

Attitude Passages

*Gifts from God for Study
and Spiritual Health*

WARREN BERKLEY

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Study and Spiritual Health

by Warren Berkley

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Dedication

To my sisters Paula Dunn and Lisa Boyd

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Lesson 1

What Causes Quarrels and Fights Among You?

*“What causes fights and quarrels among you?
Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?”*
(James 4:1)

We are living in a time when animosity seems to be on the rise, and peace seems to be a victim of our cultural divide. While I believe that there are still many who seek peace and refuse to get entangled in vicious controversies, there can be little question that—especially through our various forms of media and digital communication—the volume has been turned up and the value down.

Expressions of disagreement now have a rapid and widespread forum for dialogues about politics, religion, health, education and almost any other subject. These dialogues are sometimes carried on through a hostile and acrimonious manner that defeats any point the parties want to make. In short, the tide of hostility often soaks up all the attention, leaving knowledge or healthy dialogue buried under the ugly surge. This series of studies will rely on Scripture to re-focus our awareness on the transgressive aspect of popular debate. And the positive section will take us to higher ground (Lessons 8 to 12.)

James provides an excellent starting place.

What causes quarrels and fights among you? 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 will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will 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. 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 are 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 neighbor. (James 4:1–12)

External conflict always has a cause. If the cause is not identified with a remedial response, the temperature of the conflict continues to heat up. All animosity is produced by immature and wrong attitudes.

Conflict is not the result of some sort of mystical fate or “karma.” It cannot be explained away as simply chance, time, or personalities. External conflict (in person, written, online, public or private) always means somebody has an attitude issue (often more than one). This is true on the international scale, within nations, communities, institutions, local churches, marriages, families and friendships. About this, James is clear in the lead-in to chapter four: “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.” (James 3:16; see also Mark 7:20–23)

What does this mean? When you find yourself in conflict with someone, examine your attitude before you call out your opponent’s attitude. Inquire: Am I thinking objectively and being clear. Beyond the details of your argument or accusation, take a full inventory of motives and methods. May we make certain we are “speaking the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15)

Trouble and conflict are inevitable here on earth. Let’s just make sure it doesn’t come from us!

For Further Study and Discussion

1. Without taking a political position in your response, what are some of the signs in our time of animosity?
2. In terms of speed and impulse, what has changed about dialogue and debate over the past 20 years?
3. Without giving specific examples, discuss how modern dialogue and debate trends can be harmful in a local church setting?
4. What can parents do to keep children from destructive dialogue, unnecessary controversy, and harsh responses?
5. What can elders, preachers and Bible class teachers do to contribute to peaceful dialogue, “speaking the truth in love?”
6. What statements/phrases in James 4:1-11 need consistent emphasis to preserve peace among us?
7. Give an example from the Bible of a conflict that was resolved peacefully.
8. Give an example from the Bible of a conflict that was not resolved peacefully.
9. How can prayer play a role in preserving peace?
10. How can humility preserve peace?