

## WHERE IS RIN TIN TIN WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

Eighth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Let's Look at God* from James 4:1-10  
“*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*” James 4:10

Those of you who are younger than fifty-five have no idea who Rin Tin Tin is, so let me tell you. Rin Tin Tin a German Shepherd dog who was the star of a TV series when I was a boy. Rin Tin Tin's master was a kid named Rusty who, for some unaccountable reason, lived at a log stockade fort in the wild West with a United States Cavalry regiment. It was every boy's dream. Rusty had no mother to tell him to be careful or tie his boots or wash his face. In this man's world Rusty was looked after by Sergeant Biff O'Hara and Lieutenant Rip Masters and Corporal something-or-other.

The soldiers at Fort Apache were constantly attacked by Indians or gangs of outlaws, and their pleasant life of fighting was continually disrupted by idiot Easterners in their wagon trains who kept getting themselves into trouble. Each week somebody had a crisis for which there was no solution until Rusty told Rin Tin Tin, “Rinny, go get help!” And the dog would slip across enemy lines and race away to the fort or wherever Biff O'Hara was. He'd bark until some dumb human figured it out and said, “Rusty must be in trouble! Take us to him, Rin Tin Tin.” Then the bugle blew “charge,” and the blue-coated cavalry galloped to the rescue, arriving in the nick of time to save the day. This was inspiring television for a nine-year-old boy!

For several weeks now we've been taking a fresh look at God. We've tried to understand who he is and to analyze our human predicament. We've seen God come to save us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Two weeks ago we learned that if we have been saved through faith in Christ, God changes the motivation of our hearts. The good works we do, our obedience to God, and our desire to please him, are not an effort to secure God's approval, but expressions of thanks to him for what he has done for us.

So, you'd think that, as grateful people, we'd follow through. You'd expect that being a faithful Christian would be easy. You'd bet that we'd consistently try to know God and to serve him. But, if your experience is like mine, it doesn't happen like that. We keep stumbling. Christians quarrel with each other. Often we don't like each other much. Christian marriages struggle. Sometimes they completely fail. Our families are full of disappointments. Family affection can be sterile. Or we tumble into sin. Or we compromise with evil. Just like other people do.

The question I want to address with you this morning is, why is it so hard to be what we want to be? The classical Biblical theologians tell us it's because Christians face three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil. That's what James addresses in the first ten verses of chapter 4. However, James puts them in a different order: the flesh, the world, and the devil. This morning I want to examine each of these enemies and then look at the ways James says we can defeat them and live a more consistent Christian life.

**1. The Flesh.** How do you know you're being attacked by the enemy of the flesh? James gives us the answer in verse 1. He says there are “*quarrels and conflicts*

*among you.*” We’re used to having conflicts. In each Friday’s newspaper I enjoy reading Tom and Ray Magliozzi’s column on automotive problems. A fellow named Frank wrote in wondering about the benefits of putting extra weight in the trunk of his 1992 Buick Roadmaster to help improve traction on snow-covered roads. He hoped Tom and Ray would support him against his wife who thinks it’s dumb to load the trunk with sand bags. Tom replied, *“You might need several hundred pounds to actually improve your traction. You might need to drive around with your mother-in-law in the trunk. See how that goes over with your wife, Frank.”* Frank has a problem. And we Christians have a problem when we have quarrels and conflicts. If you’re feeling disagreeable or irritated by other members of the church, or with the pastor, or with the elders, that’s a symptom that we’re being attacked by the flesh. Conflicts are the little red malfunction lights that pop up on the dashboard of our lives.

James goes on to ask how our flesh causes these conflicts. *“What is the source”* of the quarrels and conflicts in the church?, he asks. He says in the second half of verse 1, *“Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”* The *members* he mentions here are the members of your body. That is, conflicts grow out of our human nature that is tainted and trained by sin. When two or more members of the church quarrel, it’s because their individual human natures are colliding with each other. He explains in verse 2. *“You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.”* Calling it murder may seem a little strong, but it isn’t really. James’ brother Jesus said the category of murder includes anger against one another, the nasty things we say about each other, gossip we pass on, and the uncharitable judgments we make against fellow believers.

