

## A War Worth Fighting—Part Two

James 4:1-12

This morning we are picking up where we left off last week—part two of *A War Worth Fighting*. Last week we asked three questions.

1. How are you fighting? And the answer was that we fight with meekness and gentleness.
2. Who are you fighting? Although we interact with real people in the real world at all times, the real battle is in the unseen world. Our enemy is not the flesh and blood person you work with or live with but our true enemy is Satan.

Then I presented two problems that most believers have when it comes to spiritual warfare: We see it as defensive warfare. All of the warfare terminology from 2 Corinthians chapter ten are offensive weapons. Demolishing strongholds is like tearing down a castle wall with siege weapons. Jesus said that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church. This means that fundamentally, the church is engaged in an offensive battle against the gates of hell and there is no way we can lose. Isn't that encouraging to know that the church will win?

But this raises the second problem we have with spiritual warfare—we engage in it alone. The church will prevail against the gates of hell but not every believer will prevail equally. Some will prevail and some will be defeated. Spiritual warfare is a big topic and the question that always arises is this—Can believers be possessed by demons? The short answer is no, we cannot. However, Satan is a deceiver, a liar a destroyer and a devourer. If you believe his lies you are deceived and once you are deceived you will eventually be devoured. So tell me—what is the difference between being possessed by a demon and deceived and devoured by one? The practical difference between the two can be very insignificant. The frightening thing about spiritual warfare is the fact that you can be deceived and devoured and not even know it. This is what it means to be deceived, right? If you were aware of Satan's hold on your life then it wouldn't be deception! In a church this size it is likely that most everyone is deceived in some way and some of you are deceived to the point of being devoured. No one is exempt from this battle. There is no conscientious objection from this spiritual war. You can't run away to Canada to avoid it. You cannot dodge the draft into this battle. If you have breath of life within you, then you are in this battle. If you are a leader then you are a special target for attack. Listen to how Puritan pastor Richard Baxter described it. "...take heed to yourselves because the

*tempter will make his first and sharpest assault on you. If you will be leaders against him, he will not spare you. He bears the greatest malice against the man who is engaged in working the greatest damage against him.”<sup>1</sup> Do you know why the mature believer is attacked more viciously? Because he or she is closest to the battle. The mature believer storms the gates of hell through their daily lives. They are in siege formation at the castle wall and are being pummeled.*

At one level the outlook appears grim. The battle rages around us at all times. Fellow Christians are constantly being wounded and falling. If we had eyes to see this invisible world, very little of it would look like a certain victory. Yet we are given these two amazing assurances. As a church, the gates of hell cannot prevail against us and as individuals we are given this promise in James 4. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Is it really that simple? Does the devil give up that easily? If mere resistance was all that is required, then why would so many be falling daily in battle? There is more to it than just standing up against the devil and we can draw this truth out by studying the larger context of the verse.

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?<sup>2</sup> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.<sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*

These verses should be the mission statement for all mothers of toddlers. “Why can’t you two stop fighting? Do I have to explain the concept of sharing to you again?! I don’t care who sits in the front and who sits in the back. Just buckle your seat belt and be quiet!” These verses explain why toddlers engage in bitter sibling rivalry. They also explain why church members have bitter rivalry. This certainly describes Paul’s conflict in Corinth with the false, super-apostles. Our inner passions are at war within us. This reminds us that the war with the devil is not the only thing that is causing us difficulty in life. This is the unholy trinity—the world, the flesh and the devil. Even if we were left all alone, we still have these passions that burn within us but the world tugs at our passions and the devil fans the flames of our passions until we become enslaved to them.

