

# Defeating Disputes

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm going to pick it up from verse 13 and read through chapter 4 verse 12. I love that song, it's a really helpful song, isn't it? It's become to hear God's word and to have it dwell in us.

James chapter 3 verse 13. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

[ 1 : 11 ] Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 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.

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

But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil and he'll flee from you. Draw near to God and he'll draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

[ 2 : 14 ] Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he'll exalt you. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.

The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you're not a doer of the law but a judge.

There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour? Well, I thought it would be appropriate for us this morning to just talk to the person next to you for a minute or two.

What stands out from this passage? What jumps out at you straight away? And what is, you think, what that means? So have a yarn of the person next to you for a minute or two and then we'll plunge in.

What jumps out at you? And what things sort of cause a little bit of question? Okay.

[ 3 : 25 ] Well, let's pray and ask God to help us get a hold of his word well together. Our Father in heaven, thank you that you speak the words of life. You speak words of truth.

We pray, Father, as we spend time now in your word, that you would show us Christ and that your word would be planted deep in us, that we might live accordingly to your word.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. One of the very unsettling things in life is disputes and discords. You just can't avoid it. Disputes and discords cause great disappointments and sadnesses.

And we experience it in every level of society, between nations, between countries, between companies, between families, between individuals, between denominations, between churches, between believers.

You'll remember John Lennon wrote a song about the world being one. And his solution was to have a world without any unifying principle.

[ 4 : 31 ] And then it's really an imaginary world. And it's a world without God and no hope, really. We're all affected by disputes and disappointments that follow.

Disputes tear friends apart, tear families apart, tear our world apart. And not being at peace causes stress and ruins any good experience of life that we might be having or want to have.

We all want to have peaceful, harmonious relationships. But we all experience all too often quarrels and fights. Disputes, disorder and discord.

Disputes, disorder and discord. Now it's all too easy to see the problem, right? What we're after is the solution. But in order to get the solution, you really need to understand the cause of the problem.

Because once you understand the cause, then you can work on the solution. And our world will tell us there's all kinds of solutions to the discords and conflicts in the world.

[ 5 : 43 ] We're told that if only we communicate better, well then we wouldn't have disputes. So we have been given communication tips. If we could negotiate better ways, we would fix the problems that happen.

And we're also told about personality types, you know. If we understood the other person better, then we'd have less disputes. Well, if everyone's like me, we'd have none.

We're told systematic problems, right? If we could just fix the system, the world would be a better place. We're told it's education problems.

We could educate people better. Well, then we'd have less disputes. People would be able to sit on and get on better. But let me tell you, the cause in the first instance is not external.

The cause is an internal problem. The cause is a spiritual cause. The cause of the problem is within me, right?

[ 6 : 54 ] The cause of the problem is evil, demonic, sinful, godless wisdom. And so the solution, first and foremost, then, is a spiritual one.

And you and I live in a world that denies the spiritual, the supernatural. You and I live in a world that is all about mechanisms and materialism and materialistic causes and without God and without hope in the world.

That's the world we live in. But if we call our soul St. Lucia Bible Church, well, then you and I need to be listening to what God says in his word, the Bible. Now, this passage is not that hard to understand.

But this passage must pierce our hearts. As by God's spirit, we're convicted by his word. There's two questions that frame the passage in there.

Chapter 3, verse 13. What causes... Who is wise and understanding among you? Question. And then chapter 4, verse 1. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

[ 8 : 07 ] Which makes sense if we're up to in the book of James because last week we were looking at the power of words, right? In chapter 3. A little part of the body, that tongue, directs and cause the whole life of the body.

And from the heart, the mouth speaks, the tongue speaks what's on the heart. Which means we need to have Jesus ruling our hearts. And let me confess to you.

The thing that's caused me the most pain in life is the words that I have spoken. And the words that I should have spoken and haven't.

So, let's plunge into verses 13 to 18. And we've got two kinds of wisdom. A wisdom of this world and a wisdom which is from above, from heaven, from God.

There's a wisdom that's to be commended there in verse 13. Who's wise and understanding among you? Well, who is it, right? Who really is wise and understanding among you? It's plural, so it's you people, right?

[ 9 : 17 ] Notice James addressing believers. He's talking to people who are Christians. And wisdom is on display. Wisdom is knowing how to do something skillfully.

It's applying knowledge. Having experience in something. That's the idea of wisdom. And understanding is having expertise and knowledge of things as well. And so, wisdom and understanding are very similar ideas.

