

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Friendship with the World James 4:1-6 Part One

(1) What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? (2) You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. (3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. (4) You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (5) Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Hopefully you remember the theme of this epistle which is “Tests of Living Faith.” Based on these verses another key indicator of true saving faith is one’s attitude toward the world. Look at V. 4: “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” We could call this test the “Friendship with the World test.” The message is loud and clear. Those who are truly born again will not be a friend of the world.

This is not a new thought in this epistle. Some of you might remember **James 1:27** “**Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself**” ... what? “**Unstained by the world.**”

Genuine spiritual life and faithful Christian living involve separation from the world and all its countless contaminations. If we can remain unstained by the world, the genuineness of our faith will be clearly evident. If we do not remain unstained by the world, the genuineness of our faith will not be clearly evident.

But how can we tell if we have in fact been contaminated? One of the ways that we can know if we have been personally contaminated by the world is if our life is characterized by turmoil in our relationships. Over the next several weeks we will be looking at three specific relationships that will in fact be effected if we have in fact become contaminated with the world. We will be looking at three specific relationships that will in fact be effected if we have come under the influence of the world. Let us begin with the obvious, which happens to be the very first relationship that James addresses.

CONFLICT WITH OTHERS

Let us look at the first part of **James 4:1** “**What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?.....**” This is a diagnostic question. James apparently is very aware of interpersonal conflicts amongst his readers. James is challenging them to identify the true source of their “quarrels” and

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their “conflicts.” The plurals, “quarrels” and “conflicts”, indicate that the reference is not to an isolated occurrence in their midst but to a chronic condition. The picture that is being painted for us by James to his readers and the conditions that existed within their churches is not a pretty one.

The word “quarrels” (POLEMOS), from which we get the English word “polemics,” relates to general prolonged, serious disputing or combat and is often rendered “war” (Matt. 24:6; Heb. 11:34; Rev. 11:7; 16:14).

The word “ conflicts” (MACHE) refers to a specific fight or battle.

Both terms here are used metaphorically of violent personal relationships, which, in the extreme, can result even in murder which we see in **V. 2**.

Why do certain churches have conflicts? Why do certain churches have ongoing quarrels? Based on the context of these verses it is because certain of members of their body have linked themselves to the world and it’s wisdom rather than to Christ and that wisdom which comes down from above. Or, in other words, because certain members have begun to manifest a friendship with the world.

Could this happen in our fellowship? And the answer is, of course it could! In fact I can honestly tell you that it in fact did. It occurred over 20 years ago. During that time I was called “demon possessed” and ultimately was subjected to a trial before the executive board of the church accused of being “unloving, manipulative, and unteachable.” My wife was accused of being a liar and was subjected to a formal time set apart for the specific purpose of accusations being brought against her. My children were branded as rotten, and certain families in the church refused to let their children play with them. This conflict lasted approximately 4 years. Do you think this might fall into the category of what James is specifically addressing in this verse? I would think so. I believe that many in our church had begun to think and act like the world. What is our challenge when we find ourselves in such a situation?

The challenge that faced me during this period of time was not only that I would not be creating conflict but that I would make sure that I was not contributing to the turmoil that was swirling around me. **Rom. 12:18** says, **“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”** The good news, as I reflect back on this difficult time within our church, is that the Lord used this occasion to strengthen not only myself but also our fellowship.

Almost 10 years ago another problem broke out in our church where once again hostility became evident and many of you who are here this weekend went through that problem with us. But even though this also was a difficult time in the life of our fellowship, the personal attacks were far less vicious and the commitment to honoring Biblical truth on the part of the vast majority of the people involved in the dispute was actually very encouraging in comparison. What had happened to the church over those then years? I believe that our congregation as a whole had become more closely identified with the teachings of the Word of God and were less contaminated by the attitudes and the thought processes of the world.

Today, we as a church are at peace, and I praise the Lord for this. But even though we at the present time are at peace as a congregation, I do know that this is not true of our individual families. I know that there are families in our congregation at this very moment who are characterized by quarrels and conflicts.

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Just as this is a manifestation of friendship with the world when it occurs in the church, it is also a manifestation of friendship with the world when it occurs in our families. The challenge during those times is not only that you would not be creating the conflicts and the quarrels but that you would also not be contributing to them.

We are in the world but we are not of it. Therefore let us not become despairing when being tested but rather persevering; persevering in the sense that we will not allow ourselves to succumb to the thinking and practices of the world. Where might this struggle between the influence of the world and the Word manifest itself in our relationship with others? There are many different areas but I would like to suggest two very basic ones.

First of all the struggle between the world and the Word is demonstrated by how anger is viewed. The world tolerates the anger of man; the Scriptures do not. What do the Scriptures tell us to do with our anger? Listen to the words of **Eph. 4:31, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”** How much are we to put away? We are to put “**all**” of it away. We are not to tolerate any root of bitterness, no symptom of wrath, no trace of anger, no echo of clamor, no slime of evil-speaking, no dregs of malice. None of it. This is God’s will for us in Christ Jesus. Therefore whenever we see anger raising up its ugly head in our lives whether through an angry outburst, an irritated spirit, or purposed withdrawal of affection and kindness, we need to confess it as sin. Otherwise I believe that we will be thinking very much like the world thinks, and we will be behaving very much like the world behaves.

