verse 1. The first line of verse one reads this way: “From where, wars and from where, battles?” James doesn’t even include verbs. One commentator believes that James is so carried away, he’s so worked up about this, that it’s as if he’s speaking “parent” talk. You know, parents, how it is, how sometimes you’re, you’re so into what you’re trying to tell your kids, that you skip necessary parts of speech to get the message across. And that’s exactly what’s happening here, with James: “From where? Where’s it coming from? What’s the source?” Now notice that James chooses the language of war. Both these Greek words that are here translated “quarrels and conflicts”, both of the Greek words, like their English counterparts, can refer to literal wars and battles, or they can be used metaphorically to refer to quarrels and arguments and conflicts. And of course, that’s the sense James means here.

Take a look, for example, at the word, “quarrels”. The Greek word literally means “armed conflict”. From where do the armed conflicts among you come? It was used to describe either a war, or a single battle. In fact, it’s used later in the book of Revelation to describe the wars at the time of the End. The word, “conflicts” originally meant “battles”. It’s used this way, back in the Old Testament, in Joshua 4:13, in the Septuagint to refer to a literal battle, with armed men fighting. But it came, eventually, to be used of battles that were fought solely with the tongue. In fact, in secular Greek, this word was often used to describe marital conflict.

In the New Testament, it never speaks, the second word translated “conflicts,” it never speaks of actual war, but always it denotes verbal quarrels or internal arguments. So, from where, or as the NAS translates it: “What is the source of [the wars and the battles, or the] quarrels and ... [the fights] (and this is shocking) ‘among you’?” Now remember: James is writing to Christian people. These are believers. And he says, “Where are these quarrels, these wars and battles among ‘you’ coming from?” Sadly, Christians are not exempt from conflict.

You see this throughout the New Testament. We love to pick on the Corinthians, and perhaps, rightly so. First Corinthians 1:11, Paul begins his letter to the Corinthian church by saying, “I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s *people*, that there are quarrels among you.” You turn over to chapter 6. You find that these quarrels had grown into lawsuits. The people in Corinth were so much “at each other”, that some of them were taking other members of the church before the court! They were suing them!

When you turn to his second letter to the Corinthians, you learn that things hadn't gotten much better. Paul had written 1 Corinthians to them. He'd written a letter that we don't have recorded for us in the New Testament. And then he'd written this third letter that we call 2 Corinthians. And at the end of this third letter, and all the time Paul spent in Corinth, listen to what he says: 2 Corinthians 12:20: "... I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you not to be what I wish; and may therefore be found by you not to be what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;" [in the church!] This is a reality!

You remember our study of Philippians, now a year or so ago, that when you come to chapter 4 of Philippians, you find the same thing was happening in the church in Philippi. There were these two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who were "at each other", and he urges them; he pleads with them to live in harmony in the church. It's a problem. And the same problem was true to those Christians to whom James writes. James writes to these believers who used to be a part of his church. And he says, "I'm concerned about the conflicts that are going on among you and how it damages the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Seventeenth century Jewish philosopher, Spinoza, wrote these, really chilling, words. He says,

I have often wondered that persons who make a boast to professing the Christian religion, namely love, joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all men should quarrel with such rancorous animosity, and display daily towards one another such bitter hatred; that this, rather, rather than the virtues which they profess is the readiest criteria of their faith. (End Quote)

Wow! What a terrible indictment! What you and I have to do is: we must each ask ourselves, "Am I a reasonable person? Am I easy to be entreated? Am I peaceable? Or is there someone, or is there, are there many people with whom I tend to quarrel and argue constantly? The people who know me best see me as a quarrelsome person, constantly engaging with at least one person, and maybe a number of people in arguments and fights of various kinds?"

When there is a Christian who is engaged in quarreling and arguing and fighting and conflict with others, the question comes, "Where does it come from?" "How can this be?" "Where does it come from?" You know, that's an interesting question, in and of itself. Why would James begin his discussion of conflict with that question? There's an important implication to it. And

it's this: you and I tend to look at merely the external. We tend to get carried away with the external. And we want to fix the problem by doing a little better in our interaction with people.

