

# **James: The Practical Christian**

## **The End of the Struggle**

*James 4:1-6*

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# The End of the Struggle

## Scripture

A couple had been fighting over the purchase of a new car for weeks. He wanted a new truck. She wanted a fast sports car so that she could zip through traffic around town.

The discussion was getting very heated when finally the wife shouted, “Look, I want something that goes from 0 to 180 in four seconds or less, and that’s all there is to it!”

And then she added, “My birthday is coming up next week, and you better surprise me. Or, it’s going to get mighty lonely for you around here—if you get my drift!”

When her big day came, the wife woke up early and dashed out to the garage, but there was no new car. Angry, she went back into the house looking for her husband, but he was not at home. Frustrated and upset, she went into the bathroom to get dressed. And there, sitting on the floor and wrapped in a red ribbon, was a brand new scale!

(I understand that funeral services are pending. . . .)

We live in a world that is filled with conflict. Whether personal or national or international, conflict is found everywhere.

James addresses the issue of conflict in his letter. He teaches us how to come to the end of the struggle in today’s text.

So, with that in mind, let’s read James 4:1-6:

**<sup>1</sup> What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

**<sup>4</sup> You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to**

**be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? <sup>6</sup> But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:**

**“God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:1-6)**

## **Introduction**

The Bible teaches that we are all, by nature, fighters! There is no greater evidence of original sin than this.

Franklin Roosevelt made this point during his campaign for the Presidency by saying, “There is nothing I like as much as a good fight.”

Wherever there are relationships, you will inevitably find struggles and conflict. Whether we look at conflict on a global scale by taking into account all the wars that have been fought, or whether we look at modern marriages, conflict is a fact of life.

Webster defines conflict as a “struggle between opposing principles or aims.” The verb means “to be at variance, to clash.” It takes place on the highway as we drive. It takes place in business as we fight with the competition, as we jockey and juggle and work our way to the top. And yes, serious conflict even takes place among sincere Christians.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth he earnestly appealed to them to agree with one another so there would be no divisions among them. He appealed to them to strive earnestly for unity and oneness in their relationships, for he had heard from someone at the church about many quarrels and fights among them (1 Corinthians 1:11).

## **Lesson**

Conflict is something that we all encounter. In James 4:1-6, James show us how to resolve our conflicts God’s way.

## I. The True Source of Conflicts (4:1-3)

First, let's notice the true source of conflicts.

James begins with two questions: **“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?”** (4:1).

The Greek word translated **“desires”** in verse 1 is not necessarily a bad word. It's a term that can even describe good desires. And we all have certain desires. It may be a desire to achieve, or to find freedom, to have a place, to use our gifts, to express ourselves, or to be heard and have a voice. The person who doesn't have these desires is less than whole.

But James' point is that sometimes these desires within you can go too far. They can become frustrated—then there is a war. When something stops you in your route toward fulfillment, the natural tendency is for you to fight until you get your way.

Notice that in verse 2a James says, **“You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.”** If something or someone blocks your inner desires and goals—watch out! Conflict is coming.

When James says here that you **“kill,”** I don't believe he means that you literally **kill** others, although it would not necessarily exclude that. James is most likely drawing on the teaching of Jesus in the *Sermon on the Mount* where Jesus equated being angry toward someone with committing murder in your heart. Jesus taught that you can murder someone with your lips. You can murder with your thoughts. You think thoughts of murder when your desires are frustrated and held back, and you don't get your way.

The problem is that most of us are unaware of that inner battle in our souls that is the true source of our outer conflicts. It's always the other person who is at fault. There wouldn't be any conflict if the other party would just get his or her act together!

You've probably heard the story about the woman who complained to her marriage counselor saying: "I would like to divorce my husband."

To which the counselor replied, "Well, do you have any grounds?"

"Why, yes," she answered, "we have just about an acre."

The puzzled counselor then said, "You don't understand. What I want to know is: do you and your husband have a grudge?"

The lady answered, "Actually no, but we do have a nice carport."

At this the counselor shook his head and said, "Madam, I'm sorry, but I just don't see any reason why you should divorce your husband."

At this, the lady looked at the counselor and said to him, "It's just that the man cannot carry on an intelligent conversation."

But this problem is really no laughing matter. I'm convinced that being unable to see what Jesus called the log in your own eye is the greatest barrier to resolving conflict.

I can't tell you how many couples I've seen whose marriages are falling apart. And even though they agree to counseling—they get nowhere! They make no progress! And the reason why is because they are too proud to remove the log in their own eye. The man is there so that his wife will get some help. The woman is there so her husband will get his act together. And when the marriage splits up, they both go their own self-righteous ways blaming the other. When, often, all it takes is for just one of them to be willing to take an inside look at the real source of the conflict being in the core of his or her own soul.

