

# Conflict in the Church

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good evening everyone. Thank you Fiona. My name is Aaron and I'm a member here at Brunfield Evangelical Church and it's my privilege tonight to continue our series looking into the book of James.

In Germany in the early 20th century there were two brothers who owned and ran a successful athletic shoemaking company called the Dazzler Brothers Shoe Factory.

The two brothers, Rudolf and Adolf, or Adi and Rudi as they were known, they began however to have differing opinions about how they should run this company.

And going unaddressed it was beginning to develop into a soured relationship. There are accounts of multiple incidents but apparently the final straw was during the Second World War when during an air raid and Rudi's family were hiding in an air raid shelter and Adi's family came in.

Adi was hired to comment something that can be translated something loosely to here come the pig dogs again. He later claimed to be referring to the enemy above but the damage was done.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] The company soon dissolved and they both went on to start their own companies in the same town. Adi Dazzler would call his Adidas and Rudi Dazzler his Ruda, later changing it to Puma.

And for the next 60 years these companies were bitter rivals, splitting this town in an almost sectarian way as they both grew into sporting goods giants.

Today these companies, which I'm sure you might have heard of, are no longer run by descendants of the Dazzlers. And so while they are still competitors, it's no longer personal. They are both still headquartered in that same town, where apparently the evidence of the long rivalry is unavoidable. Now, that might seem like a trivial example depending on your point of view, but what we're going to see tonight in this passage is that when this happens in a church context, the consequences are very real and can have a huge impact on our church family.

I don't know if anyone's ever been in a situation where you've maybe had a disagreement with something or something that's been building up for a while, which has then caused you to say something you wish you hadn't.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] I certainly have. Now, most of these situations can be resolved quickly if you're prepared to accept some fault and apologize, but sometimes they aren't.

And a little bit too much pride and hurt can let the situation develop, resulting in significant consequences. I hope everyone's been enjoying this series and James so far.

It's amazing how much practical teaching is packed into such a short book. If you haven't managed to come along or tune in, the recordings are all available, so I would recommend catching up.

But if you haven't, or just as a quick reminder for some context of where we are, this book is written by James, not to James. James was the brother of the Lord Jesus.

He's writing here to the early church, the very early church, who were mostly Jews, who had now heard and accepted the gospel that Jesus brought and were likely here about 20 years after the death of the Lord Jesus.

[ 3 : 2 6 ] So still very early days for the church. And so obviously they didn't have any of this rich New Testament teaching that we do. This letter was them getting it firsthand.

And the teaching of the good news of the gospel, which is that salvation can come by faith alone, was only being passed by word of mouth mostly, which was starting to create some gaps in understanding.

And serious problems were starting to form, which is what James is looking to address here. A couple of weeks ago, Jonathan was taking us through, in chapter 3, the general problems that come from an untamed tongue.

And today what we're going to see is what happens when that behavior encroaches into our churches and the conflicts it can create and the subsequent consequences of them. And what we see here in chapter 4, although it's a theme really throughout the book in this early church, is that they're not displaying or living in the light of the grace that they have received. [ 4 : 25 ] They're failing to display the humility that a believer living by faith should. But it becomes a helpful encouragement for us also, as we can all fall short in this area. And James helps us see that.

So while it does start with some stark warnings here about the threat and the consequences of these conflicts for his people, the church, as James admonishes them for it, is clearly a prevalent issue in this church.

Please stick with me as he also gives some real encouragement and hope for the cure and how to avoid it and how to keep our focus centered on the Lord Jesus.

We'll first see the cause of these conflicts in the church. That's kind of verses 1 to 3. And then we see the consequences of these conflicts in verses 4 to 5. And then it's the cure for these conflicts in verses 6 to 10.

And then finally in verses 11 and 12, James gives a helpful but challenging example of the kind of conflict that he's talking about, just to give it some illustration.

[ 5 : 30 ] So firstly, the cause of these conflicts. In verse 1, we're introduced right away to what is causing these conflicts in the church. He doesn't wait around. These quarrels and fights, as it says here, although there is no suggestion that they're actually physical.

He asks it as a rhetorical question in a sense, but he answers it right away. He's saying they don't have to look far. The answer is right here in themselves.

It's their own selfish desires, their pleasures, their passions, all things related to their own self-centeredness. In other words, it's the sin that they hadn't let go of.

What's clear is that it was a problem for them and it was destroying them from the inside. So while everyone is susceptible to this, I don't necessarily think he's saying it's everyone all the time, or even a majority.

But that's why it's still an issue, is it only takes one or two for it to start. Even in my relatively short experience, I have sadly seen this in churches for myself, sometimes it only takes a disagreement between two individuals and they can't get past it.

[ 6 : 35 ] Others are then forced to choose sides, families are involved, friends, fallouts, and a division can become inevitable. A small lapse in focus from God and a little bit of disguised sin creeps in and it spoils the lot.

Needless division caused by a lack of awareness in preparation for these causes and the cure which we're going to come to shortly. We as a church have to be mindful of this as it can affect our reputation and our testimony and become a distraction from the message that we're here to share if we're marked by these other things and these fallouts, rather than being known for the good news of the gospel and the hope it can bring and the lives that it can change.

