

James
War and Peace: Learning to Deal with Conflict, Part 3
James 4:1-10
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Tom Pennington, Pastor
Countryside Bible Church

We turn, again this morning, to James 4 where James is teaching us how to deal with conflict. If you doubt that conflict is a part of our world, then you didn't read the newspaper this week, and you didn't watch the news. The Middle East, as you probably know, stands on the brink of war all-out war. And while the issues there are complex, and they go back to Genesis, and a strange little plan that Sarah cooked up. Nevertheless, I can tell you the true source of the conflict. It's the same source that lies behind every sinful conflict in our world, whether it's wars between nations or the fight between a husband and his wife and everything else. James, here, tells us exactly what the problem is. And even better, James tells us how to deal with it, how to resolve the arguing and fighting that can be so much a part of life in our world. Since it's been a couple of weeks since we looked at it together, let me read the passage for you. You follow along as I begin in James 4:1.

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. 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.

This paragraph contains three very practical steps for dealing with the conflicts in our lives. And all three of the steps involve our knowledge. So often, our problem, as believers is our thinking. Our mindset needs to be adjusted. We need our minds renewed by the Spirit, using the Word of God. We need to think God's thoughts after Him. That's what James is attempting to do, here. Notice in 4:1, he asks, "What is the source?" And he goes on to explain the source of the quarrels.

In verse 4, he says, "Do you not know?" He's saying, "You ought to know this. I taught you this. But somehow the truth of it hasn't really gripped your heart. So, let me explain it to you again." And then in verse 7, he says, "Therefore, in light of all that I've just explained, let me give you the application." And he goes through a series of imperatives. The implication is that you and I don't know how we got into the conflicts and quarrels, what the issues are that lie behind it, and how to get out of the situation, how to extricate ourselves from our current sinful quarreling, arguing condition. We need to learn the path out.

And James' mission in these verses is to explain to us what we need to know about how to deal with conflict: the three practical steps that lead us, that set us on a path to resolving the conflicts that are so much a part of our lives. Now these are three very practical steps. We've already learned one of them.

The first step is to identify the true source of conflict. You can see that in verses 1 - 3. He says in verse 1, "What is the source? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" We learned that it's the pursuit of sinful pleasures, or to put it another way, our efforts to satisfy the sinful cravings of our hearts that creates quarrels and arguments.

A way to picture it is like this: There are, within our hearts, (within that unredeemed part of us the Bible calls our "flesh") ... there are these cravings that are like a mighty army, crying out for satisfaction and fulfillment. And when someone gets in the way of our fulfilling, or satisfying those cravings, an argument breaks out. That army expends its energy on the person that stands in their way. That army of cravings declares war against anyone who gets in the way of that satisfaction: whatever it is we have set our hearts upon. Every time you and I find ourselves in a quarrel, in a fight, in an argument, we should ask ourselves this simple question: "What self-centered craving or sinful expectation am I trying to protect by engaging in this argument?" That's what it comes down to.

But even as you think about that as the true source, it raises an important question and one that I need to answer before we move to James's second point. The question is this: "Is it ever right for Christians to fight? Is it ever right to be locked in conflict with other Christians? And if it is right, what would such a conflict look like?" Well, you'll discover, pretty quickly with me here, that it is appropriate at times to be in conflict, or at least, what appears to be conflict. But there're several questions that can help us discern when it's right for a Christian to be engaged in conflict with other Christians, when it's right to fight.

Number one: Ask yourself this question: "What are you fighting about? What is the issue, itself?" You see, the only acceptable issues over which we, as Christians, can fight are those that Scripture identifies. It's when we're obeying God. It's when God has commanded us to fight that it's acceptable. And in the New Testament, there are two specific reasons that are laid down that are acceptable causes of conflict among Christians.

The first is in the practice of church discipline, in keeping the church pure. You see in Matthew 18, Jesus lays out a process a process in which first one individual privately goes to another. Then he brings several other Christians back. And eventually, the entire church finds itself set against another believer, for the purpose of restoring that believer, for the purpose of bringing them back. But to someone outside the church, or even an untaught believer within the church, that can appear to be sinful conflict. And yet God has commanded it of us.

