

Where Do Wars and Fights Come From?

Jeremy Ferguson

James writes in a debate-like style. After his basic introduction, James starts right in with stating problems and saying what needed to be said to fix the problem. In chapter two, the problem was showing partiality. In chapter three, it was the tongue. Now in chapter four he will address the subject of conflict itself. Why do men choose to sin and put themselves against God or as James writes, “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” These conflicts could be between man and man or they could be between man and God. The answer is still the same, “Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (James 4:1)

James uses two different words to describe the conflicts in question. The first word, translated “wars,” originally defined a prolonged conflict that included all the smaller, individual battles. For example, this word could describe the American Revolution, and it would include the Battle of Lexington and the Battle of Yorktown. The second word used, translated “fights,” is a description of a single battle. Using our same example above, this word would describe the Battle of Lexington or the battle of Yorktown but not both. By using both words, James is including any and all types of conflict in his address. It includes a heated exchange between family members or the rivalry that over time splits a congregation. One problem or the entire series of conflicts all are started by the same source, the pleasures that war in the body.

The battles that happen externally all around us have their origin within us. Two desires are at war with each other within every one of us. The combatants are the flesh and the spirit. Although James does not name the two here in his letter, Paul outlines the conflict in Romans 8. The two are the opposite of each other. What the flesh desires, the spirit does not. What the spirit desires, the flesh does not. The flesh and its lusts are for the darkness and carnality of this world. The spirit and its lusts are for the light and the things of God. That is why Paul tells us that, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:5-8). Both sides are seeking to have completeness or happiness, but only one will achieve it.

That is why James writes, “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). The flesh can never find true peace and happiness. Why is this? The flesh desires things that it does not have. If a fleshly, carnal-minded person decided that they wanted something, they would do whatever it takes to obtain it. Whether by murder, stealing, fighting or warring, it makes no difference. Once the person receives what they lusted after, the flesh, by definition, will still want what it does not have. Therefore, the flesh continues to fight and war because it continually wants and lusts to fill the hole that can never be filled. The things of the flesh cannot bring peace to anyone. Peace and happiness can only be achieved by following God.

James writes that the way to be at peace and end these petty wars is through prayer to God (James 4:3). They were asking God to end the wars from without and within, but they were not asking for the right things. They prayed for material blessings to bring them peace. Of course God was not answering their prayers! Why would God give his children something that would only cause them to lust and desire more possessions? If they had prayed to God for wisdom and spiritual maturity then the Father would have given them all they could have wanted (James 1:4). They might have even received some physical blessings because God would have taken care of them in whatever way was best. If they truly needed something, God would provide it. If they were truly following the mind of the spirit, the Father would have done whatever needed to be done. They were more focused on the physical, carnal things around them.

James calls them “adulterers and adulteresses” because of their outward profession of faith, but their inward dedication to the world. Did they not know that holding onto the lusts and desires for the things of this world puts one at odds with God? Just as the flesh and the spirit war with each other, God and this world are at war. In any war, a person cannot fight for both sides. If we choose to follow this world, we put ourselves against God. If we choose God, then we put ourselves at war with this world. Both sides want us. This world wants what it does not have, Christians. God wants all men everywhere to be saved (I Timothy 2:4). Which side are you choosing? Being mindful of our thoughts and prayers can help us determine which side of this conflict we are on. God is going to win; will you be on His side?

But We Have Been Redeemed

Chris Thomas

“How have you loved us?” they said (Malachi 1:2). “Curse God and die!” one said (Job 2:9). But these weren’t pagans or demons balking at His love, chiding His care... they were people who knew God. They were familiar with His character and aware of His nature, but they dismissed Him all the same. The Bible is replete with examples of children of God being displeased and distrustful of the ways in which He deals with them. The classic story of Jonah is a prime example. From his initial flight “from the presence of the LORD” (Jonah 1:3), to his being “greatly displeased” (Jonah 4:1) at the people of Nineveh’s repentance, Jonah seemed to be consistently unhappy with how God was handling things. While his prayer in chapter 2 is a beautiful one of salvation, it isn’t long until he’s unhappy once more with how God is doing things. God even reminds him of His nature in His concluding remarks, “Then the LORD said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?’” (Jonah 4:10-11). How could Jonah be so oblivious to God’s nature? How could he be, even in the slightest way, resentful of who God is? How can any of us?

Those who seek to serve God today are so blessed in that we have the Bible and within it, the gospel. We have page after page of God Himself speaking to us. We can read a passage such as Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare

and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” And we read Romans 5:7-8: “... one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” How amazing. I was neither the former nor the later. I was worse. I was helpless. I was lost. We all were.

But we’ve been redeemed. And no matter what else happens in this life, I have cause to rejoice in the Lord for His gift of salvation. I rejoice because He is who He is.

Life here is often unfair, but we must always remember that we live in a broken world full of sin. We must also always remember that “our citizenship is in Heaven” (Philippians 3:20), and that this world, with all its pain, is not our home.

