

A MESSAGE ON CARNALITY

James 4:1-11

Here we have a sudden transition from the beautiful picture of the Christian life as it should be back to a sketch of their quarreling. James recognized that the wrangling and strife which existed among his readers were fierce enough to be notorious. By "wars" he meant the general condition of hostility, and by "fightings" he had reference to the bad outbreaks of hostile feelings. There were hot arguments and disputes among church members. James, therefore, denounced such conditions. However, it is most encouraging to note that James did not say that all of the Christians indulged in those things.

Doubtless those who were fighting and brawling would have justified their actions on the grounds that they were battling for righteousness. James said that their source was the evil lusts or longings of the heart. What causes war between nations? Both sides will say, "Our national honor was at stake." At the bottom of it all, you will find pride or lust for power. Wars between labor and capital are excused on the grounds of unfairness, yet on the part of one or both there is a lust for material things or power. Quarrels among Christians, too, are justified for one reason or another, but always selfish passions have something to do with it. Usually someone, like Diotrophes in III John, wants the place of preeminence. So the real trouble is self-praise and self-love.

James here shows the intimate connection between strife and laxity of life. These things have no other source than the body and its lusts. These lusts are common to all men. The Word of God never underestimates the power of the old sinful nature which we inherit from Adam. We came into the world with a nature corrupted from the fall. All are born with a sinful nature. This old sinful nature is of the earth and seeks its pleasures and satisfactions in the world. It loves sin and is by nature at enmity with God. There are some who imagine that when one accepts Christ as Saviour and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit takes place, that immediately the old nature is annihilated and ceases to exist. Such a conception is altogether erroneous. This old nature cannot be eradicated or changed. The new birth is not the eradication of the old man, but the creation of a new. The divine nature is imparted. These two natures in a Christian war against each other. In some creatures the one seems to have the upper hand, and in some the other. The new nature must be controlled or we are sure to get into trouble.

Lust, envy, strife, murder show the progress of sin. The first step is an unreasonable longing for something someone else has; the second step is envying the one who has it; and the third is fighting to get it. Sometimes this person does not stop until murder is committed. Seldom is anything gained in this way, but many things are ruined by this method.

"Lust" may be translated "covet" or "long for." People long for wealth, recognition, honor, place or power. That sort of thing can stir up a lot of trouble. In the book of James it is not lust for wealth, but for recognition or place or honor that caused the trouble. In spite of their lusting, they did not get what they desired. The things that one covets are seldom obtained, but, if they are, they do not bring the desired satisfaction. The way for advancement in the things of the Lord is not by strife, but by prayer.

Lust is such a wicked thing that it may lead to murder. Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, and it led to the murder of Naboth. David's lust for Bathsheba led to the killing of Uriah. It may be that the lust for place or honor of some in these early churches may have led to murders, however, it appears that James was not thinking of killing in a moral or spiritual sense. They were murdering each other's character with their tongues. In their lust to obtain they may have ruined the reputation of their rivals and broken

their hearts. Such terrible actions always have a devastating effect and usually cause the lamp of testimony to be put out.

These Christians were longing for things, striving, struggling, fighting and warring together, but James solemnly said, "Ye cannot obtain it." Why? "Because ye ask not." Here James introduces a new topic, that of prayer. If they had been men of prayer, they would not have been in such a terrible condition. If their longings had been for the proper things, the Lord would have given them to them. Furthermore, if they had been Christians who enjoyed real communion with the Lord, they would have been content with the will of the Lord, even if they were denied the things for which they prayed. So the remedy for this terrible condition lay in prayer.

Do you sometimes wonder why you are unsuccessful in the things you attempt? Perhaps you struggle on in your own strength, and fail to pray. Perhaps you have even quarreled and blamed some other Christian for your failure to receive. You should remember that, "It is better to wrestle with God than to wrangle with men."

In case you ask the Lord for the things that you desire to have, and then do not receive what you ask for, there is something wrong. The motive behind the asking must be wrong. The Lord will not give what is asked if the motive is selfish.

James intimates that those early Christians did not receive because they asked for those things which they should not have desired. They were not asking for anything in the will of God; they were asking for the things that would satisfy their own wills, or the things that would satisfy the demands of their unclean lives. Praying in order to satisfy selfish lusts will keep the Lord from answering. One may ask for perfectly legitimate things, but, if the reason for wanting them is selfish instead of for His glory, He will not give them.

Sometimes Christians say, "I pray and pray, but it seems that the Lord does not answer." Perhaps the trouble lies right here. What would they do with it if they got it? Spend it on their own pleasures? If this is the case, the Lord knows, and He will not grant it. We should pray like the Lord Jesus, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Luke 22:42. In fact we need not ask Him much concerning the things of our own. If we continually ask Him to enable us to live for Him, His glory and the welfare of His work, He will take care of our personal affairs. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33.

If we take care of the Lord's business, He will take care of ours. It is entirely possible to be very selfish in nature concerning the work of the Lord. Those who look for preeminence in the church certainly are selfish.

How often we miss it in prayer! We ask for that which we should not have, staking our judgment against that of God. We ask in a spirit of rebellion instead of subjection to the will of God. We ask for the gratification of our own selfish whims and pleasures rather than for the glory of God and the blessing of others, even when the things we ask for are good in themselves. Prayer is probably the poorest of all our spiritual exercises, when it should be the most constant and the most helpful one.

