

READING

James 4:1-17

SERMON

For God and People (James 4:1-17)

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight....” (James 4:1-2 NIV)

How can this be? People in church at war with each other. Never, surely not. People who come to church are perfect. That is what some people think. I need to be perfect, then I can come to church. Let me say here and now that if ADBC was full of perfect people, then I would have to leave.

Yeah, we know that, but fight and quarrel – that is totally a different ball game. But many, many people have left church, not because of doctrine, not because of worship, but because someone has upset them. Someone has said or done the wrong things and upset the person so much that they have left. The assumption can be that everyone in church must be perfect and that everyone gets one with everyone else all of the time! So often that is not the truth, but it should be the truth and James gives us seven principles or steps that will help us.

1. Submission to God

The first step is found in verse 7

“Submit yourselves, then, to God...” (James 4:7 NIV)

To submit. The thought here is to

accept or yield to a superior force or to the authority or will of another person

This might be when we go to the doctor’s we submit ourselves to the doctor. He or she tells us the next step of the treatment and we agree. Most of us agree because we have no medical knowledge and so we agree.

As Christians we submit ourselves to a higher authority, we submit ourselves to God. The thought here is that to submit is

"a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden"

We are not coerced into submission like a wrestler might be when in a certain hold and asked if he or she submits or not. We do it because we want to. We are giving in to God. We assume the responsibility that he gives us and carry any burden that he puts upon us although we know that his burden is light and not heavy.

We do this by looking at what we do and asking ourselves, “Am I doing this for God or for me? Would God want me to do or say this, or have that attitude or value

2. Resisting the Devil

The second item is found in the same verse. As we are to submit ourselves to God, we are also told to

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7 NIV)

This is not something passive, but active. Satan will want us to have fights and quarrels between each other because that weakens the church, that lessens our witness to the world outside. So how do we do that, how do we resist the devil? In 1 Peter we read

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”

(1 Peter 5:8-9 NIV)

The devil is not some pussy cat waiting to catch us out, but a roaring lion, ready to pounce, so we need to be alert, to be self-controlled, to think before we speak or act. Not something that some of us find easy to do. If you tend to be an activist, then actions come easy, but delaying the action may not.

It has been shown that we react in two ways – all of us, without realising it. Firstly we react with our emotions, even if we say that ‘I am not emotional.’ Our emotional pathway in the brain is activated. Then a split second behind, the thinking pathway is activated, the one that reasons it out. Note though which comes first, the emotions. So when someone says or does something to us, we react firstly on an emotional level, then we kick in the mind – that can lead to trouble. So when you feel the emotions rising, stop, take a breath, maybe count to ten and then reply calmly and Satan will hate it and he will flee from you.

Sounds easy, but it is not, I can tell you, but God is gracious and will forgive and we too must be gracious to each other and forgive each other the slips that will occur.

3. Coming Near to God

The next is found in verse 8

“Come near to God and he will come near to you...” (James 4:8 NIV)

Come near to God. Or it can be thought of as

join one thing to another

That is the closeness of the command. We have to remember the awesomeness of God, but also the fact that he wants to have a close relationship with him. He is an intimate God, an imminent God who want to have a close relationship with us, with us as individuals. The problem is never with God, but with us.

So how do we get close to God? How do we get close to anyone? Think about your best friend – how did you become best friends?

- × Was it by never speaking to them?
- × Was it by not listening to them?
- × Was it by not spending time with them?
- × Was it by not knowing what they wanted?

You get the point – God wants us to know him, but for that we need to

- ✓ Spend time with him
- ✓ Read the Bible – doesn’t have to be a long passage – just a short passage each day, but read it closely and remember what it says.
- ✓ Prayer on a regular basis throughout the day – the Muslims who pray some 5 times a day – many Christians are pushed to pray five times a week. The pray times do not have to be long and the language one talks in – the language you use everyday

4. Purifying Your Heart

Then we are called upon to purify our heart

“...Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”
(James 4:8 NIV)

Yes we are sinners, but sinners that God wants to know and wants to save. We are all sinners, this is why we are not perfect, this is why we ask

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.” (James 4:1-2 NIV)

It is because we are sinners that this keeps on happening, but hopefully as we draw closer to God we become more and more holy, we get purified – we want to reflect God in our life – we want to be more and more like God.

