

Place: Lurgan Baptist
17:10:2004
Reading: James 4:1-12

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

24. HOW TO CONQUER CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

I wonder have you heard of the “*The War of the Whiskers,*” or “*The War of the Oaken Bucket ?*” How about “*The War of Jenkins Ear ?*” These were actual wars fought between nations and you can read about them in most history books. Here James poses the question, “*From whence come wars and fighting’s among you ?*” (4:1) That word “*wars,*” (*stratos*) comes from a Greek word meaning “*an encamped army.*” It is a phrase used to illustrate a continuous state of war. So what James is saying right at the beginning of this part of his letter is, “*Don’t you know there is war on ? Just look around you ! There is a continuous state of war.*” Now was he right ? Well, if we are correct in assuming that the James who wrote this letter was the half brother of our Lord Jesus (Gal 1:19) and if this letter was written sometime between AD 45 and AD 62, then it was probably written in Jerusalem, where James lived from the time of the resurrection of Christ until he was martyred some 30 years later.

Now the interesting thing is this. Jerusalem probably means, “*The City of Peace.*” But that was only its name and not its experience. This city had a long and bloody history and when this letter was being written it was a time when the ferment of Jewish revolt was boiling up again, a revolt that led to the invasion of the city, by the Roman Emperor Titus in the year AD 70. Now that gives us the background against which James wrote of

“*wars,*” a continuous state of unrest. In his book, “*The Study of War,*” Professor Quincy examines the period

From 1480 to 1941. These nations were engaged in the following number of wars, Great Britain 78: France 71:

Spain 64: Russia 61: Austria 52: Germany 23: U.S.A. 13: China 11: Japan 9. What astonishing figures. You see, war has been a part of every era of human history.

No civilization has been immune to it. Our Lord Jesus spoke of “*wars and rumours of wars.*” (Matt 24:6)

My as we have entered the third millennium critical days lie before us. The Berlin Wall has crumbled. The Cold War has subsided. The Soviet Union no longer exists. Outwardly, at least it appears that former enemies have become allies. Yet our world may be closer than ever to global war. But perhaps some of us are at war right now for did you notice what James says, “*From whence come wars and fighting’s among you ?*” that word “*fighting’s,*” means “*individual conflict.*” Do you see what James is doing ? He is narrowing the issue down from the international level or the national level to the individual level. You see, even the greatest of wars begin with individuals. But James goes further for he says, “*From whence come wars and fighting’s among you.*” My that’s not the international level, that’s not the national level, that’s not the individual level, that’s the ecclesiastical level. For he’s writing to the fellowship of

God's people, who were obviously fighting and squabbling among themselves. What a contrast there is between the end of (Ch 3) and the beginning of (Ch 4) James is contrasting the ideal (peace) with the actual (war) Now I want to talk to you this **“ How to Conquer Conflict in the Church.”**

(1) A CONDITION THAT IS SERIOUS

The Amplified puts it like this, “ *What leads to strife and how do conflicts originate among you ?*” Among who ? Among Christians ! “ *Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*”

(Ps 133:1) Surely, brethren should live together in unity but often we do not. When you examine some of the early churches you discover that they had their share of disagreements. The members of the Corinthian church were suing each other in court. (1 Cor 6:1) The Galatian believers were “ *biting and devouring one another.*” (Gal 5:15). Even Paul's beloved church at Philippi had problems, two women in the fellowship were not on speaking terms with each other. (Phil 4:2) Is it not shameful to find that sort of behaviour among believers ? But before we condemn the early Christians, let us examine our own churches, and our own hearts. Are you without sin in this area ? Are you in a healthy, harmonious relationship with your fellow-believers ? Here in this letter James mentions several different kinds of disagreements among the Christians.

(a) THERE WAS SOCIAL RIVALRY:

That age long rivalry between the rich and the poor. Do you recall (Ch 2) Rich man, poor man ! The rich man gets the attention, the poor man is ignored. My isn't it tragic when we bring the worlds standards into the church and make these the criteria in so many areas ? Is it not true that so often because of a mans rank, and financial resources, he's placed on a mission board, named for a committee, nominated for some council.

My if fellowship in a church depends on such external things as economic status then that church is out of the will of God. (a)

(b) THERE WAS ECCLESIASTICAL JEALOUSY:

Apparently many of these believers to whom James wrote were at war with each over positions in the church, many of them wanting to be teachers and leaders. That's why James writes, “ *My brethren be not many teachers.* (3:1, 13-18) What a terrible amount of striving, wriggling and politics there is the church today.

