

# **The Rhetoric of Violence in James 4:1-6: A Study in the Context of Discipleship and Witnessing in the Church**

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## **Abstract**

The essay explores James 4:1-6 in context in which the writer presents clearly the disturbing issue of the conflict that bedeviled the Christian Communities of his time. The root cause of the strife and quarrels, he argues is human innate passions at war within them. These they exhibit in wanton pursuit of worldly affairs that provoke mistrust and violence among them. He writes to address the matter which appeared to have gone out of control. The paper discovers the use of hyperbolic terms namely “war” by the author to convey his thoughts on the matter. This he did perhaps to catch the attention of his audience in order that he might present his perspective to bring about a lasting peace. Though there are some expressions that show the gravity of the matter that appeared unresolvable, however, there are also indicators of remediation. Based on the above, the paper therefore uses literary and contextual approaches in the interrogation of the text. It exegetically and theologically unmask the core issues at stake e.g. the rift among them and jealous yearn of God for our Spirit. Furthermore, it finds a nexus between veritable discipleship and profitable witnessing which their intra-polemics or aggressive attack on one another endanger. The significance of the study is that the paper will add value to Biblical Scholarship by unearthing more exegetical contents that will aid readers and commentators to

have more insights on the pericope that will promote discipleship and witnessing in the Church.

**Keywords: War, Rhetoric, Violence, Discipleship, Witnessing.**

## **Introduction**

War is an undesirable human reality. It is defined by ancient philosophers like Cicero who made a broad definition by saying that it is a contention by force. Hugo Grotius adds that war is the state of contending parties. Thomas Hobbes explains that war is an attitude. Warring parties could be of different socio-cultural background, ethnicity, religion or same. Even members of the same family at a certain point can be at conflict with one another etc.

In the Biblical tradition, particularly in the OT, there are war narratives of diverse nature, scope and cases which the authors narrate in texts possibly to convey lessons of spiritual or moral values. Some of these wars are said to be approved by Yahweh (Deut 20:1-4), especially the Holy Wars, e.g. “Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down.”<sup>1</sup> This “term ‘holy war’ was coined by a German scholar, Friedrich Schwally in early 20<sup>th</sup> century,”<sup>2</sup> the term he applied to biblical contexts “like Deut 2:34, 7:3-5, 20:16-18; Joshua 6, 11:12-20 and 1 Sam 15 (*Milhamah*) warfare.”<sup>3</sup> Though NT does not

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Lanier, “A Biblical Theology of OT Holy War, Pt 1: The Problem” Oct 18, 2014, in wordpress.com (<https://glanier.wordpress.com>) accessed March 30, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Old Testament Holy War and Christian Morality’ Nov 21, 2011(<https://static1.squarepace.com>) accessed March 23, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen D. Renn. “Warfare” in *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2010) 1026.

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contain physical battle narratives like the OT, however, there are some indicators of rivalry among early Christians and the celestial wars attested in the book of Revelation. There, one notices also *polemeoa* figurative action denoting the making of war or fight and in this context the “heavenly Christ gives a warning to wage war against the godless Nicolaitans of Pergamum in Rev 2:16.”<sup>4</sup>

War is a popular theme in the bible. For some sacred authors like Qoheleth, there is time for everything under the sun: time for war and time for peace (Qoh 3:8b). These two periods distinctively demarcate such human activities, and defines the human person as a mutable being who is susceptible to good or evil. James 4:1-6 is one of the texts in the NT that attests and addresses the situation of violence as the author portrays. In it the writer decries and condemns the state of turmoil among his audience, a community that is at the precipice of being consumed by internal polemics.

