**BOOK OF JAMES CHAPTER 4**

**JAMES 4:1-17**

A word of caution – this chapter is strongly worded. James is blunt. Chapter 4 contains stern warnings and it gives clear instructions for those of us who call ourselves Christians. In case you thought that the 1st C church had their act together, always got along, exercised their spiritual gifts, had few internal problems – if you think that then you haven’t read the Book of JAMES or 1 CORINTHIANS or GALATIANS. When you read these NT letters (we’ve studied all of these this year) it’s obvious that the early church had problems just like our churches today. And why is that? Why do the people of God have internal issues? Well, because the church is made up of imperfect people. All people are sinners, yes, even church folks. While it’s true that most of us in the church have experienced God's grace and profess Christ as our Savior, we are still far from perfect! In Chapter 3 James just finished a discussion about the importance of controlling the tongue. And he’s talking to believers! Look with me now at how James opens up Chapter 4…

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this [OK, here it is…], that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He [speaking of God] yearns jealously over the spirit [our spirit, which has a bent toward sin] that he has made to dwell in us”? 6 But he gives more grace [His grace is greater than our sin]. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves therefore 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 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. 11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? 13 Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’-- 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

Comments? Questions?

V 1, A major problem that existed in the early church was quarreling among the believers (to whom James is writing). James asks them what the cause of their squabbling is. The same question could be asked of us today. James answers it with a rhetorical question to the affect, “Doesn't it come about as a result of your passions and desires?”

In our hearts and minds there are battles being waged over who will be in control of our life. It’s obvious from reading verse 1 that far too often **SELF, ME, I** wants to be in control and this leads to conflicts. A bunch of “I’s” and “me's,” each wanting thier own way creates a conflict of interests and, naturally, quarreling ensues. If each of us were yielded to the Holy Spirit, just think about it -- we would desire the same things and, therefore, we would be in one accord, united in spirit and purpose. Unfortunately, we, just like our 1st C counterparts, have a natural bent toward pursuing selfish desires.

V 2-3, James mentions two negative results that will be produced if the internal quarreling continues. The first mentioned is wounding or “murdering” each other with our words. This piggy-backs on what James talked about in Chapter 3 where he said that sometimes our words can be harmful; for example, slandering, gossiping, criticizing, bragging, etc.

The second negative effect is a failure to ask God for what we want. Instead we try to obtain it our own way often through fighting, which does not glorify and honor God. James says even if we do ask God, we often ask with the wrong motives. So there’s the problem.

V 4, Whenever we fight amongst ourselves we’re embracing the philosophies of this world, which are from Satan -- the “me first” mentality centered on satisfying the inner man, the flesh. We do this rather than following the teachings of Jesus, which are self-less, that put the needs of others before our own. Basically we say, “Lord, I do not really believe that your way is best for me. I know what’s best for me. I will satisfy my own needs by doing things my way instead of your way.” This divided loyalty creates a major conflict with God.

Jesus addressed this whole issue in Matt 6:24. He understood the conflict that exists between our flesh and the things of God. He taught that we must choose either to yield to our fleshly desires or to yield to the desires of God. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and [material things].”

By using the term “adulterous” James gives us a real life example of divided loyalties, that of a man or a woman cheating on their spouse. You see, as believers we are the bride of Christ. And yet we have pursued after other “christs.” We have sought them out in order that they might fulfill us and make us happy (or so we think). This is something that only God can do for us. In essence we have committed spiritual adultery! Strong words!

V 5-6, If our loyalty is completely with God and if we truly love HIM and are seeking to please HIM, why then would we want to turn right around and do the very thing that God hates? God is a jealous God and wants us for Himself. He promises to give us the grace to resist the enticing pleasures of our sin, but only as we humble ourselves to Him. We humble ourselves by admitting we are powerless to overcome the pull of the world and we ask God to help us to do it.

Pride makes us self-centered and leads us to conclude that we deserve all we see or all we can imagine. It creates greedy appetites for more than we need in this old world. What we desire is no substitute for what God wants to give us *[analogy of church picnic]*. His best for us is far better than our best for us.

The next few verses James give us the keys to ultimate satisfaction…

V 7 SUBMIT. Turn it all over to God, seek His face, and make a willful choice not to give into temptation. We cease from fighting (the way of the world) only when we surrender our will to God's will. RESIST. What is the best way to resist the devil? By actively doing God's will in God's way.

V 8, Three courses of action are given in this one verse: (1) “Draw near to God” – Pray and get into the Word, read it, study it; (2) “Cleanse your hands” – Confess and get rid of the sin elements that you have been holding onto. Unconfessed sin hinders our fellowship with God and makes us prime targets for Satan's fiery darts; (3) “Purify your hearts” – Fill your mind with righteousness and replace your sin with God's purity.

There is a war going on every day inside of us over whom we will serve. Our loyalties are tested constantly. Either we will come down on the side of being worldly-minded, self-serving, seeking to gratify our own desires and ambitions, or we will yield to, follow after God's plan for our life. Trying to have it both ways is being “double-minded.” It’s having divided loyalties.

V 9, This verse is a vivid description of being spiritually broken. It’s a painful but necessary experience. Being spiritually broken will likely produce tears of repentance, sorrow, and grief as we are made aware of our sin and we begin to see our sin the way that God sees it. The laughter referred to in this verse is that which is associated with the frivolity of this world. The reckless fun-loving approach many people have toward sin.

V 10, Recognize who you REALLY are whenever you come into the presence of a holy, perfect God. He is so much more capable of handling our problems than we are! Let Him do your fighting for you. *[analogy of my dad handling a situation I had in junior HS]* My earthly father, true to his word, handled a situation I could not deal with myself and our heavenly Father will do the same for us!

V 11-12, We are not to talk bad about our brothers and sisters in Christ. We’re not to put down or criticize them if they are not around to defend themselves. Also, we’re not to judge others. Here again, we do not know their thoughts or motives.

“The law” referred to in these verses is the law of love. It’s the same law that Jesus taught in Matt 22:37-40: “And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ (Deut 6:5) This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ (Lev 19:18) On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

We are to be doers of the law of love and not judges of it. We are to live according to the law of love Jesus stressed, not questioning it.

Let me give you an example. When the speed limit is posted at 70 mph, we are to be doers of the law and are not to exceed 70. We are not to be judges and make determinations of its validity. “I think that speed limit is too slow so I decided that I would drive faster.”

There is only one judge and, guess what? We are not Him. Leave the judging and condemning of others to God Jesus taught us in Matthew 7:1: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.” Judging others is not our responsibility. What is our responsibility? To love others.

V 13-16, How much longer are you going to live? Nobody really knows. It is not wrong to have plans and goals, but it is wrong to leave God out of them. Instead of saying “I will do such and such…” we need to say, “If the Lord wills, I will do such and such…” Recognize the need for God's leading in everything that we do. Never presume that He will automatically bless the desire of your heart.

I’m the kind of person who likes to plan all aspects of my life. What will I do tomorrow? Next weekend? Next month? Next year? 10 years from now? But God steps in quite often and rearranges my plans. He re-prioritizes my life. My advice based on what James says here: Plan lightly and be flexible. Seek God's desire for you first and foremost as you make your plans.

V 17, There are sins of omission as well as the sins of commission. Sometimes we can sin by what we do NOT do. As Christians, we know what we are supposed to do and we are NOT supposed to do. Ask yourself, “What would Jesus do in this situation? Then do that.