

## **BE MATURE**

### **How to End the Wars Within and Without**

July 15th, 2012

Reading: James 4:1-12

(All scripture quotations are from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated)

The letter from James was written to Jewish Christians. This is evident from the language he uses in chapter 1, verses 1 – 3 when he addresses his audience ‘.....the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.....,’ (v. 1), “brethren” (v. 2), and in verse 3, ‘.....the trying of your faith worketh patience’ (King James Version {KJV}). So we know that what we are discussing is what is actually taking place amongst Christians.

Now a little bit of history lesson: in 1962, the world was brought close to the brink of nuclear war when Nikita Khrushchev, then the head of the Soviet Union, decided to locate nuclear missiles in Cuba. John F. Kennedy was then the American president and he declared that that will never happen. The only missiles he was prepared to have within the Western Hemisphere are those under Western influence and control. He was ready to go to war to have his way. During what became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the two nations faced off each other, then Nikita Khrushchev backed down, and thank God for that, otherwise the story might have ended very differently indeed!!

Why do nations go to war? Why did the Cuban Missile Crisis happen? Isn't it because of someone's lust for power? Isn't it because an individual or individuals decide they need a larger sphere of influence? Influence over other people. Influence over large tracts of territories. Or the need to match one nation's influence or control. In the build up to the Cuban Crisis, Nikita Khrushchev was reported to have said, 'Why shouldn't the Soviet Union have the right to do the same as America?' Apparently America had more missiles than the Soviet Union at that time.

That is what drives nations to war. Indeed that is also what drives individuals: the lust for power, the lust for privileges, for material possessions. We know that is what happens outside of the church. We see it in our workplaces, in our communities, in our society. The boss at work consolidating his or her power base, feeling big by making subordinates feel miserable. Governments at local and central level take decisions that do not make sense. But they have the power, so why bother to think their decisions through? No matter the adverse effect on literally millions of people.

We see it in the hypocrisy surrounding the way highly placed bankers are being treated, no matter the sorrows that they have plunged the world into. The government is prepared to spend billions of pounds to bail out banks, and at the same time is ready to close local hospitals just to save a few tens of millions of pounds.

We see it in nations where the leadership decide to hold onto power no matter what the cost may be!! We see it happening in Syria at the moment. What are a few massacres of hundreds of civilians as long as the leadership hold onto power, and to its privileges? We know all these goes on outside of the church, but what James was saying to his audience – and as it was then, so it is now – is that such things are happening even among the brethren, right within the church of Christ. Let's look again at what he wrote in Ch 4, vv. 1 – 3: '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.'

Christians are at war with each other! Why? Because of the desires that rages within!! These are unhealthy, selfish, unholy, lustful desires that drive the individual. Christians unhealthily compare themselves one to another; 'brother or sister so and so has got the latest 4 x 4, therefore I also must have my own 4 x 4.' And then we start praying for it and claiming it in misguided prayers. We look at a brother who is married, and we say, 'Lord, You have blessed that brother with such a beautiful wife. Lord, I want my own wife! Lord, I want you to bless me with an even more beautiful

wife than the beautiful wife you've blessed brother so and so with!!' And the Lord is probably looking down on him and saying, 'So he wants a wife. He can hardly take care of himself, yet he wants to take care of someone else.'

At other times, we see a brother or sister looking really good in expensive designer wear – a Gucci or Armani suit, in an executive car, and we start to wish we were in their shoes. Are we sure we actually want to be in their shoes? Just because someone is well dressed and is smiling and looking good on the outside doesn't mean everything is alright. In private, their lives may be a nightmare, falling apart right around them. We need to be careful what we wish for!!

