

VIDEO: What causes fights?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETmnuA7yo44> king of queens cereal fight

Our motivation

When was the last time you had an argument with someone?

What was it about? How did it end? Did you win? Did you lose? Did you work it out?

What is it that causes arguments? Chapter 4, verse 1:

4 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

We desire to get what we want. We fight because we desire something. We argue because we want something. And it's even the same when we come to God! Verse 2:

You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

So even when we ask God, we often do not receive them because we ask with wrong motives. And the rest of the chapter hinges on understanding this – God WANTS to give us good things. But we often ask for WANTS, earthly desires – to gain pleasure for ourselves.

What do you ask God for? What do you pray for? How much of what we ask for is focused on our pleasure? How often are we asking for things that will give us pleasure in this world?

Our loyalty

And so James asks us: Where is your heart? With the world? Or with God? Verse 4:

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?

Strong words. Strong words that say to us: Who are you friends with? Again, James gives us that choice – are we waiting to be friends with the world, or friends with God? When we ask God for things, what is our motivation?

For example, it's good, and right, and OK to ask God for healing when we're sick. But **why** do we ask? If God grants us healing, what will we use it for? Will we use that good health to serve him? Or will we use that good health to indulge ourselves in the pleasures of this world? What is our motivation?

When we ask for a job – why do we do that? If he provides us with a job, will we use that job to serve Him? Or will we simply use it to get the worldly pleasures we want? You see, James is challenging our hearts. What do we really want?

In this letter, James is actually writing a lot of this to church leaders. There are leaders who are arguing about the way the church is being run, or the way things **should** be done. He's saying that there are leaders who are only thinking about their own desires, and their own pleasures, and getting their own way.

III - Let me give you an example: A Church is deciding whether or not to buy new chairs. And no, this isn't our church... it's just a good example!

So one person says: "What's wrong with the seats we have? They've been fine for 50 years, and they'll be fine for 50 more. We can use the money to send to missionaries in Africa.

Another person says: Actually, the seats we have are really uncomfortable. They actually give me back pain every week. And they're not very inviting for visitors. And my wife is pregnant and she can't sit in those old seats for more than 15 minutes at a time...

Who is right? What's the right decision? Isn't it right to send money to missionaries? Isn't it right to look after people in the church, and visitors?

And the point of the illustration is this – sometimes there is not “right” answer to an argument.

And this is what the book of James challenges us with. We these arguments happen, who's needs are we thinking about? Let me put myself in the hot seat here - quite often, I have an opinion on the way things in church should be done, because it's the way **I** like them done. And it makes sense to **ME**. But others might have a different opinion. And for them, **THEIR** way is right. To me, **MY** way is right. What do we do?

And James says that we need to ask: “HOW are you dealing with the situation?” Rather than asking what's right or wrong, ask: “How do we treat each other through this?”

Do we buy new seats? Or do we keep the old ones?

It doesn't matter. Both could be the correct way forward. What matters **MOST OF ALL** is that we conduct ourselves in a way that is in line with God's heart. With humility.

5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

Our God is a jealous God. His spirit in us is jealous - he wants us to be His. He wants us to have the same desire as him. When we speak to each other, he wants us to put aside our own selfish desires and put others first. God is jealous to have us with him in all that we do and say.

But when we fail, when we're arrogant and think about our own selfish desires, verse 6, God gives us more grace.

6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

When we admit our mistakes, our selfishness, our arrogance, and when we humble ourselves before him, God shows us grace, and forgives. Therefore, verse 7,

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Submit to God. Humble yourself. Are you arguing with someone? Do you disagree with them? Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil – resist the urge to be arrogant. Resist the urge to get what **YOU** desire. Resist the urge to satisfy **yourself**. Resist the temptation to always think you're right. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Pray. Read his word. Confess your sin. Come back, again and again, to the cross of Jesus – the cross of humility and sacrifice, the cross of selflessness and peace.

Our fights and quarrels, our arguments and disagreements – the outcome is not as important as the process – the outcome is not as important as the **way** we conduct ourselves through those times. If we get our own way, but damage someone's faith in the process, what have we gained? As verse 11 says:

11 *Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it.*

And when we come to God – think about what we ask from Him: it's not so much about the outcome – whether God chooses to heal us or to provide a job for us – but more about how we conduct ourselves during that time. Do we trust Him with his answers to our prayers? And do we humble ourselves to trust His will for our lives?

Our plans

So finally, James finishes chapter 4 with one more warning. Verse 13:

13 *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." **14** Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. **What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.***

It's not **WRONG** to make **plans**. It's not **WRONG** to plan a holiday, or put aside money in superannuation. What's wrong is when our heart is arrogant. When we plan our lives **without God**. Verse 15:

15 *Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." **16** As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.*

Obviously, I have personal experience here! I had a plan with my family. A plan to be in Waitara for 20 years. A plan to buy our own house and settle down here. A plan to be comfortable. A plan to have worldly stability. And then God challenged us with **his** plans. The plans to move to another parish. Another suburb. Another house. The plan to leave our friends and family here at Waitara. But when His desire became clear to us – that we **should** move, and give up **OUR** plans, then everything else started to fall into place. All the things that concerned us were taken care of. Not in the way we had thought, but in God's ways. It would be pure arrogance to think that I knew better than him. And verse 17 is very helpful for me in this time of change:

17 *If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

If we know that God has plans for us, and we don't follow him, that is arrogance. That is sin. That's when our heart moves away from him and settles down with the world.

And that's what I think is important to take away from James 4:

Don't settle down with the world.

Don't settle down with your **own** plans. Keep the door open for **God's** plans.

Is God calling you into a particular area of ministry? Don't push His plans aside until you have time to think about it.

Is God calling you to help someone in need? Don't push that aside because it's not convenient for you right now.

Is God calling you to be generous in some way? Don't push that aside. Act on it now.

Never be settled with your own plans, your own desires, and your own ideas about what's right and what's best. Always be open to God's plans. **SEEK** God's plans. **ASK** God what his plan for you are.

Because settling down with the world is really settling for less. We are truly missing out if we settle for our own plans. God has much greater things for us than we can possibly plan ourselves!

James 4

4 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? **2** You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. **3** When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. **5** Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." [c]

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8** Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister [d] or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. **12** There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

Boasting About Tomorrow

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." **14** Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. **15** Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." **16** As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. **17** If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.