

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A0739 – September 30, 2007 – Jas 4:1-3 – The War Within

James 4:1-3 Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ μάχαι ἐν ὑμῖν; Οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν, ἐκ τῶν ἡδονῶν ὑμῶν τῶν στρατευομένων ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ὑμῶν; ²Ἐπιθυμεῖτε, καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε· φονεύετε καὶ ζηλοῦτε, καὶ οὐ δύνασθε ἐπιτυχεῖν· μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμεῖτε, οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ τὸ μὴ αἰτεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς· ³αἰτεῖτε, καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε, διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε, ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ὑμῶν δαπανήσητε. **(BYZ)**

James 4:1-3 From where are the quarrels and conflicts among you? Are they not from your pleasures that wage war within your members? ²You desire and do not have so you murder and you envy and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive because you ask wickedly, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. **(Author's Translation)**

James 4:1-3 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. **(NASB95)**

What we want to do here is understand the historical circumstances. As you read these verses you wonder, “What is going on here? Why all this bickering and fighting in these churches? What can we gather from the early chapters of Acts and what we’ve learned so far in James about these churches? *First*, they are some of the first Jewish believers in the Messiahship of Jesus to enter the church (Jas 1:1-2, 18). Remember, the church started on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. That is the first day that believers were baptized into the body of Christ which is the church. Some of them may have heard Peter’s sermon on Pentecost in Acts 2 or His sermon in Acts 4 or Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, but whatever the case, these Jews heard the gospel and believed that

Jesus was the Messiah and became a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (Jas 1:18). *Second*, they are *diaspora* Jews, that is, they have been scattered outside the land of Israel. This dispersion happened because they were persecuted heavily by Jews loyal to Judaism like Paul and Roman officials who required emperor worship (Acts 2-8:4). Needless to say they are in a stressful situation. Put yourselves in their shoes, you've been driven from your country, your home, your job, your friends and your family. *Third*, they used to live in a Jewish world where they were sheltered from the rampant paganism of the Gentile world. But now they are living in the heart of the Gentile world, so they are being confronted with a much greater degree of worldliness that tugs on the sin nature. That's a key sentence. Let me read that again and then we're going to develop it. *They now live in the heart of the Gentile world, so they are being confronted with a much greater degree of worldliness that tugs on the sin nature.* Where are they? They are on the fringe of the Christian world at that time. Turn with me to Acts 1:8. Acts is the first Church History book, later you get Josephus, Tacitus and Pliny, secular authors who touch on the beginnings of Christianity in the Roman Empire, but here we have the first Church History book and it was written by a medical doctor named Luke. Acts 1:8, virtually every commentator agrees that this is the theme verse of Acts. As you go through Acts you see the gospel starting in Jerusalem and spreading outward and Luke is tracing the development of Christianity and that's what we're interested in, this spreading out of this new movement, Christianity. "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." See the outward spiral. Everything starts in Jerusalem and moves out. So, when we come to James we find these Jewish Christians and where are they living? On the outer rim of Christianity. They are living out on the fringe. Let's not forget another factor here. Let's be realistic. Here's Jesus Christ back in the gospels and He's coming along in His ministry and Satan is always trying to get Him and he finally think he gets Him on the cross. Satan thought he had victory. Satan thought he had checkmate. But then Christ completely outmaneuvers him, the brilliance of the resurrection and so now Christ is going to start the church, His body, and if you're Satan you're angry. He's been working for 4,000 years to kill the plan of God and right when he thought he had Him Jesus pulls out the ace of spades. Jesus Christ pulls out a tactical maneuver that Satan is still recovering from today. But there's nothing he can do about it. And where did