It's like saying warm and cosy, right? And the idea here is that beliefs are to show that they are wise, that they have a particular wisdom, a wisdom that's from the things of God. God's wisdom is,

well, what's God's wisdom?

Well, God's wisdom is the cross, isn't it? A wisdom that goes about things which confound the world. Laying aside your rights for the rights of others.

Loving your enemies. Bearing with insult. Entrusting ourselves to God who judges justly.

Recognising that we've been forgiven much. Recognising that God's in control of the world.

[10:18] Now, if someone's wise and understanding among us, then we're to have good conduct, right? And this good conduct will be the works done in the meekness of wisdom, which is a strange phrase, isn't it?

Meekness of wisdom. The word meekness is oftentimes translated gentleness, not seeing yourself as overly important, as being humble, as being courteous, as being considerate.

So it's not weak to be meek, right? It takes a lot of strength to be meek. And so it's only in the power of God that we can be meek.

I can be meek. And this meekness is the quality of heavenly wisdom. This meekness, this humility is something that God gives, right?

It's the wisdom that God gives. And since we understand that we are not God, we understand that God's in control and we understand the grace of God, right?

[11:36] That God has been patient with us, that he's been merciful, he's been kind to us. And then that will shape the good works that are done in the meekness of wisdom, in the humbleness of this wisdom, which is the outworking of the saving faith that James has been talking about.

But, verse 14, right? If your conduct is shaped by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, don't boast to me false to the truth.

This is a bit tricky, right? That is worldly wisdom. It's earthly, verse 15. Unspiritual, it's demonic.

Jealousy is not rejoicing in the good things that someone else has.

It's wanting to take it off them and resenting that they have it in the first place. That's jealousy. But notice it's bitter jealousy. It's ungodly jealousy.

There is a jealousy which is commended, which we'll get to in chapter 4, verse 5. But selfish ambition as well is misplaced ambition.

[12:48] In this case, it's for our own ego. It's for our own cause. Not the cause of the other, but the cause of self. Not the cause of God, but the cause of Roy. And selfish ambition is closely linked, right, to political power and influence.

It's the godless power struggle. Being the one who climbs the ladder of corporate success and ladder of influence in worldly ways.

You see it in the political parties all around the world. Very, very ugly is selfish ambition and bitter jealousy.

And if you're like this, if I'm like this, then I mustn't boast about being wise.

Don't boast about having any form of Christian wisdom. This is being false to the truth. It's lying about the truth. You're misrepresenting the truth.

[13:51] It's misrepresenting what heavenly wisdom really is. And here's the rub, right? Here's the truth. Here's the promise. This way of living, this way of wisdom, this way of thinking is antithetical to the way that God thinks.

It's opposed to the way that God does things. It's not wisdom that aligns with the kingdom of God.

It's not the wisdom that comes from above, right? It's not Jesus.

For Jesus is the one who comes from above, isn't he? Jesus is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We learn about in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. And his ambition was one of self-sacrificial service. Being wronged rather than asserting his rights. Being wronged rather than seeking his rights. And notice this jealousy and bitter ambition in the heart.

If this is ruling my heart, right, then Jesus isn't. And notice that this is of the devil, right?

[15:03] This is demonic. There is a war going on in our hearts. A war between the things of God and the despot, chaotic world of the devil.

And here's the promise, right? Here is the promise. Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, starting in the heart and working out in the conduct, will come, let's see what it says in here, disorder and every vile practice.

It'll come confusion and chaos and every type of godless behaviour. You want to know why there's discord and disharmony and disorder and chaos and crude behaviour?

In the first instance, it's not something out there that's causing it. It's wisdom from above, the wisdom of God, is not ruling our hearts.

Jesus is not ruling our hearts. The world is. You want to know why vile things happen? Foul, base, unspeakable, evil things happen?

[16:23] Why sick things are done to vulnerable children? Why prostitutes prey on kids at schoolies? Why there are disorder in churches and rebellions and complaints?

Why people in positions of trust in churches do vile things? I'll say it again. You want to know why there's disorder and discord? In the very first instance, it's not something out there causing it. Right? It's because the wisdom from above, the wisdom of God, is not ruling our hearts. Jesus is not ruling people's hearts. The world is.

That's the cause of the problem. It's first and foremost a spiritual problem. And it's not about me fixing you or you fixing me.

Right? This is something that only God can fix. Only God can enable me by His powerful Spirit working me to change my heart.