The author identifies the brawling and the root causes which he emphatically links to innate human elements prevalent in them. The rhetorical question he poses and swiftly answers is reminiscent of Paul’s perspective of the cause of internal war (Rom 7:21). To deal with this enigma, he employs hyperbolic and metaphoric terms to convey his view on the subject matter of discourse. This is perhaps to catch the attention of his audience(s) and readers for their edification in order that they might realise their configuration in Christ and adopt a self-restraint. This approach would perhaps spur them to turn away from depraved act of covetousness and pride and to embrace the pivotal role of the Spirit. To achieve a lasting solution to the

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<sup>4</sup>Renn. “Warfare”, 1027.

impasse, the writer underscores worldly friendship as an enmity with God.

The carefully knitted stern admonitions, enunciated there in, depict the author's authority and influence. The precision that characterises the argument showcases the pericope as emanating from one who has firsthand information of the community he addresses. The essay explores the rhetoric of violence in the text by interrogating the indictments, using the literary and contextual approaches. Among other things, it also looks at the consequences of internal wrangling and its disastrous effects particularly on discipleship and witnessing in the Church. The scope of the paper is James 4:1-6. However, other relevant texts are employed and appropriated in order to enhance its quality.

### **The Author, Recipients, Background and Canonical Intertextuality**

According to Adamson, the epistle is alive with the personality of its author. For him, the author has a Galilean background, a home bond with Jesus, a pastoral passion for the people of Israel, matching that of Paul for the Gentiles. His personality is felt in his choice of words, which many do not occur elsewhere in the NT. He is so familiar with the Greek Septuagint, and uses words peculiarly and contextualises them to suit his purpose. Like his quotation: the scripture says (4:5) has no trace anywhere else, but quotes it authoritatively. The writer identifies himself as James a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps, he is an eyewitness, though this is not the concern of this paper. James generally is addressed to the twelve tribes in dispersion. In the early New Testament church, the believers saw themselves as the new Israel. The recipients perhaps are Jewish Christians living in diaspora who may not have understood the implications

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of internal polemics to their call to discipleship and witnessing or they are aware but departed from it.

The epistle of James “gives one today an uncanny sense of one who has re-entered the ethos of the synoptic tradition.”<sup>5</sup> Cain Hope Felder discloses that “James provides remarkably similar moral imperatives and wisdom among other things, teachings variously akin to those found in Jesus’ traditions preserved in Matthew and Luke.”<sup>6</sup> Still this epistle is such an eclectic book that has affinities with almost every segment of the biblical corpus. In other words, some texts in James to some extent have parallels in some other text of the New Testament (Rom 7:5, 23; Gal 5:17; Col 3:5, these attest to the fact of the flesh is prone to sin).

### **Non-Specificity of the War in the Text**

The nature of the violence in the text is non-specific. The writer begins his accusation and admonition concurrently which makes it more difficult to ascertain its exactitude. However, he is emphatic about the existence of war among his audience, which he identifies its root cause as the work of the flesh that is prevalent in them. He indicts them of killing one another if their desires are not met. He claims that their inability to receive is that they ask wrongly. He calls them adulteresses, because they are in love with the world and still claim friendship with God. That friendship with the world is an affront to God. He admonishes that the Spirit of God in them is not in vain, that God offers his grace to the humble and opposes the proud.

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<sup>5</sup> Cain Hope Felder, “James” in *The International Bible Commentary: An Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty First Century*. (William Farmer, ed.), (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2007) 1861.

<sup>6</sup> Felder, “James”, 1861.

There is no reference to doctrinal conflict or disputes as they are mainly Jewish Christians who may have little influence from their former backgrounds. In the same vein, there is neither political nor literal warfare between rival religious Jewish factions in Samaria and Galilee.