Turn with me to 1 Timothy 5. Here, you see the application of it, even to leaders in the church. First Timothy 5:19: Paul writes, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except on the basis of two or three witnesses." There's protection built in, as there was in the Old Testament law as there is, even in the process of Matthew 18 of church discipline: two or three witnesses. Verse 20,

"Those elders, however, who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest will be fearful *of sinning*. I solemnly charge you, in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, and of *His* chosen angels, to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in the *spirit of* partiality."

He said, "Don't let whoever it is sway you from this path. You must do this." But if this happens, God forbid, in our church, (and if it were to happen in another church), it could appear to some to be sinful conflict. But it's not. This is commanded by God. It must be done, however awkward, however difficult, however much it may be uncomfortable to us.

You see the same thing in Titus 3, of the factious person. Titus 3:10: “Reject a factious man after the first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” Here, you have a slightly different process, or I should say, the process slightly altered of Matthew 18. He says, “When you go to him privately, and then you go to him with two or three witnesses, if the person is a factious man, don’t tell the whole church and encourage them to go to him; because that’s exactly what a factious person wants.” Instead, reject him.” Take him to that fourth step, in which you put him out of the church. Again, I ask you: If this were to happen, would it not appear to be, and would there not be some conflict in the church? Well, of course there would be. And yet, it’s commanded by our God.

A second reason that we’re given for acceptable conflict within the church is when it’s in defense of the faith in defense of the faith. In 1 Timothy 1:18, Paul tells Timothy, “Fight the good fight.” Now, what’s he talking about? Well, he’s just told him that Timothy has had passed on to him sound doctrine. Paul calls it the Treasure. And he says, “Timothy, you’re supposed to defend that Treasure. You’re supposed to protect the Treasure. Fight the good fight! Do whatever you have to, to defend the Treasure of sound doctrine!” In 2 Timothy 2:3, he says he’s a good soldier. Timothy, the ministry is the life of a soldier!

But we’re all commanded to that life. Turn to Jude 3. This small little epistle at the end of our New Testament lays out the reality that there are mixed into the church, pretenders. And so, Jude writes in 3, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation...” He says, “Listen! I wanted to write to you and encourage you about the salvation that we’ve received together, and all that God has accomplished for us, it, He says, [But I couldn’t; because] “I felt the necessity to write to you, appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all, handed down to the saints.” He says, “You’ve got to contend! You’ve got to fight! You got to defend it!”

The faith is that body of doctrine that we have received from the generations that have faithfully proclaimed it in the past, and passed it on to us. And he says, (verse 4) Here’s the reason: because there are “certain persons [that] have crept in unnoticed,” “... ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” He says, “You got to fight! You got to fight for the truth!” And there can be times in the church, when we’re truly fighting for the truth. It could be a time of conflict. And yet, we’re commanded to do that.

The most graphic and compelling illustration of this, of course, is in Galatians 2. You remember Paul gives it to us: an account of his interaction with Peter. Galatians 2:4: He says,

“... because of the false brethren [that were] secretly brought in, ... [they] sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.” He says, “But we did not yield in subjection to them, for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.”

Paul engages himself in conflict with error. Even with Peter. Verse 11,

But when ... [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, [publicly, by the way] because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, [he bought into the whole deal that was going on in the churches in Galatia.] [He says, “They feared] ... the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy ... even Barnabas!” Verse 14, But when I saw that they were not straight-forward about the truth of the gospel, I said to ... [Peter] in the presence of all [I rebuked Peter in the presence of everyone.]

That’s conflict! And yet, it’s absolutely crucial for the life of the church. We are commanded to engage in conflict when it involves the purity of the church and sinning believers that need to be dealt with, and when it involves the defense of the truth, as God has given it to us: the Treasure! So, ask yourself, “What are you fighting about?”

Secondly ask yourself, “Why are you fighting? Why are you fighting? What’s your motive?” The only acceptable motive for fighting is the glory of God. And the goal is obedience to that God! That’s the only reason to fight. What are you fighting about? Is it for the purity of the church? Is it in defense of the faith? And are you fighting for the glory of God? There’ve been times in church history, and even in modern times, when bedrock issues were involved when the motives on the surface seemed to be right. And yet, it still degenerated to sinful arguing and fighting. So how do you know if you’re engaged in a righteous fight, both in the cause and in the manner?