Remember last week when I said that we are known in the community for two things—our fighting and our potlucks. We have the best tator-tot casseroles and we fight better than anyone else. I may have unintentionally overstated this somewhat. Actually, our tator-tot casseroles aren’t even all that good. ☺ In all seriousness, I did not mean to imply that our community sees our church in this way. I was referring to churches in general. Besides, we haven’t had an all-church potluck since we left the Landmark and we don’t fight that much. But we have had our share of fights and I cannot think of a single one that has not arisen from sinful passions and desires waging within one another. We all have these passions. We all covet things that we cannot obtain and we all desire things that we do not have. This inner war with ourselves causes all manner of conflict with others. If we desire power and influence, then the easiest way to obtain these is to knock down those that hold the power and influence. This is what the false apostles tried with Paul. They had to take him out so that they could possess the power and rule the church. It’s like the famous line from the old westerns—“This town ain’t big enough for the two of us.”—and then the guns start a’blazin’.

Some of you are thinking, “But I don’t have these controlling passions warring within me.” I hope that is true for you, but we must realize that our passions start off small. It begins with the thought: “I could really use that. I wish I had that.” And remember, that which we desire could be things/objects or it could be power and influence, it could be that you think you deserve to be treated in a certain way. Maybe your wife or your boss or your co-worker or a neighbor disrespects you. It is easy to become like Haman in the story of Esther. Haman was absolutely consumed with demanding respect from Mordecai. No doubt Haman also wanted the vast wealth that came from his position and he coveted the power and influence that he had as a close advisor to the king, but more than all of that, he was literally possessed with getting respect from Mordecai. If you recall the story, the more the passions drove him, the deeper they became in his heart. And the deeper they were driven into his heart the further they drifted away. We may not be consumed as deeply as Haman, but understand that our passions tend to start small and gain life and power over time.

There was another issue with the church to whom James wrote. First, they were a prayerless bunch—*You do not have, because you do not ask*, and worse still, when they did pray, *James said that you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions*. Notice the repetition of the word passion.

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your **passions** are at war within you?*

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your **passions**.*

The passion from verse one is the same passion from verse three. Those believers who did pray only prayed because they wanted to use God as a means to satisfy their passions. Do you see what they were doing? First, they were treating God like a magic genie. You rub the lamp three times by saying a nice prayer and then you get whatever it is your heart desires. Second, they were sinning by seeking to fulfill their selfish passions yet all the while they covered up under the cloak of prayer. This is one of the most powerful and effective delusions of Satan. He gets us to sin, but since we wrap it in a layer of Christianese, we not only *don’t* think it is sin but we actually *believe* it is righteousness. This is a potent deception.

It’s no wonder that James used such strong language in the next section.

<sup>4</sup> *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* <sup>5</sup> *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?*

Eighteen times in this short letter James referred to his readers as “brothers.” He was writing to his brothers and sisters in Christ. They were truly spiritual kin to one another, but this close relationship did not stop him from pulling any punches when it was necessary. He was not accusing them of actual *marital* adultery—though some of that was probably present as well—but he saying that they were practicing *spiritual* adultery.

Spiritual adultery is a concept present throughout the Old Testament. *For your Maker is your husband — the LORD Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth* (Isa 54:5). The sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel has one of the most famous husband and wife metaphors.

<sup>32</sup> You **adulterous** wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! <sup>33</sup> Every **prostitute** receives a fee, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors. <sup>34</sup> So in your **prostitution** you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favors. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you.

<sup>38</sup> I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. <sup>42</sup> Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry.

The husband and wife metaphor is the most clear and beautiful metaphor for Jesus and the church. This intimate relationship is described in Ephesians chapter five. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* This is the language of bride and groom, of husband and wife. Jesus is the husband and the church is his bride. Through his shed blood and resurrection, he has purified the church to become a spotless bride. This is a rich description of marital intimacy between us and Jesus. He is our husband in a sense greater than we could ever imagine. Wives, if you think you have a good husband, the love of Jesus for us is ten billion times greater than the greatest husband in this church. He has done all for us, his lovely bride.

But what happens to a good husband when the wife starts to have eyes for another man? What is the natural response? Jealousy, right? Any “good” husband would be jealous or he isn’t worth his weight in rocks. This is exactly the emotion that God has when his bride gets eyes for another and begins to wander away. Did you notice the jealousy in the Ezekiel passage?

