

## ANATOMY OF A FIGHT

### James 4:1-12

**4** What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup>You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so 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,<sup>[a]</sup> don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, 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 he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us<sup>[b]</sup>? <sup>6</sup>But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud  
but shows favor to the humble."<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

<sup>11</sup>Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister<sup>[d]</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup>There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

### **INTRODUCTION:**

**Don't you find it interesting,  
that in one of the very first churches  
there were fights, quarrels and divisions?**

**Well, that is *exactly* what James is referring to;**

**“wars and fightings” going on in the church he was serving.**

**Although the actual meaning of the words James uses  
refer to wars, seditions and revolutions,  
the translation is not to be taken literally.**

**James is responding to and addressing  
the arguments and contentions  
taking place in the church  
and within the people of the church.**

**CAUSE OF FIGHTS:**

**One would think that fights within the Church  
would be extremely rare – if they even happened at all.**

**Well, let’s take a look at the *cause* of fights.  
Not just those that happen in church –  
- but the ones that happen in families and nations.**

**According to James,  
the primary cause of fights and quarrels,  
is that someone or something  
is threatening our *perceived* happiness.**

**That’s an important phrase, let me repeat it:  
something or someone is threatening  
our *PERCEIVED* happiness.**

**The word James uses for happiness  
is actually translated as “pleasures.”  
From that word we get the English word *hedonism*,  
the worldly philosophy that the chief goal in life  
is pleasure.**

**According to hedonistic philosophy**

***Nothing* can be allowed to stand in the way  
of achieving our personal pleasure; happiness.**

**In the Declaration of Independence of the United States, it reads:**

**“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are  
created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with  
certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty  
and the pursuit of Happiness.”**

**It has become almost imprinted on our DNA**

**that we have a “right” to be “happy”  
and a “right” to fight for that “happiness.”**

**Unless you are a Viking, a Mongol, or Irish,**

**I don’t think you can be “happy” while fighting.**

**But we put such an emphasis upon happiness,**

**that we are willing to go to great lengths to preserve it.**

**Long before the Declaration of Independence,**

**there were two brothers: Cain and Abel.**

**You know the story: They were the sons of Adam and Eve.**

**Cain was a farmer; Abel was a shepherd.**

**They both made sacrifices to God;**

**and for reasons beyond the scope of this sermon,  
God favored Abel.**

**Because Cain saw it as “unfair;” and because it stole his happiness,**

**Cain murdered his brother, Abel.**

**The concept of “warring” and “fighting” for our “happiness**

**is as old as the Bible itself and continues to this very day.**

**On a global scale,  
a nation has resources that we want or need;  
a nation is causing us concern and anxiety –  
- and we go to war.**

**Political fights arise when we perceive that one party  
threatens to enact laws that we don't like.  
Not only do we turn against the party;  
we turn against each other!**

**We are inventive people.  
We can find the silliest of things to fight over.**

**For example, I know of instances where a person  
has broken fellowship with another person  
over which news program to watch.  
Really? Yes, really.**

**Unfortunately, that same shameful thinking  
has too often erupted in church fights.**

**Oh, my gracious!  
I have seen Church fights over the silliest of reasons.**

**One church I served had a parlor.  
The carpet in the parlor needed to be replaced.  
A patron offered to finance the replacement  
IF we would make rules  
on who could use it and when it could be used.**

**Another church, again a fight over the parlor,  
several folks got really angry  
because a mother was using the parlor  
to change her baby's diaper during worship.**

**Can you imagine how much time and energy was spent  
trying to referee those fights?**

**I vowed to NEVER serve another church with a parlor!**

**Then there are family fights.**

**We've all had them.**

**Our feelings get hurt . . .**

**usually over something pretty silly . . .**

**and we strike back.**

**When someone hurts us – steals our happiness –**

**- we want to inflict the same amount of pain on that person;  
and we are not satisfied until we do.**

**That's a good time to stop and ask yourself:**

**Which is more important:**

**the relationship or winning the argument?**

**Are you willing to get things your way  
at the expense of the relationship?**

**If we look at the cause of a fight,**

**usually there is a perceived wrong that we want made right**

**. . . a hurt for which we want justice**

**. . . a disagreement over a decision.**

**We fight because we want something**

**and someone is preventing us from achieving whatever that is.**

**The root cause of all fights, therefore, is Distorted Thinking!**

**We relinquish control of our emotions and our actions to our ego –**

**- we don't stop long enough to weigh the consequences.**

## **CONSEQUENCES OF FIGHTS:**

**There are dire consequences to fights –**  
- whether it is on a global scale  
- a political brouhaha  
- or a family squabble.