Do you mean that even if my folks, for no good reason, tell me I can’t go over to a friend's house to play video games, that I cannot be angry with them? Yes that is what I am saying. The Scriptures do not give us that freedom. Do you mean that if my husband does not help me with the children night after night after night that I cannot become angry with him? Yes, that is what I am saying. Does this mean if my wife disrespects me in front of our friends that I cannot choose to become angry with her? Yes, that is what I am saying. The Scriptures are clear. We are to put away all anger. This does not mean that we cannot lovingly and sensitively communicate with a family member or friend that we may have an issue we would like to talk to them about, but that communication must be free of anger.

The world, on the other hand, accepts anger. It is only a question to them of whether to repress it, express it or glorify it. Is this not so? But this is not the teaching of God’s Word. Therefore hopefully we will, as believers, have a zero tolerance for personal anger within our lives.

But someone might say, "But I have been seeking to do exactly what you say that the Bible teaches and nothing has changed. My wife is still angry with me, my parent is still angry with me, my best friend is still angry with me." Do not think that just because you might follow the biblical instruction of putting anger away from your life that others will necessarily follow suit. They may never put their anger aside. But this does not change your responsibility. What do the Scriptures teach? **“If possible, as far as it depends upon you, live at peace with all men.”**

But this is not the only place where we see the struggle between the influence of the world and the Word. We also see this struggle in respect to the question of when kindness should be expressed toward, those who make our lives difficult.

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The world rejects the idea of showing unconditional kindness; the Scriptures do not. What do the Scriptures teach us? Look again at **Eph. 4:31**. After telling us, **“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice,”** it then goes on to say in **V. 32**, **“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”** We not only are not to be angry with those who may have in some way injured us, but we are called to be tenderhearted and kind toward them.

Not only will the Christian young person whose parents told him that he cannot go to his friend's house to play video games not become angry, but he will stay home that evening and help clean up the house. Not only will the Christian wife not become upset with her husband for not helping with the children, she will hopefully come and sit beside him on the couch after she has put the children to bed and ask him how his day has been. Not only will the Christian husband choose not to harbor anger toward his wife for disrespecting him in front of their friends, but he will get up and make breakfast for her in the morning and present it to her with love.

Is this how the world thinks? Is this how the world behaves? Of course not. But for us, we need to be proactive. We need to actually consider how we might come alongside of them to exercise care.

When Christians find themselves contributing to quarrels and conflicts with people in the world, it is a terrible thing. But it is far worse for Christians to find themselves contributing to quarrels and conflicts amongst themselves. Rather than abusing our brothers and sisters in Christ, whether that is in our local church or in our homes, we are to love them. Jesus said in **John 13:34-35** **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** And then later in **John 17:21** Jesus prayed for his disciples and asked **“that they all may be one, even as You Father, are in Me and I in you, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (17:21).** This alone is the only way that we can walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. **Phil. 1:27**, says **“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”** When this actually takes place, it is a thing of beauty. In **Acts 4:32** it says, **“The congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.”** This is, hopefully, how it will be here in our fellowship. Hopefully, this is what will be in our families.

One of the ways that we can tell whether or not we have become contaminated by the world is if we find ourselves actually contributing to our conflicts with others. This is one way that friendship with the world can be manifested. What is another relationship that we can experience conflict in that is also an indicator that we have begun to become influenced by the world?

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CONFLICT WITH OURSELVES

Up to this point, in this passage James has simply introduced to us the fact that quarrels and conflicts existed amongst his Christian readers. These conflicts and quarrels are a manifestation of friendship with the world. But, we still have not answered the question, **“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?”**, and in seeking to answer this question, James begins to probe the hearts of those involved in these quarrels and conflicts and in doing this exposes an even more basic conflict. Let us continue to read, **“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures (James 4:1b-3).”**

Friendship with the world not only contributes to conflict with other people but also produces conflict within the worldly person himself. If you see a person who is not enjoying peace with others, you can be fairly well assured that he is not enjoying peace within himself.

The evidences of internal conflict are legion in society today. The proliferation of psychologists and psychiatrists, counselors and therapists of all sorts, clinics for the treatment of a host of emotional and psychological disorders, the increased problems of drug addiction, domestic violence and abuse, dreadful crimes, alcoholism, and of suicide give abundant evidence that personal disorders have reached a crisis point. The increase of impatience, frustration, anger, and hostility is not only seen in street crime, but vividly portrayed on modern highways, where drivers use obscene gestures, dangerous acts of intimidation, and sometimes even gunfire to vent their displeasure at what another driver does or fails to do.

What is going on? What we are seeing is the outworking of the thinking and attitudes of the world in all of its glory. This is the product of a world that does not know where they have come from. This is a product of a world that does not know why they are here or where they are going.

Because the world has been unwilling to embrace the clear teachings of God’s Word and embrace the answers to these very basic questions, they are very dissatisfied, discontented and misguided.

CONCLUSION

The theme of this epistle is Tests of Living Faith. We have considered six of these tests.

The first test we examined was the “Response to Trials test” in James 1:2-18

The second test that we examined was the “ Response to the Word test” in James 1:19-27

The third test that we examined was the “Impartiality test” in James 2:1-13

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The fourth test that we examined was the “Works test” in James 2:14-26

The fifth test that we examined was the “Speech test” in James 3:1-12.

The six test that we examined was the “Wisdom test” in James 3:13-18.

We are now considering the seventh test and we are calling this test “Friendship with the World test.” How can we know whether or not we have begun to be contaminated in this way? We can tell if our lives become characterized by conflict..... First of all conflict with others, and secondly conflict within ourselves.