Some years back when I was still a bachelor, soon after I had finished my degrees, and I was job hunting, I suddenly had this urge, this desire to own an apartment in the docklands. I started praying for a docklands apartment, and I was fervent in prayer. The Bible tells us the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5 v. 16, KJV). And I prayed, and prayed, 'Lord, I want a docklands apartment. Lord give me a docklands apartment.' I didn't even have a job. Even if God had moved a rich individual to hand me an apartment in the docklands, I would still need an income to maintain it, but I wasn't deterred. I kept on asking and asking, and I know that God heard my prayers. You know how I know my prayers were heard? Because God answered with an emphatic, 'NO!' There are times when God answers you, and you know that you have been answered and there is no going beyond that point. Full Stop!! There was nothing more to say on the issue!

Years later, married with children, and a job, I moved with my family into our house in Enfield, and my mind was at peace. I like the area I live in, and indeed the borough. My neighbours are friendly. In fact, just this morning, as I was waiting for the bus, a neighbour of mine coming from work, turned round his car, drove up to me and asked where I was going. I said I wanted to get to the A10 to get a bus to Turnpike Lane, and he asked me to get in. He dropped me right in front of the church. This is a doctor at the Royal Free Hospital who had been on night duty!! That is the type of neighbours I have. In the main they are friendly, and some of them are Christians. What would have been waiting for me in the docklands if God

had allowed me to have my way? Besides which, Enfield is nearer to church than the docklands.

The trouble is, we want our way and we want it now, without actually considering that God actually has something better for us. As it is now, so it has always been. The lust of his eyes led Lot to part from Abraham and straight into trouble. Genesis 13, vv 10 – 12 tells us that Lot looked up and saw a sight that enticed him to move near Sodom. He chose what he thought was a good and fertile land without seeking God's will in the matter. Chapter 14 records how Lot was then captured by enemy forces and had to be rescued by Abraham his uncle. Similarly, the lust of the eyes and the desires of the flesh led David to commit adultery and murder. He took another man's wife and arranged for the death of the husband, and in so doing he reaped calamity for himself and his household. You can read this story in 2 Samuel, chapters 11 – 18.

David paid a terrible price for what he did. He first of all lost the child born to him through adultery. That child was innocent. He did not ask to be born in such circumstances. Then one of David's sons committed incest with his half-sister by raping her, and he in turn was killed in an act of revenge by Absalom, the brother of the half-sister he had raped. It did not stop there. Absalom rose up in rebellion against his father, King David, took the kingdom and David had to flee for his life. Absalom then committed incest in broad day light with his father's concubines. Israel was then plunged into civil war as forces loyal to David fought forces loyal to Absalom to regain David's throne. Whenever there is a civil war, innocents suffer terribly, and the same would have happened during this civil war in Israel.

And before all these happened, God had already declared to David through the prophet Nathan that the sword shall never depart from his house!! That is a terrible legacy to leave to his descendants!!! This is what happens when we step out of God's will: we reap trouble.

As it was then, so it is now. We see a brother or sister who has something nice and we desire the same thing for ourselves, instead of seeking that which God has for us. After David's sin had been exposed, the prophet reminded him all that God had

done for him: how He had saved David from the hands of King Saul; given David the throne of Israel and the house of Saul, and even Saul's wives. And God then declared through the prophet that if all that had not been enough, He would have given David even more. All David needed to have done was to ask, and he would have received. But he was consumed by his lust and his covetousness for that which belonged to another man. All that God had already done for him and all He could still do did not figure in his thinking at that time.

The same issues go on now; we covet what belongs to other people. We read in the passage in James that even when we ask, nothing happens because we have asked with wrong motives, to indulge our sensual pleasures. Often, we actually deceive ourselves into thinking we are not doing anything wrong. I remember sharing at the men's fellowship sometime ago how I started thinking about my neighbour's house and wondering whether he would put it on sale. The house is end of terrace and easily the biggest in the row of houses in the terrace. The owner is a builder, and you can see that work has gone into it. It stands out!!

The man and his wife are elderly; they are grandparents – still quite active, but I found myself thinking, 'I wonder if they would put that house on sale and downsize to a smaller house.' I thought and thought about it, and suddenly it occurred to me that I could actually be coveting that which belonged to another man. Immediately I prayed for forgiveness and put it out of my mind. About a couple of weeks later, I think, my wife said to me, 'I wonder if the couple next door are going to sell their house.' She had been thinking in exactly the same way as I had. I shared with her my experience and I urged her to stop thinking about the house; whatever happens to it was not really our concern.

