

## Day 2: The War Within Us

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Ephesians 4:26b-27

There's a reason why the war around us frequently becomes a war within our churches. Satan knows that if we open ourselves to his influence, he can get us to act like unbelievers and wreak havoc in our lives and churches (Ephesians 4:27). Don't give him the opportunity!

In Acts 2:41-47 we read how the early church experienced tremendous blessings following the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The church grew exponentially as believers *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer"* (Acts 2:42).

❖ **Read Acts 2:41-47 in your Bible. What about their fellowship would strengthen these individuals as maturing believers? Check all that apply.**

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> internalizing God's Word      | <input type="checkbox"/> unity in Christ     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> consistent praise and worship | <input type="checkbox"/> fellowship          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> corporate prayer              | <input type="checkbox"/> eating together     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> church attendance by all      | <input type="checkbox"/> generosity to needy |

❖ **Now circle those elements that describe your congregation.**

The church in Jerusalem continued to enjoy these blessings until human sinfulness marred its fellowship. Acts 5:1-11 describes how a married couple, Ananias and Sapphira, sold a piece of property and claimed that they had given all of the proceeds to the church. They had in fact kept some of the money for themselves, intentionally misrepresenting their giving to God. Not long afterward, a churchwide conflict erupted between Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking believers (Acts 6:1-7). A complaint arose because needy widows from the minority Greek-speaking group were being overlooked during the daily distribution of food.

These problems were resolved but not before human sinfulness had created short-term disruptions in the fellowship and unity of the Jerusalem congregation. Several years later more strife broke out among the Jewish Christians who were *"scattered among the nations"* (James 1:1). James wrote them and asked, *"What causes fights and quarrels among you?"* (James 4:1a) Note his use of the plural words "fights" and "quarrels," suggesting the presence of several conflicts in congregations throughout the Roman Empire.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

James 4:1

### **Ungodly Desires**

James answered his question straightforwardly: *"Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"* (James 4:1b) The word "desires" refers to the deliberate choice of "worldly pleasures that are contrary to the expressed will of God."<sup>4</sup> These desires don't represent actual needs. They are merely intense wants – wants which eventually devolve into demands, then deteriorate into sinful attitudes and actions. Earlier in his epistle James

described the outcome of this downward spiral by writing, “*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*” (James 1:14-15).

❖ **Are you familiar with an actual church conflict? What are/were some of the desires or cravings evident during the conflict?**

- advancement of personal agendas
- focus on personal ministry
- desire for control
- desire for position or recognition
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

Satan cannot force us to sin against our wills. We must choose to sin and deliberately give him an opportunity to influence our lives. As Ron Susek has written, “Satan can only incite sinful behavior where he finds agreement in the human heart.”<sup>5</sup>



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Ron Susek

❖ **What does this statement mean for you personally?**

James’ remedy for the ungodly desires that ravage rebellious hearts and tear our churches apart is unapologetically forthright. Confession and repentance are necessary to restore our broken relationship with God and other believers. James writes,

*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. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up (James 4:7-10).*

***Crucial Questions***

As you consider an actual or potential conflict in your church, take a few moments right now to ask yourself some challenging but indispensable questions:

- Have I wanted something so badly in this conflict that I’m willing to do anything to get it? (James 4:1-2)
- Is there any unconfessed sin in my life that has given Satan an opportunity to work in my heart and life? (Ephesians 4:27; 1 John 1:9)
- Am I obedient to God’s Word? (John 17:17, 1 John 5:3)

Be gracious to me,  
God, according to  
Your faithful love;  
according to Your  
abundant compassion,  
blot out my rebellion.  
Wash away my guilt,  
and cleanse me from  
my sin. Surely You  
desire integrity in the  
inner self, and You  
teach me wisdom deep  
within. God, create a  
clean heart for me  
and renew a steadfast  
spirit within me.

Psalm 51:1,2,6,10  
HCSB

- Do my attitudes and actions at church show that I have a submissive heart? (Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3-4)
- Have I examined my own life before approaching others about their sin? (Matthew 7:3-5)
- Are my actions motivated by a deep commitment to “building up” the Body of Christ? (1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Jude 20)

The plain truth of the matter is that you might be the greatest problem in your church and not know it! Jesus noted this human tendency when he asked, “*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*” (Matthew 7:3)

### ***Part of the Problem or Solution?***

How can you know if you’re part of the problem or part of the solution to a conflict in your church? Jesus taught that a person’s outward actions or “fruit” provide a window into his or her heart (Luke 6:43-45; John 15:1-8; Matthew 7:16). Paul is even more direct:

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* (Galatians 5:19-23)

If your heart is filled with hatred, envy, or ambition, you’re part of the problem at your church. If you can’t control your temper or if you create *any* division among church members, you’re contributing to the conflict. However, if you are bearing the fruit of the Spirit, then God can use you to help resolve the conflict in your congregation. As James wrote, “*Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness*” (James 3:18).



It is impossible to make peace without the power and fruit of God’s Spirit in your life.

Making peace is not easy, especially in the heat of conflict. It is impossible to make peace without the power and fruit of God’s Spirit in your life. So resolve today to “*live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature*” (Galatians 5:16). Then your heart will be at peace and Satan won’t have an opportunity to use you for his unholy purposes. You will be a peacemaker who receives and gives God’s blessings.

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God* (Matthew 5:9).

- ❖ **Before you proceed with this study, take time to pray to God about your heart's condition. Relinquish any wrong motives or sinful desires and commit to bearing the fruit of righteousness in peacemaking. Consider this prayer as your own.**

Father, I love and care about Your Church because I know that Your Son gave Himself on the cross to make her holy, clean, radiant, and blameless. I know that it grieves Your heart when there is discord and disunity. Cleanse my heart of any unrighteousness. Take away any wrong motives or desires, replacing them with godly attitudes. Allow me to see what You want my church to become, and my purpose in that vision. Give me a submissive heart – give me the strength to choose submission over my own will, opinion, and desire. Give me a hunger for the truth of Your Word over the truth of my experiences. Show me how to be a builder, a peacemaker, in my church and convict me through Your Holy Spirit when I am in error. I ask for a heart of forgiveness. Give me the courage to go to those whom I have offended and ask for forgiveness and reconciliation, for the sake of Your name, for my witness, and for Your Church. In Jesus name, Amen.



Cleanse my heart of any unrighteousness and take away any wrong motives or desires, replacing them with godly attitudes.

- ❖ **Now add to your prayer a personal commitment by answering the following questions.**

1. List any motives in your heart that need replacing.

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2. Which fruit do you need to harvest in your life? Circle your answer.

love	joy	peace	patience
kindness	goodness	faithfulness	gentleness
self-control			

3. What stands in your way of being a builder or peacemaker right now?

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4. Consider praying the prayer above again if you wrote an answer to question 3 above.