Well, ask yourself a third question: “How are you fighting?” You see, even conflict for a godly cause must never be in the spirit of a quarrel or an argument. It must never be accompanied by the kinds of sins of attitude and speech that accompany most arguments.

About a year ago, we studied communication. Turn with me to Ephesians 4. We looked at Ephesians 4:31 in detail at that time. But let me just remind you. Verse 31 says, “Let all bitterness [That’s internal resentment, because of another person’s hurt] and wrath [This word speaks of outbursts of anger], and anger [This refers to the internal slow boil. So, you’ve got the one who blows up and the one who clams up] and clamor [That’s yelling, shouting, raising your voice in an argument, in a quarrel], and slander [That’s name calling. That’s not sticking with the issue that’s under discussion; but attacking the person] be put away from you, along with all malice [all hateful intent to harm and hurt another person].

You see, even a biblical fight should never be carried out in contradiction of this command. A wise and mature Christian will fight, if the circumstances require, but he never enjoys it. He is, by nature, as we saw in 3:17, peaceable. So, if your argument, listen carefully, if your argument or your fight is in obedience to Scripture, if your motive is for the glory of God, and if you’re fighting in a gracious, selfless spirit, then this passage doesn’t apply to you. You do need to understand that even when conflicts occur that involve obedience to the truth, those people who want peace at all costs are going to cry “Foul.” They will immediately assume that it’s a violation of unity, or that it’s an unbiblical conflict. Our response to that is as Peter’s was to the Sanhedrin: “It’s better to obey God than men.” So, there is such a thing as righteous or godly conflicts.

But listen carefully. The truth is: ninety-nine percent of the arguments and fights in our lives are sinful and selfish. And the reason we’re fighting is not for the glory of God; not for the desire to obey; but out of pride and selfish ambition, and jealousy and the satisfaction of our desires. James says, “The true source of most arguments and quarrels is the cravings of our heart or our lust.” If we’re going to deal with our quarreling and arguing, we’re going to see a decrease in the pattern of our sin in this area, we’ve first got to understand the source.

And listen carefully: The source is not the other person. And the source is not the issue, whatever it is. James doesn’t even tell us here what the issue is among these people. That’s not the point. And the problem is not the circumstances. The source is our own sinful hearts. We crave something. And that other person stands in the way of whatever it is we want. J. A. Motyer writes, “Conflict is at root no more than the existence in each of us of a self-centered heart, a controlling spirit of self-interest. This is the militant cause of all disturbance.” So, the first step in overcoming conflict is to identify the real source, the true source. What is it? It’s the pursuit of our pleasure. It’s something we want, and the other person stands in the way.

Now today, I want us to look at the second practical step in dealing with conflict in our lives. And it's this: Not only must we identify the true source, but we must magnify the real sin behind the conflict, magnify the real sin behind the conflict. What exactly is the real sin that lies behind arguing and fighting and quarreling? Well, it's identified here for us in one Greek word. In English, it's translated "You adulteresses." Now, I don't know about you. But that's pretty shocking to read that, in the pen of James. Remember how James has, prior to this, referred to his readers. Before this, he's called them "My brethren." That sounds nice, doesn't it: "My brethren." You see that in 1:2; in 2:1, verse 14; 3:1; 3:10; 3:12: "My brethren." He's also called them "My beloved brethren:" 1:16, 19; 2:5.

Imagine, for a moment, that you are part of the congregation who originally received this letter, one of the congregation that received it. You were in Jerusalem. James was your beloved pastor. And now, you've heard that a letter has arrived from Jerusalem, written by James to you. And you've gathered to hear that letter read for the first time. And James has said some hard things, so far, hasn't he? We've all found ourselves pierced by his words. And yet, he still maintains that love and calling us his "brethren, his beloved brethren." Imagine how shocking it would have been that first time to have been seated in the pew, as it were, or sitting in the house of one of the churches there in one of those cities in Asia Minor, and to have heard your pastor say, "You adulteresses." It would've been a horrible thing. They were undoubtedly horrified, because that's not a label anyone wants to wear. And because of their Jewish background, they immediately understood what James meant. Because you see, this phrase, this word has its root in the Old Testament.

