

# Fight the Good Fight - James 4:1-12

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[ 0 : 00 ] James chapter 4 verses 1 to 12.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill.

You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Or do you think scripture says, without reason, that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us. But he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says, God opposes the pride but shows favour to the humble.

[ 1 : 08 ] Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to bloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up. Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

There is only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you, who are you to judge your neighbour? Let's pray.

Let's pray. Father, we ask, do your work in our lives.

[ 2 : 44 ] We pray this for your honour. Amen. Well, I wonder, have you ever been to a perfect church?

I'm not talking about Carygilline Baptist. Have you ever been to a perfect church? Well, if ever you find one, please don't go, because you'll ruin it.

Recently, I was talking to a pastor who told me very proudly that the name of his church was Perfect Church. I asked him, does anybody go to your church?

But I think the irony was lost on him. The fact is, as soon as we put people together, conflict is not far behind. And while that's sad, and it always is sad, we should never be surprised that there can be fights in the church.

You see, there is no such thing as a perfect church. Because, well, let's admit it, none of us are perfect people.

[ 3 : 56 ] But it doesn't have to be like that. Fights might be normal for day-to-day life.

Disagreements might happen in your work with your colleagues, with your boss.

Arguments may be part of your family experience. But they should never be part of the church. Look at verse 11.

Brothers and sisters. So here he's addressing the church family. Christians. Followers of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters. Do not slander one another.

So through this text, James is showing us how we can prevent fights from breaking out. And instead build loving relationships.

How we can prevent fights from breaking out. And how we can build loving relationships. First, fights and quarrels.

[ 5 : 04 ] James wants us to face up to the fact that, well, disagreements, and fallouts do happen. This fight happens in different ways. First, we fight with each other.

Look at verse 1. What causes fights and quarrels among you? Now, I don't think James is saying that punches are being thrown during the sermon.

Or that we should expect a wrestling match to be happening down the back there. Remember what James has been talking about. Go back to chapter 3, verse 6.

James chapter 3, verse 6. He tells us there that the tongue also is a fire. That's the tongue in our mouth. Is a fire. A world of evil among the parts of the body.

It corrupts the whole body. Look at verse 8 of chapter 3. No human being can tame the tongue.

[ 6 : 08 ] It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. So the fight studies talking about are not physical. They are verbal. We can't seem to control our tongues.

As soon as we open our mouth, out comes this destructive fire, a deadly poison that can break and destroy relationships.

Instead of using our words to build and make peace, out of our words, we start a fight. So we fight with each other.

But James wants us to go a little bit deeper. Second, we fight with ourself. Look what it says in verse 1. What causes fights and quarrels among you?

That's the issue. He's saying, look, there are fights and quarrels. But here's the issue. What causes these fights and quarrels? Well, the cause of every disagreement is always the other person, right?

[ 7 : 18 ] If they hadn't said, well, then I wouldn't have said. If they had just kept their mouth shut, everything would be fine. It's not my fault.

It's their fault. They always want to have the last word. The cause for every argument and quarrel is the other person, right?

Wrong. Look what it says in verse 1. What causes fights and quarrels among you? Answer. Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

The cause of every fight and quarrel is in here, in our hearts. You see, the real fight is with our sinful, selfish desires.

Verse 2. You desire, but you do not have. So you kill. Of course, arguments don't always turn violent or end in someone being killed.

[ 8 : 21 ] It can happen. Even on the news this week, in Mitchellstown, there was a man who was killed sitting with his mate in the pub.

They start having an argument. Just words. But it turns violent. It can happen. Look at the rest of verse 2.

You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. The point is, we're not to blame others and start pointing fingers at others.

We're to look at ourselves. I fight and I quarrel because I want to be right. James has already talked about this.

If you go back to chapter 1, verse 14. James chapter 1, verse 14. Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

[ 9 : 33 ] It's our own evil desires that drag us away and cause us to fight and quarrel. A very helpful, but yet a tragic example of this is the account of Cain and Abel.

Let's have a look at that. If you keep your finger in James chapter 4, go back to Genesis, which is the very first book of the Bible. Genesis chapter 4.

The context here, Cain and Abel were the first two sons of Adam and Eve. And Cain and Abel have both made offerings to God.

Abel's offering was accepted, Cain's wasn't. And Cain has now become jealous, angry with his brother Abel.

And we pick it up in chapter 4, verse 6. Then the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?

[ 10 : 39 ] If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door.

It desires to have you, but you must rule over it. Do you see what God was saying to Cain?