Paul, no stranger to suffering (2 Corinthians 11:23-29, 12:7) writes, “for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). And once again, I can’t help but think how amazing, comforting and beautiful the thought.

A little further, in Romans 9, Paul writes about God’s extension of salvation to the Gentiles as well as the Jews; a matter which had caused some contention among the latter. In responding, God employs the imagery of a potter molding clay. The clay has no input in what it becomes; rather, it’s the potter’s prerogative and the clay has no right. Likewise, we haven’t the right to a loving God. After sinning, God very well could have decided that we blew our chance and were eternally lost forever. He didn’t have to love us, He didn’t have to save us, He didn’t have to die a cruel death, but He did. He did because He loves us.

The next time we find ourselves bogged down with troubles and woes, or, like Jonah, overcome with a sense of displeasure at being asked to do His will, let us stop and be thankful, rejoicing in who He is; remembering that He saved us because He loved us. Let us never disregard that. May we never forget.

Temptation

Drew Nelson

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)

Temptation is a dangerous thing. It hits you where you are weakest and when you expect it least. Temptation can accurately be described as desire plus opportunity. When one has the desire and the opportunity to commit a sinful act, they are being tempted. In order to overcome temptation, one must rise above both aspects of temptation: limiting opportunity for it, overcoming fleshly desires, and ultimately changing what we desire altogether.

Let’s face it, being tempted is inevitable and inescapable. Sin is all around us and with it comes the temptation to act and think like the sinful world. We don’t live in a Christian commune where everyone has the same beliefs; but even if we did, temptations would continue to abound and sin would still occur.

If we recognize that it will occur no matter what we do, how do we go about overcoming temptation? The first step is limiting opportunity for it. There are times when temptation is unavoidable, but we could go a long way if we were more discerning in where we go, how we spend our time, and who we spend our time with. We've all heard the adage, "One rotten apple spoils the whole bunch," but did you know this saying echoes what 1 Cor. 15:33 says: "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" In Psalm 101:6-7, David declared that he would surround himself only with those that were faithful and that "he who practices deceit shall not dwell within my house." Even the most zealous Christian can be worn down and corrupted when they have friends who are worldly and sinful.

Of course with temptation comes the possibility of stumbling; but on the flip side, there's the opportunity to overcome it: a way of escape. Again, we should limit our opportunities to be tempted, but when temptation comes (and it will come), we have a great opportunity to choose the way of escape, to please God, and to grow as a Christian. James 1:2-3 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various temptations, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance (steadfastness)." Verse 12 says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Temptation generally has a negative connotation, and this is for good reason: it can lead to sin; but temptation can also lead to righteousness. Through it, we can prove our faith to God and show Him that we are willing to forgo our own fleshly desires and make God's wishes number one in our lives (cf. Rom. 8:5-8).

Forsaking All

Matt King

Luke 5:1-11 records Jesus calling His first disciples to follow after Him. The fishermen Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, had "*toiled all night and caught nothing*" (**verse 5**), but when Jesus called them to "*Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch*" (**verse 4**), the result was more fish than their nets could hold! After this astonishing record, we read, "*when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him*" (**verse 11**). What were they "forsaking" or "leaving behind"? Of course they would have to leave their fish, boats, nets, and whatever else related to their particular profession, but perhaps this passage communicates a much greater truth about being a disciple of Jesus: When we decide to follow Christ, we necessarily must "forsake all" that stands in our way!

A few years later, we read in **Luke 18** that the disciples heard Jesus as He spoke with a rich young ruler. He instructed the young man, "*Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*" (**verse 22**). Jesus was calling this young ruler to lay aside the one thing standing between he and Christ and follow as a disciple of His. We are sorry to read that the young man went away sorrowful, choosing his belongings above the Master. After this event, Peter seems to reflect on Jesus' instructions to that young man as he speaks to Jesus, "*See, we have left all and followed You*" (**verse 28**), and Matthew's account adds Peter's question, "*Therefore what shall we have?*" (**Matthew 19:27**). Jesus' answer to Peter and the disciples is one that provides great comfort and ties together the essence of

discipleship: *“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30)*. How comforting it is to know that our labor and sacrifice for the Lord is not in vain as we stand to receive much greater rewards than what we have left behind in our service to Christ!

We must understand that the concepts of loyalty, sacrifice, and “forsaking all” for Christ extend far beyond some sort of “Lent-like” ritual where we restrict ourselves from certain foods or activities for a few days. Loyalty to Christ is choosing His entire will and His entire way in any given situation over anyone else's will or way; and that includes our own! Loyalty to Him demands that we lay aside the spiritual pressures that friends and family impose upon us, and choose Christ instead. Jesus said in **Matthew 10:37**, *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.”* Over the years, people have tried to skew and distort this verse, attempting to change what Jesus so clearly stated. However, we need to accept that Jesus means exactly what He says: If we are not willing to do what it takes to stand for Christ, even if that means going against what our family members want or what they tell us to do, then we are simply not worthy of Him. That can be a mighty hard truth to apply, but it's a truth nonetheless.