What causes us to feel this way toward other Christians? James says it’s our pleasures. In other words, we want to please ourselves, and woe to him who gets between us and what we desire. He goes on in verse 2, *“You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.”* What are the things in the church that we want for ourselves? Sometimes it’s money or the material wealth of other church members. I recall the ugly comment a church member in a previous church made about where another family in the church lived. She sniffed, *“They live in a mansion!”* Well, they did. He was a prominent cancer surgeon at one of the big city hospitals and he and his wife bought an old, run-down mansion in the Jewish section. When they had a bit of extra money they improved it over the years. But they used that house as an outreach base for the gospel in an unreached section of the city. But that envious woman saw only that her house was more modest by comparison. Usually, however, what people envy in the church and resent when they don’t receive it, is honor or attention or office or recognition. I’ve known lots of people who’ve left their church in a huff simply because the church officers did not accept idea of what the church should be doing.

Notice how insidious this is. James says in verse 2, *“You do not have because you do not ask.”* Then he adds in verse 3, *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”* In other words, when the flesh attacks, James says, we stop praying. Or if we do pray, our motives are selfish. And God doesn’t answer prayers that are selfish. This is what our enemy, the flesh, does.

**2. The World.** In verse 4 James says, “*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?*” How do we know we are being attacked by the enemy of the world? The symptom is adultery. The first thing we think of when we say *adultery* is our sexually obsessed culture. Certainly, sexual immorality can spiritually neutralize a Christian. For example, who do you think is the father of Anna Nicole’s baby? How tawdry! And yet the news media is fixated by it. Cornerstone’s youth ministry leaders, Nathan Aylestock and Grace Marie Ward, reported to our staff last week about what you’ll find on students’ iPods and on *MySpace.com*. I thought I was pretty well informed, but when they finished I asked for a tutorial on the changes in the local youth culture over the last five years. Members of our church passed on to me the latest issue of the *New York Times Magazine* so I could read what evolutionists are saying about how humans are hard-wired to believe in God. It was interesting, but the issue contained another article about student-published, high quality pornographic magazines at our nation’s finest universities. Students volunteer to be photographed in sexual poses. And the presidents of these universities support and defend these magazines. Do you really want your kids to go to college? It’s so easy for the world to seduce us and destroy our spiritual health.

But actually, it’s not sex that James is thinking about, not directly. Instead, the adultery he refers to is spiritual adultery. However, the two are linked. In the second part of verse 4 James says, “*Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*” If you heard Peter Jones speak last weekend you recall that he referred to the pagan view of sex, which begins by breaking down morality and ends with androgyny, the merging of male and female in homosexuality. If a first century Christian adopted pagan thinking—and remember, they were immersed in this, it’s where they came from—or if he compromised his faith by going to one of the many pagan temples with his friends, he would be neutralized as a Christian, and would cross over to the side of God’s enemies. We face the same problem today. We are told that every religion, every person’s god, should be treated with respect, so that we tolerate different religions. Morality is dumbed down so that we approve of styles and behavior we would never have tolerated as little as five years ago. When we do that we drift from God’s side to the world’s side, and our Christian witness loses its impact.

Listen to a little story. A mother has a four year old daughter who keeps saying things that aren’t true. The mother decided to tell her the story about the boy who cried wolf. “He kept warning the villagers that a wolf was going to attack,” the mother said, “but no wolf ever came. One day a real wolf did come, and the boy cried out, but no one listened to him, and the wolf ate him.” The little girl thought about this for a moment. Then she said, “I was eaten by a wolf once, you know.” I fear that we Christians have cried “Wolf!” so often over inconsequential things, that now when the wolf is at the door, nobody’s listening, and many Christians are being eaten up by the world. Listen to what James says in verse 5. “[God] *jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us.*” God saved us to be his own. Be careful. The world is our enemy and is dangerous.

**3. The Devil.** In verse 7 James calls us to “*Resist the devil.*” It is so convenient to blame the devil for everything. That was what Eve tried to do when God confronted

her about eating the forbidden fruit in the garden. She said, “The devil made me do it.” But the devil does not make you do it. The sins we commit are caused by the weakness of our flesh or by the seduction of the world, or both. What the devil produces is something else. In verse 6 James tells us it is pride. That is, we come to believe we are most important. We elevate ourselves, however unconsciously, above God.