Sin desires to have you. It's controlling you. It's at your door. It's knocking. It's wanting to rule over you because you want to be right.

And sadly, Cain didn't deal with that sin, did he? And it did end in murder, the loss of his brother's life. Let's go back to James chapter 4.

You see, this same fight is happening within each one of us all of the time. Our desire for self rules our hearts. We always want to be right, never wrong.

[11:46] The battle rages inside of us. Our desires take over. We want to get even. We want the other person to know how we feel and so we tell them.

We want them to know how wrong they've been. We want to set the record straight and it all comes out in fighting and quarrelling. Don't look at other people for the reason.

James is saying, look at the desires within you. But the fight goes even deeper than with each other and with ourself.

It's actually a fight with God. Look at verse 3. When you ask, when you pray to God, when you talk to him, you do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Now this kind of prayer that he's talking about here reflects a hostile relationship with God. It's a selfish relationship. He says you're asking with the wrong motives.

[12:58] You're not interested in what pleases God or what God wants, but what you want and what will satisfy you. Look at the end of verse 3.

That you may spend what you get on your pleasures. And that same word, pleasures, is the same word for desires in verse 1.

You desire something. You want something for yourself. And so you're asking just to please your own desires. It's all about me, what I want.

Now such a prayer is a sign of a relationship that's in conflict with God. Somebody who's actually fighting with God. Look how James describes it in very strong language.

Verse 4. You adulterous people. Imagine a husband who's been married to his wife for a number of years and one day he discovers that through the marriage she's been committing adultery.

[14:10] Her visits to family, weekends away with friends, were actually secret affairs with other people. Well look at verse 4.

This is how James is describing our relationship with God. He says, you're adulterous people. Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity?

That means hostility against God. He's saying when our sinful desires control us, it's like walking out on our marriage relationship with God.

It's a spiritual adultery. Instead of being loyal and faithful to God who loves us and who's given his all for us, we walk away and we build friendships with the world.

We have an affair with the world. Now just as a husband would be rightfully angry with his wife if she had an affair or vice versa, if the husband had an affair, the wife would be right to be angry.

[15:21] So God is rightfully angry with us when we choose friendship with him over friendship with the world. Walking out on God puts us in conflict with God.

Look at the end of verse 4. Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. So when I begin to follow my own desires, I become God's enemy.

When I pursue what I want rather than what God wants, I'm starting a fight with God. It's hostility. It's enmity. So let's understand the seriousness of arguments and disagreements. The causes of fights and quarrels is not out there.

It's actually in here, in my heart, in your heart. And it reflects a much more serious fight that we're having, a fight with God about who has control of our life.

[16:32] Is it your desires or is it God's desires? So what's going to stop or prevent this kind of fighting?

How are we going to build loving relationships instead of fighting and quarreling? Well, second, we need grace and humility.

Let's see how God responds to us. First, jealous grace. Look at verse 5. Read it carefully.

It's a little bit difficult, but we'll work our way through it. Verse 5. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he, that's God, jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us.

But he gives us more grace. Let me try and unpack that for you a little bit. A husband who loves his wife, even though she has had an affair, will not give up on her.

[17:49] He will pursue her. He will long for her return. And that kind of love is a jealous love. He will not be satisfied until she is at home with him.

Now that's a beautiful description and picture of God's love towards people like us. Remember in verse 4 he says you are an adulterous people. We've left God.

We've moved away from him. And look how God responds in verse 5, the end of verse 5. He jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us. Now, if you can bear with me, you may see that little sentence. There's a letter at the end of it and it has a little note at the bottom of your page and it can be translated or read like this. Or that the spirit he calls to dwell in us envies intensely. Or the spirit he calls to dwell in us longs jealously.

[ 18 : 55 ] So God by his spirit that is within us, his spirit longs. It's an intense love, a jealous love that we would not drift from him but that we would come back to him.

And whenever we sense or are aware of the spirit convicting us or challenging us, this is a sign of God's jealous love at work in our hearts, longing for his people to return, pursuing us, calling us, stop fighting with me, stop resisting me, open your hearts to my love.

And when we open our hearts to his love, we find mercy, we find forgiveness. Look what it says at the beginning of verse 6, but he gives us more grace.

You see, a wife whose husband has had an affair has every right to reject him, to refuse him. And God has every right to refuse us.

But here's the beautiful picture. He doesn't. instead of rejection, there is a rich welcome. Instead of anger, there is this beautiful, warm embrace.