If you are in the midst of a conflict with someone now, I want you to know that the end of your struggle will begin at that very moment you are able to humble yourself, and take an inside look at your own selfish desires that are underlying that conflict.

I realize that for some of you that's just too much to ask. You just see too many faults in the other person. Listen, I'm not saying that the other person is without fault. I am saying that it takes two

to fight. But it only takes one to begin the peace process. And God calls us to be at peace with all men.

At the end of verse 2 and in verse 3 you find that if you won't do that, even if you are praying your heart out, you'll never get the results you want. James writes, **“You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”**

Many times in the face of conflict the last thing you do is pray! Instead of struggling over the issue on your knees before God, you concentrate your energies on better ways to struggle and fight against those who are dare to stand in your way to fulfillment.

But then there are those who would say to me, “But, Pastor, I am praying about this conflict. In fact, I pray everyday.”

And yet the prayer is too often rooted in what James calls **“wrong motives.”** At its core, it is a self-centered, self-righteous prayer, a prayer that is not truly seeking the glory of God as its chief end, but the meeting of that person's personal desires. And so it is not answered, and the conflict continues.

The point is this: Bowing your head without bowing your heart never accomplishes anything.

Don't expect conflict in your life to be resolved until you are first willing to take an inside look at your own self-centered desires that may be fueling that conflict. Instead of storming off into battle, go before God with an open, submissive heart. Ask him to search your heart and expose your self-centered desires. Openly admit those desires to him and ask God to change you before you ever ask him to change the other person.

So, the true source of conflicts arises from our own self-centered desires.

## **II. Conflicts Are Fueled by Worldliness (4:4-5a)**

Second, notice that conflicts are fueled by worldliness.

James writes in verse 4, **“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”**

Worldliness is not merely doing something someone says you shouldn’t do. It’s not just adhering to the slogan, “I don’t drink, I don’t chew, and I don’t go with girls that do.”

Worldliness is adopting the philosophy of the world and living by it. It’s adopting the philosophy of life that says that your personal pleasure is the highest good and primary pursuit in your life.

The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer was well known for his ability to understand our culture. As he looked at western society he concluded that the two primary pursuits of modern man in our day are personal peace and affluence. I believe he was right.

And it’s this pursuit of personal peace and affluence that is at the root of much of the conflict we face in our daily lives. You see there are certain things the world system is constantly telling us we must have if we’re going to be happy. And therefore woe unto the person who gets in the way of us having it all.

Have you heard the “Yuppies Prayer”? It goes like this:

Now I lay me down to sleep;  
I pray the Lord my Cuisinart to keep.  
I pray my stocks are on the rise  
and that my analyst is wise.  
That all the wine I sip is white.  
That my hot-tub stays water tight.  
That my racquetball won’t get too tough.  
That all my sushi’s fresh enough.  
I pray my cordless phone will work  
and that my job won’t lose its perks.  
That my microwave won’t radiate  
and my condo won’t depreciate.  
I pray my health club doesn’t close  
and that my money market grows.  
If I go broke before I wake,

I pray my Volvo they won't take.  
Lord let's do lunch, I don't know when.  
I guess that's all for now. Amen.

In verse 4 James speaks to those who adopt the world's philosophy with very strong words. He calls them **adulterous people** who hate God and are actually enemies of God.

James is saying that you cannot embrace both God and the world's system. To align yourself with the world—whether deliberate or not—is to become an enemy of God. You cannot look to both God and the world for happiness and fulfillment. They are antithetical. You have to choose. And if you claim to be God's and you start buying into the world's system, God sees you as an adulterer.

You who are married, how would you feel if you found out this next week that your husband or wife has been committing adultery with the neighbor next door. It would anger you terribly! Why? Because he or she would have acted in unfaithfulness to you.

Worldliness is saying, "Lord, you are not adequate for me. I'll find what I need over here. God, I know what is best for me and I know how to get it. Don't call me, I'll call you." Worldliness is built around man's desire to find happiness and fulfillment in life apart from God.

In *Veggie Tales'* "King George and the Duck," an adaptation of the story of David and Bathsheba, Larry the Cucumber stars as King George and Bob the Tomato is his faithful servant, Lewis.

The privileges of royalty—kingdom expansion, castles, power, and treasures—do not appeal to King George. But King George loves to bathe with his rubber duck. Splishing and splashing, he sings an ode to his rubber duck called—what else? "I Love My Duck."