### **James' Concept of Wisdom**

For James wisdom is not an intellectual matter. There are two kinds of wisdom, the worldly wisdom characterized by mundane acts or carnality which he elaborated (vv. 14-16) which neither recognises the spirit of God nor allows its function and the second is the wisdom from above. In other words, this distinction separates the earthly and the heavenly. Human beings need to exhibit this wisdom anchored on the heavenly which shows works that are incidental to good life (2:14-26). This is moving toward the *Sapientia IMashal* attested in 3:18. According to the author, one needs to refer to “the strategic nature of v 18 because it prepares the reader for what follows in 4:1-6.”<sup>7</sup> Having declared at the end of chapter 3 that true wisdom is peace, and false wisdom is strife, James naturally begins chapter 4:1 with view that worldly wisdom leads to fights and quarrels. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Prov 9:10). For D.A. Carson, the focus of the wisdom that James has in mind is its ability to bring about integrity and peace to human relationship<sup>8</sup>. He continues by stating that wisdom from heaven is characterised by the virtues that make for peace.<sup>9</sup> Mary Jerome Obiora, discloses that wisdom “comprises careful

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, on “James” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. (G.K Beale, ed.), (Michigan: Baker Academics. 2007) 1007.

<sup>8</sup>Carson, “James”, 1007.

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observation of nature and human behaviour, and by means of that observation they discern the best way to behave”<sup>10</sup>. Generally Biblical Wisdom ( HB Hokmah GK Sophia ) is essentially a practical instruction about how to live properly and successfully (Prov 1:16; James 3:1-4:17).<sup>11</sup>

### James and Morality

There are many texts that depict the author of this letter as a moralist who is so much concern about ‘doing’ and not only believing. In 1:22 he says do not just listen to the Word and deceive yourselves, be doers. He believes in practical faith, that is why he emphasizes ‘work’ and good relationship with other people.

As a moralist, the writer of James has concern for the way people carry out in action what they profess in speech. The contrast drawn is not between faith and law but between the empty profession of religion and its living expression. The target is the double-minded person (*dipsychos*, 1:7-8; 4:8) who claims allegiance to God but lives by the world’s standard. James regards such a person as self-deluded {1:26-27}.<sup>12</sup> This is

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Jerome Obiorah, “Proverbs 18:13 and Listening as a Thematic Nucleus in Lived Synodality” in *The Bible On Synodality: Walking Together in Communion, Participation and Mission*. (Bernard Ukwuegbu, ed.), *Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) 15* (2022) 95.

<sup>10</sup>Obiorah, “Proverbs 18:13”, 92-108.

<sup>11</sup> Rowland E. Murphy, O Carm, “Wisdom” in Carrol Stuhlmuehler (ed.), *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2005) 1081.

<sup>12</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation Revised Edition*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications 2009) 512.

another dimension of the indictment the author brings to the realisation of the audience. The wise person is the one who hears and does. The non-specificity of the author's indictment perhaps buttresses the point that the situation degenerated to amorality.

### **Neutrality of the Indictment**

The writer does not apportion blame or singles out a group or individual in his indictment. He makes a general accusation that concerns everyone in the community. The presentation itself affirms his neutrality. He lays out his indictment without sparing anyone. Inferentially, everyone is an accomplice. The entire episode centres on intra-rivalry that engulfed everyone in the community.

### **The Indictment Realism or Paraenetic?**

The argument that the writer of the text used the method of indictment that was prevalent at his own time to draft the Letter is valid in its own merit because judging from the terminologies employed which tend to put the reader in a fix state strongly supports the position. The second position that the author addresses a real situation is valid too considering the personality of the writer, who stood so prominently, in the Early New Testament Church. This position holds that he could not have written anything less, as the Bishop of Jerusalem, than what he writes by addressing squarely the situation bedevilling the infant Church that is at the precipice of being consumed by internal rifts or war which poses a serious threat to the call to discipleship and witnessing. The sad likelihood is that James addresses real problems that have been brought to his notice at a difficult and quite ugly phase of early Jewish Christian community.<sup>13</sup> It is very pertinent to note that the bible assumes authority and

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<sup>13</sup> Felder, "James", 1871.