You remember, of course, that in Genesis 12, God appears to Abraham. And He tells Abraham that He is going to choose His descendants, which will eventually come to be known as Israel as His own covenant people. And eventually, as the Old Testament unfolds through the words of the prophets, we learn that God pictures His relationship with Israel, the descendants of Abraham, as that of a marriage. There're a lot of passages we could turn to. Just turn with me to one of them: Isaiah 54 Isaiah 54:5. Isaiah says,

"For your husband" [Israel] "is your maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth. For the LORD has called you, Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, Even like a wife of *one's* youth, when she is rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I forsook you; but with great compassion I will gather you."

Here's a description of God casting off His unfaithful wife, but only for a short time before He throws His arms of love around her. But what I want you to see is Israel, here, is pictured as His wife. So when Israel was unfaithful to God, when she allowed her heart to wander away, when she chose a path of sin, when she got involved in worshiping the idols of the peoples around her, God accused her of spiritual adultery. There're countless Old Testament passages that make that point. But I think none more clear, or more direct than Hosea.

Turn over a few pages to the minor prophet, Hosea. And you remember that God, through Hosea and his relationship with his wife, Gomer, pictured the unfaithfulness of Israel to Him. Gomer, you remember, became involved with a countless number of men, in unfaithfulness to her husband, Hosea. And in chapter 2, God makes the connection to Him and Israel. Listen to what He says in Hosea 2:5:

“For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give *me* my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’ “Therefore,” [God says,] ... “I will hedge up her way with thorns, ... I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but she will not find *them*. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!’”

Jesus used this same kind of language of adultery in His own ministry. You remember that He often referred, in the gospels, to the people living then, the Jewish people living then, as a sinful and what? adulterous generation. The apostles used this same sort of image. They speak of marriage. In fact, Paul uses it in 2 Corinthians. Turn there for a moment. Second Corinthians 11, you see, the church, all of us together, are the bride of Christ. We will be married to Christ. We are committed and betrothed to Him. Second Corinthians 11:2: Paul says,

“... I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” [He says,] “But I am afraid.” [And he goes on to say,] “... I am afraid ... [you're going commit spiritual adultery.]”

That's the context in which these dear people heard James' words to them in James 4. Listen carefully. James is saying that if we, as individuals, if you are engaged in a pattern of arguing and fighting, then you are committing spiritual adultery against God. That obviously takes the

sin of quarreling to a whole new level. You see, we have a tendency to downplay our sin. We say things to ourselves like, “Well, yeah, it was a lie; but it was just a little white lie. I mean, it didn’t really hurt anybody.” Or, “I’m not angry; I’m just frustrated.” And, yes, I know I argue and fight with my spouse, or my friends, or whomever, but it’s just not that big an issue.”

Well, God says it is. He sees us, if we’re engaged in the pattern of that kind of sin, as involved in spiritual adultery against Him. Our problem is a spiritual one. Now, if you’re thinking with me (and I hope you are), then your next question should be, “Now, wait a minute. How did we get from quarreling and arguing to spiritual adultery? How can James say that the real sin behind arguing and quarreling is unfaithfulness to God? That seems on the surface, doesn’t it, like a huge illogical leap. Well, James goes on to explain. Look at verse 4 again. “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?”

Now remember, he’s already identified the source of quarreling as the pursuit of our pleasure, our cravings. And now he’s saying that when we live to pursue those pleasures, we are living just like the world around us. So, when we decide to pursue our own pleasures, we declare ourselves, as it were, to be the friends of the world. When we make pleasure the chief aim of our lives, we become the friend of the world. The word, “friendship” here, by the way, is the word which comes from the word which means “to love,” or “to have affection for”. In this context, the word “world” does not mean people; but rather, a system a value set, a mindset, a way of thinking. It’s describing those who are locked into a system of pursuing self-satisfaction, self-enjoyment, and self-promotion. That’s what they live for. That’s what it’s all about. And when you and I become locked into that kind of mindset, we become friends of the world; or, in other words, “worldly.”