The other thing about this intro is that he doesn't really go into specifics about the quarrels or what it's about on a surface level because regardless, it all comes down to giving in to our desire for self-gratification and for pride and for the need to be right and an unwillingness to accept correction and blame.

This is important for us who are Christians because we're all at war constantly, still living in our human fleshly bodies, but we have the Holy Spirit living in us.

So there's this constant push and pull where we have to consciously choose whether to obey the spirit in us or the flesh that we live in. For me, this sometimes looks or usually looks like a flash anger moment.

[ 8 : 07 ] If something has been said that has really angered me or upset me and it's just not sitting well, and then like a flash, the old life comes back and I'm just looking to say whatever I need to get my way and make sure that I don't look bad.

You know, I'm looking out for number one kind of regardless of who's affected by what I say. Maybe that's relatable to you too. And the issue is we forget the grace of the gospel, how to put our unity in Christ first and the call to love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

How would the Lord deal with a situation like that? Would he be trying to think of the best comeback just to make someone else feel bad and prove them wrong? Or would he approach it with love and

a willingness to forgive?

When we move away from God's will, it's always to gratify our own, to try and satisfy our own desires based on what feels good or seems appealing. But it comes at the cost of not honoring the Lord by putting our own sinful and selfish wants above his, affecting our spiritual well-being as well as the well-being of others, resulting in hurt, divisions, strife and fallouts.

And so then in verse two, James is speaking to those who are at fault for this. And what he's saying here is they never actually get the fulfillment they want from these desires. And so they chase it in vain and it leaves them unfulfilled and not satisfied, which is what causes them to start quarreling and fighting with each other.

[ 9 : 33 ] And even to kill, it says here, or murder. Now, I don't think he's accusing them of outright murder, but quarrels can lead to an equivalent hatred in the heart, which is how the Lord Jesus described the inward condition of the heart shown outwardly by anger when he spoke on it in the Sermon of the Mount.

And then at the end of verse two, he's referring to them not having what they want because they didn't ask. They didn't pray. In taking their focus away from God and only on their own wants, they're feeling self-sufficient, self-reliant.

Maybe they thought, well, I'm saved now. Why do I need God now? I'm saved. They were taking their grace for granted. And I think we should ask ourselves, can we be guilty of that? Life can get busy.

I'm sure we can all relate to that. And maybe in a time of blessing where lots of things seem to be going well and it's all happening for us, it's tempting to give ourselves the credit a little bit and on our hard work and not give thanks, the thanks deserved to the provider.

So then, bam, as soon as there's a blocker and we're not getting it all our own way and things aren't going how we would like and we're a bit confused how that can be, then we think about praying. And so then in verse three, it's no surprise then when they didn't receive because they were asking with the wrong motives.

[ 10 : 50 ] It was from a selfish place that they started to pray and it wasn't in line with God's will. Now this is touching on a bigger subject and I don't want you to take away that just because you feel there hasn't been an answer to your prayer or you haven't received what you've been asking for, that that's God telling you your motives were wrong.

That's not the case. Asking with the wrong motives never results in good. Asking with the right ones doesn't always either. It is worth checking ourselves so when it comes to our petitions in prayer, that's the things that we ask the Lord for.

And while we may not always be sure what God's will is for us, what I will say is what we pray for should reflect the blessing that he's given us, be God-honoring and be a blessing for others.

Then it will be truly self-fulfilling. So then moving into verse four, verses four and five, we have the consequences of these conflicts.

And it starts with very strong language. He's accusing them of being adulterers, adulteress. It's provocative language that was typical of Jewish scripture and it was used deliberately to get their attention.

[ 12 : 03 ] But we should take note here as well as this accusation is directly applicable to us too. Obviously the word has a few meanings and in the context here, he isn't talking about their physical relationship behavior, but he's rather using it to describe their spiritual relationship with Christ.

What he's saying here is that the Christian is in a special relationship with God. The language often used throughout the Bible is that he is the bridegroom and his people, the church, are the bride.

And so these people that he's writing to and where I think this is very relatable to us as well, they were choosing themselves and friendship with the world over him, over God. It's a spiritual unfaithfulness.

And when you are desiring things other than God first in your life, choosing the gods of pleasure over the God of heaven, then it makes us adulteresses in that sense.

It's okay to want things and have dreams. That's not what I'm saying. It's about checking our priorities and the root of our desire for them. This gets easier, the better the relationship that we have with Christ.

[ 13 : 09 ] It starts there and then we can look to him to get the steer and the direction when faced with big decisions and to always look for the opportunity also to give back and to serve.

And then so in verse 6, we have the cure of the conflict. From verse 6, from 6 to 10, we have the cure of the conflict. Verse 6 is a key verse in this section and really the whole book as well. These threats and temptations of choosing the flesh that we've been speaking about are real and constant for the believer and can overwhelm even the strongest of us. We have all fallen at some point to some degree to some of this, but here is the reminder we need. He gives us more grace. Grace upon grace, more and more. As long as we recognize that we need it. That's what's key here. Which is why we also need the reminder that God opposes the proud, but shows favor or gives more grace to the humble, as the ESV puts it nicely.