Jesus Christ go after these words in Acts 1:8? To heaven. We call that the Ascension. In tactical terms, in military terms, the Ascension means Jesus Christ took the high ground. You never want to let your enemy get the high ground but Jesus Christ took the high ground and Satan can't touch Him now. So, Jesus Christ starts his body down here on the Day of Pentecost and if you're Satan and you can't get to Christ what's your next best target? The body of Christ, the church here on earth. So, Jesus says, we're going to start this thing in Jerusalem and it's going to move outward. How is that accomplished? Persecution. Who do you think inspired that persecution? Satan, He's angry so he uses the Jewish leadership, he uses the Roman officials, he's doing anything he can to wipe out this movement but what does Jesus do? He uses it to fulfill Acts 1:8. "The harder you try to stomp this thing out Satan, the more you just fulfill my purposes, the more you spread the gospel." See, Satan is brilliant, one of the most brilliant creatures but Jesus Christ is infinitely brilliant so that every time Satan goes to destroy the plan of God Jesus Christ just outmaneuvers him, every time. And so everything is going wrong for Satan at this point. Earlier in Acts he had this whole thing confined in Jerusalem, now it's loose out here in the Gentile world so He comes in with some other tactics. If you are a military strategist and you have some of your enemy away from base camp, out on the fringes, what do you do? You attack there. You start picking them off. You've got to confine the enemy because the farther they spread out the more difficult it is to control. So, Satan is out to stop Acts 1:8 and he's out on the fringes working overtime on these believers. And he's stirring up strife there. He's got a lot of weapons he can use. For one He's got the Gentile world, its pagan, a lot of it is new to these Jewish believers, it's seductive, the Roman world was a very seductive place, a lot of idolatry and sexual immorality. He's going to use that. And sure enough, notice v 4, "do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God". Second weapon, do these believers still have a sin nature? Oh yeah. You think Satan's going to use that? v 1, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" That "war in your members" is a reference to the sin nature. He's going to use the surrounding pagan world to appeal to their sin nature and wipe out these new Christians. One of the greatest war tactics is to cause inner strife among your enemy. If you can get them to fight one another that's half the battle. Okay, Jeremy, I'm not buying it. how do you know Satan is behind all this. Look at v 7. What does James say? "Resist the devil and he will flee from you". In other

words, “Hey guys, I’m sitting down here in Jerusalem and I’m getting reports about the church on the outer fringes and I hear about all this strife, ‘I am a Christian’, I know the plan of God, I know about Acts 1:8, I know Satan wants to stomp this thing out, ‘Hey, let me give you some tips guys, ‘Satan is attacking you.’” So, we have to combat this. You guys are all competing “to excel one another as wise and understanding teachers in the church.” He’s got you fighting amongst yourselves. Now that you know what’s going on, now that you have some historical perspective let’s see what James says.

Verse 1. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? In other words, brothers and sisters in Christ, your outward conflicts are manifestations of inner conflict. You’re jockeying with one another for position, arguing, having verbal disputes, Jews love to dispute, you find this in the gospels (cf John 6:52). But where is that coming from? Why are you fighting? Because there’s an inner conflict, a war being waged in your members. As Hodges says, “Why were the Christians at war with one another? It was because they experienced war within themselves...” That last phrase, **wage war in your members** is James’ way of referring to the sin nature. There’s a war going on inside of all believers, a conflict between the Spirit and the flesh, between good and evil, between the law of my mind and the law of sin. Paul talked about this in Romans 7. Turn there. Here’s the classic portrait of this inner battle. All Christians face this, there’s always this debate about whether Paul was reflecting on his pre-Christian experience or if this is his Christian experience. That’s more theologically imposed than textually discovered. Paul is clearly a believer here and what he’s arguing is that you can’t be sanctified by following the OT Law. You can’t have spiritual victory by following the OT Law. It simply won’t work. So, here’s how he describes the battle, Rom 7:21-25 “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ²²For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, ²³but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.” So, Paul is saying there’s two things at work in me and he describes them in various ways but the point is that believer’s have two natures or two dispositions, whatever you want to call it and the sin nature overpowers the new nature. You can’t win, you want to win, you want to do good, you want be victorious but you can’t do it! Here’s Paul’s conclusion, verse 26, “Wretched man that I am! Who