Now, I’m reluctant to use that word, because it’s so often misunderstood. In the circles I grew up, there was a lot of confusion about what it means to be worldly. There’re really two dangers in defining “worldliness.” The first danger is to define it in an aesthetic way: that is, the person who thinks that Christians must completely remove themselves from living in the world; that it’s wrong to enjoy even the legitimate pleasures that unbelievers enjoy here. Some of you, perhaps, have read Garrison Keillor’s book, *Lake Wobegon Days*, in which he describes a bit of his upbringing, connected to the Brethren Church. And he describes the reality that there were “hot water brethren” and “cold water brethren.”

The hot water brethren enjoyed nice, hot bath or hot shower. But there were those in the brethren movement who felt that that was giving into the body and the flesh too much to take a

hot shower, and so you should take a cold one; because that kept your body in line. And they were called the cold-water brethren. There're people around us who believe that worldliness is enjoying any of the pleasures of this life that God has given to us. You see them disconnect themselves from the culture. You see it in the lifestyles of people like the Amish. You see it in nunneries and monasteries. It's an aesthetic approach to worldliness.

The other misunderstanding of worldliness, however, is to think that it is merely external; that worldliness is bound up in certain things you do. Course that list varies, depending on where you are, and who you're associated with. It's strange how it can happen. There was in the circles in which I grew up a predisposition against any sort of alcohol consumption. Well, I heard, recently, a conversation, in which a European Christian woman was drinking her glass of wine; and was appalled that American Christian women would think about wearing pants to church. You see, the list varies, depending on where you are, and who it is you're connected with. And the reason for that confusion, listen carefully: worldliness is not primarily about externals!

Worldliness is a mindset. It's an attitude that is just as much at home at Brooks Brothers as black leather; and it's just as much at home in blue jeans as Armani; and everything in between. Cause worldliness doesn't have anything to do, primarily, with the externals. It has to do with what's going on in your heart! Worldliness is, listen carefully, here's the definition. Worldliness is "eagerly pursuing the same sinful pleasures the world pursues," or Number two: "living with the primary purpose of pursuing legitimate pleasures." That's worldliness. Either pursuing sinful pleasures with the same sort of reckless abandon the world around you does, or pursuing legitimate pleasures as your only purpose in life. And worldliness, or as James calls it, "friendship with the world," is hostility toward God. Why is that? Because the pursuit of sinful pleasure and the pursuit of God are diametrically opposed. In 2 Timothy 3:4, [Paul says, "There are] ... lovers of pleasure[s, and then there are, on the other hand] ... lovers of God." And you can't be both at the same time.

So, back in James, 4:4, in the first part of the verse, the Holy Spirit makes a general point: "... friendship with the world is hostility toward God." And then in the second half of the verse, he applies it very directly. "Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Now, your first response to that should be, or may be, I should say, your first response to that may be this: "I don't want to be a friend of the world!"

But that's James' point. If you choose, and if I choose to pursue our own sinful lusts, the same ones that the people around us pursue, and then when someone gets in the way of our pursuit of our pursuit of that pleasure, we routinely argue and fight with that person, then we are choosing to be a friend of the world. If we love the world, we are idolaters. And our false god is the world, the mindset of our age.

It can happen, certainly to false Christians, that is, people that connect themselves to the church, but end up showing that they weren't the genuine thing to begin with. You remember Demas? Second Timothy 4:10: Paul says, "Demas, my fellow worker for awhile, has deserted me, having" what? "loved this present world." But, it can also happen to us, as believers.

Turn to 1 John 2. In 1 John 2, the apostle John gives us this warning: that you and I can be susceptible to falling in love with the world, the system, the mindset that's around us. Verse 15, 1 John 2:

Do not love the world. [Stop loving the world and] the things that are in the world. If anyone," [as a habit, as a pattern of life] "... [is loving] the world, the love of the Father is not in him! For all that is in the world," [now he's going to give us an idea of what he means by this term, "world." He says, "Let me give you an idea of what constitutes the world." "... all that is in the world" Here it is.]: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life."

Notice that worldliness, here, is all about what goes on in your heart. It's craving: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. What are these things that constitute the world system in which we live? You want to know what the world is in biblical terms? Here it is: It's the system that encourages, that promotes these three realities.