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perennial significance not only due to its spiritual insights but also because of its realism; it is more than “historicised fiction” as too many modern Western scholars suggest. Once again, the above two positions are credible given the fact of the probability of the writer having being disturbed by the violence or perhaps having being challenged by the dispute he noticed or informed about, decides to tackle it using the methodology of rebuke that exists in the culture.<sup>14</sup> The text is interrogated, as it patterns the realism of the recipients or the use of paraenetic technique to drive home the author’s point. The point of convergence, which is the aim of the writer, is the end result, that is, the calming of nerves that will lead to the permanent resolution of the impasse.

### Text Issues

There are two major textual problems that are conspicuously noticeable in the unit. The first is *moichalides* (adulteress) in v. 4. It is figuratively employed by the author who knew very much about the covenant between Yahweh and Israel and how Israel as spouse at various times transgressed it (cf. Isa 54:5; Hos 9:1; Jer 3:20 etc). Such idea is attested in the NT in the text like Mark 8:38; Matt 12:39. The literal meaning of the word puzzled the copyists because of its feministic connotation, as the result included males too who were not insulated from the rift by using the shorter form *moichalis*. This is adopted and testified by the Alexandrian and Western Witnesses.<sup>15</sup> The study adopts this shorter reading because the community is not a single gender.

The second are terms *katōkisen* and *katōkissen* that are pronounced the same way but with different meanings.

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<sup>14</sup> Felder, “James”, 1871.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, “*Moichalides*”, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament, Second Edition*, (New York: American Bible Society, 1994) 612.

*Katōkisen* which plays a causative role: the spirit he made to dwell in us and *katōkissen* the spirit which dwells in us.<sup>16</sup> Among the two, *katōkisenis* is better attested by external evidences namely *Sinaiticus* and *Baze*. This paper uses *katōkisen* for the purpose of harmonising the thoughts of this essay. It should be noted that James B. Adamson categorised the term adulteresses as Greek Vulgarism.<sup>17</sup>

### **Translation of the Text**

- V. 1 Where come disputes and from where quarrels among you come? Is it not from there out of the passions in you warring in your members?
- V. 2 You desire and not have it you kill and covet and not able to obtain you quarrel and wrangle. You do not have because you did not ask.
- V. 3 You ask and not receive because you ask wrongly that in your pleasures, you may spend it.
- V. 4 Adulteresses do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility with God? Whoever therefore has chosen a friend of the world is an enemy of God.
- V. 5 Or do you think that in vain the scripture says with envy yearns the Spirit that he has made to dwell in us
- V. 6 Greater however, he gives grace therefore it says, God opposes the proud and to the humble however he gives grace.

### **Operational Structure of the Text**

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, “*Katoōkisen & Katōkissen*” *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, Second Edition, (New York: American Bible Society, 1994) 612.

<sup>17</sup> James B. Adamson, “The Epistle of James” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1976) 169.

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V. 1	Root Cause of Dispute
Vv. 2-3	Lusting ,Coveting and Corrupt Request
V. 4	Worldly Friendship: Hostility with God.
V. 5	He Yearns for the Spirit he made to dwell in Us
V. 6	God opposes the Haughty and Approves the Humble

### Analysis of the Text

#### ***V. 1 Root Cause of Dispute***

The use of the term *polemoi* at the beginning of the text underscores the permanent state of enmity that exists among the audience. For James this always results to war and battles, which the term *machai* represents. The writer is very meticulous in the use of words, which is why the Greek terms are knitted in a way that terminological proficiency is evident. *Enteuthen* stresses the source, the root cause, the origin of the war which he identifies, visibly evident in the following words *ek ton hedononhymon*. The author uses the word *hedonai* to express the fact that humans are naturally susceptible to the lusts of the flesh Luke 8:14; 2 Pet 2:13; Titus 3:3. This idea the author expresses is paralleled in 1 Pet 2:11; Rom 7:23 and 1 Cor 9:7.