These are the internal passions that drive our behaviours so that we conduct ourselves in a worldly fashion. James says that makes us adulterous (v. 4), in other words we have left our love of God to embrace worldly ways and the things of the world are now our god. We are in idolatry and once that happens, we declare our enmity to God. King David did that in his conduct with Bathsheba and we all know what ensued. This is a war we cannot win!!

There is also the spirit of pride that drives us. God detest the proud! He hates pride with a passion!! He will always resist the proud!!! It was pride that puffed up Satan (or Lucifer as he was then known) to think he could usurp God and take His place. It was pride that enabled him to so easily deceive Adam and Eve with the words: 'You will surely not die.....you will be like God, knowing good and evil' (Genesis 3, vv. 4 – 5). People are striving for honour in the church. They all want to be pastors, or choir leaders, or to be known with big titles, and that is causing havoc with the ministry that God has given His church. Paul lists the qualities that those who desire spiritual authority must have in 1 Timothy chapter 3. He went on to say in verse 10 that, 'They must first be tested.....' A lot of people don't want to wait. They want the spiritual promotion a.s.a.p. God doesn't work like that! He wants to know if a person is capable of higher responsibilities and the more mundane tasks or responsibilities are the testing ground where God prepares us for higher authority.

When I was first invited to become one of the deacons in this church I refused. I said I hadn't prayed about it. I agreed with the person who had invited me that I would pray about becoming a deacon the following year, and a year later, the same person asked me. Again I refused. Although I had agreed to pray about it, I had been careless and I had not prayed. Another year went by – two years after the first invitation that I finally accepted the invitation to be a deacon. We need to be very careful, otherwise we can easily become puffed up and fall into Satan's trap. Many gifted men and indeed women have been waylaid just because of pride.

There was a pastor in the USA who was a gifted speaker, very bold indeed! He was also young and quite good looking! Then he was found to have had an affair with a Chinese masseuse. He asked the forgiveness of his church and his wife, claiming his relationship with the lady was a one off fling. His church forgave him, but then the lady he had the affair with went public with the claim that the relationship was more than a one off fling – theirs went on over a period of time. That was the last straw for the pastor's wife; she divorced him and sadly he was sometime later found dead in a motel room.

On the other hand there are those with a gift of oratory who have not been called into a pastorate ministry and yet they are in a pastorate ministry.

What should we do to avoid these situations? At the end of the day, as written in 1 Peter, chapter 5 vv. 8 – 9, we need to remember that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom to devour, but we should resist him, standing firm in the faith. We need to remember how we have been described in 1 Peter, chapter 2 v. 9: 'We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.'

We are special to God. We therefore need to conduct ourselves as a people set apart from the way of the world. We need to totally subjugate our fleshly, worldly desires to be what God wants us to be. How do we do this? James provides the answer: chapter 4, v. 7: we should submit ourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from us. Submission to God means complete surrender, and I do not think I am wrong in saying everyone finds that challenging. We always want to do things our way. Yet it is wisdom to submit. Then we can draw near to God (verse 8), and He will draw near to us. To do this we need to deal with the sin issues in our lives. That takes real humility! The flesh is screaming and kicking against our efforts to put it firmly into check, yet we must check it, if we must have a meaningful relationship with God!!

In Isaiah chapter 66, v. 2b, God says, 'This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.'

Psalms 34 v. 18 says, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit' (KJV).

In surrendering all to God and drawing near to Him, and resisting the devil, He will give us more grace to overcome the fleshly, worldly desires that so besets us. James chapter 4 v. 6 says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' And verse 10 reminds us that as we humble ourselves before God, He will lift us up. If we do all these, the wars within and without will cease, God will cleanse and forgive us, and we will not be at war with God – a war we could never win – nor will we be at war with ourselves or with others.