will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” So, what’s the answer? How do I win? Well, he gets into that in chapter 8, and shortly, it’s the Holy Spirit. Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). The Spirit of God can help the believer obey and overcome sin. But we can’t do it in our own strength. So, that’s the battle James is talking about in 4:1, this war being waged in our members, it’s the war between our old sin nature and our new nature, the outer man and the inner man, the law of sin and the law of my mind, all those terms are just describing the two soldiers within us that constantly wage war. And anytime we find ourselves engaged in external conflict with people, rest assured, the sin nature soldier is winning. Let me ask you, do these people have DVP wisdom? or HVP wisdom? We just got done talking about these two kinds of wisdom. Back up to James 3 and ask yourself this, “What was the result of DVP wisdom in v 18?” Righteousness and peace. Does that sound like the situation here? Are they making peace? No, they’re quarrelling and fighting (cf 2 Tim 2:23; 1 Tim 6:4 and Tit 3:9-11). “What was the result of HVP wisdom in v 16?” Disorder and every evil thing. Now, are quarrelling and fighting disorderly and evil? Yes. So, are these people ready to be teachers? No, they don’t have DVP wisdom. All it is is a big sin nature contest, my big ugly sin nature against your big ugly sin nature. If you want a great picture of this let me recommend you read 2 Cor 10. That is a great chapter on some of these issues. Let me ask you this? How does a person get to the top? James is going to tell us down in vv 5-10, and how does he conclude in v 10. What does it say? “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and” who “will exalt you?” “He will exalt you.” Your sin nature isn’t going to exalt you. It’s going to cause division and every evil thing. Let’s see what their sin natures were producing in v 2 and then we’ll look at James’ solution.

You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You lust, that word “lust” has sexual connotations in our culture so you want to translate that “desire”, **you desire** (Gal 5:17; Rom 13:9; 1 Cor 10:1-6). What did they **desire**? Leadership in the church, this was a big deal in Jewish culture. I told you before and I tell you again a teacher carried a lot of weight in that culture, a lot of authority, a lot of recognition, a lot of perks and it precipitated this power lust in men and here they are out in the Gentile world and the rabbi’s

are back home so this is our big chance to step up and be teachers. **You desire and do not have**, in other words, you're not the big dogs on campus so what do you do, **you commit murder**. Now, this is figurative, this is not saying they were actually killing one another, this is the spirit of murder. Anyone know what the spirit of murder is in the NT? John talks about it in 1 John 3:15. Hatred, the spirit of murder is hatred. If anyone hates his brother he is a murderer. So, the idea here is that they **desire** these top positions in the church but they don't have them so they hate the people who do have them. And that's just a manifestation of the sin nature and the fact that the eternal life they possess is not abiding in them. Next, **you are envious**, again, **envious** of their position and you **cannot obtain** it. This is the word used of Joseph's brothers in the OT (LXX Gen 37:11). They became so envious of Joseph, he's daddy's favorite, that what did they do? They threw him in a ditch and then when they saw the Midianites passing by they said, "Hey, we could make some money off Joseph" so they sold him into slavery. That's a great picture of envy. Well, these people are **envious** and they can't obtain the position so what do they do? **fight and quarrel**. The word **fight** means "fighting words", verbal warfare. Turn to 2 Tim 2:24 because I want you to see what how the teacher is supposed to handle this. These are Paul's words to young Timothy. He was one of those up and coming Bible teachers in the 1st century. And as a young man he's going to have these Christians fighting him for his position. "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." See, these are believers, believers being held captive by the devil and what do you do? You don't fight back, just be patient, be gentle, correct them and maybe God will bring them to their senses. But mature believers don't fight back. They make peace. Tit 3:9-11 says you correct these factious people twice and then you avoid them, stay clear of them. Now, what's the solution? What does James say is the solution? Why don't they hold high positions in the church?

You do not have because you do not ask. The sin nature does not advance us into wisdom status so we can serve as teachers. God advances us into wisdom status so we can serve as teachers. And where does wisdom come from? Where does DVP wisdom come from? We just learned this last week.

“From above,” *anóthen*, from God (Jas 3:17). God is the source of DVP wisdom. And how do we get it? How does God dispense wisdom? Who does He dispense wisdom to? Those who ask, that’s a word for prayer and what did James tell us in 1:5? “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” God is the source of wisdom and He gives wisdom to those who ask for it. If you don’t ask you’re not going to receive it because it doesn’t come from the world. It doesn’t come from the Bible + postmodernism. It doesn’t come from mixing the Bible + secular psychology. You get DVP wisdom from above and if anyone is going to be the teacher they have got to be committed solely to Scripture. Cry of the Reformation, *sola scriptura!* I told you last week this is a real problem in churches today and I want to share with you what’s going on out there today in churches. I got this e-mail from a Christian outside who’s searching for a sound Bible teaching church and here’s what they said.

