

What causes conflicts among people?

James 4:1-12

Purpose statement

To resolve conflict, repent of your selfishness and humble you self before God who will lift you up.

Introduction

My name is Todd Khupe. I am one of the teachers elders at Christ Central Soweto.

I have a very challenging topic to teach today. The passage for today seeks to answer the question, why do people fight? God's word in James 4:1-12 is going to help us answer this question. In simple terms a conflict is a fight or unresolved difference between two people or a group of people. Before we unpack this very challenging but necessary topic let me open for us in prayer. Our Father in heaven, may your holy name be glorified as we come to your throne grace to learn from you. You created us in your image and put your Spirit in us so we could have fellowship with you. Help me Lord as I explain your word to your people that our hearts may be transformed so we can live our lives to *your glory* instead of living to please ourselves. Amen.

Conflict often two people have a difference in opinion that remains unsolved. It is a normal part of life. If you we could take a video of our life in a week we would be surprised how much conflict, we get involved in. I am talking about those moments we find ourselves in extreme irritation towards someone even those you love. Let me give examples. A couple (married people) may simple fight over which restaurant to go to for lunch or whose family to spend holiday with. A parent and their child may fight over which subjects to do at matric. Church members may fight over which type of music to sing, while government and civil society may fight on whether children should go back to school at level 3 lockdown or not. James says all these fights have one cause and one source.

My will shall be done no matter what (1-3)

James places the source of conflict within us and not from other people (1). Our usual thinking is that other people are the problem, our spouses, our children, our extended family, our colleagues at work, our bosses, our neighbour and our church leaders. The finger is always pointing to others. But James says our enemy resides in us. We are simply our own enemy not others. He says our desires are always waging war in us. Our selfish desires undermine the needs of others and look only to our own needs. John Calvin one of the reformers who had influence in what we call evangelical churches like ours commented that "...*our hearts are idol factories*". Idols are those things that we love so much in our hearts that they displace our love for God.

Therefore, James says there is a very strong connection between what we desire and conflict with others.

The things that we desire are those that give us pleasure. So, desire works this way. *“If you help me get what I want, I will be happy with you. If you don’t you are my enemy* and because you stand in my way to get what I want, I will be angry with you, frustrated, discouraged, bitter and act vengefully. This type of desire says life rotates around me. All other people should exist to serve me to get what I want at whatever cost. Brothers and sisters, such self-centred behaviour is selfish and sinful. The result, we fight, we quarrel, and we even are prepared to kill to satisfy our own pleasure (read v 2).

Notice that with all these evil motives reigning in our hearts we do not stop praying to God. Still our evil desires influence way we pray. We don’t go before God in faithful humility and submission to seek His will but give him demands, *“...God, I want this girl. If you don’t give her to me, I will get her myself. I will make pregnant then we can take it from there or God if you don’t give me that job, I will get it my own way”*. This is a selfish prayer. It is saying, because God doesn’t give me what I want for my own pleasure, He is not a loving and blessing God. I will play God and give myself what I want. By so doing we push God out of the way so we can run wild with our desire for pleasure.

Submit to God (4-10)

James does not leave us confused by all that he is saying. He points us to where we can go to be saved from the destructive desires of our hearts. He shows us that the desires of our heart are very clear in God’s eyes. It is a conflict of control for the heart. James wants his audience to understand that whatever controls their heart will control their behaviour towards others. It is a war of adultery (v 4) and James now charges them with adultery. Where is adultery coming in? Has James changed the topic. No! He is saying human conflict is rooted in spiritual adultery. In this case the adultery is self-love instead of loving God. James gets straight to the point in verses 5 and 6. He says their hearts have been captured by the things (pleasures) of this world, riches, prestige, recognition, power, celebrity status and so on. They want these things so badly that they always fight, quarrel and kill. But a loving God is seeking to redeem them from this destructive path.

James is saying it is God’s jealousy that can save us from the slippery path of fighting with everyone to get what we want. His warning is that if our hearts are ruled by the desire for something, they put us at cross-purpose with God’s desire. James, the elder therefore calls his listeners to specific actions to be saved from their destructive behaviours. The need to draw near to God in humble submission, seek His favour and his pleasure. *“Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart”* (Psalm 37:4). He is the only one who can satisfy all the desires warring inside their hearts. Worldly pleasures can only temporarily give them satisfaction but not solve their heart problem. They need not only to submit to God’s authority and rule but to realise that they hearts have been captured by God’s enemy the devil. By pursuing

the desires of their hearts, they are actually in the service of God's enemy. They are not passive in the process of their rescue. They need to consciously resist the devil and bring their hearts to Christ for purification. A reminder that God is holy, and he expects those who worship him to be pure and sincere in heart.

James calls them to repentance. He calls them to realise how serious the sin in their hearts is before God and their need to come to Him with broken hearts because he cares. This is the attitude with which David approached God in humble faithful worship, "*My sacrifice O God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart you, God will not despise*" (Psalm 51:17). Brothers and sisters, this is the nature of the God we worship. If we humbly draw near to Him, He will not despise us for our transgressions. He will lovingly embrace us and replace our anxieties, fears, and unrest in our hearts with peace that surpasses all understanding (Phl 4:7) and give us the gentle spirit that we need to live at peace with each other seeking to, "...*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves* (Phl 2:3).

Be gracious with one another (11-12)

Having called his listeners to repentance for the sin in their hearts, James concludes his message by appealing for harmony with one another. He warns them against slandering or speaking bad about each other. This he says expresses itself in judgementalism and criticisms. He says this is bad and besides dividing them as a community, it violates God's law of loving your neighbour as yourself (Mtt 22:39). James calls us to examine our attitudes and relationship to others, whether they are guided by self-interest or care and concern for others.

We ought to examine our hearts and see if in our relationship with others, we judge or criticise them and seek self-promotion tearing others up instead of building them up. Do we always find faults with others and not with ourselves? A pure heart will seek to honour God and others ahead of self. We can go a long way in maintaining good relations with others living lives that shun always seeking our way, our position, our influence our image. Let's desire to serve others more than ourselves and enrich our relationships knowing that there is only one judge, God who knows the secrets in our hearts. Brothers and sisters let's daily strive to live at peace with one another for the glory of God.

May the grace of Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you
always.

Reflection Questions on James 4:1-12

1. Look back at a conflict you have heard with someone in the past. What personal desire would you say you were protecting?
2. Is James saying I am always the wrong one in every conflict?
3. In what way does turning to God help us handle conflicts?