[14:16] We need to humble ourselves to actually receive it and be blessed by it. And then, when we are Christ-centered or the closer to Christ we get, the more you realize you need.

The better the understanding we have of what we have been given, the more in awe we are of what he did and how much we need him.

And then, so, from verse 7 through 9, we have a clear list of actions we must follow in order for this repentance to be genuine. He says, And then in verse 10, he gives the command, the call to action, an appointed statement on the result of repentance.

He says, And just as an encouragement here, aside from the emphasis on repentance and submitting to God, we know these listed actions can be difficult to do all of these things and we can feel the opposition sometimes strong against us, but the encouragement here is that the devil will flee from us if we resist him.

Not forever, after one instance, this is a continual thing, but what is clear here is the protection we get from God as we draw near to him. And then he to us.

[15:52] It's when we're straying out of the way of being in his presence, picking up our old bad habits again, and we're walking unprotected that we're most susceptible to the attacks.

So please, be weary and vigilant, friends. True faith requires true humility. True faith requires true humility.

It's not until we have true faith and we realize our constant need and we humble ourselves that he will exalt us. It was recognizing this need that caused those of us here who have made that commitment of faith to take it.

And if you find yourself today realizing that you have never taken that deliberate step to put your trust and faith in Jesus Christ, this is what it looks like. You need to simply accept that based on our own sinful nature, that is your human condition, that is the opposite of God and causes us to do wrong, we will never be able to meet God's standards.

And the only one who did was his son, the Lord Jesus, who took our place when he gave his life on the cross. And so, in humility, if you put your faith and trust in the work completed not only on the cross, but also in the belief in his subsequent resurrection from the dead and have genuine repentance, then you too can call him your savior.

[17:22] And so then, moving on into the final section, verses 11 to 12, where we have an example of a conflict. Verses 11 to 12, it almost starts a new train of thought, but what he's bringing up here is a very specific but very typical example of what he's been speaking about this whole time, especially at the start of the passage as a cause of quarrel or conflict.

It is still an example of what happens when we become less Christ-centered and too self-centered, too concerned with the judgment and the judging of others, and it breeds coveting and jealousy, which starts in the heart, but it gets brought out by speaking ill and slandering each other by talking down to them, backstabbing, maybe spreading rumors, frankly just lying in this kind of slander.

And so he continues this thought here by saying that those who criticize the law are in a sense making themselves judges of the law. This is God's law, to be clear, and to make yourself a judge is putting yourself at the same level or even above God.

And so then in verse 12, he is very clear there is only one lawgiver and one judge, the one who has true power over life and death, he who is able to save and destroy.

And then so he finally, he closes with another rhetorical question. Who are we to put ourselves in this position to judge our neighbor or our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

[18:54] I think it's telling that this closing example of conflict that he gives of malicious talk in the church is still so poignant today.

I'm sure we don't have to think too hard to recognize examples that we've seen in our church. Alistair touched on it briefly this morning even. Differences of opinion are natural and can even be healthy and helpful for learning when we have a genuine love and respect for each other. But we need to watch where it becomes a genuine disagreement. This might be over or might look like a disagreement over a simple practical issue in the church just because you've always done it one way or someone's family habits and how they do things in their household are just not how you were brought up.

Or your interpretation of a verse is very different to theirs but it's over something that is very much of secondary importance to the gospel truth and you let it compromise your fellowship. And as the disagreement goes unsettled it damages the relationship and it leads to unkind things being said either to others about them or even directly to themselves without necessarily thinking about it.

[ 20 : 12 ] And that can cause real hurt and then real damage to the church family. Whether it's just to try and make one seem better than others or just to tear another down deliberately casting seeds of doubt and suspicion can cause cracks that are difficult to repair and sadly often aren't.

So the call is to be aware of the causes and the dangers these conflicts can bring however insignificant they might seem initially and their potential consequences and the division and hurt that can come as a result.

And we do this by always assessing our focus staying close to the Lord and striving to always be Christ-centered in our actions which will not only be a cure for these pitfalls but will allow us to get closer to Him still humbling ourselves each time so that we can truly live a life by faith that is also pleasing to Him for Him but also with Him.

Let me just close for us now in prayer. Our God and Father we thank you for this challenging reminder again in this book of James of what true faith really looks like and then the dangers that can come if we don't have such true faith and humility.

We realize how much of a challenge this can be when we're still living here in this world in our human fleshly bodies Father but that's why we give thanks that we do not have to do this alone. We pray that as a church we would always be weary of these dangers and strive to get closer in our walk with you to be more Christ-centered in all aspects that will lead us to a strengthening of our fellowship and we're so thankful that all we have to do is to humble ourselves so that we can accept this grace that is given to us and that we might honor you with our actions and our service and so we just pray that you will bless have blessed this time that we've spent together in your word as we ask this all now in your son's precious and holy name Amen Amen Amen on the future ■ lu V