



# HG22: James 5/6

## *Submission To God (or War Of The Worlds!)*

James 4:1-12

### Home Group Sermon Notes

1st November 2009 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** Many people don't realise that Bob Dylan became a Christian in the late 70's and wrote a number of overtly Christian songs with titles such as: 'Saved,' 'Property of Jesus,' 'I believe in you' and 'Shot of Love.' They caused a huge stir when they were released, especially when, on tour in the early 1980's, he would only play his Christian material. Now, I recognise his voice and musical style is an acquired taste, but his lyrics are hugely doctrinal and theological – certainly on a par with the best that Wesley, Kendrick and others have to offer. There's no way he could have wrote the songs he did without a having personal relationship with Jesus. One of his songs was called 'Gotta Serve Somebody' and Bob Dylan could well have been reading the book of James when he wrote these words:

*You may be an ambassador to England or France, You may like to gamble; you might like to dance,  
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world, You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed, You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, But you're gonna have to serve somebody.*

We don't always like the idea of serving someone, do we? Somehow the father of lies has convinced us that the idea of being a servant is beneath us. We don't have to serve anyone. We can do just as we please and live to please ourselves. But that leads to anarchy and we'll be thinking a bit more about that on Remembrance Sunday. However, not only are there wars between nations, there are also wars of one kind or another in almost every area of life. James discusses the theme of war in this passage and explains how there are three wars going on around us. He also tells us how these wars can be stopped.

**1) We are at War with Each Other (vs1a, 11-12):** Vs1b: *What causes fights and quarrels among you?* asks James. When we look at the early churches we discover they had their fair share of disagreements. The Corinthian church were competing with each other in public meetings and even suing each other in court (1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 14:23-40). The Galatian church were guilty of 'biting and devouring' one another (Galatians 5:15). Paul even had to warn the Ephesian church about spiritual unity (Ephesians 4:1-6). The Jerusalem church wanted to excommunicate Peter because he dared to spend time, energy (and money) on mission to the Gentiles (Acts 15). James draws attention to several disagreements in his own letter: *Class Wars*, 2:1-9; *Employment Wars* 5:1-6; *Church Wars* 1:19-20; 3:13-18; *Personal Wars* 4:11-12.

I'm glad that we at Emmanuel don't fight and quarrel amongst ourselves! I mean, we would never let pride or envy come between us would we? We are so firmly rooted in scripture that it would be impossible for us to quarrel or disagree with each other ... right! We are no different to the early church, or, sadly, any other church for that matter. There's always disagreement in churches, whether it's to do with Music; Liturgy; Length of Services; Style of Sermons ... it saddens me when Christians seem to be at odds with their brothers and sisters, while the world watches and concludes 'what a load of hypocrites! No wonder Jesus prayed that the church *'may be one so that the world may believe that you have sent me'* (John 17:21). But why is it that we are at war with one another? We belong to the same heavenly Father; we trust the same Saviour; we have the same Holy Spirit within us. It doesn't seem to make sense does it? James answered this question by explaining the second war that is going on:

**2) We are at War with Ourselves (vs1b-3):** Vs1b: *Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?* The war in the heart causes the wars in the church! James recognises that we are people trying to live in agreement with the Holy Spirit within us, yet still feeling the desires of our earthly nature. The result is division among God's people and leads to wrong actions. Vs2: *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.* "Thou shalt not covet" is the last of the Ten Commandments, but breaking this one command can make us break all of the other nine! Covetousness, or selfishness, can make a person commit murder, tell lies, dishonour his parents, commit adultery and, in one way or another, violate all of God's moral laws. Selfish desires are dangerous because they do not edify, nor do they build up, the kingdom of God.

Have you ever noticed that people who are at war with themselves are always unhappy people? They never seem to enjoy life do they? Instead of being thankful for the blessings they *do* have, they complain about the blessings they *do not* have. They can't get along with other people because they are always envying others for what they have and do. They always seem to be looking for that 'magic something' that will change their lives, when the real problem is within their own hearts. This leads to wrong praying vs3: *When you ask, you do not receive; because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.* The purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth. Instead of seeking God's will, we tell God what He is supposed to do; and we get angry with Him if He doesn't obey. This anger at God eventually spills over and we get angry with God's people. It's never pleasant being on the receiving end of someone's anger. More than one church split has been caused by Christians who take their frustrations with God out on the members of the church. Many a church or family problem would be solved if people would only look into their own hearts and see the battles raging there. If there is war on the inside, there will ultimately be war on the outside. James stated the reason we are at war with ourselves, and consequently with each other, is because:

**3) We are at War with God (vs4-5):** It seems to me that the root cause of every war, internal and external, is rebellion against God. It is – think about it. At the beginning of creation, even though God said that it was good, sin came into the world, and this led to conflict. 1 John 3:4 tells us that sin is lawlessness and rebellion against God. But how does a believer declare war against God? James says we do this by being friendly with God's enemies and names three enemies that we must not fraternize with:

**The World (vs4):** *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.* By the 'world' James means, of course, human society apart from God. And whilst comparing friendship with the world to adultery might sound pretty severe to our modern ears, Jewish Christians fully understood this picture of 'spiritual adultery' be-

cause the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea used this comparison when rebuking Judah for adopting the sinful ways of the other nations, and worshipping their gods (Jeremiah 3:1-5; Ezekiel 2:3; Hosea 1-2). The church is the Bride of Christ (Romans 7:4) and ought to be faithful to Him. Adultery occurs in a marriage when one of the partner's looks outside of the marriage relationship to get their needs met. A third party is added to the relationship that doesn't belong. In the same way, 'spiritual adultery' occurs when Christians look outside their relationship with God to get their needs met. A third party, the world, is invited into the relationship. But it's not as if we consciously betray God is it? I mean, we don't intend to be unfaithful to Him - it happens in subtle ways and over time. When our leisure time greatly exceeds our time given to the Lord; when we rarely read/study God's Word; when we let pride rule our lives; when we let envy control us; when we adopt the ways of the world; when we don't guard our tongue in what we say (Thumper and Bambi) ... in all these ways and more, we demonstrate our unfaithfulness. *You're gonna have to serve somebody, Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, But you're gonna have to serve somebody.* The second enemy James named was:

**The Flesh (vs1,5):** When we become a Christian we receive a new nature, but the old nature isn't removed/reformed. This is the battle within: *"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want"* (Galatians 5:17). Living for the flesh means grieving the Holy Spirit who lives within us, vs5: *"Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely?"* Just as the world is the enemy of God the Father, so the flesh is the enemy of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit within jealously guards our relationship to God, and is grieved when we sin against God's love. Living to please the old nature means to declare war against God (Romans 8:6-7).

**4) Making our Peace with God (vs6-10):** As Winston Church remarked on the eve of the 'Battle of Britain,' *"Our task is not only to win the battle but to win the war."* And that's so true isn't it? James gives us five suggestions as to how we can do this:

**Receive God's Grace (vs6):** *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* God opposes the proud; the self-sufficient ones who don't need Him; those who think they can make it on their own; those who fail to recognize the blessings they enjoy come from Him. And he gives grace to the humble; the meek; those who willingly and gladly serve Him. James suggests that we need 'more grace' vs6. *God gives grace to the humble,* to those who admit their helplessness and look to God to meet their needs. Instead of continuing in a course of independence, arrogantly refusing to admit the impossibility of a satisfying life apart from God, they begin to walk in dependence upon Him for everything. God hates arrogance, and independent living. That is why he *'opposes the proud'*. He forces us to choose between the world and Himself. *'You're gonna have to serve somebody.'*

**Submit to God (vs7a):** To submit is a military term which means, 'to get in proper rank.' When a private acts like a general: there is going be trouble! When we desire our own pleasures: there is going be trouble! When we are not putting God first: there is going be trouble! If there is any area of life kept back from God, there will always be battles. Submission, as a Christian, is not the result of God inflicting excruciating pain on us so that we finally give in to his will, submission is an act of will; it is saying, "Not my will but yours be done." Unconditional surrender is the only way to complete victory.

**Resist the Devil (vs7b):** *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* Resisting does not mean yelling and screaming at the devil and telling him to go away. The Devil flees because our resisting means God is drawing near to us, and the Devil can't stand in the presence of God. Light and darkness cannot dwell in the same place. The Devil will only get to you if you get too far away from God.