*I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and **jealous** anger. <sup>42</sup> Then my wrath against you will subside and my **jealous** anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry.* Were you aware that the Lord is an extremely jealous husband? It may sound strange putting it that way, but this is a Biblical truth. Moreover, we see this same emotion and passion in our passage in James. Verse five—*He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us*”?

If you have an NIV or a King James, then verse is not very clear. Those versions seem to imply that our spirits are the one who are envious and jealous, but I think this is a very poor translation. I am convinced that the NASB and the ESV have it right. It is God who is jealous for us. But how can God be jealous? Is jealousy not a sinful emotion? The jealousy that flows out of our hearts is usually a sinful emotion. As I just said, a good husband will have a natural jealousy for the wife that he loves and I believe it is possible for this jealousy to start off as pure. However, if left unchecked, it will inevitably degrade into sinful anger, envy and raging jealousy. But Jesus is without sin so the jealousy he has for us is a pure and holy jealousy empowered by his infinite love for us. Jesus yearns with a jealous envy for our affection. He can be jealous and have strong passions because they arise out of his perfection and holiness. Isn’t this just a fantastic idea? The Lord Jesus yearns jealously over us. What drives him mad with pure, holy jealousy is when we refuse to submit to him and stray away from his love. But regardless of what we do, he is jealous to have us back in full fellowship with him. His love seeks us out and is full of jealous affection

until we return. When you think about it, we would expect no less from a perfect husband who has an infinitely perfect love for his bride. If a sinful husband can have a pure jealousy for a straying wife, how much more can a perfect husband have a perfect jealousy for a straying bride?

But there is another layer that James is about to introduce. When we commit spiritual adultery and have a friendship with the world, what we have done is to align our loyalties with the enemy. Friendship with the world is hatred toward God because we have placed ourselves under Satan's authority. Before you were saved, you were a slave to the devil and you had no choice in the matter, but as believers, Satan is no longer our master and we have to willingly choose to place ourselves under his authority. We have to re-enslave ourselves, if you will. This is one of the reasons why I think spiritual warfare is overly emphasized in some churches. As I said earlier, we have the unholy trinity of the world, the flesh and the devil. Our flesh has passions that war within us which leads to friendship with the world which places us under the authority of Satan's domain. I don't think it is possible to separate these out and try to say that today we are fighting against our flesh, tomorrow we will be fighting against the temptations of the world and the day after that we will be engaged in spiritual warfare. Unfortunately, all of these work together as a 1-2-3 punch and since they all fight together against us, it is not possible to isolate one area and get freedom. We also have to fight back on all three fronts, which leads us to the next section in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> *But he gives more grace.*

Let me stop right there. This section starts very encouraging—*but he gives more grace*. There we go—that's what we all need, right? We need more grace. Grace is that free thing we don't deserve. Grace is the thing that sustains us in our time of need, and the wonderful truth is that God gives more grace. Or does he? Let's read further.

*Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* God is grace. He dispenses grace with lavishness and abundance. He can never run out of grace but we cannot presume upon his grace. He does not dispense grace like a cheap pop machine. In fact, to the proud person, not only is grace not given, but God actively opposes that person. Please understand that this is not saving grace that we are talking about. This is not a matter of moving in and out of salvation but rather the ebb and flow of sanctifying and sustaining grace. Don't get me wrong—we need this grace. We must have this grace but our pride prevents it from flowing into our lives and causes God to actively oppose us. Don't make the mistake of thinking that pride is only thinking that you are better than others or thinking too highly of yourself. Pride is simply a focus on self. If you hate yourself, you are very prideful person. If you do nice things for others so that people will think you are a nice person, this is deep seated pride. I met with a pastor last week who told me that he was in his mid-fifties before he realized that he was driven by personal success in his ministry. If people "liked" him, if the ministry appeared successful, then he was happy and convinced he was in the center of God's will, but you can imagine how he felt when ministry was not "successful." We all have pride. Pride is the mother of all sin. Our prideful, self-centeredness gives birth to every other sin. This mother of all sins is very fertile and the gestation period is very small—she delivers baby sins in our life in nearly constant succession.