Notice the connection between verses 6 and 7. In verse 6 James says, “*God is opposed to the proud.*” And in verse 7 he says, “*Resist the devil.*” Pride is the devil’s sin. The devil is a created angel, but he tried to elevate himself over God. The prophet Ezekiel said of Satan, “*Your heart is lifted up and you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods.’*” (Ezekiel 28:2) And that is what the devil tries to lure us to do. Do you recall the story of how Jesus washed the disciples’ feet in the upper room on the night before his crucifixion? The gospel accounts tell us that the disciples sensed things were coming to a head and that Jesus would soon reveal himself openly as the Messiah and overthrow the government. So they began to argue with each other over which one of them should have the greatest place in his new kingdom. Who would be most important? They were so caught in the grip of their pride that none of them would be a servant wash the dirty feet of the other disciples, as was the custom in that culture. Finally Jesus got sick of it and he got up, took off his outer garments, filled a basin with water, and went from disciple to disciple and washed each one’s feet himself. When he was finished and they were all thoroughly embarrassed, Jesus said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and that’s what I am. But I have set you an example for you to follow. Whoever would be greatest among you must be the servant of all.” (John 13) But oh, how that troubles us. We don’t want to be the servant. We want to be the boss, the honored guest, the one others do things for. Whenever pride enters our hearts, we fall under the influence of the devil, and fail to act like Jesus.

**4. Overcoming the Christian’s three enemies.** The enemies we face are powerful and often very effective in their war against us. Fortunately we are not helpless. James gives us seven things to do that will help us overcome them. The first one is, **Rely on God’s Power.** In verse 6 he says, when we face the flesh, the world, and the devil, “[God] *gives a greater grace.*” Someone has said, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.” God understands we are weak. He gives us grace to help us. His grace is greater than our sins. Change your way of thinking: Don’t stand in your own strength. Rely on God.

Second, James says, **Rest in God’s plan.** In verse 7 he says, “*Submit therefore to God.*” Three boys are bragging about their fathers. The first one says, “My dad can shoot an arrow and reach the target before the arrow does.” The second one says, “My dad’s a hunter and he can fire his gun and be there before the bullet.” “That’s nothing,” the third boy says. “My dad works for the city. He stops working at 4:30 and gets home by 3:45.” That’s our kind of plan. God has a different plan for your life. It may involve being a witness for him at work. It may be a place of service in the church. Maybe it’s in your family, as a mom or a dad. The key is to be faithful in what he’s called you to do.

Third, James says, **Resist**. In verse 7 he says, “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” The devil is a coward. If he can’t defeat the Christian he will withdraw. The key is to dig in and prevail. Gordon Liddy, went to prison for his role in the Watergate affair, but he never cracked, never talked about what he had done or who told him to do it. After his release he wrote a book about his experience entitled, *Will*. In it he tells how once in a restaurant, to demonstrate his strength of will, he held his hand over the open flame of a candle until his flesh burned and the smell filled the room. Sometimes standing for Christ can get hot, but the Christian must fight off temptations and hold firm.

Fourth, **Reach out to God**. In verse 8 James says, “*Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.*” How do we draw near to God? Methodists are called *Methodists* because in the days of the Wesleyan revival in eighteenth century England, those who were turning to Christ formed together in small groups. There they studied the Bible and prayed and worshiped God. They had a daily regimen of personal Bible reading and devotions. They gathered their families together for daily prayers. And God took ordinary, weak Christian people and enabled them to change their society. The same pattern is available for you here at Cornerstone. If you follow it, God will draw close. Fifth, **Reorder your behavior**. Verse 8 says, “*Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*” This is simple. Clean up your life. In the places where you tolerate sin, clean up what you do, how you speak, the way you think.

Sixth, **Repent when you sin**. James says in verse 9, “*Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned onto mourning, and your joy into gloom.*” Some Christians read this and conclude that we should be solemn and cover up their joy. Years ago a couple quit a small group Bible study Barb and I were leading. On their way out they explained, “We don’t think Christians should laugh when we study the Bible.” I said, “Thank you for leaving!” James is concerned that we take far too lightly the presence of sin in our lives. We laugh about it. We joke it off. Friends, our sins ought to cause us to weep. We should hate the things we do that tarnish our witness and compromise us spiritually. Does your sin bother you? James says it ought to.

Finally, **It’s Rin Tin Tin to the rescue**. James says in verse 10, “*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*” Kevin Weaver collapsed in a diabetic shock and lay unconscious on his kitchen floor. His Beagle, Belle, located his cell phone and chomped down on the keypad, triggering a 911 call. Emergency dispatchers heard only barking. Somebody said, “Kevin must need help!” and they dispatched an ambulance. but Belle hitched a ride to the hospital in the ambulance and when Kevin came to, she was at his side. Maybe not Rin Tin Tin exactly. But God does this for us. Are you in trouble? Ask his help, and God will supply your needs. This is a promise you can stake your life on. Yes, the Christian’s enemies are powerful. But God is greater than our enemies and he is faithful. Do you want to know him better? Learn to trust him as you follow him.