

Cravings Underlie Conflicts James 3:13-4:3

“Cravings underlie conflicts.” Listen to the wise counselor David Powlison:

I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility (and the accompanying fear, self-pity, hurt, self-righteousness) who really understood and reckoned with their motives. James 4:1-3 teaches that cravings underlie conflicts. Why do you fight? It's not “because my wife/husband...” – it's because of something about you. Couples who see what rules them – cravings for affection, attention, power, vindication, control, comfort, a hassle-free life – can repent and find God's grace made real to them, and then learn how to make peace. (*Seeing with New Eyes*)

That's what we want to think about today – Is there anything ruling us, thus creating conflict? We want repent of such cravings and experience renewal.

I wish I could say that “I have a conflict free life” but that's not true.

- **Story: My first conflict with our kids, Corky's B'bque! It happened when we got on US soil. I had a lot of cravings (control, praise, hassle free moment, comfort and ribs!).**

This life is filled with conflicts.

- Some arise from just a **difference in goals, values, expectations**, etc. These **may not lead to anger and fighting**.
- But James is talking about conflicts that arise from **sin**.

The Story of Scripture shows us what's happened, & what Jesus has done to remedy it:

- (1) **Garden** – no sin, no shame, and no conflict. **Just naked, happy and in harmony!**
- (2) **The Fall** – A consequence of sin: Conflict (3:16); Cain/Abel (Gen 4); etc
- (3) **Jesus**, the Prince of Peace comes to bring peace & reconciliation (2 Cor 5; Eph 2)
- (4) **New Creation** – we will know total shalom.

- But now we have to deal with wounds, alienation, disunity and so on.

Conflict can actually be a great **opportunity** to grow in Christ-likeness; to deal with wounds and heal; to imitate the forgiveness of Jesus; to learn to trust God more.

- Conflict may expose your own sinful habits, and can be a turning point of repentance and change.

Notice this theme: **Sinful Cravings Lead to Conflict**

3:16: Jealousy and selfish ambition leads to **disorder** – verse 16.

- **Strife/disunity/absence of peace** within the community of faith. “Heart” - v. 14

4:1-3: “among you” and “within you.”

- When your passions at war within you; when you have unmet desires, when you're selfish; when you covet, it leads to **quarreling** and **fighting**.

NT Scholar Doug Moo explains the relationship between 4:1-3 w/ 3:13-18:

The common thread running through both paragraphs is **peace**. After the initial rhetorical **question** setting up the issue of wisdom (v. 13a), James calls on his readers to **demonstrate** the reality of their wisdom in humility and good works (v. 13b). This leads into the **contrast between two kinds of wisdom that dominates the paragraph**. The wrong kind is characterized by envy, selfishness, and disorder (vv. 14–16)—the opposite of peace. The right kind of wisdom, on the other hand, is above all “**peace loving**” (the first specific “fruit of wisdom” listed in v. 17). And James underscores this virtue with his concluding blessing on **peacemakers** (v. 18). **The absence of peace, on the other hand, is obviously the main issue in 4:1–3**. The community is marked by quarrels and arguments—some of them perhaps even violent. And James traces these disputes to the characteristics of false wisdom that he pointed out in 3:14: envy (v. 2) and selfishness (v. 3).

So let’s look at it in three parts:

Initial Question About Wisdom (3:13)

[The Contrast of Two wisdoms: false/true, heavenly/hellish, spiritual/demonic, above/below]

Characteristics of False Wisdom: Sinful Cravings & Relational Conflicts (3:14-16; 4:1-3)

Characteristics of True Wisdom: Peace and Other Godly Fruits (3:16-18)

I. Initial Question about Wisdom (3:13)

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

Like “faith,” James says that we should demonstrate our “wisdom.”

- “Show me your faith by your works” = “Show me your wisdom by your works”
- **Here’s something for my Seniors: “My Fair Lady”**

Audrey Hepburn as “Eliza Doolittle”

Make me no undying vow. Show me now!

Sing me no song! Read me no rhyme!

Don't waste my time, Show me!

Don't talk of June, Don't talk of fall!

Don't talk at all! Show me!

Never do I ever want to hear another word.

There isn't one I haven't heard. [I was around Seniors half of last week in FLA!]