#### ***Vv. 2-3 Lusting, Coveting and Corrupt Request***

Verses 2-3 present words that are complex which he contextualises considering the subject matter of discourse. There is in one hand lusting and coveting, murdering, fighting and in the other hand there is praying. Which interpretation should the exegete adopt? Anyhow, the context gives clue to every biblical text. In our context, the author bluntly states unequivocally

murdering and fighting as the means through which the characters take grip of coveted items and the reason coveted items are not gratified is because they are not asked for or they are wrongly asked for. A critical look at the word denotes the above interpretation. Exegetical question this raises is cogent. Can one pray for gratification of coveted items? The resolution of this complexity is dependent on the interpretive value of words considering the context in which the writer writes. The literal meaning of the words cannot unravel the idea he intends to convey. Therefore, the exegetical input of this essay is anchored on moral order which is exigent on the horizontal dimension of human relationship. Lack of reception of what is asked, that is contingent on improper prayer should be understood within a sociological framework that demands good moral behaviour. Covetousness operates outside this framework and establishes its own false values that operate within the ambient of brute force. This attitude does not ask for the consent of the owners of items but covets them forcefully, whereby setting a stage for violence and war.

Adamson discloses that these two verses (2-3) are among the examples of poetical form in the Epistle of James.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this gives the key to the solution of the exegetical problem created by the semiotics of the terms in the text. Concerning the difficulty created in the text, he suggests that it seems best to change the term in the text “you kill” *phoneuete* to “you are envious” *phthoneite*.<sup>19</sup> This emendation, he observes was earlier suggested by early generation writers like Erasmus, affirmed by Moffat, Philip and Spitta etc. He maintains that 4:1-6 even beyond, are string of quotations, not very skilfully strung

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<sup>18</sup> Adamson, “The Epistle of James”, 168.

<sup>19</sup> Adamson, “The Epistle of James”, 168.

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together. In order to make this protest against a disgraceful state of affairs in the community of his audience more emphatic and authoritative, he uses words that are complex in meaning. If the words are to be taken in their obvious meaning, there is something extraordinarily incongruous in the whole passage, which defies explanation. Only one thing seems clear, and that is a moral condition which is hopelessly chaotic. According to Adamson, the twofold What ... What (where ... where) divulge the intensity of the writer's feeling as does the duplication in war and fighting. In a latter Greek, fighting was used of philosophical contests and in disputes about words (Prov 25:10; 2 Tim 2:23 possibly 2 Cor 7:5 and personal quarrels (Prov 15:8; Sirach 28:8)).<sup>20</sup>

Adamson maintains that the battles in the text arise from the lusts within the body (members) which fight against righteousness. For him, despite its philosophic guise lusts is to be taken in a practical and bad sense (4 Macc 1:22; 5:23) equivalent to evil desire.<sup>21</sup> The evil, James insists, lies within us: one covets more things, more power, more victories, and does not even recognise the genuine good gifts. One should note that James 1:2, 12ff owe the doctrine of desire to the Jewish *yeser*, and like the rabbis, he associates the passions with physical body – a point made explicit by the present, where the bodily appetite is said to reside in the flesh. In Pauline anthropology, there is a related view concerning the human person. In view of the Pauline use of the term flesh (Rom 7:23; 2 Cor 6:12-18), the term members should not be construed literally. As one may recall in the letter 3:6, James had already used the expression in a natural and more individual manner of the tongue as one of the members. He uses

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<sup>20</sup> Adamson, "The Epistle of James", 168.

<sup>21</sup> Adamson, "The Epistle of James", 168.

this figuratively. He also bares the thought of C. A. Anderson Scott, that Paul's concept of the term members is not so much in their physical connotation as in their function of giving expression to the personality. This suggests that like Paul, especially in his doctrine of the "Flesh", James traced all sin neither to "pleasure" nor desire, but ultimately to the core of disordered personality,<sup>22</sup> the nature that was acquired from the tragic fall experienced at the time of the first temptation.

