**LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE RIGHT**

**The Marks of a mature Christian**

**Being a Peacemaker, not troublemaker**

**Sermon 6:**

**James 4:1-12**

**How to end wars**

This morning we cover the fourth mark of a mature Christian; being a peacemaker, not a troublemaker. In earlier messages I discussed how we needed to learn to be patient in testing and turn trials into triumphs by practicing joy, understanding, submission, and faith. We also considered the dangers of temptations, the process of sin, and the need to be Doers, not just Hearers of The Word. After we learned the importance of patience, we examined the second mark of a mature Christian, Practicing the truth. We studied the relationship between faith and love and faith and works as they apply to practicing the truth. Last week we looked at Taming the tongue to use it for God’s Glory by examining the three powers of the tongue; the power to direct, the power to destroy, and the power to delight**.** Today we will move on to the fourth mark of a mature Christian, being a Peacemaker, not a Troublemaker.

War is most commonly understood as armed conflict between nation-states. I have spent many hours studying war at this level over my military career. One of the greatest military strategists was a Prussian named Carl VonClausewitz. In his book, *On War*, he called war, “*a continuation of political activity by other means* and suggests that war should only be engaged after all other avenues have been exhausted. Then, when engaged, “Direct annihilation of the enemy's forces must always be the dominant consideration." "War is, at its root, an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will." There is a wide spectrum of philosophy and doctrine concerning how to conduct war, and almost all of the revered experts agree that war results in devastation and destruction. Most of the revered experts agree on one thing; war is, in the end, inevitable. Not only are there wars between nations, but there are wars of one kind or another on almost every level of life and they all spring from the same motive – selfishness.

Chapter 4 of James analyzes how we are all at war and what we should do about it.

Our text today is James 4:1-12.

James discussed this important theme of war and explained that there are three wars going on in this world. He also advised us on how these wars could be stopped.

In this world we are:

 *At war with Each Other:*

 *At war with Ourselves:*

 *At war with God:*

*At war with Each Other:* “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” Among CHRISTIANS! Psalms 133 tells us, “How good and pleasant it is
when God’s people live together in unity!” Surely Brothers should live together in harmony, yet often they do not. Lot caused a quarrel with his Uncle Abraham in Genesis 13. Absalom created a war for his father David (2Sam 13). Even the disciples created problems for The Lord when they argued over who was the greatest in the Kingdom (Luke 9). When you examine some of the early churches, you find that they had their share of disagreements. The members of the Corinthian church were competing with each other in the public meetings, and even suing each other in court (1Cor 6, 14). The Galatian believers were biting and devouring one another (Gal 5:15). Paul had to admonish the Ephesians to cultivate spiritual unity (Eph 4); and even his beloved church at Phillipi had problems: two women could not get along with each other (Phil 4). James mentioned several kinds of disagreements among the Saints.

 **Class Wars:** As we previously studied in Chapter 2, there is that age-long rivalry between the rich and the poor. The rich man gets the attention, the poor man is ignored. How tragic it is when the local churches get their values confused and cater to the rich while they ignore, or even reject, the poor. If fellowship in the church depends on such external things as clothing and economic status, then the church is out of the will of God. The next type of disagreement James mentions is…

 **Employment Wars:** In chapter 5 James again discusses the rich man who has the power to control and hurt the poor man. Laborers do not get their fair wages. Even with today’s government regulation, there are still many people who cannot get a good job, or whose income is less than adequate for the work they are doing. Christians should be benevolent employers and employees. The third type of disagreement is…

 **Church Fights:** In chapters 1 and 3 of James it is apparent that the believers James wrote to were at war with each other over positions in the church, many of them wanting to be teachers and leaders. When they studied The Word, the result was not edification, but strife and arguments. Each person thought that his ideas and ways were the only right ones. Selfish ambition ruled their meetings, not spiritual submission. Finally, James discussed…

 **Personal Wars:** The saints portrayed in verses 11 and 12 of our text today were speaking evil of one another and judging one another. Here again, we see the wrong use of the tongue. Ephesians 4 tells us that Christians are to speak the truth in love; they are not to speak evil in a spirit of rivalry and criticism. If the truth about a brother is harmful, then we should cover it in love and not repeat it. If he has sinned, we should go to him personally and try to win him back.