You understand why God must actively oppose our pride, don't you? As James says, our pride is friendship with the world—or we could also say, our friendship with Satan, for that is what it means—is also hatred toward God. If we are a friend of Satan then we are an enemy of God. The issue is authority and submission. If we choose to submit to Satan's authority, then the Lord cannot give us his grace. But some of you are thinking to yourself, "What do you mean? I am no friend of Satan. He is my enemy." True enough. A genuine believer would never willingly submit to Satan's authority and submit to his will. This would be treason against our Lord and Savior. Such an act of defiance could only be called treachery of the highest degree.



sovereign or nation.<sup>3</sup>

How do you feel when you read about people like Aldrich Ames, probably the best known spy from the United States. "The information he supplied to the Soviets led to the compromise of at least 100 CIA agents and to the execution of at least 10. He ultimately gave the Soviet Union the names of every CIA operative working in their country and for this they paid him 4.6 million dollars."<sup>2</sup> We are rightly disgusted by a man like Ames because he betrayed our nation and arguably put all 300 million of our people in danger. He might as well have put a bullet in the head of those ten CIA agents and he did all of it for personal gain. This is high treason.

Here is a legal definition of treason.

In law, treason is the crime that covers acts of betrayal of one's

Now here is a Biblical definition of treason.

In Scripture, treason is the sin that covers acts of betrayal of one's sovereign Lord.

What James is telling us is that our self-centered pride which gives birth to every other sin is no less than treason against our Sovereign Lord. But we go right back to what I said a minute ago. A genuine believer would never knowingly commit treason against our sovereign Lord and submit to the will of Satan. The key word there is knowingly. Unlike Aldrich Ames, we would not knowingly and intentionally seek out the enemy and agree to work for him so that we could gain material benefits in return. But James is telling us that is what we have done and the reason we are not aware of it is because we are *all* deceived *all* of the time. We know that Satan is a liar and a deceiver, but we tend to think of deception in individual acts.

I will use the example of the pastor I met with last week. This man had been living under the lie that his identity was tied up in his definition of ministry success. Thankfully he was finally able to identify that lie and he is no longer deceived by it. This is a classic tactic of Satan. The battle of spiritual warfare is largely a battle of the mind. This is at least part of what Paul meant by 2 Cor. 10:5—we *take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*. This pastor had to take this thought captive, recognize that it was a lie and renounce the lie and accept a new truth.

This is a typical deceptive strategy of Satan. But we must not only think of deception as individual parts of the whole but as the whole itself. Fundamentally, every act of sin is treason

against God because we have chosen to live under the authority and rule of Satan for that period. However, because we live under this great cloud of deception at all times, we are not even fully aware of our treachery. But some of you will object further by saying, OK, I can see how my sin may be an act of treason, but unlike Aldrich Ames, I don't get any personal benefit out of my treason. No one is paying me 4.6 million dollars." But we do get personal benefit out of sin, which is a chief reason we sin. The man who stares at pornography does so, at least in part, because something deep inside of him is stirred by the images. These images tap into his centers of pleasure which feeds back into itself until it becomes an addiction.

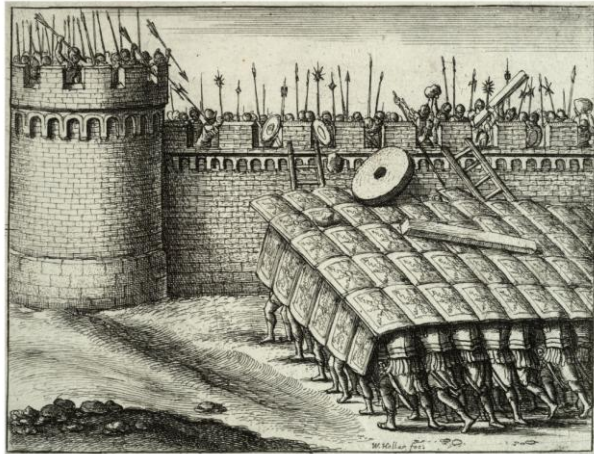
The five year old child who is told by his mother to clean up his toys before dinner gains pleasure by disobeying his mother. That five year old is engaged in a battle for supremacy in the house. The five year old eventually realizes that if he delays obeying his mother's direction, she may just forget about it or intentionally let it go because she doesn't have the energy to fight one more battle with her strong-willed son. Little by little the mother begins to lose the fight for supremacy in the home and the five year old begins to realize he is gaining ground in the battle. He is storming the castle with a very simple siege weapon—ignoring his mother. Most of all, the five year old loves the battle and he especially loves winning the battle. He gains pleasure from it and before long, he is as much addicted to power as the man is addicted to pornography.

