

# THE DANGER OF WORLDLY ATTITUDES

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James 4:1-10

■ The Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported that firefighters in Genoa, Texas, were accused of deliberately setting more than forty destructive fires. When caught, they stated, "We had nothing to do. We just wanted to get the red lights flashing and the bells clanging."

The job of firefighters is to put out fires, not start them. The job of Christians is to help resolve conflict (Matt. 5:9), not start more of it.

-- Gerald Cornelius in *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching* (Baker), from the editors of *Leadership*.

It's too bad that not every Christian understands their job. Some people seem to have the same attitude of those firefighters. They can't stand it if the bells aren't ringing and the lights aren't flashing. They've just got to get something negative started or to keep something negative going.

Apparently James knows a few folks like that, and thus he has his work cut out for him in dealing with this particular problem. It would seem instead of living in a state of peace and righteousness as spoken of in chapter 3; these individuals are at war! Fights and quarrels were evidently common among these people to whom James is writing—too common.

In our text, James speaks of quarrels and conflicts. "Quarrels" is a term referring to an entire war. When he uses "conflicts" he is referring more to individual battles. James gets right to the point by pointing out the root causes of ALL the problems. All their problems are rooted in their *attitudes*.

James is quick to point out that...

## I. **WORLDLY ATTITUDES CAUSE ANTAGONISM AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE (vv. 1-3).**

A. Relationship problems begin with EVIL DESIRES (v. 1).

■ James points out how evil their desires were when he asks, “Is it not the source of your pleasures that wage war in your members?” Or as one translation puts it, “Aren't they caused by the selfish desires that fight to control you?”

The word “pleasures” (*hedonon*) means “desires or passion.” It can refer to good or evil desires.

■ Oswald Chambers writes, “The man or woman who does not know God demands an infinite satisfaction from other human beings which they cannot give, and in the case of the man, he becomes tyrannical and cruel. It springs from this one thing, the human heart must have satisfaction, but there is only one Being Who can satisfy the last abyss of the human heart, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.” -- Oswald Chambers, *Christianity Today*, Vol. 37, no. 11.

B. Their DESIRES had gotten out of control (v. 2).

■ James says in essence, "You want something you can't have so you kill and covet."

*If they had to destroy the influence of another to gain what they wanted they would do it.* They were assassins of one another's characters. The reason for not receiving what they wanted was their wrong actions. They were lusting and fighting instead of asking God for it.

C. Their MOTIVES were wrong (v. 3).

Some would say, "We prayed but God did not answer so we took action." That is our mistake. When we act without God it is doubtful we will act with the right motives.

■ Commentator Curtis Vaughn explains, "Their requests were legitimate, but the reason for making them was illegitimate. They wanted only to satisfy their own cravings, pamper their own passions. God's glory, God's service, consideration for other people—none of these things entered into their thinking. Such prayers are an insult to God." (Swindoll, 136)

We need to remember...

## II. **WORLDLY ATTITUDES ALSO LEAD TO UNFAITHFULNESS (vv. 4-6).**

A. Spiritual adultery was their sin (v. 4a).

The phrase, "**You adulterous people**" was a blunt way of pointing to their unfaithfulness.

B. The object of their affection was the world (v. 4b).

We define the word "world" (*kosmos*) as a system of evil controlled by Satan including all that is wicked and opposed to God on earth.

■ Someone said, "To have a warm, familiar attitude toward this evil world is to be on good terms with God's enemy. It is to adopt the world's set of values and want what the world wants instead of choosing according to divine standards. The person who deliberately "chooses...to be a friend of the world" by that choice "becomes an enemy of God." (Burdick, 193)

C. The Scripture makes it clear that God demands our devotion (v. 5).

God jealously desires the entire devotion of the heart. God stakes claim to all of us. He wants us to be entirely His—body, mind, and soul. All we have to do is let Him be our everything. If we will do this He will give us His Spirit to guard us against unfaithfulness.

D. God has promised to help us to be faithful (v. 6).

God gives grace to those who will humble themselves and submit to His desire for their lives.

### III. WORLDLY ATTITUDES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY A LACK OF SUBMISSION (vv. 7-10).

A. "Submission is not the same as obedience. It is the surrender of one's will, which leads to obedience" (v. 7).

It is a proven fact of Christian people that if we will not surrender we will not obey! If we are having problems submitting, God gives us 4 things to do that will help.

1. Submit to God
2. Resist the devil
3. Draw near to God
4. Cleanse our hands and purify our hearts

B. In addition we are to come near to God in our devotion (v. 8).

James' use of the phrase "you sinners" is to point out their involvement in the world. The phrase "double-minded" speaks of their trying to love God and the world at the same time.

C. We are to come to God with godly sorrow if we have sinned (v. 9).

Sorrow for sin is the sign of true repentance.

D. We are to come to God in humility (v. 10).

■ A young woman went to her pastor and said, "Pastor, I have a besetting sin, and I want your help. I come to church on Sunday and can't help thinking I'm the prettiest girl in the congregation. I know I ought not think that, but I can't help it. I want you to help me with it."

The pastor replied, "Mary, don't worry about it. In your case it's not a sin. It's just a horrible mistake."

-- Haddon Robinson, "Good Guys, Bad Guys, and Us Guys," Preaching Today, Tape No. 80.

The horrible mistake we make is when we forget that the inward part of man must be humbled not just the outward.

■ “A person who is truly humble is a person who has turned from sin and the devil and is walking with God. Authentic humility comes from God. A humble person is one who has seen himself as he really is in the sight of God, has repented of his sin, and is following Jesus as his Lord.” (Cedar, 85)

## CONCLUSION

■ The May 1987 edition of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC included a feature about the Arctic wolf. Author L. David Mech described how a seven-member pack had targeted several musk-oxen calves who were guarded by eleven adults. As the wolves approached their quarry, the musk-oxen bunched in an impenetrable semicircle, their deadly hooves facing out, and the calves remained safe during a long standoff with the enemy.

But then a single ox broke rank, and the herd scattered into nervous little groups. A skirmish ensued, and the adults finally fled in panic, leaving the calves to the mercy of the predators. Not a single calf survived.

Wolves continue to attack the church today but cannot penetrate and destroy when unity is maintained. When believers break ranks, however, they provide easy prey. (Larson, 270)

Only a church at peace and in unity can achieve the purposes of the Lord. Satan knows this and sets out to destroy unity, weaken commitment and rob the church of its peace. He does this by promoting worldly *attitudes* in those who drift from where they should be with the Lord.

### References

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