[17:28] To do in me what needs to be done. However, if the wisdom from above is in our hearts, then there'll be peace and purity.

Have a look at it with me there. Have a look at it. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. This is the opposite of confusion and chaos and crudity.

Notice that this wisdom is like, there's a list, isn't there? Here's the list. Pure. It's clean. Like white snow. Like the pure water that comes out.

We just learned about last week. The fresh water. It's peaceable. Harmonious relationships where we bear with each other, not seeking our own way, where we're yielding to the authority of the other, not seeking our own ambition, submitting to authority and so there's some order rather than chaos.

[18:35] Gentle, right? Well, Dr. Gentle's the model, isn't he? Interesting. It's the idea of not insisting on every right or letter of the law.

That's the idea of Gentle. Not insisting on every right and letter of the law. It's being courteous. It's being tolerant of others. And you can only tolerate others when you disagree with them.

If you don't disagree with them, you don't have to tolerate, do you? It's full of mercy and good fruits. Mercy. It's not giving the other person what they deserve for the wrong they have done to us.

That's mercy. It's how God is described. It's the wisdom from above, obviously. Exodus chapter 34 verse 6. God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Impartial. Not showing favouritism to one group of people or another and sincere. That's genuine. What you see is what you get. That's sincere. No pretension.

[19:46] Not trying to win the approval of one group over another group of people. We're just out to please God. I'm just who I really am.

Not putting on airs and graces to pretend I'm something I'm not. And that just makes life so much harder, doesn't it? We're not trying to do that. We're not trying to impress anyone.

That's impartial. And that's God's wisdom on how to make peace and to live at peace. And notice what comes from those who conduct themselves with this wisdom from above. A harvest of righteousness.

It's only impeached by those who then make peace. that is the group of people you want to be a part of. That's the kind of people I'm thinking we are.

And that's the kind of people we need to continue to strive to be. Now the way to defeat disorder and vile practices, the only way to defeat disorder and vile practices is to start spiritually by having the wisdom from above rule my heart, rule our hearts.

[21:00] And we desperately need the wisdom from above to rule our hearts. And so every area of our lives and especially our tongues.

So just there's two types of wisdom, right? Heavenly and earthly. One leads to disorder, one leads to order and peace. So there are two types of pleasures.

One leads to quarrels and fights and murder. being an enemy of God, opposed by God. And one leads to peace with God, being a friend of God and being exalted by God.

Again, chapter 4, verse 1. You want to know where quarrels and fights among God's people come from? James tells us the answer, it's our passions that are at war within you.

Now the word passion, pleasures, a bit better, is where we get the idea of the word hedonism from. So when you see fights and quarrels among believers, when you see fights and quarrels in churches, here is the reason.

[ 22 : 14 ] You ready? our passions, or better, our pleasures, are at war with each other. You desire and do not have, so you murder, verse 2.

Now I remembered, back in chapter 1, verse 15, your head's thinking, I remember chapter 1, verse 15, desire, when conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it's fully grown, brings forth death. If you want to see a society ruled by pleasure, if you want to see what hedonism looks like, look no further than Australia.

We have everything we need, and so then we seek pleasure, we seek comfort, we seek ease above all else.

I went to a retirement seminar on Thursday, it wasn't a retirement seminar, it was a thing about repurposing on Thursday night, and talked about retirement a little bit, for most Australians the expectation is that retirement would be all about, can you supply the next word, pleasure, yeah, having enough money and resource to finally, to completely live for myself without any restrictions, and not living for the kingdom of God.

[ 23 : 45 ] Now I can't help but think of what Jesus says in the parable of the rich fool, in Luke chapter 12 verse 19, you'll know it, I'll say to my soul, soul, you've ample goods laid up for many years, relax, eat, drink, be merry, and how does the parable end?

But God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself, is not rich towards God. It's our passions, or a bit better, our pleasures, that are at war amongst us with each other, verse 1. I can't help, right, but have the values of our society permeate my heart, and yet it's the pleasures I seek, and aspire for, and want, and fight for, that cause wars in the churches, in the church. But not only in the church, in families, in society, and in the world. You desire and do not have, so you murder.

Murder physically, right? And murder by having hatred in your heart toward the other.

[ 25 : 15 ] 1 John chapter 3 verse 15, everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. So be careful, right?

Be careful about our attitudes to the others, because if we hate them, we're murderers. I'm talking to Paul and Debbie Howells, you might have had a chance to talk to them recently, they were with us last weekend, or the weekend before, the missionaries with us up in the Philippines.

