COME NEAR TO GOD

James 4:1-12

Key Verse: 4:7-8

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

When we have a fever or cough, it is evidence that we are sick. There must be possible causes of this symptom, whether it is inflammation or a virus. Our immune system accurately identifies these causes and eliminates them.

Today's passage begins with a ‘fight and quarrel’ among God's children. This doesn’t just happen. Fight and quarrel is a superficial problem like symptoms of a disease. Therefore, James touches the root cause of this problem and gives a solution in today’s passage.

Look at verse 1. What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? James says that fights and quarrels come from your desires that battle within you. Your desires produce strife deep with your conscience, and it manifests itself as fights among brothers and sisters. In James chapter 1, he expressed this desire as an evil desire. 1:14-15 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. This evil desire is like a seed. It grows and conceives sin, and this sin gives birth to death. The book of 1 John describes this evil desire more specifically.1John2:16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. In KJV, it says the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Human beings were created with a holy desire for the glory of God. But in Genesis 3, Satan tempted Eve that she can become like God. When she did not resist the temptation, she became seized by her desires and eventually sinned against God. / King Ahab in the Old Testament was one of the powerful kings of northern Israel. An anecdote from the Bible revealed his evil desire. King Ahab wanted a vineyard from a man named Naboth, so he asked for a deal. But Naboth did not sell it for any price, because the vineyard was the property he had inherited from his ancestors. In his evil desire to own the vineyard, King Ahab used false witnesses to accuse of Naboth and kill him and his sons, and eventually took possession of the vineyard he wanted. / King David was captured by the lust of the eyes. In order to obtain a beautiful woman Bathsheba, David put her husband Uriah, his loyalist, to death with his evil plan. / The fatality of evil desire becomes clearer in the Ten Commandments. (Ex20:13-17) 13“You shall not murder. / 14“You shall not commit adultery. / 15“You shall not steal. / 16“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. / 17“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” All of the 5th and 10th commandments have to do with this evil desire. Verse 2 tells how evil desire can lead to quarrels, fights, and even murder. 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

You don’t get what you wanted because you don't pray to God. You don’t pray to God because you know that this is not God's will but your own evil desire. The reason you don't get answers even if you pray is because you ask God with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

At that time, most of the scattered believers had to bear external persecution and temptations. However, some believers were promoting conflicts in the church while pursuing the evil desire of lust and pride. James rebukes them in a very strong way. Look at verse 4. 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Here, “adulterous people” is a metaphorical expression, referring to those who love the world more than God. If we have a desire to get anything that belongs to someone, we should naturally get closer to and make friends with them. Likewise, to get things like the world's money and pleasures out of the evil desire, you have to meet the demands of the world and compromise with it. But the closer you get to the world, the farther away you are from God. In the end, you become enemies of God. See verse 4 again. We need to know what James warns to us. Apostle John also said in 1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. God created us in His image and wants us to fellowship together. In order to be with humans who had left God, he Himself has been humbled and came to this world in human form. In John chapter 15:13-15, Jesus no longer called his disciples servants. Instead he has called them friends. Indeed, he laid down his life for his friends. He lives with us in the HS. We desperately need friends in life. In the most difficult times, who can be with me and help me? Essentially, the Lord is our friend. We pray that we do not become friends of the world by chasing after evil desires, but that we become friends of the Lord.

Look at verse 5. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? God is a fiercely jealous lover. Without affection and love, there is no envy and jealousy. God loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son. However, if we forsake our love for God, make friends with the world, and lose our hearts to material things and pleasures, God is envious. In the second of the Ten Commandments, God said to his people: Ex20:4-6 4 You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. God does not want anything to be between God and us. He wants us to be His holy brides and beloved children forever.

James developed his argument that the cause of conflicts is evil desires for the world, which makes us befriend with the world and eventually become enemies of God. So what does he say we should do?

First, humble yourselves before God. Look at verse 6. 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. To be humble means to lay down your evil desire and turn to God. Then God, who is rich in grace, gives us assurance that God is with us and freedom from sin. God’s grace is deep and wide, different from the momentary satisfaction and comfort that the world gives.

Second, submit yourselves to God and resist the devil. Look at verse 7. 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Here the word ‘submit’ means to “put oneself under the authority, admonition or control of.” We may be allergic to the word ‘submit’. We don’t want to submit to anything or anyone. But if you believe that your life depends on with something or someone or if you are preoccupied with something and you eagerly seek for it and rely on it, you actually submit to it. It might be money, lust, or pride or success or a person, even theory. Unfortunately, none of these does guarantee your salvation and your eternal life, rather it will enslave you and take you away from God. So let us submit to God our Creator and our heavenly Father, who can take responsibility for our future and our salvation and let us obey His Word.

See verse 7 again. Devil’s aim is to oppose God and destroy our relationship with God and with other believers. So resist the Devil. To resist means to take the firm stand against the Devil and to hate and actively fight against him. Many people know that the temptations of money and lust are dangerous, but they do not resist them. Joseph in the Bible is a good example who resisted Potiphar's wife’s temptation, in saying that “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”(Genesis 39:9) Joseph submitted to God and resisted the Devil. God was with him, and used him to save many lives. In Ephesians 4:27, Apostle Paul said, “and do not give the devil a foothold” And Ephesians 6:10-18 explains how to resist the devil. 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Here, the truthful Word of God and prayer become more critical to Christians living in today's spiritual warfare. I pray that we may draw closer to the Holy Scriptures and do our best to pray to God.

Third, come near to God. Let’s look at verse 8. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Luke 15 tells the story of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. A father had two sons. One day the second son claimed an inheritance from his father and he left his father and went to a distant country. There he lives a free and wild life, squandering all his money. Leaving his father, he lives as he pleases, but in the end his body and soul are wracked with sin. It is only then that he realizes deeply that how good it was with his father. Then he goes back to his father. But while he is still a long way off and when the father sees his son returning, he is filled with compassion for him and he runs to his son and throws his arms around him and kisses him. And he slaughters the fattened calf for the huge party, put a ring on his son’s finger, put the best clothes on him and new shoes on his feet. The Bible says it all. It echoes all the times for the sinners to come near to God just as they are. I pray that we may repent of our love for the world and our sinful deeds and come near to our God. Then God will come near to us and becomes our God and we live together forever.

Fourth, do not slander one another. Look at verses 11-12. 11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor? We should not slander one another. This is because we are law-keepers, not judges. It is God who made the law and judges whether we keep the law or not. We are only obligated to keep the law. Therefore, we should only humbly keep God's law, not judge or slander others.

In Conclusion, the battles within me and conflicts within God’s community are fundamentally derived from my evil desires. If we dissect this desire, it boils down to where our love is headed, to the world or to God. Becoming friends with the world for our evil desires is the process of becoming enemies of God. These days there are so many temptations that take over our hearts today. Therefore, we have to make a clear and firm stand as God’s children. We must submit to God and resist the devil. We should strive to come near to God through His Word and the prayer of the spirit.