But our God is never content to let us deal only with the outward manifestation of our sinful heart: in this case, quarreling and fighting. Instead, the Lord, and in Scripture, we're always being taken to the sinful attitude, or the thinking, or the mindset, or the motive that lies behind that external, sinful act. You see, it's not enough to try to get along with the one you're quarreling with. You have got to ask yourself, "Why?" "Where's that coming from?" "What is it in my sinful heart that's causing me to argue with others?" You need to discover what prompts you to fight and quarrel. What's the source? You don't have to look very far, because James tells us exactly here, where the quarrels and arguments come from. But let me just tell you: You're not going to like the answer. He tells us, "Those quarrels those fights that you engage in, that I engage in, they come from our sinful hearts." We're the real problem.

Now this is important, because what do we all have a tendency to do when we get in a fight or a quarrel? We are the ones who are taking the moral high ground. We're the ones who are right. We convince ourselves. We have this tendency to defend ourselves, and immediately assume that we're right, and the person that we're arguing with is wrong; that we are the ones who are in the defensible position. We're the ones who are taking some noble defense of the truth. And the person we're arguing with is just a low life who can't understand our force of argument.

But James doesn't allow that. He says, "Forget about the other person." You can read James 4:1-10 all you want, and you won't find the other person in the argument mentioned at all! James is talking to "you" as you hear, and to me, as I read it! He's addressing each of us individually. He doesn't even think about the other person! You see, it doesn't matter who the other person is; doesn't matter whether they're a Christian or not a Christian; doesn't matter whether they're doing what they ought to do or not doing what they ought to do. If you're involved in a quarrel and argument, the problem is with "you"! And it's with "me"! And by the way, it doesn't even matter what the issue is. Notice that James never tells us, in these verses, what the issues were that were causing conflict among these Christians. We don't know! And it doesn't really matter. It doesn't matter who was right or wrong. If there was quarreling and fighting, both were wrong. And that's what James wants us to see. If you're engaged in quarreling and arguing, the source of the problem is "you"!

But James gets more specific. Notice verse 1. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" Now this is

obviously a question that is “not” a question! You men understand this. It’s like when your wife says to you, “You’re not going to wear that, are you?” Now that is obviously and most certainly “not” a question! She is not looking for information. She’s making a point. It’s an affirmation! And that’s exactly what James is doing here, in the second half of verse 1.

We could legitimately convert this to a statement of fact. James says, “The source of the quarrels and conflicts among you is ‘your pleasures’.” Now this is absolutely crucial to understand. The key word, here, and the crucial concept is this word, “pleasures.” You’ll notice, that word occurs again at the end of verse 3. The word “pleasures” translates a Greek word that you’ll recognize. It’s the Greek word “hedone.” It’s the word from which we get our word, “hedonist.” Originally, this word was used to describe the feeling of desire perceived only through the sense of taste. I hesitate to mention this with lunch so close, but we, on our trip, had a wonderful time. And one of the things we enjoyed doing was eating, in fact, eating a little too much. We had everything from fried green tomatoes to fried oysters. You know, everything in the south is fried. And we had shrimp and grits. And we had all these great South Carolina low-country dishes. And the desire for those tastes is what this word originally meant. But, eventually, it came to be used for the pleasure of, or the desire of “all” the senses.

Let me show you how this word is used in the New Testament. It’s only used five times, two of those times here in James 4. So, let’s look at the other three times it’s used. Turn back to Luke 8. We need to get a handle on this word, because it’s crucial to unlock this passage: Luke 8:14. Jesus is in the middle of the “parable of the soils,” or as it’s commonly called, “The Parable of the Sower.” And you’ll remember the one kind of heart, the one soil was the one with thorns. And the seed of the gospel is sown there. And Jesus is now explaining what that means. Luke 8:14: “The *seed* [the gospel,] which fell among the thorns, these are those who have heard the good news. And as they go on their way, they are choked with worries and riches [and here’s our word] and ‘pleasures’ of *this* life.” By the way, the word, “life” here, is the word “bios,” the word from which we get “biology.” He’s talking about natural life. He says, “These pleasures of natural life, of life here in this world, as opposed to the true pleasures that are found in God, choke out the gospel, and cause a person not to truly, savingly respond. So, we find that these pleasures are part of natural, fallen life, and are antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Turn to Titus 3. I read this to you, just a few minutes ago for our Scripture reading: Titus 3. Here, we learn something more about these pleasures. Not only are they opposed to the gospel; not only do they crowd out spiritual interests. But in Titus 3:3 Paul writes: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, in slavery to various lusts [or cravings] and [here’s

our word] “pleasures”. So, we find that as part of who we used to be, we were absolutely in slavery to fulfilling the demands of our cravings and “pleasures”.