**Draw near to God (vs8):** In vs8a James tells us what we must do to enjoy the grace promised in vs6. We must confess our sins and ask for His cleansing. *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."* James is reminding us that however close we have been drawn to the world, we have been drawn equally as far away from God. It is we, and not God, who has created that distance. In vs8b: *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."* James clearly indicates that a return to a close communion with God demands a change in conduct and that contact with the world leaves us polluted. James does not want us to be a bunch of depressed, miserable Christians, but he does want us to be so moved by our own sins that we will not continue to wallow in them. God graciously draws near to us when we deal with the sin in our lives that keeps Him at a distance. He will not share us with anyone else. And when we as the body of Christ commit to draw closer to God, we draw closer to each other and don't, Ephesians 4:27: *give a foothold to the devil.*

**Humble yourselves before God (vs9-10):** People have a tendency to treat sin too lightly, even to laugh about it, and so James almost reprimands them: *'change your laughter to mourning'* to enable them to understand the seriousness of this call to repentance. We will never turn away from sin until we see it for what it is - an offence against God - something that breaks his heart. David came to this realization in his life after his sin with Bathsheba, for in Psalm 51:3-4 he says, *"For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done what is evil in Your sight."* It was not that David had not sinned against Bathsheba, against his family, against the people that looked to him for leadership, against Uriah he had killed, for he had sinned against all of them. But sin in essence is first a sin against a holy God. Sin is serious, and one mark of true humility is facing the seriousness of sin and dealing with our disobedience. *"a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"* (Psalm 51:17).

It is possible to submit outwardly and not be humble inwardly. However, God hates the sin of pride (Proverbs 6:16-17), and He will discipline the proud believer until he is humbled. But it is only through our willingness to humble ourselves before God that we find the ability to admit that any kind of truly satisfying life is impossible apart from Him.

**Conclusion:** Before most sporting occasions - football, cricket or rugby - a coin is tossed to decide which team will kick off first. Do they do this in netball and hockey? One of the team captains will usually call 'heads' or 'tails' when the referee tosses the coin in the air. They only get two choices. They can't hedge their bets in any way, they have to make a choice: 'heads or tails'. And so do we have to make the choice of whom to serve: *"... it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody."*

Make the right choice; you cannot follow Jesus without doing what he says. If you try to serve yourself, or if you befriend the world, you are only serving the enemy. You may enjoy your sin for a moment, but there is no lasting pleasure in sin. And if you, as a Christian, are still trying to run your life your way - you will end up a miserable, unhappy, unfulfilled and angry person. Do as James suggests and grieve for the way you have behaved. Mourn for your sin. Turn to God. Admit that you can't make it without Him.

If you draw near to God he promises to draw near to you and cleanse you, and forgive you; and the wars within you, and around you, will cease! You will not be at war with God, so you will not be at war with yourselves and you will not be at war with others. When you come to God humbled, He will lift you up! He will give you true joy for the sorrow you bring to Him! He will satisfy your soul and give you peace beyond measure. Are you willing to let God be God? Are you willing to do whatever he pleases? Can you submit to his plan for your life and his way of working things out in it?



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### **Home Group Discussion Notes**

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.*

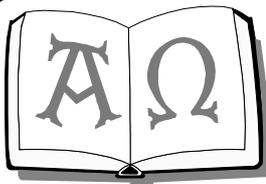
#### **Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins):**

Paul used a Bob Dylan song in his sermon: do you have a favourite 'pop' song that contains, in some way or another, a Christian message that is helpful to you? If so, share this with the other members of your group.



#### **Looking Upwards - Worship (10 mins)**

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



#### **Looking Upwards - Bible Study (40 mins)**

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1) Bob Dylan sang: "You're gonna have to serve somebody ... it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody." Do you find it easy to make the right choices in your Christian life? Is there a way to be consistent in the choices you make? If so, how?

2) Read the section: 'We are at War with Each Other.' In what ways might we be at war with each other at Emmanuel? How can we overcome these difficulties? (Don't spend too long on this question!).

3) Read the section: 'We are at War with Ourselves.' Have you ever prayed for something with the wrong motives? If you feel able to do so, share with the group what this might be. Compare this experience with praying with the right motive.

4) Read the section: 'We are at War with God.' Is the comparison James makes between friendship with the world and adultery a helpful one?

5) In what ways might the devil be able to attack us? How can we resist him? Do any other Bible passages come to mind which help you to answer these two questions?

6) Read James 4:6-10. Making peace with God seems to be so simple, yet we can make it so difficult. Why do you think this is? Are there any principles you can put in place to ensure you do not continue to make the same mistakes? What might they be?

7) How would you answer the questions at the close of Paul's talk: "Are you willing to let God be God? Are you willing to do whatever He pleases? Can you submit to His plan for your life and His way of working things out in it?"



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



### Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



### Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

*(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).*