- **James is after a “show me” faith.**
- **He is interested in the fruit of wisdom.**
 - It’s “wisdom in working clothes,” lived in everyday life.
- “Wisdom is proved right [justified] by her actions” (**Matt 11:19**)
- **Do you think you are wise?** Then you should display it by “humility, and good works.”
- **He takes wisdom out of the realm of academic philosophy, and views it practically.**
- **The wise person is humble/meek and does good works.**
- **This is how you recognize wisdom!**

“Meekness of wisdom” – **The wise person is the meek person.**

- The meek person submits to God’s Word, and lives for God’s glory.
- **Meekness is not weakness!**
 - Numbers 12 – Moses, “meekest man in all the earth.” (12:3)
 - He was not a weak man.
 - He needed 70 elders to help him with his work! “How much help do you need?” “About 70 men.” That’s how much work he was doing - the work of 70 men!!
- Ferguson **adds**: “**One of the things that marks a meek person is that people are drawn to them because they are sensitive to the Lord.**”
- **Jesus**: “**Come to Me, because I am meek, and you will find rest.**”
- **The meek are welcoming.** You find **a certain rest** when you are with them.
- **Would anyone dream of coming to you if they have a problem?**
- Now, this idea pops back up in verse 18 – the **peacemaker**.

“Good Conduct”

- That’s not a very good translation because it makes us think of getting **gold stars** for behaving well & not breaking rules. It’s more than that.
- “**Calligraphy**” is derived from this word adjective “good”
- **Attractive, beautiful handwriting (cf., 1 Pet 2:12)**
- It means being good in the way Jesus was good – **showing off the beauty of God’s grace to others.**
- **The wise person has a spiritual attractiveness about his or her life.**

True wisdom is lived out in a life of meekness, and in a life of beautiful deeds.

Characteristics of False Wisdom:

Sinful Cravings & Relational Conflicts (3:14-16; 4:1-3)

A. Sinful Cravings (14-15)

14: Bitterness and selfish ambition are **contrary to humility.**

“**bitter jealousy**” – **To want something that is not yours.** (Gal 5:20)

- **Jealousy kills our joy and prevents us from loving others.**
- It’s an inward, self-centered heart problem.

Some examples of jealous that kills our joy and keeps us from genuine love (ht: Piper)

- A friend gets married and you don’t; you’ve been single much longer. It could make you resentful.
- You have trouble with your child, and your friend doesn’t. That can create all kinds of issues in your heart and in your relationships.
- Or you’re second string on the basketball team, while the smart elec kid starts. That may create pouting, fighting, etc.
- You have a friend who makes a lot of money with little effort, while you work yourself to death for little.

- You're a pastor and you see other churches growing while yours doesn't; this sort of thing creates all kinds of ministerial jealousy.
- Someone has better looks and a better shape than you... you feel envious...

There are so many reasons we can be jealous.

- **But to overcome jealousy, we must love Jesus' glory more than our own.**
- **We must seek to find our satisfaction in Christ above all things.**
- **We must say, "Jesus is better" — than marriage, trouble-free kids, sports glory, money, success, or physical beauty.**

"Selfish Ambition" (*eritheia*) only occurs here in the NT.

- Moo: Aristotle, uses it to describe the narrow partisan zeal of politicians.
- Often a "party spirit" can create disunity in the church, and among churches.
- **There's a difference in a "holy ambition" — doing something for the glory of God and the good of others, and a "selfish ambition" — doing something for the glory of self.**
- **"Billy Graham's death, virtual broke the internet!" He was as famous. But Billy Graham never wanted to be famous. He wanted to make Jesus famous.**
- **That's the kind of ambition we should have, to make much of Jesus, and to care about the good of others.**

"Do not boast and be false to the truth" — you have nothing to boast about.

"in your hearts" (14) and "passions at war within you" (4:1-3)

- The battle is in the **heart**.
- 4:1 — passions at war within you (cf., 1 Pet 2:12)
 - **The Village Movie** — that battle is in "here" (the heart).
- 4:2 — you desire and do not have
- 4:2b — you covet and cannot obtain.
- 4:2c — you're prayerless, or when you pray it's selfish 4:3.

Sinful cravings involve desiring sinful things, or even desiring *good things too much*.

Detecting an Inordinate Desire (Dr. Robert Jones)

- Does it consume you? Do you dwell on it continually?
- Are you willing to sin to get it?
- Do you sin when you don't get it?

We call this idolatry.

"Inflicting pain on others is one of the surest signs that an idol is ruling our hearts." (Ken Sande)

You can't just say "no" to these desires, you have to "replace them" w/ godly desires.

15: Source: It is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic

- True wisdom comes from above – **it’s a gift of God.**
- False wisdom comes from below, the ***world, the flesh and the devil*** (1 Jn)
 - A bad tree leads to bad fruit.
 - Seek the wisdom that comes from God — fill your mind/heart with Scripture.

