

Why Are We So Angry • James 4:1-2

Riots ravaged the city of Los Angeles after police officers were acquitted following the Rodney King beating trial. Television cameras focused on King and he asked a simple question: “Why can’t we all just get along?”

That is a very good question. Why *can’t* we all just get along? Men and women who vow to love each other for the rest of their lives end up fighting until one is murdered. Parents and children argue as if they hate each other when you would think they should love each other most of all. Even Christians who wear the name of Jesus Christ sometimes gather into churches where they bicker and battle until hatred prevails and God is dishonored.

After thousands of years of working at human relations, it seems our world is no better off now than we have ever been in terms of relational harmony. Some would say it is worse now than at any time in history.

Why can’t we all just get along? Or, in the New Testament words of James 4:1, “*What causes fights and quarrels among you?*” That question is important for many reasons. First, it applies to every one of us. Next, God doesn’t want us to fight. And finally, our fights on the outside tell us a great deal about what kind of people we are on the inside.

James, the brother of Jesus, answers the question with a question in James 4:1 when he asks, “*Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?*” The obvious intended answer to the question is “Yes!”

Everyone has internal desires. As Christians we have desires that are bad because of sin and

desires that are good because of God. At times it seems as if these desires are battling each other with flame-throwers. St Paul described his own struggle in Romans 7:21 saying, “*When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*”

We all have to decide between good and evil, between purity and immorality, between violence and peace, between the words of God and the ways of sin. But don’t get so focused on the conflicting desires that we miss the most important part of the point—that the battle is inside! Fights and quarrels and anger are not primarily about circumstances on the outside; they are about what is going on inside us.

Too many people miss the point. We have all heard some angry person shout, “You make me so angry!” That is just not true. Another person cannot make us angry unless we choose to be angry. The decision comes from the inside not the outside. Some people in the same circumstances don’t become angry while others become wildly angry without provocation. In other words, the reason people become angry, fight and quarrel is because of what is inside of them. It’s true for me; it’s true for you. It’s true for everyone. The battle is on the inside.

Not getting all we want on the outside causes fights and quarrels. In James 4:2 it is explained this way: “*You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.*”

There is an ugly progression described here. It is a progression of greed. To one degree or another, we all do it. A person thinks up something he wants. He imagines what it would be

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like to get it. He plans his steps to acquire it. He begins to convince himself that it is rightfully his; he deserves it; he'll get it for sure. Then something happens and he doesn't get what he wants. He feels cheated, becomes angry, blames other people and lashes out to hurt others. He may even kill them if he doesn't get control. He schemes to take what he wants away from whoever has it because they have what he thinks is his. Relationships are ruined resulting in fights and quarrels. He becomes bitter and miserable. It makes little difference what it is a person wants. It may be a job, car, house, wife, husband, baby, friends, health, recognition, success or happiness.

Let's take happiness as an example. People decide that they want to be happy. They define exactly what happiness will look like for them. When their expectations are not met they begin a downward spiral into sin, anger, self-pity and bad relationships. They feel cheated. They blame God, society, family, co-workers and everyone else.

So everything begins on the inside. We are not controlled from the outside. What a tragedy when failure to get what we want on the outside is allowed to change us into persons who fight and quarrel and are filled with hostility, violence and greed.

The third answer on James' list is the failure to ask God: "*You do not have, because you do not ask God.*" It may seem as if this doesn't quite fit on the list but it's the most important of all. Be careful not to misunderstand what God is teaching here. God is not suggesting that we are unhappy because we didn't ask to be happy. This is not an invitation to simply pray for wealth, health, power and success. God is not an

Aladdin's Lamp to be rubbed in order to make all our wishes come true. James 4:2 is saying that lives are filled with anger, fights and quarrels because people don't pray and make God Number One in their lives.

When God is excluded from the inside of our lives, everything starts to go wrong. Sin is like

a virus that takes over one piece of life at a time until it becomes impossible to control. We lack the inner strength from God to cope with the difficulty of external circumstances. We fight to control our lives because God is not in control of our lives.

The opposite of this is the Christian who regularly submits control of the inside to God. When God controls our lives on the inside the battle against temptation is won. When God's strength fills our souls, outside circumstances aren't so important. When we pray and trust God to run our lives we no longer need to fight and quarrel because we leave the outcome to the Lord.

When we try to rule our own lives we always get ourselves into trouble. There are always battles that tear us apart. We get upset when things on the outside don't go our way. We seldom or never pray. But when Christ sits on the throne of our lives everything is different. His power overcomes the evil on our insides. His peace and strength help us deal with the disappointments and delights that surround us. We are in constant conversation with him as the King of our lives.

In one sense the kingship of Christ in our lives is a one-time decision, but in another sense it is a day-to-day decision and relationship. It is possible to have had Jesus on the throne yester-

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day but to push him off and take back the throne ourselves today. There is nothing better than Jesus ruling our lives as our Savior and King. There is nothing worse than trying to save ourselves and rule our own lives.

I invite you right now to take a look into your own soul. Who is on the throne? If it is Jesus, never rebel against his rule. But, if you are ruling your own life, decide right now to make a change. Pray! (“*You do not have, because you do not ask God.*”) Invite Jesus to rule in your life 100%! Tell him you sign over all decisions to him. Promise him you will do whatever he says. Choose Jesus as your King! May he be on the throne of your life!

Jesus, thank you for caring. Thank you for loving us. You know first-hand whether you rule in each of our lives. Hear us as we pray. For those who are not yet Christians, come into their lives in response to their faith. For all who ask, become the King on the thrones of our lives. We humbly pray in your name. Amen.

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