

CCF Study Notes
Tuesday 7 AM Study
31 October 2006
James 4

Before beginning to read from James, let us spend time in prayer, considering how we deal with conflicts between people. Let us ask God to do the following:

1. **Give** us the desires of our hearts, that is, that God control all our desires,
2. **Keep** us faithful to God and at enmity with the world,
3. **Pour** out His grace on us,
4. **Submit** to God and resist the devil, drawing close to God in absolute humility,
5. **Speak** evil of nobody,
6. **Lay** our plans and boasting aside and follow God's perfect will, and
7. **Take** responsibility to help eliminate division within.

Division has always been a problem within the church. Where do wars and fights come from? What is the root cause? How can we avoid starting fights? What is God doing about divisions within the body of Christ? What part can we play in the healing process? What is Satan's role in divisions? How can we be sure we are part of the solution and not part of the problem? When we find ourselves in the midst of a quarrel, what can we do to end it? Conflicts often arise over plans and programs within the church. How can we eliminate such conflicts? Who is responsible to work toward resolving conflicts within the church? The answers to these questions and more are given in this chapter. The answers are very practical. Our obedience to the simple principles set out in this chapter is vital to unity within the body of Christ.

(4:1-3) Wars and fights have their root cause in our desire for pleasure. We want things we do not have. We covet those things and fight to get them. We do not have these things because we do not ask for them. When we do ask for things from God, we ask God to provide for our pleasures. God is not in the entertainment business, nor does He pander to our sensual pleasures. When we find ourselves in a battle or come upon some great battle, we need to look for the underlying desires that fuel the conflict. The battle takes on an entirely different appearance when we understand the root cause. Some of the greatest theological battles of all history were merely cover for somebody's quest for pleasure. Should we be surprised or hurt when we discover the truth? No! God has known the truth from the beginning.

(4:4-5) Friendship with the world is enmity with God! The principle is so simple and so direct. Yet we often seek to violate this simple principle. We want to have it both ways: friendship with the world and friendship with God. We cannot have both at the same time. We want friendship with the world so we can satisfy all our earthly desires. These earthly desires become the seeds of discord within the church and without. Not only do we fight with other believers, but also we grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells in us! People often formed denominations to fulfill various earthly desires. Diversity within the body is good. Division is

not. The earthly desires no longer have any legitimate place in our lives. The earthly desires certainly have no place within the body of Christ.

(4:6) Now that we know wars and fights come from; we must ask what can be done about these conflicts. What does God do about fights? First, God gives more grace. If we gave more grace to our brothers and sisters we might not need to fight. Our brothers and sisters in Christ do not need to win our somehow merit our favor. Our love and favor is given as pure grace, because we are saved by God's grace. How does God's grace work to end fights? God resists the proud. If we are too proud to lay down our arms and stop our foolish fighting, God takes note of our pride and resists us. God notices the humble, those who would rather be wronged than fight, and gives them more of His grace. We do not earn grace by our humility! Grace is still grace. God chooses when and upon whom to lavish His grace. God grace should lead us to be humble – not proud.

(4:7-10) What part do we have in resolving conflicts within the church? First, we must submit to God in all things. We often forget this obvious requirement in the heat of battle. There is also another command with a promise: resist the devil and he will flee. Conflicts originate with Satan. Resist Satan and Satan will flee, knowing that he has no business messing with the unity of the body of Christ. Notice the command is not to engage Satan in open battle. The command is to resist the work of Satan within ourselves. In a practical sense, how do we do these things? First, we draw close to God. Conflicts are meant to drive us closer to God. Second, we need to cleanse our hands, to clean up our own act – rather than looking at what others are doing. Third, we need to purify our hearts, seeing to it that our allegiances are not split, that we are not double-minded. Fourth, we need to mourn rather than rejoice over divisions. Some people derive great pleasure from sparring with other Christians. Lastly, we need to humble ourselves before God. The promise is that when we humble ourselves before God, He will lift us up.

(4:11-12) When we speak evil of another person, we pass judgment on them. However, Jesus reserves all judgment to Himself, so we have no business judging others. Conflict leads people to speak evil of each other. Conflict always escalates when people speak evil of each other. We stop the cycle by speaking no more evil of anybody.

(4:13-16) At the center of many conflicts within the body of Christ are human plans, expectations and programs. Such programs are not worth fighting over since we do not know what the future holds. Plans and programs become the basis for human boasting. Instead we should commit ourselves to God's perfect will and plan.

(4:17) We often ignore conflicts and refuse responsibility for resolving them. God holds us responsible by declaring that it is a sin (of omission) for anybody who knows to do good when they fail to do that good. We must not fail to work for peace and reconciliation.

P.S. Recordings and notes for these studies are available at <http://www.jstoker.name> . A podcast is available at <http://feeds.feedburner.com/CCF-T-Podcast> .