"The lust of the flesh:" that is, the cravings of our flesh, probably a reference to the bodily appetites. It is a life lived to satisfy the strong cravings of the flesh. And you and I both know people around us who live to satisfy those cravings.

Then he says, [the cravings of the eyes] ... "the lust of the eyes." This is a difficult phrase to understand. It's probably a reference to the fact that we long to possess. What the eyes see, we crave to have. We live in a world that's given over to the pursuit of things. You know: the guy with the bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins." That's the mindset of our world! "I've got to have!" Even if I can't afford it, I've got to have it!"

And then, thirdly, he says, “the boastful pride of life.” Here is the person who takes pride in who he is, in what he has accomplished, in his status in the world John says, “This is what makes the world go round.” This is what characterizes the mindset of a world that’s hostile to God. It lives for the cravings of its flesh, for the cravings of its eyes and desire to possess, and to inflate itself with others. And he goes on to say, in verse 16, “All of that is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its cravings. But the One who does the will of God lives forever.” This is exactly what James is saying.

Turn back to James 4. To support this radical statement that he’s made in verse 4, he directs us to the Scripture. Verse 5: “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?’” Do you think that the Scripture speaks in vain? Now it’s clear here, that James intended to support the statement that he made in verse 4 with Scripture. But where, exactly, does the Scripture say what’s in the second half of verse 5? Well, since there’s not a verse that says exactly that, it’s probably likely that James was summarizing the truth expressed in much of the Old Testament.

When you look at what he says, the end of verse 5, understand, as we look at it, that it’s the most difficult passage in the entire book to understand. And it’s one of the most difficult in the entire New Testament. Now without dragging you through every nuance that I had to uncover this week, let me just give you a summary. Let me see if I can help you understand the problem. The problem with this expression in verse 5 is that the word, “spirit” in Greek, can be used as the subject of the sentence, or it can be the object of the sentence, which makes life a little difficult as we’re trying to understand it. A second problem is whether the word “Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit or to the human spirit. In the end though, just to simplify the whole thing, when you put all the factors together, when you look at all the evidence, you essentially come down to two main possibilities.

Possibility number one: (The *NIV* takes this approach): The human spirit constantly craves and envies. As D. Edmond Hiebert explains this view, “The human spirit, imparted at creation, longs perversely for the enjoyment of the world’s pleasures, even to the point of envy.” That’s one approach we could take.

The *New American Standard* takes the second approach. You see it, here: “God jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell within us.” After spending many hours, this week, sorting this out, studying this verse, I think the preponderance of the evidence supports the second translation, the one in your *New American Standard* translation. But in this view we could be

talking about the human spirit, or we could be talking about the Holy Spirit. But in the end, it doesn't really matter. The point is the same, either way. Listen carefully. Here's the point: God jealously desires us to belong whole-heartedly to Him. You see the Greek words "jealously desire?" Those refer to the kind of desire that a husband has for his wife's complete love and affection; that it be totally his.

Douglas Moo says, "What God requires of us is a total, unreserved, unwavering allegiance to Him, rather than to the world." We've already encountered this concept, you remember, back in verse 17 of chapter 3, where we're told that the mature person is first of all pure? Remember, that word "pure" can mean morally pure. But it can also mean devotionally pure; that is, wholeheartedly committed to Christ. God will tolerate no rivals for our affection. This is what God jealously desires from us. We must give Him our total, unreserved, unwavering allegiance. Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear that, it seems like an impossible goal because I know my own heart. How can we achieve that level of commitment? Well, let me tell you something: Never through the strength of your own will, or the force of your own resolutions.