James was not forbidding us to use discrimination or even to evaluate people. Christians need to have discernment (Phil 1:9), but we must not act like God in passing judgment. We never know all the facts in a case and certainly cannot know the motives that are at work in men’s hearts. To speak evil of a brother and judge a brother on the basis of partial evidence, and probably unkind motives, is to sin against him and God. We are not called to judge; God is the only judge. He is patient and understanding; His judgments are just and Holy; we can leave the matter with Him.

It is unfortunate that the saints are at war with each other. The world sees this strife within the church and discredits our faith because of it. It is no wonder that Jesus prayed of the saints “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21).

But, why are we at war with each other? We belong to the same family; we trust in the same Savior; we are filled by the same Holy Spirit – and yet we fight one another. Why? James answered this question by explaining the second war that is going on.

 *At war with ourselves:* “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? The war in our hearts is helping to cause the war in the church. As we discussed last week in the powers of the tongue, it is the heart from which sin originates and we must first purify our hearts in order to improve our behavior. The essence of sin is selfishness. Eve disobeyed God because she wanted to eat of the tree and become wise like God. Every sin since then is rooted in the same selfishness – our desire to do what we want instead of what God says.

Selfish desires are dangerous things. They lead to wrong actions (you kill, quarrel and fight); they can even lead to wrong praying (when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives). When our praying is wrong, our whole Christian life is wrong. If we are praying for what we want, and that is in contradiction to what God wants, then we are praying wrong! Thou shalt not covet is the last of God’s Ten Commandments, but its violation can make us break the other nine! Covetousness can make us lie, cheat, steal, and kill to get what we want. Selfish living and selfish praying always lead to war. If there is war on the inside, there will ultimately be war on the outside.

People at war with themselves because of selfish desires are unhappy people. They spend all their time complaining about what they don’t have and fail to be thankful for what they do have. They can’t get along with others because they are always envying others for what they have and do. They are always looking for that “magic something” that will change their lives, when the real problem is within their own hearts.

Sometimes we use prayer as a mask to hide our true desires. Instead of seeking God’s will, we tell God what He is supposed to do; and we get angry with Him if He doesn’t obey! If you take a moment to reflect on that concept, it boggles the mind. This anger at God eventually spills over and we get angry at God’s people. More than one church split has been caused by saints who take out their anger at God on the members of the church. Many a church or family problem would be solved if people would only look into their own hearts and see the battles raging there. God made us a unity: intellect, emotions, and will should work together. When we have an internal strife raging, it causes war within and amongst God’s people.

The final war going on is…

 *At war with God*. Reiterating my earlier quote from Herr Von Clausewitz, *“War is, at its root, an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will*." I am NOT a noted prognosticator who can accurately predict the outcome of future events, but as a Soldier whose career has spanned three decades and numerous wars and campaigns, I can state with absolute certainty that I DO NOT WANT TO WAGE WAR AGAINST GOD! The odds are NOT in my favor! The root cause of every war, internal and external, is rebellion against God. At the beginning of creation you see perfect harmony; but sin came into the world and this led to conflict. Sin is lawlessness and lawlessness is rebellion against God.

Most believers, if asked if they were at war with God, would say an emphatic NO! But, are they correct? How does a believer declare war against God? By being friendly with God’s enemies. James points out three enemies which we must not fraternize with if we want to be at peace with God.

 **The world:** 1 John 2:16 defines “the world” as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” Essentially, human society apart from God. The whole system of things in our society is anti-Christ and anti-God. A Christian gets involved with the world gradually—very similar to how you boil a frog.

First, there is friendship with the world so our lives meet with the approval of the world. Friendship leads to loving the world which makes it easy to conform to the world. Solomon was a great example of the gradual descent into the hands of the enemy. Friendship with the world is “spiritual adultery.” The believer is married to Christ and ought to be faithful to Him. We cannot be faithful to Christ and faithful to His enemies. God, many times, describes Himself as a “jealous God.” He wants our TOTAL allegiance. The man who wills to be a friend of the world cannot be the friend of God.