[ 20 : 26 ] Look at verse 6, but he gives us more grace. There's an overflow of grace that floods and overwhelms the sinful, selfish desires of our hearts.

grace. That is the abundance and the amazing response of God towards people like you and me. This is the grace of God.

That intense jealousy, jealousy, longing for us to come back to him, longing that we would stop fighting with him, stop rejecting his advances, but welcoming him and trusting him afresh.

How beautiful it would be to experience and to know that grace in our lives. And the good news is we can. To experience God's jealous grace, we must come in humble repentance.

Look at verse 6 again. He gives us more grace, grace. So no matter the depth or greatness of our sin, no matter how bad it may appear, or what people might say, God gives us more grace to cover it all.

[ 21 : 55 ] That is why scripture says, God opposes the proud, but shows favour to the humble. He opposes the proud, but shows favour.

That word favour is the same word for grace. He shows grace to the humble. You see, there's a condition. If we are to receive and experience God's amazing grace, there must be humble repentance.

Look at verse 10. He says, humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up. we will experience the depths of God's mercy and grace towards us.

You see, if we continually blame others and point fingers at one another, if we persist on wanting to be right and never at fault, if we say, it's them, it's not me, then we'll never know God's grace. what will remain is a fighting, critical, judgmental spirit and we will never be lifted up from those depths.

[ 23 : 10 ] But if we humble ourselves, how rich a welcome we will receive, how beautiful it will be to know the depth of his grace.

well, what does humble repentance look like? Well, if you've got your notes on your sheet, there's a place there for you to write down three things.

Let's look at verses seven to nine, because that shows us what humble repentance looks like. First, we submit to God.

We submit to God. Verse seven, submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. To submit is simply to surrender.

It's actually to give up the fight. It's to hoist up our white flag and say, I've put down my weapons. I no longer want to fight or kick against God.

[ 24 : 12 ] Our sinful desires no longer want to be in control. I want God to be in control of my life. It's not about my desires, but what does God desire of me?

What does his word say is right and best for me? And as we hoist up our white flag and lay down our weapons, as we submit and surrender ourselves to God, look what happens, verse seven.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. The devil is real. He's not a joke or somebody who's a pretend character. He's active and he's out to use us to cause these fights and quarrels, to build our

hostility against God.

But as we surrender to him, so our desires begin to change within our life. We begin to want what God wants.

surrender. And when such a person begins to submit and surrender, their desires change and the devil has no interest in such a person.

[ 25 : 25 ] He wants willing partners. He wants people who will kick against God. So as we submit, in a sense the devil flees from us and our relationship with God deepens and strengthens and those desires become central to our life.

So what does humble repentance look like? Well first we submit to God, we lay down our weapons. Second, there should be sincere repentance.

Sincere repentance, verse 8. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Again, what a beautiful picture that is.

We do not need to fear coming to God. Why? Well because in Christ, Christ has taken the condemnation that we deserve. That has been removed completely at the cross.

So we can come near to God and he will come near to you. If we come to him sincerely, he's going to welcome us, not push us away.

[ 26 : 38 ] He's longing for us to return. Look at the rest of verse 8. Wash your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. Now we've got to remember, repentance is not just simply coming along and saying to God, sorry, and then just kind of toddle on our way.

True repentance longs for change and transformation. Any one of us can say sorry. We do it all the time. We say sorry, but we want to stay as we are.

We want to stay in control of our lives. Whereas sincere repentance says, I want to change my actions. That's why it says in verse 8, wash your hands.

It's about action. Lord, change my actions. And Lord, change my attitudes. purify my heart. Or purify my heart.

It's asking God to change us so that we are fully devoted and loyal to him. Not just sorry, but Lord, change me completely so that I will not be double-minded.

[ 27 : 58 ] Running to build friendships with the world instead of building my relationship with God. So we submit, we surrender, we lay down our weapons, we come in sincere repentance wanting true change and transformation.

And third, we are to take sin seriously. Take sin seriously, verse 9. Grieve, mourn, and wail.

change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Now it sounds awfully depressing, doesn't it? Mourn, wail, gloom.

But it's helping us to see how we should think about our sin. We should take it seriously. It's not just to be brushed under the carpet and go, oh, it doesn't matter, that's just the way I am.

it does matter. It matters deeply. I found this very helpful, a quote that I came across written by Sam Albury, who has a very helpful little book on James.

[ 29 : 17 ] And this is what he says in relation to verse 9. Just listen to it. It's very helpful. we are not just to regret our sin, but to grieve over it.

