

Conflicts and Cures

James 4:1-6

Icebreaker Question: What are some of the things that can cause conflict? Can conflict be avoided? Is there such a thing as winning an argument or a conflict? Why or why not?

1. This passage focuses on differences of opinion and conflicts among individuals, especially those who outwardly profess a faith in Jesus, but continue to long for the things of the world. Unfortunately, due to satanic influences, conflict is inevitable, even within the church. Although we can expect conflicts in our lives, God can help us deal with them in a way that honors Him and strengthens our faith.

2. James does a great job of setting the table from one subject to the next. Having dealt with the danger of uncontrolled speech and the wisdom of a life under control, he then delves into the unpleasant subject of conflicts - why they occur and what needs to change.

3. Suffice it to say, "The best way to resolve a conflict is to never start one in the first place." The following story is true, and it illustrates how one man was able to avoid having a fight with his wife.

Mr. Bud was an elderly man in his late seventies. He lived up the road from us in the small town where I grew up. Some nights, just before dusk, he would drive his white Ford Falcon by our home at a speed of about 20 miles an hour. He didn't appear to be going anywhere special. One evening, my Dad was standing near the road, and Mr. Bud stopped by for a chat. After talking a while, my Dad said, "Don't want to hold you up, Mr. Bud." "Oh, you aren't holding me up," he said. "I am just taking a ride down the road to let Estelle (Bud's wife) cool off. She gets a bit fired up once in a while, and I've learned after forty-some years of marriage to just get away from the house and give her time to cool off. Besides, the best way to end an argument is not to start one, so I just get in my car and go for a ride. I learned long ago, that a person won't argue with themselves! She will calm down by the time I get home." I imagine that most people would have liked Mr. Bud.

Q1. Perhaps someone in your group would like to share how they avoid arguments.

4. James ends Chapter 3 by saying, "Peacemakers, who sow in peace, will harvest a harvest of righteousness." Then he opens Chapter 4 talking about conflicts and quarrels and gives us three tips for calming the storms of conflict. His tips are:

a. Determine the cause of the conflict. (James 4:1, 2) James does not refer to his audience as "my brothers", as he did in the previous chapters, rather he begins talking more sternly to the church. He says to them:

(i) Conflict comes from a person's own selfish desires. These people say to themselves, "I must have what I want! I must have certain pleasures! I must have my way! I will fight, argue, whine, and pout until I get what I want!"

(ii) Those involved in conflict have a heart issue. They believe that they deserve to get the things they want.

(iii) Conflict arises when a person refuses to change their focus from inward (it's all about me) to outward (it's all about God).

Q2. Have you encountered someone who sees life only from their own perspective? What might be their response when a neighbor is in need or has something that needs to be done for them, which they are unable to do for themselves? What would be a Godly response to the needs of this neighbor?

Q3. Are you saying that we should always think of our neighbor's (or our brethren's) wants or needs before we think of our own? Always? How could that avoid conflict with our neighbors or our brethren in Christ?

Q4. What is the difference between a want and a need?

b. Determine the consequences of conflict. (James 4:3, 4)

(i) When we ask for things to fulfill our own desires, rather than submitting to God's will, He most likely will not give us what we ask for.

(ii) James warns that seeking to satisfy our own pleasures, rather than seeking the honor and glory of God and His will, is the same as being a friend of the world, thus making us an enemy of God. In summary, he is saying that a rebellious and hard-headed person, who professes to be a Christian, but is bent on getting their own way, is at odds with God and His purposes. This person continues to long for the things of the world and they show, by their actions, that they are not true believers. **We must be all in or we are not in at all, because there is no such thing as holding onto both lifestyles and being a true believer.** Read Matthew 6:24.

(iii) The unfortunate consequences of conflict within the church is that God will not bless or grow a church that continues to bicker and do things their way, rather than seeking and submitting to His will.

c. Determine the cure for conflict. (James 4:5, 6)

(i) The Holy Spirit does not give us a spirit of jealousy or envy, but a spirit of grace.

(ii) Read Proverbs 3:34 and I Peter 5:5. God opposes the proud; however, He will give grace and blessings to those with a humble spirit. James is admonishing us to resist prideful desires (fueled by Satan's influence) and submit to God's authority. Remember, **be quick to forgive and slow to speak!**

(iii) There will continue to be conflict and strife in our lives, until we make a final decision to let go of the world and its values and begin to do things God's way!