**In a fight, there are going to be crushed egos.**  
**Someone must be a “loser.”**  
**And it is a label that is worn like barbed wire!**  
**It hurts!**

**Take a look at what it costs in terms of lives and dollars  
to conduct a war!**

**What if we put those lives and those dollars  
to a better use – hospitals, schools, infrastructure.**

**All those things suffer when a nation goes to war.**

**Look at what it costs to run for a political office!**

**In 2013, the latest figures I could find,**  
**The average cost of winning or holding on**  
**to a six-year term in the U.S. Senate**  
**averaged \$10,476,451!**  
**That's 10 ½ million dollars!**

**The cost to be elected or re-elected**  
**to the U.S. House of Representatives cost an average**  
**of \$1,689,580.**

**And then – THEN – the majority of the time is spent arguing!**  
**Fighting because we cannot find a way to compromise.**

**In our personal relationships,  
we simply cannot fight among ourselves  
and not end up with strained relationships.**

**Each fight chips away at an ego,  
each fight leaches just a bit of trust out of the relationship.**

**We end up with a truce –  
- but a looong memory of the hurt that was dealt to us.**

**And the one consequence we seldom – if ever – consider . . .  
. . . when we fight amongst ourselves  
we are also fighting God.**

**The truly sad thing about fighting against each other  
is all the consuming antagonism that builds to hatred  
is *exactly* opposite of the peace and love  
to which God calls us!**

**Fighting among ourselves  
drains the physical and spiritual energy from us  
so that we cannot pursue the calling  
to which God calls us.**

**How can you do mission work  
when you “hate” those you are serving  
or those you are serving with?**

**How can you share the gospel with someone you disapprove of?  
Or when you harbor hatred towards someone?**

**James refers to those embroiled in fights as “adulterers.”  
By the Grace and invitation of God,  
we have a covenant with God; sealed by our baptism.**

**When we cast God aside to pursue our personal pleasures,  
we are guilty of breaking that covenant.**

**We are guilty of spiritual unfaithfulness –  
- spiritual adultery.**

**That's blunt and shocking. But it is true.**

**Jesus said,**

**“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one  
and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and  
despise the other.” Luke 16:13**

**God calls us away from all that is evil;  
and our worldly – evil – desires keep us firmly anchored  
in the world of pleasure.**

**James says,**

**“ . . . friendship with the world is hatred towards God. Anyone  
who deliberately chooses to be “a friend of the world” by that  
choice “becomes an enemy of God.”**

### **CURE FOR FIGHTS:**

**In marital counseling,**

**I usually ask if the couple knows the best way to stop a fight.**

**So, let me ask you the same question:**

**Do you know the best way to stop a fight?**

**The answer is right there in the question:**

**You just stop!**

**There doesn't have to be a winner or a loser.**

**Just recognize that what you are about to lose  
is far greater than what you might gain . . .**



**. . . and stop!**

**Yeah, it really is that simple.**

**And it is very, very difficult to actually do.**

**But that is exactly what we are called to do.**

**“Forgive others . . . as we are forgiven.”**

**“May the peace of Christ be with you.”**

**We say it together every Sunday.**

**Maybe we have said it so often that it has lost its meaning?**

**CONCLUSION:**

**God calls us – each of us – to a very high standard  
of wholehearted love and devotion towards God.**

**It is a goal that we may not be able to achieve on our own.**

**But God gives us the *grace* to achieve that goal.**

**We live as faithfully as we can**

**and when faith has taken us as far as we can go,**

**then the Grace of God carries us the rest of the way.**

**That’s why James says we are to “submit to God.”**

**God is calling us to be willing to submit to God’s desires for us**

**rather than proudly and arrogantly insisting**

**on satisfying our own desires for pleasure.**

**Before we look down on these people James is dealing with**

**. . . we must reflect on our own lives.**

**How easy is it to slip back**

**into what we had practiced in our life before Christ?**

**We must be awake to our new life in Christ.**

**We must know that God called us to much greater things.**

**And, my beloved friends,**

**we can't do that if we are fighting with each other!**