How do we do that? Again it is thinking as we act and react in different situations. Just to take a moment, like we saw before and ask, “What would Jesus do” in this situation. However in order to do that we need to know the Bible and apply it in those situations. It is no good trying to think it out with no knowledge. That can be like the bomb disposal person who always cuts the red wire because the person has never really studied bomb disposal. It will work some of the time, but one day it will lead to an explosion and the relationship with the other person could be wrecked totally. It is not a case of what do I think Jesus would do, but of speaking from knowledge of what Jesus did, of what God does or has done in different situations as described in the Bible. But some situation today are not in the Bible like abortions Then we have to think a little more laterally and look to similar situations and get the principles that relate to the sanctity of life and what this means.

Over half way through now the seven principles or steps to help us stop warring and arguing.

5. Being Convicted

Moving on to verse 9

“Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.” (James 4:9 NIV)

What are we to grieve over? The fact that we do sin, we do get it wrong. Today we live in a culture of rights. It is my right to... I have thee right to... you are treading on my rights... And going along with our rights we have that I am not to blame. The reason I am like I am is because of my parents... the school teachers I had is the reason I am like I am... it is society – they made me turn out this way.

Yes we know that people influence us for good and bad all our lives. Recently I was rung up by Becky our eldest who said that she and Libby, her daughter, were at a play soft play area when Libby ran up to her and said that her tummy hurt. So Becky asked how that happened and Libby went, “it hurts when I put my leg up like this.” So Becky said, “Well don’t do that and you tummy wont hurt.” She then remembered that I used to say that to her and Beth when they were small and it use to frustrate them and annoy them like mad, but now she is saying it to her child. My influence spreads far and wide – well to the next generation at least.

However I sin because of me. As James says

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?...You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?” (James 4:4-5 NIV)

But we need to take this sin seriously and realise that we do it. It is me, myself personally and not blame others, but be convicted and take responsibility myself for it.

6. Being Humble

And coupled with conviction is the fact that we must be humble. We will not really be able to draw near to God, be purified if we are not humble. The opposite of humility is pride and as James says quoting from Proverbs

“But God gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."” (James 4:6 NIV)

Admit we do wrong. Admit to yourself that you are a sinner and then ask God for his mercy, his saving grace come into our lives and give us life. But this requires humility. Saying we cannot do it ourselves and we need to depend totally on God for it.

7. Stopping Malicious Speech

So we arrive at the last command to stop us having the fights and quarrels. Often this is the start, but notice it is the end product of the other six where we had

- 1. Submission to God**
- 2. Resisting the Devil**
- 3. Coming Near to God**
- 4. Purifying Your Heart**
- 5. Being Convicted**
- 6. Being Humble**

All of which are continuous actions. We do to keep on doing them so that we stop malicious speech. Verse 11

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour? (James 4:11-12 TNIV)

When we speak ill of each other, we are doing the devil’s work for him, for it weakens the church, it weakens the bonds between us and it weakens our witness to those need God in their lives. But the speech will not change on its own, we need the steps as we have said before and to constantly be checking them in our lives. It is so easy for things to slip. Just read on from verse 13

“Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” (James 4:13-17 NIV)

- Pride can so easily come, so we do not submit to God,

- Then the devil gets in because we try to defeat him in our own strength and not God's,
- We drift and away from God, just like we can without realising it drift away from friends
- Then our hearts are not constantly being made pure
- So we stop being convicted of our sin
- And so the humility goes out of the window
- And finally the malicious speech creeps in, unknowingly at first, but then builds up.

Only you and God can sort this out.

- ✚ Do you feel that you are into fights and quarrels? – if so then pray that God will help you through these steps
- ✚ If you feel that you are not in this place, then praise God. Also keep on praying and talking to God to keep you in that place of being peacemaker

It is up to you and God.