So where do we turn for hope? Let me give you a little glimpse: verse 6. "But He," [that is, God] gives a greater grace." It's an incredible promise: it's the first real breath of grace that James gives us. And we're going to look at it in detail next week. But don't leave me, yet. Stay with me, just a minute. This demand, or rather this provision of grace does not, in any way, lessen God's demand for our allegiance; because the command for our allegiance is based on His character. This seems strange to our ears. But listen carefully. Our God is a jealous God. Many texts point to this reality. Let me show you just a couple of them. Turn to Exodus 20. In Exodus 20, in the middle of the Ten Commandments, as we've just been told not to worship other gods or make idols. (Verse 5): "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God am a jealous God." In Exodus 34:14, He says, "My name is jealous." Turn over to Deuteronomy 4:23. As Moses recounts the Law for the people gathered outside the Promised Land, he says,

"... watch yourselves, that you do not forget." (This is verse 23 of Deuteronomy 4.) "... watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything *against* which the LORD your God has commanded you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

How could God be jealous? Well, I think Alec Motyer is right, when he says, “Jealousy, properly considered, is an essential element of true love. It is an essential longing for the loved one’s welfare.” John Blanchard writes, “When the Bible uses “jealously” of God, it is not the jealousy of self-centered possessiveness or carnal desire, but a loving concern for the welfare of His people.” The bottom line is this: God demands our absolute, undivided allegiance. He will tolerate no rivals. He is a jealous God! As you sit here, this morning, perhaps you have never announced your hostility to God. Perhaps, you have never announced your allegiance to, and affection for, the world.

But let me ask you a couple of pointed questions. Do you find your pleasure and entertainment in things that are patently hostile to God? Have you, to use James’ expression, made friends with movies, and music, and entertainment that attack and demean the very God you profess to love? Do you crave and constantly pursue pleasures that God has directly forbidden in His Word? If so, James says that you are engaged in adultery against God. You have become a friend of the world and God’s enemy.

Let me just ask you very directly: Last week, think of your time, for a moment your use of time. This last week, what percentage of your time did you commit to carrying out love for God and love for other people? What percentage, on the other hand, of your time did you use pursuing your own sinful pleasures, or pursuing your own selfish agenda? As I’ve searched my own heart, I’ve had to acknowledge my sin. If we’re going to learn to deal with sinful conflict, James says we must:

Number one: identify the true source. It’s the pursuit of selfish pleasure, whatever makes us happy. That’s what we want. And whoever gets in the way of our happiness, we’re willing to fight with.

And number two: We need to magnify the real sin that lies behind the conflict. If we are engaged in a pattern of arguing and quarreling, it’s because we love God too little, and this world, and our own sinful, selfish desires too much.

Dr. Christian Barnard, performed the world’s first human heart transplant on December 3, 1967. That transplant obviously made him one of the world’s most noted surgeons. He went on to perform a number of other transplants. He once asked one of his patients, a man by the name of Philip Blaiberg, if he’d like to see his old heart. Blaiberg said, “Yes, he would.” And so, Barnard walked over to the cupboard, took out a glass container, and handed it to Blaiberg. For

a moment, he simply stood there, in sort of stunned silence, because, he was the first man in human history to ever hold his own heart in his hands. Eventually, he spoke. And he and the doctor carried on a conversation about the technical nature of the surgery. And when they were done, Blaiberg took one last look in the glass container. And then he handed it back to Barnard. And he said these words: “So that is my old heart that caused me so much trouble.”

James has shown us our hearts, this morning. We’ve been able to look at them, right in front of us, as it were. And our only hope is God’s grace. And we’ll learn about that next week. Today we learned the diagnosis. Next week, we learn the prescription.

Let’s pray together.

Father, these are hard words for us to hear. To think that You think of us when we live lives pursuing pleasure, as adulterers and adulteresses. Father, forgive us. Forgive us for tolerating rivals to our affection to You. Lord, forgive us for loving You too little, and loving ourselves and our own selfish and sinful pursuits too much.

Help us to identify, Father, the real source that lies behind our fighting and quarreling and arguing. And help us to see the real sin for what it is. It’s adultery against You, because arguing and quarreling betrays the reality that we live to pursue our pleasures. Father, forgive us. Help us to learn from this incredibly insightful passage how it is that we can overcome these patterns in our lives.

Father, I pray, as well, for the person here, this morning, who is locked into, enslaved by, a pursuit of pleasure, because they don’t know Your Son. They’ve never had a new heart given to them. I pray that this morning You would strip away all of the pretence, and all of the all of the hypocrisy, and all of the profession, year after year, that they’re in Christ. And help them to see the reality of how they stand before You. And draw them to Yourself.

We pray this for the glory of Your name and in the name of your Son our Redeemer, Amen