In 2 Peter (you don’t need to turn there), but in 2 Peter 2:13 Peter says (speaking of false teachers), “They count it a ‘pleasure’ to revel in the daytime.” Here, he’s talking about false teachers being given over to pleasure. Now the other two occurrences are in James 4. The one we’ve already seen in verse 1, the source: your pleasures. And in the end of verse 3: “You ask, and you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.” Now what I want you to notice is that this word, “hedone,” or “pleasures,” as it’s translated, is a synonym with another word you know: the word “lust”. Lust, by the way, as we’ve learned before, when we’ve covered James 1, doesn’t speak of just sexual temptation. It speaks of craving: a strong desire for anything that’s opposed to God, or outside of His purpose for you.

Now, notice: James uses this word in its verb form, (4:1) is our noun “pleasures”; and then in 4:2 “you lust:” There’s the verb form of our word “lust”. So basically, he uses the two synonymously. That’s important that you understand that; because there is a rich theology behind these two words They are identical. They are the same. By the way, notice James adds a clarifying comment at the end of verse 1. He says, “Your pleasures that [are constantly waging] ... war in your members.” “Your members” is probably a reference to our human bodies, our individual human bodies. So here, we have, in James a powerful picture. Listen carefully. He’s saying that within us, within every one of us, there are strong desires, or cravings, which are a continual assault on our souls.

You see, the New Testament speaks of believers having a part of them that is yet unredeemed. The Bible calls it our “flesh”. We are a new person in Christ. We have a new heart. We’ve been given a new desire to serve God, and new power to do so. But we retain, even as believers in this world, what the Bible calls “our flesh”. And the key characteristic of our flesh is that it has within it these cravings that long to be satisfied. Their clear goal is to secure satisfaction for themselves. And because of that, they war against our souls.

In fact, Peter says, in 1 Peter 2:11: “Beloved, I urge you ... to abstain from fleshly cravings, lust, which wage war against the soul.” These cravings, these strong desires, or maybe another word would be “sinful expectations.” They’re expressions of the flesh, seeking satisfaction. And here’s what you need to understand.



Turn back to James 1, James 1:13. You remember, we studied this in detail. When you're tempted, don't say, God did it; because God doesn't tempt anyone. Here's how it happens: verse 14, "... each one [every one of us] is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own [cravings] his own lust." Here's the synonym. Here's the point you need to get. Within your heart, and within mine, in part of what the Bible calls "our flesh" that we retain; it's not strictly the human body. It includes the human body, but it's more than that. There's part of our immaterial part that's affected by this, as well. As part of who we are, there is these desires, these strong cravings for what will satisfy. And James wants us to know that it's out of those cravings that temptation grows. Our temptations are involved with these cravings. But more than that, these same cravings, these same lusts, these same sinful expectations not only lead us into temptation, but they lie behind every sinful conflict.

In other words, if you draw a line between your temptations and its root, and your conflicts and its root, they both flow from the same root, the cravings that are in your heart and mine. Those desires for whatever it is that's opposed to God: could be sexual, could be for power, could be for acceptance, could be for peace, could be for security, could be for comfort, could be for a certain appearance, could be a craving for whatever! But those strong cravings are what drive us into temptation and into conflict. You say, "How do those cravings produce conflict?" Well, listen to D. Edmund Hebert: "These cravings, in demanding gratification, actively enter into conflict with fellow believers who thwart the fulfillment of those desires." In other words, outer conflicts reveal this inner tension.

John Blanchard puts it another way: "The simple truth is that a man can only satisfy all of his own self-centered desires by conflicting with the desires of other people." You see, what happens is when your desire, when your craving for whatever it is you want, is thwarted by that other person, and they want what they want, therefore, conflict is created, and arguments begin. What's the source of conflict? James says it comes from the cravings, desires, and sinful expectations that are a part of our flesh.

But how can we stop quarrels? Well, there're several steps to dealing with conflict that are in this paragraph. We've just begun to look at the first step. James says, "Identify the true source." The true source (listen carefully) is not the issue you're arguing about. The true source of the problem isn't the other person. Please listen and get this into your head because this is the lie we tell ourselves. When we quarrel, and when we fight, the issue isn't the issue! The issue isn't the other person! It's us! It's you. It's me. Specifically, it's our pleasures that continually wage war in our members. When those desires we have go unmet, when our cravings are not satisfied,

when our expectations are not fulfilled, then we strike out at the person who stands in the way of that self-satisfaction.