Jeremy: Thanks for your answers to my questions. They are very comforting and I agree with them. I am glad you are pleased that I ask questions. I failed to be wise in the past and it has been very costly to me on every front of my life. Especially with God. I am still suffering spiritually ill effects from being involved in churches that are not scripturally sound. The last one was at Christ Harbor Church (Baptist) in Laguna Vista, TX, where Ernest Jones the pastor used mind control, Transcendental Meditation, channeling and sorcery on us. It is all New Age worthless filth. I was clueless to his secret sins of control and manipulation at the time. He is still performing spells on me. Many things did not add up and make sense scripturally and I confronted him and asked him to explain many of the things I had seen and experienced that did not fit. He would not. I exposed him to the church. The church backed him and the battles around me grew even more harsh. There has been improvement, but I am still in trouble... I came to Minneapolis to join a church that I thought was sound in its teachings that is pastored by John Piper (a famous Christian author). I should have investigated it a little closer before I came here. They are using a practice called TheoPhostic Counseling that is New Age and demonic. That was used on me by Ernest Jones. They also use a lot of psychology based counseling. I read a book by the Bobgans called TheoPhostic Counseling that explained what happened to me at Christ Harbor... I am having a very hard time finding a church that does not

practice the occult or uses psychology that is heavily laced with hidden occultism.”

You see how serious this is. HVP wisdom in the church will destroy people’s lives. And here’s a Christian who’s moved all over the United States to find sound Bible teaching and they’re having a “very hard time”. That’s why I don’t let all kinds of material into this church. When something comes across my desk, “Look at this” I’m very skeptical. I research it. Here, let me give you a tool to help you get started because all of us have at one time or another been involved in some organization, bible study, whatever and here’s a tool that will expose a lot of that so-called Christian stuff out there.

<http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/> (Biblical Discernment Ministries). I’m not trying to be mean, I’m trying to protect you. You need DVP wisdom and the only place it comes from is God and that doesn’t mean there aren’t good ministries out there, there are some, but everything has to be compared with Scripture and by that I don’t mean they cite Bible verses, everyone cites Bible verses, and by that I don’t mean they use God words, everyone uses God words, you have to be much more discerning than that. If I’m Satan and I want to deceive you what would I do? Put some truth in there with the lies. That’s what he did with Eve. That’s what he always does. So, it’s always this Bible + thing which is never DVP wisdom, it’s always a deception and it will lead you to ruin. That’s why it took this church 6 months to hire me. That’s why I always say, go be a Berean, check me out. Don’t take me at face value. Check me out. That’s why I get people out there dying for sound Bible doctrine. I had a friend 9 years ago, back in college, he was on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, a great friend and he writes me this e-mail one day about a great book he’s been reading by Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* I think it was, and he says something about “running and kissing Jesus” and I was like, “what is he talking about” so I looked into it. I watched a presentation done by John Caddock that was originally done at the Evangelical Theological Society on Contemplative Spirituality, all this meditation and centering prayer and all this, it’s total psychoheresy and yet, Manning speaks to thousands and thousands of Protestants every year propagating this eastern mysticism in the churches. I come back to my friend and I’m like, “Man you better run from this stuff. This is not Christianity” and he rejected it. Well, I talked to this guy about a year ago for the first time in 7 years and he’s got a long story of all the psychoheresy in all the churches and all the terrible stuff he got into. Thankfully, he’s come out of it, he’s

studying Bible doctrine, he's reading the sermons here, he's advancing spiritually, he's one of my closest friends again. So, now you're seeing why it's so important to have a Bible teacher who doesn't play the Bible + game! I play the Bible alone game. The Bible is sufficient. Bible + nothing. That's why when I do counseling I say up front, "I am not a professional secular counselor. I do not use Freud, I do not use Skinner, I do not use Maslov, I do not use Dewey, I use the Bible because it is sufficient to solve any and every problem." If we need wisdom how are we going to get it? James says "by asking". You ask God. Implied is that we admit we don't have it. That's always a part of asking for something.

