

True spirituality

- Controls the tongue
- Shows compassion to the needy
- Keeps itself unstained by the world
- Battles and conflicts among Christians...

James has been developing and enlarging the point that he made in James 1:26–27. True spirituality controls the tongue (1:26, enlarged in James 3). It shows compassion towards the needy (1:27, enlarged in 2:1–26). And it keeps itself unstained by the world. It is this last point that James is now developing. What is it to be stained by the world? The world is full of conflict and greed for money. It also has its problems, its unanswered prayer, its sickness, its injustices. James takes up some of these matters in the latter part of his letter. First he begins with the battles and conflicts taking place among his Christian friends.

‘Where do wars come from, and where do the battles among you come from?’ ^{□1} James reveals that there is a lot of fighting and quarrelling among his people. It is not all that surprising. We have already discovered that these people want to be wealthy and to keep the poor away from their meetings! Such people are always quarrelsome! Even James the half-brother of Jesus could not produce perfect congregations.

□1 4:1a

1. The source of conflict

- The source – the sinful nature within
- So there is a war going on inside us!
- Human ability unaided cannot deal with it
- The answer
 - Recognise the problem
 - The Holy Spirit
 - The joyfulness of the Lord’s presence

1. **He analyses the source of conflict.** It seems that James is specially interested in the **source** of different kinds of lifestyle. He wants to know what comes from below and what comes from above. So he answers his own question. *‘Do they not have their source in your pleasure-seeking desires that wage war within the different parts of your personality’* ^{□1}. There are wars outside because there is a war inside. This is very profound biblical teaching. We all need to know what we are like inside. We are all ignorant of ourselves. We tend to think that spiritual battles are outside of us – in our circumstances, our poverty, our lack of education, the problems we have from this person or that person. But the deepest aspect of the matter is that we have problems **within**. We are all born with a sinful nature. Even after we have come to salvation there is still a sinful nature within us only now the Holy Spirit is present as well! So there is a war going on inside of us! Our bodies are not yet redeemed; We are ‘waiting for the redemption of our bodies’ ^{□2}.

□1 4:1

□2 Romans 8:23

What can deal with this sinful nature of ours? Human ability unaided cannot do it. Struggling against our own sinfulness **without** help is of little value. The answer is (i) to recognize the problem. This is what James is doing at this point. (ii) To realize that the Holy Spirit is yearning to give us help. This is what James will come to in James 4:5. (iii) To know the joyfulness of the Lord’s presence. This is really the answer. Draw near to God! ^{□1} Spiritual battles are best handled indirectly not directly. When we struggle with sin on our own we are failures. When we are rejoicing in God we find it easier to deal with the ‘pleasure-seeking desires that wage war’ within the different parts of our personality ^{□2}. But we begin by admitting the problem.

□1 4:8

□2 4:1

2. The marks of this inner disease

2. **Next James points to the marks of this inner disease.** These inner desires fighting inside us show themselves in a number of ways. (i) They produce quarrelsomeness as James has already

(i) Quarrelsomeness

said. But there is more. (ii) They produce frustration. 'You want something but you do not have it, you commit murder and you are jealous, but still you cannot obtain what you want. So you fight and wage war.'

(ii) Frustration

When our inner sinfulness is getting a grip on us because it is not resisted, it shows itself in our wanting things so badly that we start quarrelling and fighting about it. But it is all deeply frustrating because there is no blessing or fulfilment in this direction.

(iii) Prayerlessness

(iii) It shows itself in prayerlessness. 'You do you have what you need, because you do not ask' ¹. When our inner sinfulness is unresisted, strangely it tends to kill our confidence in prayer. We try to get things for ourselves because we do not believe that God is able to give them to us, if we truly need them.

(iv) Unanswered prayer

The respectable backslider longs for certain things but God withholds success from him. (iv) This kind of 'respectable backsliding' suffers from unanswered prayer. For a lot of the time we do not pray, but then when we do pray our prayers are unanswered! 'You ask but you do not receive, because you ask for the wrong reasons. Your purpose is to use what you get on your own pleasures' ². We are meant to be in God's will. We are meant to know God's mind. We are meant to be people of prayer. And we are meant to get our prayers answered! But all of this goes wrong if we do not control the pleasure-seeking desires that wage war within us.

• Everything goes wrong if we do not control the pleasure-seeking desires that wage war within us

Then everything goes wrong. We find ourselves in confusion. We cease to pray. And when we do pray God takes no notice! In this situation there is a spirit of rebellion and selfishness deep within. 'Your purpose is to use what you get on your own pleasures,' says James. Your motives are wrong. You are praying for the wrong reasons. God is not likely to answer that kind of praying.

¹ 4:2

² 4:3

The answer

• First repentance then receiving forgiveness and the Holy Spirit's help

But there is an answer for us. James will explain what we must do. It all begins by our recognizing what has happened to us. It begins with repentance – realizing where we are, changing our minds about ourselves, determining to obey God. We turn to God, receive His forgiveness, and look again for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit upon us. And we shall recover. God will use us again. Our prayers will begin to be answered.



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