Here's your homework for this week (and mine, as well): Every time that you find yourself in a quarrel, this week, every time you find yourself in an argument, in a verbal war, stop and ask yourself this question (or if you're carried away, and you don't stop, after the fact, ask yourself this question): "What self-centered craving am I trying to protect by engaging in this argument?" That's the real issue. When you argue, stop yourself; forget the other person; forget the issue that is supposedly being argued, and ask yourself this simple question: "What self-centered craving am I trying to protect by engaging in this argument?"

And with each argument, it may be different. Or you may find a common thread. But regardless, James says, "You've got to start in dealing with conflict by understanding where it comes from." It doesn't come from the issue you're debating. It doesn't come from the other person and their problems. It comes from your heart and from my heart. If we're engaged in quarreling, then we're the issue.

Why is all this so important? Why is it important that we deal with conflict? Why is unity so crucial? Why must we overcome conflict with peace? Turn to Ephesians 4. Let me show you what Paul says. Here's why it's important. He begins this practical section of Ephesians, Ephesians 4:1 by saying,

... I ... implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called, [And do it] with ... humility and gentleness, [and] ... patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. [Watch verse three.] being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. [He says, "Listen! We're all connected. Preserve the unity! Preserve the unity; get over the conflict!" Why? [Verse 4, Here's why:] *There is* one body... [Folks, we're all connected to each other!] [There is] ... one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; [There is] one Lord! [We worship and bow to one Lord! How can we fight with each other?] [There is] one faith, [that is, one body of doctrine that we have come to embrace.] [And] one baptism, [probably a reference to our actual baptism after conversion, when we're put under the water as a demonstration that we've committed our lives to follow Christ] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in all."

He wants us to understand that we need to be united. We need to get over conflict, because of who we are; because of what it says to those around us; how it demeans and destroys and demolishes the beauty and character of Christ and His church.

Robert Johnstone, the nineteenth Scottish preacher, wrote,

Men and women, who on the Sabbath have sat side by side at the Lord's Table, and drunk of the common cup of love, will scowl at, and argue with, and thwart each other all the week. And the feeling is not infrequently such as to remind one of the host of Midian, when every man's sword was turned against his fellow.

(End Quote)

He's exactly right. You see, folks, this morning, we partake of the Lord's Table together. And the Lord's Table is a reminder of our unity, although we drink each from our own little cups, and we eat our own little bread, as a practical convenience, the picture is that we all eat the same bread. And we all drink the same cup. And therefore, we must be united together. And we must live in peace and harmony with each other without quarreling and arguing. We worship one Lord. We eat one bread. And we drink of one cup. May God help us to be committed to living together in peace in the church, in our homes, and in all our relationships.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for this passage. Thank you for the reminder of our own sinful hearts. Lord, help us not to be content to deal with the external. Help us to go deep, as Your Spirit does, identifying the wicked sins within our heart those sinful cravings and desires and expectations that, when they're unfulfilled, cause us to break forth in quarreling and arguing with others. Father, help us dwell together in unity.

Thank you, Father, for this wonderful reminder that we do live in unity; that we all have shared of the one provision you have made for us in Christ. Help us, now, to prepare our hearts, to partake of it in a way that doesn't, in any way, demean the death of Christ for us. Father, we ask that you would forgive us. We've come to you as those who belong to you, and yet, who've been bathed, who've been washed and sanctified, but who have, as our Lord reminded us, gathered dirt on our feet, as it were, as we've walked through this world.

Lord, we pray for your forgiveness. Cleanse us. Make us new, Lord.

We confess to You our selfishness our self-love, our desire above all else to meet our own desires, to fulfill our own cravings. Father, forgive us for our pride, for our argumentativeness, for our lack of peace and Lord, I pray that you would forgive us, as well, for taking those things lightly. Forgive us, Father, for not loving You like we ought to love You, and not loving our neighbor as ourself. Forgive us for using our mouths to name and injure others, Father. Forgive us for allowing those things in our minds that run contrary to Your will and purpose. Forgive us for speaking those things that are contrary to Your revealed will, and for doing those things that are in disobedience to You.

Father, cleanse us. Give us a renewed resolve to follow You, to serve You, to love Your Son. Thank you for this reminder of His death, and of His life. Drive it into our hearts.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.