We heard about, although I have a yarn with them, you might have heard about a person who came to church with the clear plan to murder somebody in the church.

This is the kind of church, a real, live, growing, healthy, happening church, right? Came with the intent, will, with a knife to kill someone in their church.

church. But, they were in the gathering, they heard the gospel of Jesus and the need to love one another and forgive each other, and they were reconciled and didn't kill the other person.

[ 26 : 29 ] Hugged them truly and went home friends. We also heard about a lot of ex-murderers in their churches, people who had killed people and were in the church, and different families who knew different family members who had killed different people in the same church.

Yeah? People who were once far from Christ are now members of the Christian community. Now, I'll put it to you.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to see lots of ex-murderers and ex-adulterers and ex-thieves and ex-criminals at church with us?

That would be the power of God at work, wouldn't it? That'd be fantastic. But verse 2 goes on, you coveted and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

You want what others have, you're not satisfied with what God's given you. And you can see the frustration building up, you ask, it sounds like you're asking God for stuff and praying, but verse 3, you're not getting it because it's only to be spent on your own passions, your own pleasures.

[ 27 : 45 ] This then is the cause of disputes, discord and disorder between one another. The root cause, God is saying, is living for our pleasures, fighting for our pleasures and fear of losing them.

It seems that there's two pleasures, one pleasure is found by having our heads firmly focused in the world, being friends with the world, verses 4 to 5, the other is found by having our heads in the heavenlies, in heaven, and being friends with God, verses 6 to 10.

You adulterous people, verse 4, do you not know that friendship with the world's enmity with God, therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God? Now, if you're a friend of the world, someone who loves the world, you're an enemy of God.

Not talking about the planet, right, as opposed to the sun, the moon, the stars, like, you know, you're a greeny type person we're talking about. No, you're talking about the world's referring to the godless values of our world that lives in hostility towards God and is ruined by sin.

We're talking about that's the worldly values. right? And to say that we love Jesus and also love the world and its values and ideologies is tantamount to adultery.

[ 29 : 15 ] verse 5, do you not suppose it's to no purpose, the scripture says, he yearns jealously over the spirit that is made dwell in us.

The scripture says, not pointing to any particular passage in the Old Testament, right, but to the whole thrust of the Old Testament. Israel was God's faithful, faithful, well, was to be God's faithful people, devoted to him as their God, that's who Israel is to be, and not to worship other gods.

And take Exodus, right, you know the Ten Commandments, take Exodus chapter 20, verses 2 to 5, the first and second commandment, listen to them, Exodus chapter 20, he just says, I'm the one who brought you out of Israel, right, I'm the Lord God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, then Commandment chapter 1, right, Exodus chapter 20, verse 3, you shall have no other gods before me.

And then Commandment number 2, verse 4, Exodus chapter 20, verse 4, you shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness or anything that's in heaven above or that's on the earth beneath or what's in the water under the earth, you shall not bow down to them or serve them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

It's right, isn't it, for husbands and wives to expect faithfulness between each other in marriage.

Jealousy, in the sense that they're not willing to share that person with somebody else, is highly appropriate, not to have the contract marriage broken by unfaithfulness by either spouse.

[ 31 : 00 ] In the same way, God is jealous, expects his people to be faithful to him and when they are not, when we are not, it's tantamount to adultery.

Idolatry is the big problem for Israel. And in the book of Colossians, we read that greed is idolatry. If we are greedy, we are committing idolatry and so committing adultery and so we are adulterous towards God.

That's a piercing word, isn't it? That's a piercing word. God is good.

The theme of single-mindedness devotion runs throughout James and God speaks in no uncertain terms about his people, the people whom he dwells in by his spirit, by his Holy Spirit now being devoted to him exclusively.

[ 32 : 31 ] But, verse 6, the idea is to have our heads in heaven. He gives more grace. Why do we need more grace? Why do we need more grace from God?

Well, let me tell you why. Because if you're anything like me, we all fail in our single-minded devotion to the Lord Jesus.

We are all guilty at times of being in love with the world and so committing adultery against God. If our heads are in heaven, we will humble ourselves before God and we will ask for his forgiveness. For God says in Proverbs chapter 3 verse 34 that he opposes the proud but what does he do? He gives grace to the humble. God is no friend of the proud.

Those who love the ways of the world but God gives undeserved forgiveness to the humble. I can't earn it, I can't deserve it but God will give it to those who ask him for it and I desperately need it.

