

The Challenge of Quarrels

Living in Unity:

James 4:1-10

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I have a couple guitars. One is a six-string acoustic guitar. It is designed to provide a beautiful melodious sound as tuned strings bounce off specially prepared wood. My second is a twelve-string guitar. It has the same six strings as the other guitar; plus it adds four strings that are tuned an octave higher. An octave sounds like this. (Play the string.) The two additional strings are identical to the ones they are next to. It is designed to give a fuller sound. I tend to use the twelve-string when I want more instrumental support for a song.

When each string is tuned correctly and played in harmony with the other, we don't only have a pleasant sound. We have a change in mood. In the Bible when King Saul suffered a foul mood, his attendants would summon young David to bring his harp and play pleasant sounds. Most often, David's music would calm and soothe the king.

I am surprised by how affected I am by the music I sing and play. There are some times when the guitar is not quite in tune, or I didn't get my fingering just right when I'm playing. There are times when I'm not quite in rhythm with other musicians. There are times when we just are a little off. I find my skin flushed, sweat beading on my forehead, and my energy draining. Then there are times when we are so in sync. There are times when the congregation

gets in sync with us as well. I experience a rush of energy. A joy lifts my soul. I could live in the moment for eternity. At exactly those moments, I believe we who are together are in complete unity.

In his last extended prayer, Jesus prayed exactly that we believers be brought to complete unity. He prayed:

May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:23, NIV)

When we are in complete unity as a band, when we are in complete unity as singers, when we are in complete unity as a married couple, as a family, as a congregation, as a team or business, we experience an energy, satisfaction and effectiveness that seems other-worldly.

It is clear from my experience and the Scriptures that God designed us to live in complete unity with one another. When our faith, our gifts, our abilities, our knowledge all work together, all fit together, all support each other, we rip open the pall of isolation, discouragement, and doubt. We see things that others have never experienced and can't believe.

God is designing a unity through the work of his Holy Spirit. He is designing a unity, despite our diversity, our brokenness and our disappointments. God retunes us as strings. He puts his finger, the finger of God on us, so that together we become notes and rhythm that move human hearts with a stirring song and reveal the work and life of God. That unity lets people know the joy and love of redemption.

If unity is a work of God, then what is disunity? When God joins a man and woman together in marriage, he has designed and is designing complete unity. I say that God "designed" because this was his intention from the beginning. I say the word "designing" because God's plans respond to your current situation. One friend of mine told me that when he and his wife

got a divorce, he felt that he fell off God's train and as fast as he ran, he could never catch up. He felt that he had lost God's perfect and best plan for his life forever. Although for years he was oblivious, focusing on the past, God was calling for him to let go of his grief and disappointment, and believe now. God is bringing you to perfect unity if you believe.

The great challenge we face is that we are not zombies. God does not zap us into unity. We don't wander into unity either. We must cooperate with his Spirit in faith. We must act in belief. Unfortunately, we get drawn into patterns and habits of unbelief. One of those patterns or habits is quarrels.

In high school and college I had to dissect animals in order to understand their anatomy and physiology. I was learning what made them tick. In fact in college, we used a turtle to help us understand human cardiac function and response to drugs. Well, God gave James the brother of Jesus the task of dissecting quarrels for the human family. In James 4 we learn that quarrels are a result of frustrated and battling desires. We have *wants* that battle within our hearts. They battle for prominence. They battle for attention. They battle for fulfillment. We get into fights with our mates when they stand in the way of our wants. All quarrels come from frustrated desires. I'll repeat it. All quarrels come from frustrated desires.

James uses the word *desires*. He does not use the word *rights*. That is our interpretation of desires. Moreover, he points to the influence of the world around us. We define what we want through our friendship with the world. The world interprets our rights. The world shapes our expectations. The world fashions our thinking. In doing so, it replaces God's agenda for us. It makes us hostile to God's will and plan.

Guess what? You will not solve a quarrel with your husband, your child, your work associate or your fellow believer by getting them to see things your way or by having them fulfill

your desire. As soon as you get one desire fulfilled, there will be another seeking your attention and filling you with frustration. You'll have relief for a moment at most. Indeed, when we are concerned about others honoring our dignity, we have stopped thinking about God's assignment. Quarrels by nature are self-focused rather than God-focused. They are always driven by pride: "You shouldn't treat me that way," or "You'd better treat me better than this."

The Spirit of God does free us from the trap of division and quarrels. When Jesus prayed for us to be brought to complete unity, he wasn't kidding. Like a taxi cab that picks you up in one spot and transports you to another, God delivers us to unity. He brings us to unity. However, we first must see the cab and get in. Let me explain.

Pride keeps you angry and fighting. If you refuse to leave your stand of pride, you will continue in the thoughts that demand actions from others. Instead, of demanding from others what you desire, it is important to go right to God. It is important to trust and submit to him and believe in his work with you.

Often when we are angry with others, we misbehave. We say things we shouldn't. We do things we shouldn't. We become manipulative or degrade others. We refuse to recognize or honor what they do well. Everything is about us and how they treat us. We leave God's love for them off our agenda. In doing so, we misrepresent and disobey our Lord. In quarrels, the quarrelers inevitably sin. When we receive the Holy Spirit through faith, we become witnesses, not judges. How many of us behave like judges with one another?

Therefore, we must humble ourselves before God bringing our desire for his approval and fulfillment. We must submit our desires, our schedules, our fulfillment, and ourselves to God. We must resist the devil's lies. We must stop the behavior and purge ourselves of the thoughts that led us into fighting. We must see our sin, the damage it does, and express our emotions.

Before we seek the favor of God, we must seek the forgiveness of our opponent. When we have sought forgiveness from our mate, our child, our parent, or whoever we've quarreled with, we have hopped in God's taxi. He then is ready to take us on the journey to unity.

Have you examined your behavior with others? Who have you quarreled with? Did you judge, dishonor or mistreat them in your zeal to validate your position? Have you listened to them? Were they hurt by you? If you have authority to correct an employee or child, did you do so in a way that values their growth over your comfort?

Jesus prayed that God would bring his followers to complete unity. We believers need to be in that cab, heading toward that destination. We won't experience complete unity with a mate, child, friend or associate who doesn't believe, but they all can experience our love... and with God at work they can come to faith.

Let's welcome right now, Jesus, the Lord of Unity and Prince of Peace.