

Carnal Man **Jas. 4:1-17**

Intro: Often I hear preachers talking among themselves and asking the question, "What do you think will be the next issue to divide the church"? Various answers are usually given. I don't know what may divide God's people in the future; but, I suspect it will be what is dividing them now!

Over the past several years I have heard of and seen numerous once-thriving congregations be systematically dismantled by conflict. Where there was once a thriving congregation working together in unity, there are now two congregations not always on friendly terms. It seems to have happened in about every city where there's a church of Christ in America. What is happening to us?

The fellowship we have with Christians should be one of the most cherished and serene relationships we possess; yet I've seen more people shed tears over their relationship with brethren than ever before. Again, I ask, "What is the source of these quarrels and conflicts among brethren"? For an answer and a solution to the problem, let's turn this morning to James chapter four!

In our last lesson as we looked at the end of chapter three we saw James reminding his readers of the conflicts that will inevitably come if jealousy and selfish ambition prevail among God's people (3:16). Now in chapter four, James gets to the heart of the problem. He shows that the conflicts that disturb the peace of God's people originate in the heart of the man who is carnal in his outlook. Thus I have called this chapter "carnal man vs. spiritual man". For in this chapter James shows us how carnality among God's people not only leads to conflict among God's people, but the loss of all that God Himself seeks to give us as His people. In contrast, spirituality not only brings peace among God's people, but the many wonderful blessings of His grace.

This morning I want to consider with you character and consequences of carnality. Let's read together James chapter 4.

The characteristics of carnality

It is important that we be able to ferret out in ourselves the tendencies of carnality before the wreak havoc in our lives and the lives of others. Carnality puts us in conflict with ourselves, with others, and with God. How can we identify carnality in an individual? The carnal person:

Seeks out earthly pleasure and earthly things

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

All of to some degree participate in the enjoyment of this earthly life. But even as we do so, there is a consciousness of God who gives us all good things to enjoy and what we enjoy is incidental to the main purpose of our lives. The carnal mindset is to be distinguished from

this in that it makes pleasure and earthly things the primary passion of life itself. They are the reason we get up in the morning and work hard at our jobs. These things make life happy; the absence of them would bring misery; the loss of them, despair.

To know if we are carnal can easily be answered by asking a few pointed questions: Which brings us greater joy? To be with God and His people, or to be with worldly friends? To sing praises to God, or to attend a worldly concert? To see an improvement in your spiritual life, or to acquire a new thing? What really gets you excited and energized? What do you love to talk about? Answer those questions and you will know whether you are carnal or not.

(Attending church doesn't guarantee spirituality, or the absence of carnality. "Being in church doesn't make you spiritual anymore than being in McDonald's makes you a hamburger!") A carnal person builds his life upon pleasure or the attainment of things. They define his happiness and his sense of personal worth.

Has a competitive spirit toward others

James speaks of how this desire for pleasure turns into envy and jealousy for ourselves at the prosperity of another.

You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

He speaks of how it causes Christians to unfairly condemn others, even while glaring errors exist in our own lives! (v. 11)

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.

Again a few questions honestly answered may reveal a lot about ourselves: Do we feel secret resentment toward others who are doing better? Does the green-eyed monster strike when we see another person's material success? Do we make attempts to diminish their esteem in other's eyes by criticism or by withholding praise? If not, I congratulate you. If yes, beware!

Courts the world's favor

Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

From what group do most of our closest friends come? The world or the church? Among which group do we feel most at home?

Upon what do we depend for our security? Is it cultivating the right earthly relationships? Staying in good favor with the boss?

Do you ever feel pressured to compromise to fit in? Do you do some things you wouldn't want church people to know about that you feel are essential to your success in business or life?

Lives in prideful self-sufficiency

James speaks of people who feel so sure that their success depends upon them that they don't take time to ask God for help (v. 2)

You do not have because you do not ask.

He speaks about people who are planning a year out without even the thought of death. Who speak as if they have the whole world by the tail and can do whatever they wish, whenever they wish. They never think about what is God's will for their lives. Listen to the language of v. 13.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

Do you hear the presumption? the proud self-confidence? The assurance of success? The certainty of future life?

How important is God in your planning? When was the last time you prayed about an important decision you made? How often do you go to the throne of God to ask His help to achieve your goals?

Consequences of carnality

Causes quarrels and conflicts among God's people! Here's how!

Pleasures "hedonon" (cf. hedonistic) wage war (campaign) in members.

Envy and lust result in antagonism and violence toward others.

You lust and do not have! So you commit murder. (That may be in the sense of Jesus' mountain sermon, that they are angry and show the spirit of the murderer, if such were allowed to reach its full end.) You are envious (zealous, to be hot) and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

It still does! It is interesting sometimes to hear the explanations for the divisions we see today. "Oh, they didn't split over anything doctrinal, just personalities!" It seems to me that statement is misguided; because a great part of what the Bible teaches in doctrine has to do with developing a personality that is Christ-like character that makes us humble, unselfish, and patient with others, not demanding our own way, but considering their needs and wishes above our own. James hits the nail right on the head when he says the real cause of conflict is the man whose carnality so dominates him that he is envious and jealous of others, ambitious for position and power, and thus competes with his brethren rather than love them and serve them! When churches develop the mentality of a cage full of lions, they need the exhortation of Gal. 5: "If you bite and consume one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another!"

Results in enmity with God! A carnal spirit not only leads to conflict among brethren, it results in a loss of the wonderful blessings God could give us both physically and spiritually! Here's why! The man who seeks the friendship of the world puts himself in hostility with God.

Selfish pride prevents the carnal man from asking.

You have not because you ask not. The man who lives in prideful self-sufficiency finds it difficult to humble himself before God and ask for his blessings.

Evil motives keep God from giving!

Even if one asks, his selfishness prevents God's answering "yes". What a lesson for us on the motives of prayer. Prayers motivated by selfish desires will not be granted.

James calls such a man a spiritual adulterer!

God created us to have a relationship with Him!

Cf. v. 5 Does the Scripture say this "emptily"? God jealously yearns for the spirit he has made to dwell in us! How can one expect God to bless him when his whole life is contrary to all that God created him to be?

When we seek the friendship of the world, God is hurt by our love of the world.

God's people have been betrothed to him; we are Christ's bride. When we love the world rather than him, He feels the same way we would feel if we knew our partner was cheating on us! Cf. Eze. 6:9 Friendship with the world is tantamount to adultery in God's view.

Conclusion: There may not be any thing that is harder to see in ourselves than carnality and worldliness. We cannot afford to be blind to our own vulnerability to it. There is too much at stake—the peace of God's people, the blessings of God's grace. Let's search our hearts and repent.