[ 33 : 49 ] And if we have our heads focused in heaven, we will resist the devils and his lies and we will trust the promises of God. Look what it's like to humble ourselves before God and so to live in certain hope that will be raised up from our sins.

Draw near to God, we can do that, we can approach God, step right into the throne room of God by prayer, we can do it confidently through our Lord Jesus Christ who is our great high priest.

Hebrews 10 and 11 territory, isn't it? Having our hearts sprinkled by the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 10 verse 1. And notice he doesn't withdraw, recoil from me, us.

He will draw near to us when we draw near to him in Christ. He doesn't reject a repentant sinner. And notice what humility looks like when you look at it with me, when the adulterer realises his guilt or the adulteress realises her guilt and expresses real remorse, it will look something like this. Have a look at it with me. Repentance, sackcloth and ashes. Destitute, wretched, mourning, weeping over sin.

[ 35 : 21 ] Have a look at it with me there. Verse 9. Or pick it up at verse 8. Draw near to God, he'll draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. God would love to tell you happy stories and let's jump around for joy and that kind of stuff, but that's not this passage. right?

Recognise the seriousness of my sin and the peril and the danger we are in and unless the Lord gives more grace, we are doomed. We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, the great God and judge like this and rely on his mercy, not presuming or boasting about our minor merits.

That's, can't do it that way and if we do that, as we rely on his mercy, that's the way that forgiveness comes. The Lord will lift us up out of our destitution and exalt us to the status of being co-heirs with Jesus of the kingdom and all the treasures of heaven.

[ 36 : 50 ] Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. Wow. How wonderful. And then we see there's two judges.

So again we come back to our speech. We're not to speak evil, speak against a fellow believer, not to resist legitimate authority. See here, as the people of Israel did against Moses in Numbers 21, not slandering someone secretly.

See, look at there, verse 11, do not speak evil against one another, brothers. Not cursing our brothers and sisters in Christ, James chapter 3, verse 8.

To do so is to make ourselves a judge and so make ourselves God who is the Lord and judge of all people. That's not the way to be. To judge others is to put ourselves over the law, over the Old Testament, over the Bible, and so prove ourselves to be extraordinarily proud.

God, I'm not God, neither are you. There are not two judges really, there's only one judge, because the Bible says that the Lord God is the judge.

[ 38 : 08 ] Isaiah 33 speaks about it, he is the one we're to fear, he is the one we're to serve, because he is the one who's able to save and destroy. Look at that there, there, there's only one lawgiver and judge, he is able to save and destroy, but who are you to judge your neighbour?

Matthew chapter 10 verse 28 Jesus says, do not fear those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul, rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Well, the scriptures are very honest, aren't they? Very, very honest. Did you notice that James is saying, he knows there are quarrels and fights among the believers?

It's not hypothetical, he says, he knows that there are fights and quarrels and unbelievers. It sounds like he's experienced his first hand and he's sure that there will be fights and quarrels amongst believers.

That's because we are far from perfect. sin runs deep in our lives and not only sin but Satan loves to divide and harass his people.

[ 39 : 31 ] The evil forces of Satan are all around us, all the time. Demonic wisdom is at work in the world against the things of God and the devil knows that the way to bring down a house is to divide it.

And not only that, there are great dangers that the pleasures and passions we have are not the pleasures and passions that God would have us have. And even if we are zealous for the things of God, it may be that we do them that zealousness for our own pride.

We might even find God opposing us trying to do God's things. Who can understand our hearts? Brothers and sisters, the things that James is speaking about shouldn't be.

So how do we go about defeating these disputes among believers? Well, I think you know the answer. First, we need the wisdom of heaven at work in us.

We need God's word to be deeply at work in us. James 3 verse 17 tells us that this is wisdom, pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

[ 40 : 55 ] We need God's wisdom from above at work in us. And second, let me tell you, second is this, we need a large, large dose of humility. We need to love God and in humility draw near to him

and confess every time and any time we are tempted to judge the other person.

We need to confess our double mindedness in wanting to love both God and the ungodly pleasures of this world. We need to confess that.

I need to confess that. And we need to weep and mourn and wail over our sins, which I can't remember doing.

Draw near to God through the finished work of Jesus and receive his forgiveness. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, you speak to us life giving words, pure, righteous words, powerful words, that reveal our hearts and our souls before you.

We pray in your mercy that we would not just hear your words, but that we would be doers of them as well. For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 42 : 26 ] Amen. Amen.