So, now we get into prayer, the vital ministry of prayer. There are a lot of important passages on prayer. First, what is prayer? Prayer is talking to God. It is a one-way conversation. God doesn't talk to us in prayer, we talk to Him. God talks to us in His word. There are a couple of kinds of prayer passages. First, there are actually prayers recorded in the Bible. We can use those as models. In the OT you have prayers by Moses (Dt 32:11-13), Daniel (Dan 9:3-19) and many others. In the NT you have prayers by Jesus (John 17:1-26), Paul (Eph 3:14-21) and others. Can't we learn something about prayer from the prayers recorded in Scripture? Yet most people don't give a dime's worth of attention to them but they are great models to analyze and utilize in our prayer life. They illustrate various elements of prayer like praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests. Second, there are principles of prayer recorded in the Bible. And we want to look at seven of these briefly. First we must *ask*. James says "you do not have because you do not ask" (Jas 4:2). Although God knows all of our thoughts He does not answer our thoughts, He answers our prayers. We must address Him, "Our Father in heaven, heavenly Father" and ask Him. Second, we must *ask with pure motives*. James says, "you ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (Jas 4:3). When we ask selfishly, desiring that we obtain things to be used independently of God we will not receive those things from God. He only answers prayers asked with pure motives. Third, we must *ask persistently*. Jesus said, we ought to pray at all times and not lose heart (Luke 18:1ff). A prayer offered only once is obviously not something we are really all that concerned about. But a prayer that we persistently bring before Him grabs His attention. Fourth, we must *ask in faith*. James said we "must ask in faith without any doubting" (Jas 1:6-8). The man who doubts that God is able and willing to answer our prayers is

double-minded and unstable and should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Sixth, we must *ask genuinely*. Jesus said, “close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Matt 6:5-6). We should not pray to be seen and heard by others. Prayers are not sermons for men but words genuinely spoken to God. There must be a genuineness about our prayers and not a strict formula or liturgy followed. Repetitiousness is meaningless and hypocritical. Sixth, we must *ask while abiding*. Jesus said, “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). To abide in Him means to remain in fellowship with Him. If we are truly fellowshiping with Him then we will ask for godly things in a godly way and He will answer. Closely related we have the seventh, we must *ask according to His will*. John said, “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14-15). When do we pray according to His will? When we are praying Scripture (Exod 32:11-14), when we are abiding in Him (John 15:7) and when we are obeying His commandments (1 John 3:21-22). When we pray this way we have confidence as we approach the throne of grace (Heb 4:16) because we know that we have the requests we ask of Him. So, we must *ask, ask with pure motives, ask persistently, ask in faith, ask genuinely, ask while abiding and ask according to His will*. If we meet these conditions we can have confidence that our requests will be answered. In fact, God promises He will. When, how and where we do not know but that He will is certain.

James’ audience was not meeting these conditions. Many failed to *ask*. Others failed to *ask with pure motives*. We can never expect God to provide when we don’t *ask* or when we don’t *ask with pure motives*. The bottom line is that there are conditions that we must meet in order for God to answer our prayer. When James says they asked with **wrong motives** he uses the word for “wickedness” (*kakos*). They asked God for things so they could then turn around and use them to serve their sin nature. That would not be asking according to His will and despite how persistent we are in such a prayer, God will not answer it. The good and perfect God will not provide fuel for our sin nature to wage war against our new nature because nothing but disorder and every evil thing proceeds from there. He rather supplies an abundant supply of His Spirit which He has made to dwell in us (Jas 4:5) so that peace and righteousness will result. We must all face the fact that as Christians wage war with one another, jockeying for position and power in the church it is

nothing more than a manifestation of the inner conflict between our sin nature warring within. While it is the way of the world it is not the way of the Christian. God exalts Christians who are humble and lowly, who flee the world and resist the devil. There is no neutrality. Either a Christian is an adulteress, a friend of the world and at enmity with God or a Christian is taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5), casting down vain philosophies and empty deceit according to the traditions of men and being taken captive of by Christ. For in Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form and in Him you have been made complete; and He is the head over all rule and authority (Col 2:8-9). Let us pray.

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