

When we have conflict, we should ask ourselves, if we are living by God's wisdom. Peace characterizes wise living. Conflict reveals a sinful friendship with the world.

I. *From where do conflicts come? The source of conflict among believers is within us (4:1-3).*

James says that our fights and quarrels come from within us. Our own desires battle within us causing conflicts with others. "Desires" translates a word which in the New Testament implies sinful pleasures or the desire for them. Fights with others start, when we yield to sinful, self-seeking desires.

We are born with a capability for various desires. But when the believer was born again, God freed His child from being slaves to such desires. Never-the-less such desires continue to exist. They war within us. A natural, sinful response is to follow worldly wisdom and not heavenly wisdom. Apart from God we will tend toward sinful means to satisfy our desires.

James probably has in mind the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-22 where Jesus taught that anger and hate makes us just as guilty as murder makes us. Cf. 1 John 3:15a.

Christians don't get what they desire because they do not ask God, or, if they do ask, they are asking wrongly. We need to remember to rely upon God and ask. We also must guard our motives. We may need to ask God to reveal our hearts.

II. *What does conflict reveal about us? Such wrong handling of desire reveals a dangerous friendship with the world (4:4-6).*

The problem behind unanswered prayer may be greater than unanswered prayer itself. Praying to get satisfaction for our pleasures shows a friendship with the world.

Adulteresses (4:4) are believers, male or female, who are not being spiritually faithful to God. Cf. Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38. One cannot be friends with both the world and God. To be friends with the world is unfaithfulness to God or spiritual adultery. Worldliness is an attitude, a lack of loyalty to God and a desire for the world. A friend of the world is an enemy of God.

God by His Spirit dwells in every believer. His Spirit yearns for our total allegiance and is grieved when we sin or show a lack of faithfulness to God (Ephesians 4:30).

But God also provides grace in abundance (4:6) which is sufficient against any attraction in the world and against Satan. Although God's grace is more than adequate for all our needs, He gives it only to the humble (Proverbs 3:34; cf. Matthew 5:3). The alternative is to be proud and have God oppose us.

III. *What should we do to deal with conflict? (4:7-10)*

James gives 10 imperatives or commands to deal with conflict.

1. *"Submit yourselves, then, to God."* Stop being proud. Admit that God is right and surrender to Him.
2. *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* Defend yourself against Satan. As we submit to God and resist the devil, he will flee. We stand against Satan wearing the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17) and using our sword, the Word of God.
3. *"Come near to God and he will come near to you."* In the Old Testament "coming near to God" referred to worship. In this context it includes forsaking worldly wisdom and worldliness and giving full allegiance to God. This is not a "feeling" of closeness, but entails submission to Him and resisting Satan.
- 4-5. *"Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."* Hands figuratively represent our actions. Hearts represent our thought and attitudes. Clean up our sinful actions and have undivided loyalty to God.
- 6-8. *"Grieve, mourn and wail."* These three commands express the actions of true repentance, beginning with the heart attitude of grieving because of sin and concluding with the outward expression of that, i.e., mourning. Cf. Matthew 5:4; Luke 6:21. Weeping is the spiritual response of one who is truly repentant.
9. *"Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom."* This does not forbid joy, but commands sinners, whose laughter arises from the pleasures of the world, to repent and mourn their sin.
10. *"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."* This final command summarizes the others as well. When believers repent from sin and worldly wisdom and then submit to God, they humble themselves before the Lord. God promises to "lift up" those believers. Humility must precede honor. Cf. Matthew 23:12.

When we love one another and walk in God's love, we must stop any fighting with one another. The problem starts with our own wrong desires. Humbling ourselves before God is the answer.

We need to submit ourselves to God's evaluation of our desires and our heart condition. Confess sin and turn to God. Then God's Spirit produces His fruit in us, including love, joy and peace. We will know the love of God and be able to walk in it.