One day while standing on the royal balcony in his purple robe and golden crown, King George peers through binoculars, and his eyes grow wide with desire. He spies something wonderful—a



rubber duck. But it belongs to Billy, who happens to be bathing with his rubber duck on his own balcony. Billy's rubber duck looks exactly like King George's rubber duck. Nonetheless, the King covets it, exclaiming, "I want it."

Lewis reminds the King that he already has a duck and that the other duck belongs to someone else.

"Are you saying I shouldn't have whatever I want?" asks the King.

Lewis opens a large wardrobe overflowing with hundreds of identical rubber ducks and says, "If I could just jog your memory, you already have quite a few ducks."

King George's rationale is simple. He shoots a condescending look at his unlearned servant and replies, "Those are yesterday's ducks."<sup>1</sup>

Worldliness is seeking to find fulfillment apart from God. And it can never ever be done with eternal satisfaction.

In verse 5 James makes the point that God is a jealous God. He writes, "**Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?**" James is saying, "The Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, which God has caused to dwell in us jealously desires the full devotion of our hearts."

God is a God of righteous jealousy! This means he is intensely jealous of your affection for the things of this world to bring you happiness. For he knows that all the things the world offers you are just cheap substitutes, quick highs and they'll never bring you lasting satisfaction. He can satisfy you in a way that the things of this world never can. That's why he commands your undivided allegiance. Like a true and faithful husband he does not ever want to share you with the world.

But once taken captive by the philosophy of this world, man rears his fist before God and says, "Get out of my way!"

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<sup>1</sup> King George and the Duck (Big Ideas, 2000), not rated, written by Jennifer Combs, directed by Mike Nawrocki.

He plows his furrow deeply. When he runs into a rock, an obstacle to his goals, he simply blasts it out of his way and keeps going.

James' point in all this is that most of our hostility and conflict today takes place because we have adopted the world's perspective toward life. And in doing that we're ultimately striving against God—not against man!

Once you see how the true source of your conflicts in life is actually your inner desires fueled by worldliness, what then is the way of deliverance? How can you bring about the necessary change that is so needed so that the true root problem of your conflict is solved? James answers that question in these final verses.

### **III. The Grace of God Is the Antidote to Conflict (4:5b-6)**

Third, the grace of God is the antidote to conflict.

The same God who makes these righteous requirements of you and demands your undivided faithfulness and allegiance also gives gracious help so that you may be able to do it.

Never forget that whatever God requires, he provides. He requires devotion and allegiance, and he grants the grace that you may be able to be faithful to him. But notice, it is grace granted to the humble and not to the proud.

James writes in verse 6, **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**

God is the active antagonist against those who set themselves up in proud self-sufficiency and seek to satisfy their desires by their own efforts.

But the good news is that **God gives grace to the humble**. If you will turn from your self-sufficiency and humble yourself before God, he promises to give you his grace, and to do for you what you cannot do for yourself, and charge you nothing for it.

God has shown his grace to you in Jesus Christ. Jesus was grace incarnate. He received and forgave people who were in

bondage to their own lust for pleasure. He led them to find in him a fountain that finally quenched the thirst of their souls.

And once their inner desires had been transformed by his grace, their many self-centered struggles and conflicts with others came to an end.

True peace with God will always show itself in true peace with man.

### **Conclusion**

This is not a mere theoretical treatise of James. It's real and relevant. Some of you are at war with someone else at this very time. There are probably many skirmishes going on that very few people know about. But underneath, in the motive area of your life, you skirt that person, you stay away, you don't talk to her or about him. Or when you do, it is with a colored word or a tone that puts the other person in a bad light.

I want you to hear God's voice today calling you to resolve this conflict. Start now by humbling yourself before him so that you might receive his grace to do that. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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**PRAYER:**

God's grace is like water; it always flows to the lowest point. He pours out his life-transforming grace on the humble and the broken-hearted. Those who come to the cross of Jesus Christ he promises to grant forgiveness and power to change. Take the next few moments of silence and humble yourself before God, confess to him your sins, especially those sins against someone with whom you may now be in conflict, and thank him for the forgiveness he gives to you through Christ's death.

Father, we thank you for the grace you pour out on the humble. We thank you for the promise of pardon and power that is ours through Christ's death and resurrection. We are so grateful that in Jesus Christ we can find true hope for every situation and cleansing for every sin. Cause our renewed peace with you today to manifest itself in a renewed peace with others. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

The good news is that the war in your life can be won if you will humble yourself before God, for he has promised to give grace to the humble. As you humble yourself before God and then get up from your knees to pursue peace with all men, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you always. Amen.