

## WHY DO PEOPLE WAR?

James 4:1

By Raymond White

*James 4:1 From whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

Wars, before they become an external act of violence executed by our hands, they are first an internal act of lust felt by our hearts. Lust causes war. Within our bodies are the desires that lead to violence. Our nature is to fulfill our desires, and when we feel our desires strongly enough and there is no way to get what we want except by violence, and if we do not have the moral wherewithal to check that desire, then the desire turns to sin and the sin to violence.

*James 1:4 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. :15 Then when lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin.*

One might here jump to a conclusion that all desire, all “lusts,” are sinful. That couldn’t possibly be true. For if that were true, then what God would be urging us to do would result in the extinction of the human race. We need our desires, our lusts, our wants, our coveting to keep us alive. Man is nothing if not a package of wants. So lust per se cannot be the sin in view here. Well if not lust per se, then what is the sin in view here?

To answer that, let’s take a careful look at the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment, the commandment against coveting. After nine commandments of do’s and don’ts regulating real behaviors, God’s list concludes with a final commandment that regulates not behavior but thinking. God is interested not in just what we do but also in what we think.

*Exodus 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house...wife...servant...etc.*

So God is here policing our thoughts. But to what degree? We see that desire is not the issue here, but rather, very specifically, desire for those things which already belong to our neighbor. Those are the things that God does not want us to want. Why? Because they are out of reach. The only way we can possess those things that belong to our neighbor, assuming our neighbor will not sell, is to take what we want by harming our neighbor. And that is exactly what the other nine commandments specifically (and the law generally) are all about: preventing us from harming each other. God has no problem with us wanting and taking whatever our heart desires, so long as what we want does not already belong to someone else.

What the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment is telling us is this: Not only don’t take things that belong to someone else, don’t even want them. Thus we nip the problem in the bud, overriding the natural impulse to get things by any means including violence.

This is really important because, sadly, there is that impulse to violence in all of us.

*Romans 3:9 Are we better than they? No, in no wise. :10 There is none righteous, no, not one. :15 Their feet are swift to shed blood. :16 Destruction and misery are in their way. :17 the way of peace have they not known.*

This is God's opinion of the whole human race. Violence is natural. Civility we have to struggle for. Society does not corrupt men, men corrupt society. The impulse towards sin and violence does not come from without, it comes from within.

**Mark 7:23** *All these evil things come from within...*

Don't blame society, don't blame the devil, don't blame your parents or your teacher or the kids next door — evil is already in us, born in the human heart.

So how can we possibly escape ourselves? There is a way, only one way.

**2 Corinthians 5:15** *he died for all that they...should not live unto themselves but unto him... :17 Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

How then do we defeat the natural impulse to grab what we want away from our neighbor creating conflict and war? The answer is to refocus our wanting away from things and towards the one object that God wants us to want: Jesus Christ.

Now that makes sense. There is a saying that I love (it's on my 10 all time favorites list). It says: "He is no fool who trades that which he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose." If the human race could learn that, we'd finally have peace.