If we are not more emotional over our sin than we are over our sports team success or failures, or our children's achievements or disappointments, then there is something wrong.

And that something is that we do not appreciate what our sin is. and what it cost our saviour to rescue us from it.

Sin is not cheap. If I want to know how serious my sin is, I need to look at the cross.

We all need to look at the cross and see Christ who suffered there, who suffered hell for us, who saw the depths of what we had done, but yet stood in our place and took the blame for our sin, who suffered hell so that we could be forgiven.

[ 30 : 33 ] And it's only as I look at the cross, I see the seriousness of my sin. And as I see how serious it is, I can only begin to appreciate how glorious my salvation is, how wonderful God's grace is that he would do that for me.

And the more I see how ugly my sin is and how rotten I am to the core, then I can only begin to see how beautiful Christ is, how attractive he is, what grace and mercy flows from him to me.

You see, if we want to know God's grace, well then we must repent humbly, repent of our selfish desires, and receive his grace.

So, fights and quarrels, grace and humility, and then third, love and obedience. love and obedience.

The evidence, if you like, the proof that we have humbly repented, that we've laid down our weapons, we've hoisted the white flag, we've been sincere in our repentance and we've taken our sins seriously, the evidence that this is effective in our life is or will be seen in how we treat each other.

[ 32 : 07 ] Look at verse 11. brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Do not speak evil. Don't use your tongues to crush and break one another.

Instead, use your tongues to build each other up and be peacemakers. Look at the rest of verse 11. anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them, speaks against the law and judges it.

Well, what does the law say? What does it mean that we speak against the law and we judge the law? Well, go back to chapter 2 and verse 8 because here James has already reminded us what the law is about.

In fact, he summarises the whole law in this simple statement. James chapter 2 verse 8. He says, if you really keep the royal law found in scripture, that is, love your neighbour as yourself, you are doing right.

The royal law, the king's law for subjects, for people like us, is love. love your neighbour as yourself. In this context, we are one another's neighbours.

[ 33 : 34 ] Chapter 4 verse 12, the end of verse 12, but you, who are you to judge your neighbour? He's talking about the church family. We are to love one another.

Here's how it works out. This is what verse 11 is getting at. If I cause a fight or quarrel with my words, what I'm doing is I'm sitting in superiority to the law.

Rather than obeying the law which says love your neighbour as yourself, I judge it. I stand over the law. The law says love, but I say I know better than what the law says.

I know I should love, but they must be put in their place. I know I should love, but they need to know how much it hurt me.

I know I should love, but they need to know that they're wrong, and I'm going to tell them. Love your neighbour does not apply right now.

[ 34 : 42 ] Do you see? That's what's happening in verse 11. Look at the rest of verse 11. when you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

We're disobeying God's law, and we're following out our own desires. We're saying, I know better than God. In fact, I want to be God, and I'm going to make up my own laws, and loving my neighbour as myself is not one of them.

But when we humbly repent, when we receive of God's rich, amazing grace to us, well then our lives begin to be changed and transformed, and we begin to obey God's law, and we love each other as our neighbour, as our self.

Rather than cause fights and quarrels, we begin to build each other up, our words become words of peacemaking, rather than quarrels and infighting.

Here's the heart of the matter, verse 12. There is only one lawgiver and judge, that's God, the one who is able to save and destroy.

[ 36 : 05 ] You see, if I slander and speak harshly against another person, if I speak judgmentally against someone, well in fact what I'm pronouncing is my own judgment upon myself, because I'm standing in defiance of God's law, and God's will will be done.

He will judge me, and I will be destroyed, as it says in verse 12. I will not stand against his judgment. But yet, if I obey God's command, if I'm speaking in love and seeking to build others up, if I've received his grace, well I can be confident that God who has given me grace, verse 12, will save me, rather than destroy me.

So have you repented? Have we humbled ourselves before God and received his grace?

Remember the question we asked at the very beginning, as we started our time this morning? We asked this question, what are you like at asking for help? I'm fine, I can do it, I don't need help, I can go it alone.

Look what it says in verse 6, but he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says God opposes the proud, but shows grace to the humble.

[ 37 : 47 ] You see, we're not a perfect church and we're not perfect people. And to some extent, that's okay, because that's what we are to admit to God. I'm not perfect.

And I need your grace. I need your favour in my life, so that I can begin to live as you call me to live.  
And God will give us more grace, more grace than we could ever think of or imagine, to love one another well.  
God. What a great God we have. Let's pray. Let's pray.