When a wife lashes out in anger at her husband, she always feels justified in doing so because she has perceived that she has been wronged in some way. She feels that there is a great miscarriage of justice in her life and the only way she can rectify this imbalance is to respond in anger and frustration. This too, is pleasurable for the wife. She is defending her territory, her right to protect herself and so she demands to be treated in a certain way. She gains pleasure by gaining back ground that she perceives has been lost to her husband. She also develops her own addiction to self-righteousness.

Sin is pleasurable. We all gain personal benefits from our sin that in many ways are far more pleasurable than Ames' 4.6 million dollars. And while all of this treason is happening, we are doing the work of Satan under his authority and we don't realize that we are living under this cloud of deception. Spiritual warfare is not merely individual flaming arrows of the evil one but rather deceiving us into submitting to his will and commands. And there is only one solution to this treachery—*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Can you see why the act of submission to our Lord must come prior to resisting the devil? If the issue of spiritual warfare is an issue of submission to Satan's authority, then the only solution is to again submit ourselves to Christ's authority. Most Christians don't actively engage in spiritual warfare at all but when they do, all of their efforts are aimed at resisting the devil. People attempt to rebuke Satan and pray against his power and take every thing captive and put on their spiritual armor but it is all useless without a full submission to Christ. Here is the problem. Unbeknownst to us, we are living in the enemy's camp. It does not matter if we suit up with our spiritual armor and practice wielding our weapons and dodging the arrows of the enemy because we are still in the enemy's camp! We use our shield to deflect the arrows but don't realize that the enemy has a knife in our back and is stabbing and twisting and turning all day long.

You cannot resist the devil because you are still in his camp. We've got to switch sides first. We have to submit to the Lordship and sovereign rule of Jesus Christ. James further describes this submission in the next three verses. <sup>8</sup> *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* <sup>9</sup> *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* <sup>10</sup> *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.* This is good, old-fashioned repentance. We are double minded spies in the enemy camp and we must return to our master. We must grieve over our treachery, we must mourn over our treason and submit ourselves in full humility to our Lord. The Lord does not want us to submit because he is some power crazed-ogre who demands submission. Remember verse five—*He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.* Jesus is jealous for our fellowship. His love cries out in holy envy for us to come back into his camp. His infinite love yearns for us to return. This is why repentance is so sweet and never to be feared. Repentance is a return into the arms of Christ.



And when we submit to God and resist the devil, we are engaged in offensive spiritual warfare. Full submission to the Lord is like siege weapon against a castle wall. We storm the gates of hell and they cannot possibly prevail against such weapons. Why? Because Satan is powerless to stop them. Look again at the promise in verse six. *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* This is a promise—he will flee from you. We are attacking under the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ and we cannot lose. It is like attacking the wall under the safety of a

tortoise shell formation, like we talked about last week. Stay under the banner and protection of the Lord Jesus, and the offensive battle will move forward. But step out from under this protective formation and you will be instantly pummeled by the flaming arrows of the evil one. Furthermore, when we are engaged in a battle like this as a church, we will stop fighting one another and stand united against our true enemy. This is a war worth fighting and one that we will win.

Rich Maurer  
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<sup>1</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Portland, OR.: Multnomah, 1982), 35,36.

<sup>2</sup> <http://listverse.com/2007/08/24/top-10-famous-spies/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treason>