B. Relational Conflicts (4:16, 4:1-3)

16: “Disorder”

- **James longs for unity among the Xian community, just as Paul and other NT writers.**

“For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.” **(2 Cor 12:20)**

- **Jesus prayed for unity in John 17.**
- **If people’s cravings control them, then it will divide churches, marriages, and other relationships.**
- **Some times conflict doesn’t lead to attack response (4:1-3), but another wrong response: escape (ie, denial, flight, avoidance)**
- **But both “flight or “fight” responses are expressions of “disorder.”**

16: “Every Vile Practice”

- **Just about anything can happen when persona is operating out of selfishness and jealousy.**

4:1-3: The Absence of Peace: “Quarrels and Flights”

- **If you don’t deal with the sinful cravings, then it will lead to a number of problems:**
 - Physical problems
 - Restlessness
 - Clouded prayers/Communion with God
 - Divine judgment
 - Enslavement to the cravings
 - ***Quarrels and Fights with others***

Thom Rainer, *25 Silly Things Church Members Fight Over*

It began as an innocuous Twitter survey. But then it blew up.(I’ll share 11 of them)

- 1 Argument over the appropriate length of the worship pastor’s beard.
- 2 Fight over whether or not to build a children’s playground or to use the land for a cemetery.
- 3 A deacon accusing another deacon of sending an anonymous letter, and deciding to settle the matter in the parking lot.
- 4 A church dispute of whether or not to install restroom stall dividers in the women’s restroom.
- 5 A church argument and vote to decide if a clock in the worship center should be removed.

- 6 A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer.
- 7 A dispute over whether the worship leader should have his shoes on during the service.
- 8 Two different churches reported fights over the type of coffee. In one of the churches, they moved from Folgers to a stronger Starbucks brand. In the other church, they simply moved to a stronger blend. Members left the church in the latter example.
- 9 Major conflict when the youth borrowed a crockpot that had not been used for years.
- 10 An argument on whether the church should allow deviled eggs at the church meal.
- 11 *Some church members left the church because one church member hid the vacuum cleaner from them. It resulted in a major fight and split.*

Rainer: “These issues are silly; many are absurd. They are really great distractions from the Great Commission.”

- Amen. **These conflicts are silly, shameful, and distracting.**
- **Such spats arise from various sinful desires.**
- **Sin doesn’t lead to peace with God or peace with self or peace with others.**

We do well to remember Paul’s counsel to the Philippians:

Phil 4:2-3

“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

- 1. He speaks directly to them! I can imagine their reaction as this letter was read aloud!**
 - **But Paul isn’t being mean.**
 - **He loves these ladies. He loves the church in Philippi.**
 - **It’s because he loves them that he seeks unity.**
- 2. Then he tells them to “have the same mind” (“agree in the Lord”), this is an application of Phil 2:2, 2:5 - the same word actually. It means “to think the same thing.”**
 - **They should unite in the gospel and in what’s important.**
 - **They can agree “in the Lord” — in his power, in his grace.**
- 3. Next, he calls for “intervention.” “Help these women” he says. Don’t let this go on!**
- 4. Finally, he says why they should be reconciled:**
 - **They are genuine sisters in the faith. “Names in the book of life”**
 - **They are genuine servants in the church. “Labored side by side”**

This is important instruction. We can and should be united in Christ.

- **But won’t have the same mind if we don’t deal with our hearts first.**
- **And one more thing: Despite the dysfunction of the church, the NT writers never cease to emphasize the glory and centrality of it.**

Cravings lead to conflicts....

Characteristics of True Wisdom:

Peace and Other Godly Fruits (3:17)

James's list resembles Paul's "fruit of the Spirit" passage (Gal. 5:22–23).

There's also a great resemblance with the **Beatitudes**.

All three lists describe the mature Christian.

First "Pure"

- The word *pure* (*hagnos*) denotes innocence/blamelessness.
- We aren't pure, but Jesus makes us pure, and by his grace we live a pure life.
- **The 7 traits that follow are specific dimensions of this godly purity. (Moo)**
- **We could put them in three groups.**
 - **The first group beings with the same letter, and similar ending in Greek**
 - **The second group share a common feature with the word "full"**
 - **The third group also has alliteration in Gk.**

These displays of wisdom are done within the context of relationships.

- **It's easy to be "peaceable" and "gentle" when you are by yourself!**
- **But in the context of the church it can be a challenge.**

The church is not a club where you come for once a week and gather information; but a community to which you belong.

Group 1: "Peaceable" (or "Peace-Loving"), "Gentle," and "Open to Reason"

"Peace loving" is esp important, as it heads the list of specific virtues, and is picked up again in v. 18.

- OT often connects wisdom with peace.
- "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." (Prov. 3:17).

This Person...

(1) can overlook minor offenses;

(2) seeks reconciliation;

(3) can speak with grace and love.

A peace-loving person applies verses like these:

- "A man's wisdom gives him patience, it is his glory to overlook an offense (Prov 19:11)
- Reconciliation: "Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you" (Col 3:13)
- "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom 12:18)

"Gentle," Open to Reason" - These are probably subordinate to "peaceable" (Moo)

"Gentle" is translated "considerate" by some.