Furthermore, according to Felder, not only does strife arise from the lusts within the human person, it also emanates from the extreme socio-economic disparities which have caused Christians to lay aside their religious values and engage in desperate struggles.<sup>23</sup>

#### ***V. 4 Worldly Friendship: Hostility with God***

James 4:4 is another verse that gives a little difficulty in interpreting because of the use of the phrase *moixoi kai moikslides*. But majority evidence favour the reading. This word paints the picture of depraved recipients, a community that is bereaved of morals, a permissive society that any kind of depravity takes place. The approach of the author is heavy enough perhaps to sink into the deepest of the hearts of the recipients.

#### ***V. 5 He Yearns for the Spirit He Made to Dwell in Us***

In this verse, the author appears to ascribe personality to scripture for the purpose of stressing its primacy in the new faith they have embraced. The freedom the new faith brings is not based on licentiousness but on faith and realisation of his Spirit

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<sup>22</sup> Adamson, "The Epistle of James", 167.

<sup>23</sup> Felder, "James", 1871.

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in Christians, which results to a good human relationship. This scripture is paralleled in Gal 3:8 where Paul uses the personification of Scripture to underscore the point that Faith precedes the Law. According to Lightfoot, as Carson portrays the singular *graphe* in the NT always means a particular passage of Scripture; where the reference is clearly to the Sacred Writings as a whole as in the expressions, searching the Scriptures. By stressing the fact of the Spirit that God has made to dwell in Christians, which he yearns so jealously, the author stings them into alertness that they the audience are not brute human beings who are at liberty to live irresponsibly, that they have the Spirit living in them.

### ***V. 6 God Opposes the Haughty and Approves the Humble***

The emphasis on the gift of grace is indicative of the fact that the audience knew very much about who they are and yet fail to recognise it and are now reminded that haughty way of living makes them to act lawlessly and worldly which is an affront to God.

### **Theology of the Text**

For James, the engagement in war occurs when God's wisdom is deficient. As such, one as a result, fails to recognise the genuine gifts that come from the heavenly father and are ours for asking (4:1-3). That one's slowness to perceive this very fact reflects the human waywardness of heart and friendship with the world is simply an adulterous act, a betrayal of the covenant relationship that one has entered into with God (4:4). That scripture teaches that God who has a covenantal relationship with humanity jealously longs for the Spirit that he himself placed within his image bearers (4:5). According to Carson, God's jealousy longs for us and that longing is driven by his own

Holy Jealousy.<sup>24</sup> He is gracious as He is holy and He supplies humans with all the grace they need to meet His holy demands. James 4:6 is quoted in 1 Peter 5:3 which shows that the two have a close connection with each other. The grace one requires to face God's jealousy (4:5) is given to the humble of heart. God sets himself against the proud. This theological view is common in the Old Testament as attested to in the following passages: Pss 18:27; 34:18; Isaiah 61:1; Zeph 3:11-12. True wisdom is a wisdom that recognises the gifts of God.

Carson further observes, that the theme of God's jealous love for His people is tied to the exclusiveness of His claims (like the exclusiveness of a spouse's claims in marriage), ratcheted up because God is not only the (metaphorical) Husband of His people but also their God.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he discloses that for his creatures to betray this first allegiance is not freedom; it is the most horrific idolatry.<sup>26</sup> Carson concludes by saying precisely that this God is personal, His response cannot possibly be dispassionate: he yearns for His image bearers still and is outraged at their "adultery" when they break their part of the Covenant.<sup>27</sup> He longs for them with jealous longing as He does for humanity today when it wanders away from Him, just like the dramatic parable of the lost Sheep, which is also called the parable of the Loving Father encapsulates this image of God who searches for his children who stray. The first duty of human beings is to recognise their creatureliness and there live in dependence upon and with worship toward the Creator

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<sup>24</sup> Carson, "James", 997-1007.

