

Human history is the history of war. Almost every year, there have been wars in the world. When we talk about a war, we get scared. What if North Korean launches nuclear missiles? What if a war occurs in Iran or in Spain? There are several places in the current world where a war may happen anytime. We are scared of a war because if it happens, people will die. Just within the 20th century, over 108 million people died because of wars. Is it impossible to bring peace in this world?

Just as war happens among nations, a fight or quarrel happens among people. There may not be many casualties as in a war, but a personal quarrel can still bring so much hatred and anger in us. We need to know about it because no one is exempted from quarreling. Everyone has some kinds of disputes or quarrels in his/her life. No matter how nice you are, you have been involved in some kinds of disputes. It could be between spouses or siblings. It could happen with our friends or neighbors. It may happen inside the church where we learn to love one another. And when it happens, both parties will get hurt. We need to learn how to avoid fights and quarrels among us.

A question is “what is the source of these quarrels”? Is it from Satan, or is it from someone who doesn’t know Jesus? James says it is “you.” *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?”* We may want to say, “No, it’s not me. I am a nice person *unless* she makes me angry. Or, “not me, but he did it all; he *is* the problem.” We may have a hundred excuses, but James says it is *your* desire. The word “desire” (ἡδονή, *hēdonē*) means simply “pleasure”, which often implies a negative sense, but it can express a good and positive pleasure, too. Using this word, I can say, “I desire to have good time; I want to please myself with some delicious food; I desire to win Ping-Pong games later on.” There is nothing wrong with seeking a good time. However, when the desire comes out of our selfishness, it can cause quarrels. If we don’t get something that we want; if we can’t satisfy our flesh, we may cause a quarrel and fight. So, what are we missing?

Our God is gracious. He wants to provide for what we need, but he is not going to give us just what we want. As James says, *“You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures”* (vv.2b-3). This is one of the most important verses in the Bible concerning prayer. The door of blessings in heaven is wide open for us. We just need to pray, but we have not asked God. Jesus said, *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you”* (Luke 11:9), but we just don’t pray. If we believe what Jesus said is true, we may want to come to pray. Not only for my need, but for the needs of our family, friends and this church, we should come to pray. The lack of prayer is one of the great problems. Another problem is that we pray for our own pleasures. If a little baby keeps asking for more candy, the mom has to say “No” for the sake of the baby. Likewise, if we keep asking God for some things just for our own pleasure, He will not give them to us for our sake. For example, we want our team to win in a sport game, but we should not pray for other players to get hurt so that you can win. I mean we shouldn’t pray for a win in the first place. It is nice to see our team wins, but that is not a right motive. God is not going to answer to that kind of prayer.

So, how shall we pray? We depend on the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, *“How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* (Luke 11:13) We will receive the Holy Spirit and he will help us to pray more with right motives. That is what we see in our text too. To our problems, James is implying, “You are still quarreling because you have not asked God. You haven’t asked for the wisdom that comes from heaven. You are still disputing because you have asked for something for your own sake.” It is true. If we don’t have peace in us, we may not have prayed yet. We still fight each other because we may love worldly things more than godly things. We need to ask for heavenly wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives us and uses within us.

James confirms it with a rhetorical question, *“Do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?”* (v.9) This is a key verse in our text. The Scripture doesn’t speak in vain. Whatever it says must be true. It says, *“The spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely.”* Here we must pay attention to three words because they will determine the meaning of the whole section. Who is the spirit? Is he the Holy Spirit or the human spirit? Who is “he”? And what is the meaning of “envy”? First, the One who caused the Spirit to live in us is God. Only God gave us spirit when he created man (cf. Gen. 2:7), and only God gave us the Holy Spirit when we are born again (cf. John 16:8; Acts 1:4). So, whether it is a human spirit or the Holy Spirit, “he” must be God. Then, who is the spirit (πνεῦμα *pneuma*)? Within the context, I will say it is the Holy Spirit. We are all spiritual beings at birth, but here James is talking to Christians in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. If it is a human spirit, I don’t think he needs to point out “living or dwelling in us.” Since it is the Holy Spirit, the meaning of “envy” (φθόνος, *phthonos*) cannot be negative, such as a selfish or sinful envy. Then, how does the Holy Spirit “envy intensely”? Literally, how does He “desire envy” or “long for jealousy”? Here, James is indicating God’s jealousy for His people. Yes, God is jealous. He will not allow his chosen people to worship idols, as He said, *“Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”* (Exodus 34:14; 20:5). Again, God wants to bless us. He wants us to pray to him through the Holy Spirit. When we have quarrels, disputes or fights among us, we pray to God through the Holy Spirit who is jealous for our dedication. As we humble ourselves before God, He will give us more grace (cf.v.6).

In humility, *“submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (v.7). How do you submit yourself to God? How do you resist the devil? Verses 8-10 describe some practical ways.

First, we need to come near to God. God is omnipresent. He is everywhere, but he will come to those who come to him. As he declares in Jeremiah, *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you”* (Jeremiah 29:13-14a). God is waiting for us to come to him. He is waiting for us to call upon him. Can’t you see that? Can’t you hear his voice? God is saying, “Come on! Don’t go by yourself. Don’t live without me. Read my Word. Pray to Me. I am already here with you!” God is more than ready to answer to our call. How do you begin your day? We should begin every day with the Word. We should pray every moment to seek His presence.

Secondly, in order to draw near to God, we must go through a purification process. *“Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded”* (v.8b). In the OT, people

washed their hands before the high priest, which symbolizes stopping evil deeds. Purifying our hearts or double-minded means purity in our inner attitude and motives. Both in our actions and minds, we need to stop sinning. We need to stop seeking our own selfish desires. This requires our determination and willingness to follow Jesus our Lord. Without hating sins in us, we may not seek God. We cannot compromise with evil. We need to stop sinning. We need to desire to seek God's glory.

Thirdly, we shall "*grieve, mourn and wail*" (v.9a). It implies repentance. As we saw earlier, the Greek word for "desire" or "pleasure" is "hēdonē" (ἡδονή), from which the word "hedonism" came. "Hedonism" is seeking pleasures. In Christianity, we may seek pleasures, fun and joy. Yes, it is biblical. We need to rejoice in the Lord. We certainly seek laughter and pleasure in our Christian life, but we must not ignore the repenting. We repent not only of our personal sins, but also for the sins of our family, church and nation. Jesus didn't sin, but he shed tears for our sins. God is calling us to seek forgiveness for ourselves, for our church and for this nation. Yes, we need strong, powerful and intelligent leaders, but we are more in need of humble servants (cf. Matt.5:3-5). We need to be humble and meek to seek forgiveness.

How do we submit to God? By coming near to God! By walking with Jesus or remaining in the Word. How do we resist the devil? By stopping sinning! By repenting our sins!

Brothers and sisters, God is looking for his servants? Everywhere in this world, we need servants. In the midst of fights, anger, hatred and division, God is looking for his servants. "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*" (Isaiah 6:8a) Long ago (c.735BC), Isaiah said, "*Here am I. Send me!*" (Is.7:8b) Throughout history, God's servants answered, "*Here am I. Send me!*" Now it is your turn. For your home, for your job, for this church and for this community and nation, will you say, "*Here am I. Send me*"? "*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up*" (v.10). Because of your humble serving, God will lift up your home, this church and community. You are expanding the kingdom of heaven. Amen.