It would be difficult for us to find better examples of loyalty to an earthly king than King David's “mighty men” in **2 Samuel 23**. Few men have displayed such great courage in the face of fear, or such great obedience at a king's most challenging demands, as these great warriors. It is fascinating to read the details of their battles, such as Eleazar who fought the Philistine armies in a field full of lentils until *“his hand stuck to his sword” (verse 10)*, or Benaiah who *“killed two lion-like heroes of Moab”* and *“killed a lion in the midst of a pit on a snowy day” (verse 20)*; How Benaiah found himself in such brutal situations we'll never know! Yet, perhaps the greatest display of the mighty men's loyalty and sacrifice for King David is found in **verses 13-17**, where three of the king's mighty men busted through the Philistine camp just to get David a drink of water! Consider how brave and courageous those men were in their allegiance to an earthly king! As Christians who pledge loyalty to King Jesus, we do well to compare our level of loyalty and sacrifice to those of the mighty men of King David. How do we react to Jesus' desires, even if they seem as simple to us as a drink of water? How willing are we to satisfy the needs of our King, even if it means braving the encampments of this world? King Jesus is looking for mighty followers who will fight for Him until their hands stick to their swords! Are we living with that kind of loyalty?

Jesus put it best in **Matthew 12:30** where He said to those Pharisees who accused Him of working by the power of Beelzebub, *“He who is not with Me is against Me”*. As simple and “black and white” as that sounds, most people will never understand it. You are either with Christ, or you are against Him. You are either loyal to Him, or you are not. You either “forsake all” to follow Him, or you forsake Him to follow something else. Who we choose in this life determines who we live with in the next! Are you choosing Christ?

The Allure of Temptation

Brady Cook

God is our Lord; Satan is our enemy. Righteousness is of God; lawlessness is of Satan. Perseverance is of God; falling to temptation is of Satan. It seems like a very simple, easy equation. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above” (Colossians 3:1). Sounds even simpler. If we want to be right with God, the path is very, very simple: stay away from sin, and embrace God’s way. If it’s so simple then, why do we fail so often?

Solomon advises all who would listen with these words in Proverbs 23:31: “Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly.” He understood the deceptive beauty that sin puts forth to both the trained and the untrained eye, that it can appeal to the senses as such a way that will put all your inhibitions on the sideline. With eyes as big as rubies, men flock to the cup that swirls, hoping for a taste of that immortality that comes with the passing pleasures of sin. The pursuit of glory that only God alone possesses is part of what drove Eve to the forbidden fruit, making it “good for the eyes” (Genesis 3:6).

The story of the foolish youth in Proverbs 7 is often used as an illustration of this thought, and we often ask ourselves how anyone could place themselves in that sort of position. However, if we look closer, we will see the mirror turned on our own lives, showing us that the youth is not too different from ourselves. Note the ease with which he allows his soul to be taken. The seductress pulls no punches in telling him of what he is about to do, but with the “swirl of the cup,” the details seem no longer to matter. It becomes an easy choice for him: he will indulge himself now, and pretend the consequences will never come. He is a prisoner of his emotions, “going to the stocks” (v.22), ready to accept his instruction at the cost of this great pleasure. What he does not know is the pleasure will be short-lived; his lesson eternal.

It has been said before that nothing in this world is quite as exciting as the “thrill of the hunt.” The problem with the end of the hunt is that the captured now seems so uninteresting, and it’s only a matter of time before the eyes of the predator gaze upon it’s next prey. In a sense, this is what we as humans do. Looking upon the elusive temptations that surround us, we give chase, always drawing closer and closer to that final catch - the line where temptation draws into sin (James 1:15). After catching our prey, we look at what we have done in passion and excitement, only to discover that the result is not satisfying but horribly unfulfilling, even sickening to the stomach. And it is here that we discover the sad reality of our pursuits: while we believed it would be us glorying in the end, the only one smiling is Satan, leaving us with a broken heart and a torn spirit.

There is a similarity between our attachment to faith and to temptations. The results of our faith are something that we see “afar off” (Hebrews 11:13), and what we do with that knowledge that they will come is the deciding factor in our christianity: accept and live, deny and perish. The knowledge of the consequences of our sin are not so different. We understand the results of drunk driving, adultery and lies as nothing glamorous, yet it does not phase us as it lies past the pleasure. But just as glory awaits past persecution for the righteous, so punishment stands patiently after pleasure for the sinner, and it’s judgment is just as sure.

What is it that drives man to pursue just one more drink, just one more woman, just one more gambling ticket? While the answer is different from every person, it can nonetheless be traced right back to the beginning of sin as we know it, and the desire to “be like God” (Genesis 3:5). This is perhaps the carnal spirit in us all, that hunger that thirsts for immortality, but immortality cannot be obtained by indulging in mortality. We must look higher than that for our glory, to the One to whom “belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11).