<sup>25</sup> Carson, "James", 997-1007.

<sup>26</sup> Carson, "James", 997-1007.

<sup>27</sup> Carson, "James", 997-1007.



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Sovereign of all.<sup>28</sup> The only option is the proud independence that is nothing other than utterly destructive idolatry because of lack of patience to rely on God; the arrogance that finally brings down God's displeasure. This theme lies at the heart of the Bible's storyline and of God's plan of redemption brought to fulfilment in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to consummation at the end.<sup>29</sup>

### **Contextualization of the Text**

The rhetoric of violence in the epistle of James 4:1-6 aptly captures the trend of things in the Church of today. This text invites the members of the Church to have a rethink on how many Christians are laying aside Christian religious values in pursuit of the superficial. The indictment of the author is not based on doctrinal conflict, but on a Christian community that had parted company with the basic Christian values and now resorts to depravity. In this situation, a stage is set for covetousness, and impunity. In some communities, the members are on the neck of one another. Tribal sentiments, ethnicity, fear of perceived domination due to inferiority complex are human elements that are playing out. The intensity of the struggle for position and power in the church is tearing many communities apart and polarising them, which makes true discipleship and witnessing difficult. Many Christians now, are only interested in the external of religion, material possession and these lead to mundane practices that are antithetical to the core Christian values.

Really internal polemics is one of the greatest challenges the church is facing today. In all ramification, the situation in James'

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<sup>28</sup> Carson, "James", 997-1007.

<sup>29</sup> Carson, "James", 997-1007.

Church is empirically with us today in our contemporary Church. The rivalry is seriously eating up the spiritual fabric of a good number of people and communities. Michael Udoekpo, using example of Africa and Nigeria decries the situation by stating that our complacency that has rendered us incapable of discerning the implications of our actions has made our current context more intricate and it has metamorphosed into lack of challenge to all kinds of shameless corruption, violence inordinate pursuit of wealth, ritual murder, materialism, kidnapping, idolatry, abuse of religion, tribalism, gradual collapse of family values, lack of obedience, lack of accountability, lawlessness and absence of selfless leadership.<sup>30</sup> The gates of hell or underworld are the external forces that attack the Church as it faces serious persecution in our time, especially by those who propagate convoluted religious ideologies that are diametrically opposed to the divinely oriented religious tenets. The underlying problem is not the external attack, but the internal. One of the metaphoric sayings of Jesus is that the house divided against itself cannot stand. Internal war is more devastating than the external. Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, states that Jesus never promoted violence, he openly condemned the use of force to gain power over others: he said "You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrant. It will not be so among you" (Matt 20:25-26). Instead the gospel tells us to forgive seventy times seven (Matt 18:22).<sup>31</sup> The continuous violence among the

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Udoekpo, "Corruption in the Household of Micah (Judges 171-6) in the Nigerian Context" in *Integrity and Corruption in the Bible*, 12, (Bernard Ukwuegbu, ed.), *Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria* (CABAN), (2020) 17.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Fratelli Tutti*, 238, *Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Ibadan: St. Paul Publications, 2020) 123.

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audience of James depicts them as unforgiving people. Currently, some warring Church communities or individuals have made up their minds not to let go and the scene in James communities is replicated.

### **Discipleship/Witnessing and Intra Polemics**

Discipleship is a call to learn and imitate Jesus. The charge he gives to the disciples is to follow and learn from him because he is gentle and humble in heart. The Christian life is a life of humility and gentleness and these are lacking among the Jewish Christians, the first recipients of the letter. The charge to be in one heart and mind is an imperative to the disciples (Acts 4:32-35). Polemics polarizes hearts and minds and jeopardizes witnessing. Polemics obscures the shiny light and obstructs the permeation of the gospel. Being of one mind and heart is the fulfilment, the completeness of the joy of the shepherd or the dispenser of the word (Phil 2:2). Internal strife in any Christian community drains its moral authority to claim its Christian identity.