- It means **"non-combative," or defensive.**
- **A qualification for pastors – "not violent but gentle."**
- **Jesus** of course was known for this.
- **Titus 3:2** – believers are to "avoid fighting, and practice gentleness."
- **He tells Timothy not to quarrel, to correct opponents with gentleness (2 Tim 2:24-25)**
- **Prov 15:1** - "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

“Open to reason” means to “defer to others” when appropriate.

- This person is willing to get along with others.

These are traits of peacemakers: gentle, warm, considerate, and able to yield to the other.

Group 2: “full of mercy and good fruit”

“Mercy”

- **Jesus** spoke often of the importance of showing mercy (Matt. 5:7; 23:23; Luke 10:37).
- James emphasized it previously in chapter 2 (2:8–13).
- **Mercy is involved, not indifferent to human needs.**
- **Mercy forgives in light of God’s forgiveness.**

“Good fruit”— Our fruit reveals who we are; that we are in Christ. We are attached to the Vine.

I think of a guy like **Barnabas** here.

- **Acts 11:23-24:** was a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith...”
- He took Paul when the others were suspicious of him. He took Mark after there was a dispute with Mark and Paul.
- **4:36** (son of encouragement) sold a field and brought the proceeds to the apostles.
- **He was full of good fruit: generosity, encouragement, peacemaking, etc.**
- **We need more Barnabi!**

Group 3: “Impartial and Sincere”

“Impartial” – This word is only used here in the NT. And there’s some difficulty in translating it.

- It carries the idea of “undoubting,” “not making distinctions,” “impartial” (NIV; cf. KJV; NRSV; ESV TEV), or for being “undivided” – that is, in **loyalty to God.**
- **Not double-minded.** Thus the CSB translates it “unwavering” (CSB) as James probably has in mind something like being “undivided” not double-minded.
- This also fits with the next word....

“Sincere” – It means “not playing a part” – being real.

- **We must not be double-minded, hypocritical, but sincere, honest, people of integrity.**
 - **So many sports scandals in one week – the Russian Curler used performance enhancing drugs! Curling! (USA proved you don’t need PED’s, just a great a mustache!). Then the FBI’s investigation of the NCAA...**
 - **Let us be sincere, honest, and repent of hypocrisy and under-handed ways.**
- **The wise person is stable, trustworthy, and transparent.**

These are the fruits of true wisdom.

What contrast with self-ambition, envy, and jealousy!

Blessed Are the Peacemakers (3:18)

James returns to what seems to be the big concern: **peace in the fellowship.**

- This is a great transitional verse, underlining the dominant concern of the verses before it, and preparing us for the discussion on conflict in the following verses.

He gives a Proverbial statement, true wisdom produces righteousness and peace.

- Righteousness here is practical righteousness; it means that which pleases God.
- **Remember 1:20: righteousness cannot be produced in the context of anger (cf, 1:20); but here we see that righteousness grows in the context of peace.**

God made us to flourish in a context of peace.

- When people aren't full of selfish ambition and envy, but are in harmony, great fruits of righteousness are displayed.

Our responsibility is to work to “cultivate peace” (CSB) so that righteousness will be produced.

- “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9).
- **“Peacemakers breathe grace” (Ken Sande)**

God desires peace in our homes, churches, and other relationships.

- **He wants to use us as instruments of peace and reconciliation.**
- Let's pursue it, as Paul says in **Ephesians 4:1-3**. Be eager to maintain it.

This is what Jesus has done for us; He has brought us peace with God.

- **He has given us this ministry of being peacemakers now.**
- **And we do this work by God's grace until Jesus makes all things new, ushering in total shalom! Where the Lion will dwell with the Lamb.**

Are you at peace?

- **Until you are resting in Christ, you won't be able to make peace with those that you have a conflict with.**
- **“Bear with each other and forgiven whatever grievance you may have against one another... Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Col 3:13, 15)**
 - **The peace of Christ ruling in your heart...**
 - **Confess sin that is disrupting your communion with God.**
 - **There is freedom in confession of sin.**

Prov 28:13 “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

Are you seeking to make peace?

- **Overlooking, or forgiving, or reconciling?**
- **Are you considering “the log in your eye” as you attempt to make peace?**
- **Are you serving as a peacemaker?**

In short, we keep looking to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

He is the embodiment of wisdom.

He exemplified all these fruits of true wisdom.

- He was the pure lamb of God**
- He was the ultimate Peace-maker**
- He was the Gentle Savior**
- He was full of mercy**
- He was full of good fruit — he went about doing good**
- He was impartial and sincere — no hypocrisy in him.**

In Christ, we pursue these qualities.

Now we turn our attention to the Table to reflect on the ultimate display of peacemaking, as Jesus died to give us peace with God, to reconcile us to one another..

May his love melt our hearts and cause us to live lives of wisdom.

May His love give us new cravings! Holy Cravings!