

QUARRELS AND CONFLICTS EXPECTATIONS AND DESIRES

James 4:1-3

INTRODUCTION

Like everyone else in America, it's been hard to escape the story of Manti Te'o, the All-American linebacker and captain for University of Notre Dame and Heisman Trophy candidate. For most of the season, the story surrounding him was of his girlfriend who "died" and provided his inspiration for much of the season. He was interviewed multiple times, tearfully spoke of her death ... the mainstream media swallowed the story hook, line, and sinker ... then ... it came out in a non-mainstream online sports site that Te'o's girlfriend is imaginary.

Mante Te'o is either, at best, an extremely gullible highest profile victim of a "catfish" and a pretty good liar. Or he is astoundingly conniving and a fantastic liar.

One interesting aspect of this is the way it reveals how deeply people believe in objective truth. We live in the reigning enlightenment philosophy of post-modernism. For decades now, we have been told that there is no such thing as objective truth. We've been told there is "your truth" and "my truth." What is amazing is that the scandal that people feel by being lied to by him demonstrates that, as we are made in the image of God, we understand that there is such a thing as truth and such a thing as error. We see this in such scandals as:

- Beyonce lip synced the national anthem at the recent Inauguration.
- The recent confession by cyclist Lance Armstrong that he lied to cycling authorities, to sponsors, and to his fans has also sparked outrage.

As much as people try to deny the objective, invariant, universal truth of the Word of God, that is binding and authoritative over all

Christians, and is the standard of all people, because they are made in the image of God, they begin to understand that truth.

In the most important same way ... The book of James deals with True Believers and False Believers ...

READ James 4:1-6

In the first 6 verses, James is zeroing in on what a non-believer looks like; what are the characteristics....

James 4:4 – “**friendship with the world**” – the false professors a false Christian with dead faith who is still in love with the world.

- James first addresses infighting within the church

Paul had the same concern: **Gal 5:14-15** – “**The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”**¹⁵ **But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”**

Proposition: 2 main thoughts:

- I. The Presence of War
 - A. Wars Without
 - B. Wars Within
- II. The Absence of Prayer
 - A. No Prayer
 - B. Wrong Prayer

I. The Presence of War

A. Wars Without

4:1a

Point – James writes of peace at the end of chapter 3 as the fruit of righteousness of the Wisdom from above – not all was peaceful in the churches at the beginning. One might think the faith of those who had seen Jesus in the flesh, the faith of those converted through their witness, would cause them to avoid the sinful strife

that plagues so many churches today. This was not the case.

“I am weary of hearing some ministers preaching on sin in such terms as women whispering about other women’s hats. I do not find pettiness in New Testament letters. I find a direct robust awareness of the wretched behavior of people in the church at Corinth and Colossae and Galatia, and their falls are weighed appropriately, addressed, and dealt with.” – Geoff Thomas

James begins with the well known understanding there are wars going on in these brand new churches.

Proof – James 4:1a – “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?”

James makes a specific connection between the “**bitter jealousy**” and “**selfish ambition**” of the demonic wisdom in **3:14-16**. He specifies exactly what he means by the “**disorder**” that comes from this.

James uses the language of warfare:

“**quarrels**” – from Greek word $\mu\acute{\iota}\sigma\eta\varsigma$
→ open warfare taking place in the church!
Matt 24:6 – “wars and rumors of wars”

“**conflicts**” – intense and bitter

- the plural “**quarrels and conflicts**” points to a chronic condition → prolonged state of hostility → established condition of strife within some of the churches to which James is writing
- opposite of the peacemakers in the Sermon on the Mount & **James 3:18**

Jewish philosopher **Baruch de Spinoza**, 1632-1677, was an enemy of God, a champion of Rationalism – a system that elevates reason and is far away from Christianity. *“I have wondered that persons who make boast of professing the Christian religion – namely love,*

joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all men – should quarrel with such rancorous animosity, and display towards one another such bitter hatred, that this, rather than the virtues which they profess, is the readiest criteria of their faith.”

Application: How sad, how pathetic, how dishonoring to Christ when Christians behave in the manner of the unregenerate. The testimony of the church is soiled beyond belief by “**quarrels**” and “**conflicts**” within.

What is the Source of this warring? These battles? Where does it come from?

B. Wars Within

4:1b-2a

Point – The origin of our problems is ourselves. There is a civil war going on within.

- the external wars come from the internal war

Proof – **James 4:1b-2a** – “**Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?** ^{2a}**You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.**”

Conflict with others comes from conflict with self.

“**wage war**” – to be a soldier, military fighting

- present, continual ongoing state
- this is the state of the unregenerate

There is a seething war in the heart of the unconverted. There is a war in the flesh. It’s war between the tremendous driving uncontrolled desire of fallen man and his conscience. It’s the war of the fallen flesh with the fallen mind.

These are the fleshly lusts which Peter says war against the soul
1 Pet 2:11 – “**Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.**”

“**pleasures**” – gratification of natural, fleshly desires, selfish, uncontrolled, personal need to fulfill passion that promises satisfaction and enjoyment when there is none to be there.

D. Edmond Hiebert, the great Mennonite New Testament commentator, described pleasures as “*the yearnings of self love*”

Comes from the Greek word, ἡδονή – from which our English word “hedonist” comes

→ New Testament usage is always negative, ungodly.