To be chairman of this, president of that and leader of the other. My if this one thing worse than social climbing in the world, its ecclesiastical climbing in the church. Are you guilty of it ? Are you like Diotrephes ?

Do you “ *love to have the pre-eminence ?*” (3 Jn 9) Does selfish ambition rule our meetings rather than spiritual submission ? (a) (b)

(c) THERE WAS PERSONAL ENMITY:

Look if you will at (4:11) It seems the saints were speaking evil of one another and judging one another. They were engaged in a personal war of words. Their tongues were not under the control of the Spirit of God.

(Eph 5:18) Isn't it sad when we are at war with one another, leader against leader, church against church, fellowship against fellowship. The world watches these religious wars and says, "*Behold how they hate one another.*" "*From whence come among you.*" There was trouble in the carpenter's workshop and the tools were having a row. One of them said, "*it's the hammers fault, he's too noisy he must go.*" "No," said the hammer, "*I think the blame lies with the saw. He keeps going backwards and forwards all the time.*" The saw protested, "*I'm not too blame. I think it's the planes fault. His work is so shallow. Why he just skims the surface all the time.*" The plane objected, "*I think the real trouble lies with the screwdriver. He's going round in circles.*" "Nonsense," said the screwdriver, "*the trouble really began with the ruler because he's always measuring people by his own standards.*" The ruler replied, "*I think our real problem is the sandpaper, he's always rubbing people up the wrong way.*" "*Why pick on me,*" said the sandpaper, "*I think you ought to blame the drill he's so boring.*" Just as the drill was about to protest the carpenter came in, put on his overalls and began to work. He was making a pulpit at the time and by the time he had finished he had used everyone of those tools to fashion something from which the gospel was eventually preached to thousands of people. My the Lord in His wonderful grace does use such imperfect instruments as us, but we all have a solemn responsibility "*to follow peace with all men,*" and "*to be at peace among yourselves.*" (He 12:14 1Thes 5:13)

But why are we at war with one another ? After all we belong to the same family, we trust the same Saviour, we are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit and yet we fight one another. Why ? (1)

(2) A CAUSE THAT IS OBVIOUS

Look if you will at (4:1) or "*Do they not arise from your sensual desires that are ever warring in your bodily members ?*" (ANT) You see, the war in the heart is helping to cause the wars in the church. My we are at war with each other, because we are at war with ourselves. Has James not already touched upon this when he told us that the two marks of false wisdom are envy (selfish ambition) and strife (a party spirit) You see, the root of our trouble lies in that phrase "*your lusts,*" or "*your desires.*" The Greek conveys the idea of "*selfish satisfaction.*" You see,

(a) THESE DESIRES ARE SELFISH:

The word "*lusts,*" or "*desires,*" conveys the idea of immediate, selfish satisfaction. Do you remember all Blue Eyes ? What is the Frank Sinatra Philosophy ?

"*I'll do it my way.*" Is that not the essence of sin ?

Selfishness ! Eve disobeyed god because she wanted to eat of the tree and become wise like God. Abraham lied about his wife because he selfishly wanted to save his own skin. (Gen 12:10)

Achan caused defeat to Israel because he selfishly took some forbidden loot from the ruins of Jericho. (Josh 7:1) My it is this inner thing, the putting of self at the centre, the demand that self should be satisfied, which leads to wars and fighting's in the church fellowship. Church conflict is the result of someone wanting to have it his or her own way. It is like the fellow who

no matter what was discussed in a business meeting always got up and said, “ *I’m against it.*” On one occasion someone offered to donate to the church a chandelier. As usual he got up, and said, “ *I’m against it.*” The pastor looked at him and said, “ *why should you be against it, it is not costing us anything.*”

The man replied, “ *Well, first of all we don’t have anybody that can play it. The second thing is this, where we put it, and lastly, what we need around here is more light.*” My do you know what the root of church conflict is ? He or she could not have their way. There was an article sometime ago in “ *Baptist Life,*” entitled “ *Where have all the pastors gone ?*” Do you want to know where some of them have gone ? Back to secular employment ! Why ? Because they were sickened with the fighting’s and quarrels and personal attacks on them and their children. Why are we at war with each other ? Because we are at war with ourselves ! The real problem is within ! (a)

(b) *THESE DESIRES ARE PERSISTENT:*

Notice what James says, “ *your lusts or desires that war.*” Now we have already noted that this word “ *war,*” conveys the idea of a continuous state of war. My let me explode a myth. You will never be sinlessly perfect this side of glory. Now that should be your aim. Was that not Paul’s aim ? Do you see him as he pounds down the track pressing toward the mark of perfection ? (Phil 3:10) He says “ *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*” Perfection should be our goal, but the fact of the matter is that each of us has these lusts, these desires, this spirit of demanding instant satisfaction and they never wholly leave us. “ *The desires which are always at war within you.*” My do you know what I’m talking about ? Is there a continuous state of war going in your heart and mind ? Do you feel as though you are a walking civil war ? James says also that:

(c) *THESE DESIRES ARE INTERNAL:*

“ *Your lusts that war in your members,*” Now James is not talking about the members of the church, but about the members members, what the Amplified Bible calls “ *your bodily members.*” Paul put it like this, “ *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.*” (Gal 5:17) Now he is not speaking here about a contest between the physical and the spiritual. He is speaking of the conflict between the Christian’s old nature and the Holy Spirit who now dwells within him. My our fights, quarrels, squabbling come from our desires that battle within us, and if there is war on the inside, there will ultimately be war on the outside. (c) That’s why we need to be in a state of vigilance. Charles Wesley put it like this,

“ Leave no unguarded place

***No weakness of the soul
Take every virtue, every grace***

*And fortify the whole
Indissolubly joined, to battle all proceed
But arm yourselves with all the mind
That was in Christ your Head.”*

(3) A CURE THAT IS PRECIOUS

How can we conquer the conflicts that so often mar church life ? Well, James says “ *Ye have not.* ” After all their fighting and bickering, what had they got ? He says, “ *Ye have not.* ” Why ? Because they neglected the better way. “ *Ye ask not.* ” My wouldn't it be better to wrestle with God than wrangle with men ? What if all our disputes, discords, desires were referred to prayer, would that not bring peace and ends wars ? James says

(a) WE MUST PRAY:

“ *Ye have not because ye ask not.* ” (4:2) Incidentally, as a professing Christian do you pray ? Do you have that time each day when you meet with God in the light of His Word and the atmosphere of prayer ? Do you pray ? You see, one reason why they did not obtain certain things was that they did not pray for them. Of course they may not have prayed for those things because the things they wanted were wrong. My have you ever thought of all you are missing because you don't pray ?

*“ Oh what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear
All because we not carry
Everything to God in prayer.”*

Are there issues that you never take to the Throne of Grace ? Are there whole tracts of your life about which you never pray ? Of how many good, godly things, how many blessings for yourself and others could it be said,

“ *ye have not because ye ask not.* ” (a)

(b) WE MUST PRAY IN THE RIGHT WAY:

Look if you will in at (4:3) or “ *you ask wrongly.* ” The Greek means “ *you ask out of place.* ” Matthew Henry says, “ *We miss when we ask amiss.* ” Its not so much a matter of asking for the wrong things, as of asking in the wrong way. You see, there are clear conditions for answered prayer and the overruling one is this, “ *And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us.* ”

(1 Jn 5:14) May I remind you that “ *prayer is never for the purpose of getting our will done in heaven, but for the purpose of getting God's will done on earth.* ” My its not a matter of asking, but of asking according to God's will. We need more than bent knees and closed eyes. We need an open, broken, humble, dependent, thirsting, believing heart. And we need the desire that in our prayers God's will shall come first. So (a) (b)

(c) WE MUST PRAY IN THE RIGHT WAY FOR THE RIGHT REASON:

You see, the point shifts here from how they prayed, to why they prayed. The Amplified Bible says, “*You ask with wrong purpose and evil, selfish motives. Your intention is, when you get what you desire to spend it in sensual pleasure.*” My its possible to pray for many good things for the wrong reason. John Ward, a Member of Parliament who owned part of Dagenham many years ago was attributed with this prayer.

“ O Lord thou knowest that I have mine estates in the City of London and likewise that I have lately purchased an estate in the county of Essex. I beseech thee to preserve the two counties of Middlesex and Essex from fire and earth quake, and as I have a mortgage in Hertfordshire, I beg of Thee likewise to have an eye of compassion on that county. As for rest of the counties, Thou mayest deal with them as Thou art pleased.”

You see, its possible to pray for the salvation of one’s parents, or children because it would be so much nicer to live in a Christian home. Its possible to pray for the success of your church, your organisation, your missionary society because that would increase its stature.

What is your concern when you pray ? When you pray for the lost ? Those missionaries ? Your church, your home, your children, your family, what is your concern ? Is your overriding concern the glory of God, regardless of what plans of yours might go astray ? “*How to Conquer Conflict in the Church.*” Are you at war, at variance with some other believer ? Is it because you are at war with yourself ? Are you war with yourself because you have not submitted yourself to God and said, “***Not my will but thine be done.***” (Lk 22:42