The Holy Spirit would not condone the conditions that prevailed. He spoke in positive and uncompromising fashion. In verse four His condemnation is plain and positive. They were making themselves friends to the world. They were walking in worldly ways and living in worldly fellowships, which was wholly contrary to the will and purpose of God. This friendship with the world, James says, is enmity with God. There he placed the real responsibility for the wars and the fightings which came among the children of Israel. Perhaps they would like to have blamed Satan for it all, but the Lord said that these things proceeded from their own lusts which warred in their members.

When James called his readers "adulteresses," he was thinking of the relationship of the Christians to Christ. He was not accusing them of committing adultery in the accepted sense, but of forsaking Christ and turning to the world. In the Old Testament adultery was applied mostly to idolatry, but James applied it to worldliness. The Christian who turns from Christ and follows the world is like a woman who leaves her lawful husband to go with other lovers. To seek pleasure and satisfaction elsewhere besides in Christ is spiritual adultery. As a man expects his wife to be solely for himself, so the Lord expects us to be His only. He is jealous of any rivals.

Worldliness is mostly a condition of the heart. Is our aim in life to bring glory to God or to receive applause from men? Is our ambition to please Him or to advance in the things of the world? Are we seeking to honor His name, or are we seeking honor for ourselves? To be filled with earthly ambitions is to be unfaithful to our God. To be a friend of the world is to be a friend of Satan.

One does not have any right to claim intimate relationship with God while at the same time living in an adulterous relationship with a sinful world that hates Him. The law of spiritual life is not always understood. Some wonder why they are not happy spiritually, that is, why they do not enjoy religion. They are living in sin with the world and marveling at their lack of communion with God.

In the light of the dark picture in verses one through five, the statement "He giveth more grace" is certainly refreshing. Here our Lord is pictured as a great giver. It is grace that He gives. His gifts are unconditional; He makes no charge for them. They are always undeserved, so by grace. He does not give to the proud, who think they deserve it, but to the humble, who know they do not. James tells the worldly Christians that God stands ready to dispense more grace; ready to pardon and to welcome them back to His heart if they would but humble themselves in His sight. God's grace does not stop with salvation. We need it for pardon, but also to carry us along the way every day. We sin daily, but He is gracious to forgive us as Christians.

When one realizes that he has received all of these undeserved favors from the Lord, it has a great influence for good in his life. It will produce love for Christ and His people. It will deaden any love there may be for the world, and help overcome its allurements. It will fill one with joy and contentment, make one more gracious to others, and cause one to be willing to sacrifice for Christ. There is grace for every need; the supplies are unlimited, but we must ask in true humility, confessing our unworthiness.

At the time we were saved we were very humble; we realized we were guilty sinners and deserved only His wrath. We confessed our sin and He lifted us up. As time goes by pride seems to return to some of the Lord's people. This the Lord hates and somehow He will eventually bring them down in humility. Pride stops the grace of salvation to many and it also stops the "more grace" to the saved.

God giveth grace unto the humble. The humble man has small thoughts of himself. He does not feel that he deserves anything from anybody. He does not have any ambitions to have the preeminence. He is not covetous or envious. He realizes that he is utterly dependent upon the Lord, and is content with what the Lord gives him. He will not fight for what he desires, but will wait on the Lord to give it to him.

We are admonished to submit ourselves to God. Christ should reign in us and over us. He should control our whole beings--our minds, our hearts, our wills and our bodies. We should submit to Him our affections, our time, our talents, our plans, our purposes, our pleasures, our possessions and our troubles. He should be our Lord and we should seek to do His will.

Submission to God will have definite effects upon our lives. We cannot submit to Him without being more like Him. Submission to Him will bring us victory, satisfaction and contentment. No matter what comes our way, we will never question God's righteousness or His love.

We owe submission to the Lord because of the many things He has done for us. First, He has the right to our submission because he made us. Then, He sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sins, and we are His by redemption. Then He sent His Spirit to give us new life, to seal us, and to be our constant Companion. He also gave His Word to instruct us and to guide us. To these we could add numerous other benefits, both material and spiritual. For all of these we owe Him our wholehearted submission.

Our Lord wants us to bring all we are and have and lay it at His feet. This presentation is giving back to Him that which He bought with His own blood. This is an expression of willingness, not only to give, but to go, not only to be, but to do. We submit ourselves to God that He may work out His plan and purpose in us. Whenever there reigns in the human will resistance to Him, victory is impaired. Our surrender must be unconditional. There must not be any reservations. Everything must be laid upon the altar.

"Resist the devil." He is God's and man's greatest enemy. If we are to live victoriously, we must resist him. We must say, "Yes" to the Lord, but "No" to the devil. There is no way to try to compromise with him. He is ever to be treated as an enemy whom we must resist. He is powerful. We see the effect of his power all about us. Men of all classes are completely under his sway. The chief part of resisting Satan is to submit to God.

One must decide whether God is to rule his life or not. It is self or God, and that is the same thing as Satan or God, for a self without God is ruled by the devil.