The second enemy James named is…

 **The Flesh:** The flesh is our old nature inherited from Adam which is prone to sin. The flesh is not the body. The body is not sinful; the body is neutral. The Spirit may use the body to glorify God, or the flesh may use the body to serve sin. When a sinner yields to Christ, he receives a new nature within, but the old nature is neither removed nor reformed. For this reason, there is a battle within: Galatians 5:17 says, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other.”

Living for the flesh means grieving the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Just as the world is the enemy of God the Father, so the flesh is the enemy of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit jealously guards our relationship to God, and the Spirit is grieved when we sin against God’s love. Living to please the old nature means to declare war against God. To allow the flesh to control the mind is to lose the blessing of fellowship with God. In Paul’s letter to the Romans he said, “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”

The last enemy of God is…

 **The Devil:** The world fights against The Father, the flesh fights against the Holy Spirit, and the Devil opposes the Son of God. Pride is Satan’s great sin, and it is one of his chief weapons in his warfare against the saint and The Savior. God wants us to be humble; Satan wants us to be proud. “You shall be like God” Satan promised Eve and she believed him. An immature Christian must not be put in places of spiritual leadership lest they become prideful and fall into the hands of Satan. God wants us to depend on His grace while Satan wants us to depend on ourselves. Satan is all about “do-it-yourself” spiritual enterprises. He enjoys inflating the ego and encouraging the believer to do it his own way. When Satan can glorify the speaker instead of The Word, he has accomplished much in his war against Christ.

The world, the flesh, and the Devil are the enemies that want to turn us away from God. They will continue to attack us as long as we are in this world. How then, can we overcome them? James gives us three instructions to follow if we would enjoy peace instead of war.

 **Submit to God:** Psalms 24 tells us that we must have clean hands and a pure heart to be close to God. Submission must be complete and not withhold any area of our lives. If any area of our lives is kept back from God, there will always be battles. Submission is more than an act, it is an attitude. The way to resist the devil is to submit to God. The second instruction is to…

 **Draw near to God:** How do we do this? By confessing our sins and asking for His cleansing and purifying of our hearts. The Greek word *purify* means to “make chaste.” This parallels the idea of spiritual adultery mentioned earlier. The great theologian, Doctor A.W. Tozer, said “Nearness is Likeness.” The more we are like God, the nearer we are to God. I may be sitting in the living room with a poodle on my lap and my wife is 15 feet away in the kitchen; yet I am nearer to my wife than to the dog because the dog is unlike me. We have little in common. God graciously draws near to us when we deal with the sin in our lives that keeps Him at a distance. He will not share us with anyone else; He must be in complete control. The final instruction James gave was to…

 **Humble yourselves before God:** It is possible to submit outwardly and yet not be humbled inwardly. God hates the sin of pride and He will chasten the proud believer until he is humbled. We have a tendency to treat sin too lightly, but sin is serious, and one mark of true humility is facing the seriousness of our sin and dealing with our disobedience. Micah 6:8 reminds us that one of the basic requirements for walking with God is that we “walk humbly with our God.” To “walk humbly with our God” is to have an awareness of His majesty and glory and of our own sin and unworthiness. It means to acknowledge His absolute right to command our lives and order our footsteps.

If we obey these three instructions, then God will draw near, cleanse us, and forgive us; and the wars will cease! We will not be at war with God, so we will not be at war with ourselves. This means that we will not be at war with others.

Quarrels and bickering are like weeds—they grow wild without any cultivation, but peace is like a garden of flowers—it must be cultivated and cared for. Peace does not just happen –it must be worked at. Put the government of your life on God’s shoulders, and let Him become the Prince of Peace in your life. (Isa 9:6).

Next week we turn to the final mark of a mature Christian, being prayerful in troubles.

**James 4:1-12**

### Submit Yourselves to God

4 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 2You 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. 3When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

4You adulterous people,[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30342a)] 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. 5Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30343b)]? 6But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

“God opposes the proud
    but shows favor to the humble.”[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30344c)]

7Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

11Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister[[d](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%204&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30349d)] 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. 12There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?