The negative implications of Intra Polemics are of four dimensions: first is the damage it causes to the community values; second, the scandal it causes the outsiders; third, it rids the community the moral authority to disseminate the gospel message and fourthly, it tears down the community model of the Church. Concerning the first dimension, the repercussions of intra polemics are enormous. Apart from the disunity, fear and suspicion it causes, other issues are envy, physical harming of perceived enemies, hatred of one another, lack of cooperation, emergence of individualistic tendencies, disagreements etc. Biblical aphorism states that two persons cannot walk together unless they come to terms or agree (Amos 3:3). Internal rift

within the Christian community causes spiritual incapacitation and saps its moral power to stand and confront outsiders with the Gospel. The second dimension is the scandalous nature of intra polemics. The inviolable role of the disciple is to preach the Gospel to the people and if there is a scandal coming from the disciples, then there will be mockery or ridicule. The followers of Christ were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26) for the very fact of their way of life that was seen as *alter Christus*. The third dimension is that intra-polemics hampers the free flow of the Word. Contextually one can confidently say without equivocation that rivalry among Christians hardly promotes discipleship and witnessing. Reading other texts of the New Testament, we can see how the early Christian communities, living in a pagan world marked by widespread corruption and aberrations, sought to show unflinching patience, tolerance and understanding.<sup>32</sup>

The internal violence that characterises many Christian communities today is a worrisome phenomenon. The players in the text of our consideration had no remorse about the disturbing situation that has reached its climax that drew the furious attention of the writer. In some communities, many church members have suspended human rational ability and resorted to brute treatment of one another. To live as a Christian in a non-Christian culture is an insistence on good behavior. Christians no matter what the setting, no matter what the moment, are to practice “good behavior.”<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, this basic admonition

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<sup>32</sup>Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 123.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard Ukwuegbu, “Responsible Good Citizenship in a Distressed Society: Lesson from the 1Peter” in *Good Citizenship and Leadership in the Bible*, 3, (Bernard Ukwuegbu, ed.), *Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN)* (Port Harcourt: CABAN Publications, 2014), 135.

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for good behaviour has become the classic Christian response to the question of Christianity and culture.<sup>34</sup>

The fourth dimension is very obvious, war or rivalry in any Christian community tears apart its foundation and sets it on the edge of collapse. In our context, if a Christian community parts company with its Christian identity, it paves the way for internal rivalry that will impart negatively on veritable discipleship and profitable witnessing. Many Christians have contributed immensely to the conversion of non-Christians through authentic witnessing to the Christian faith. In the early church, many became Christians because they saw the difference between their lives and that of the early Christians. We can become missionaries wherever we may find ourselves, bearing in mind that the reason for the missionary activity lies in the will of God, who wishes all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).<sup>35</sup>

### Evaluation and Conclusion

The author indicts his audience of violence, war and rivalry caused by excessive exhibition of their human elements. He accused them of highhandedness and readiness to kill if their desires are not met, a scenario which has torn their community apart. However, he offered a remedy by jogging their memory of the Spirit in them, which God craves jealously. The author believes that the realisation of their Christian identity and their

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<sup>34</sup>Ukwuegbu, “Responsible Good Citizenship”, 135.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Jerome Obiorah, “The Missionary Spirit of Psalm 67” in Michael Ufok Udoekpo (ed.), *Biblical Approach to Mission in Context: A Festschrift in Honour of Sister Professor Teresa Okure, SHCJ*, (Abuja: Pauline Publications, 2023) 97.

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configuration in Christ would bring about a lasting or perhaps permanent solution to the impasse. That God gives his grace to the humble and opposes the haughty. On this ground, Mary Jerome discloses that all these will be possible when one determines to live and work in harmony with others. Constant and persevering practice helps in achieving these habits in our interpersonal relationships.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Obiorah, "Proverbs 18:13", 92-108.