2 Tim 3:2-4 – “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”

Luke 8:14 – “as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

Tit 3:3 – “we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.”

The goal of the world is

- self-glory
- self-fulfillment
- self-control
- self-indulgence
- self-satisfaction
- self-esteem

And all of it

- is hostile to God
- is antagonistic to His Word
- opposes His will

James is teaching us that all family or church problems would be solved if people would only look into their own hearts and see the battles raging there.

4:2a – “You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.”

“**lust**” – a controlling, ruling desire.

Recall **James 1:13-16**

“**commit murder**” – James wants to shock – he wants us to understand the depth of the evil in this bitter hatred of others

- present tense throughout – repeated continual chronic state

Exod 20:15 – “You shall not murder.”

Illustration: Most murders take place within the family and intimate associates. This is the destruction of unchecked lust and self-seeking pleasure.

Sin #2 – “And you are envious and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel.”

“**fight**” is from same word as “**conflict**” in v. 1

“**envious**” – the Greek word  – “zealous” comes from this word – even stronger, more compelling feeling than “**lust**”

→ “**you cannot obtain**” ... ever – You will never find true satisfaction through self-gratification...ever. → It is vapor!

Application:

- Desires:**
1. Happy marriage
 2. Promotion at work
 3. Nice clothes
 4. Comfort

There is nothing inherently wrong with desiring these. The

problem isn't in the neutral desires. The problem is when we begin to covet.

Summary:

Something's wrong...

→ and that "something" is in the heart.

Desire becomes a ruling desire, a controlling desire

→ "changes categories" and becomes LUST.

- We are not happy, not content, if we don't get what we want
- We are willing to disobey God to get what we want.

The last of the 10 commandments – **"You shall not covet!"**

→ the violation of the 10th will make us break all the other 9!

How do we know if what is in our heart is **desire** or **lust**???

How do we respond when we don't get what we want?

When our desire for "something" becomes greater than our desire for God

What happens when we **don't get** our desire?

- † We are not Content
- † We are willing to disobey God to get our desire

What happens when we **do get** our desire?

- † We serve it rather than God
- † Our Desire controls us, rules us → LUST!

When our desire for God is greater than our desire for "something"

What happens when we **don't get** our desire?

- † We are Content
- † We say, "God knows the best for me"

What happens when we **do get** our desire?

- † We acknowledge God as giver

- ‡ We could give it up and honor/glorify God
- ‡ We are thankful

When these desires are not kept in check, they blaze out of control and result in a war within which produces wars without.

The presence of war comes from.....

II. The Absence of Biblical Prayer 4:2b-3

Point – 2 components:

- A) No Prayer
- B) Wrong Prayer

A. No Prayer

Reason #1

4:2b “You do not have because you do not ask.”

Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a **National Fast Day** on March 30, 1863. President Lincoln said, *“We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to God that made us!”*

When things are going well, we can get on “auto-pilot” and we can fall into the same pattern as Abraham Lincoln decried was the condition that was producing the Civil War in America.

Application:

- Ask who??? → **1:17** – the Giver of every good thing and perfect gift!
- Ask for what??? → **1:5** – Wisdom! strength

All that we really would desire to have of true joy, true satisfaction true happiness, true hope, true meaning, true purpose is available from God if we would just ask.

- this is something that should encourage us
- this is something that should challenge us

B. Wrong Prayer

4:3 Reason #2

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.”

The essence of sin is selfishness.

- Selfish living always leads to war. If there is war on the inside (divided loyalty), there will ultimately be wars on the outside.
- These three verses are often used in marriage counseling “**wrong**” – 1:13 (“evil”); 3:8 (“restless evil”)

God hates self-centered prayer.

- The Lord’s Prayer begins with God, not with man and sets the tone for all that follows.
- We need to make sure our motives are right
- If our concern is for God – a fear of God – or of self?

C.S. Lewis – *“Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*

His point is that we should do all that we do and saturate our prayers in the context of eternity and not in the here and now. It is right and appropriate to pray for the here and now - for the removal

of trials, for wisdom, for the petitions - but the backdrop to it always is God's glory, is eternity – the things unseen.

Application

1:6 – effective prayer must be in faith, without doubting, without being divided, double-minded, self-deceived, and unstable

CONCLUSION

About 30 years ago, a Dutch professor took time to calculate the cost of an enemy soldier's death at different times throughout history.

- He estimated that during the reign of Julius Caesar, to kill an enemy soldier cost less than one dollar
- At the time of Napoleon, the cost was more than \$2000
- At the end of WWI, the cost was \$17,000
- At the end of WWII, the cost was \$40,000
- At the end of the Viet Nam War, the cost was \$200,000

Other studies have shown the world has only experience about 300 years of relative “peace” in the last 5000 years. There have been some 15,000 wars, large and small, with over 3.5 billion people killed as a result. The value of property destroyed is equal to 15,000 cubic miles of gold.

The cost of war is horrific. But the cost of the physical war pales in comparison to the cost of the wars within the Christian, within a church – because the cost of the spiritual is far greater than the physical. James gives us a strong charge to excel yet more to holy living. He doesn't just describe the problem, but he reminds us of the solution.

May we excel yet more for His glory and the encouragement of one another that we may be a beacon of hope to those in need of a Savior.

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