

## Why Are We Going Through This?

**Scripture: James 1:1-4**

**Introduction:** We often think of suffering as something that happens to us apart from God's plan. James 1:1-4 helps us see that it is part of God's redemption.

In 1967 Joni Eareckson Tada jumped into the Chesapeake Bay. Having misjudged the depth of the water Tada emerged forever changed. She would from this point forward be a quadriplegic—living her entire life in a wheelchair. She has been an inspiration to many. She is a picture of our text in James 1:1-4. She shows that God often has a good purpose in our suffering. On one occasion Joni discussed having her wheelchair in heaven.

She said: "I hope I can take my wheelchair to heaven with me—I know that's not biblically correct, but if I were able, I would have my wheelchair up in heaven right next to me when God gives me my brand new, glorified body. And I will then turn to Jesus and say, 'Lord, do you see that wheelchair right there? Well, you were right when you said that in this world we would have trouble, because that wheelchair was a lot of trouble! But Jesus the weaker I was, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. So thank you for what you did in my life through that wheelchair. And now, you can send that wheelchair to hell, if you want.'"

Where does that type of joy come from? The answer is that it can only come from God. Here are 3 truths to help us have joy in the midst of trials.

### I. We Will Experience Trials

James 1:2 does not say, "Count it all joy... **if**..." No, it says, "...**when**" you experience "divers" trials. Cp. 1 Pet. 4:12

**a. Suffering is part and parcel of the Christian life... "fall into"** This does not suggest a stupid accident. It means "to encounter, come across." We should not manufacture trials or volunteer for them, they are coming...

• Seen in Jesus (John 16:33). • in Paul (Rom. 8:17). • in Peter (1 Pet. 4:12).

**b. Suffering prepares us for all types of trials. "divers"** (Different; various)

• God is Sovereign over all the "various trials"

By telling us that we will suffer the Lord is giving us grace. It keeps us from going into shock and asking foolish questions when suffering comes upon us. When we know that suffering is part of God's plan we will be better prepared to trust His sovereign goodness. We are reminded that God knows that we are going to suffer—but he also knows that our suffering has a purpose.

### II. We Will Grow From Trials

Verses 3-4 give us the reason why we should be joyful in the midst of trials.

The only way the Lord can develop patience and character in our lives is through trials. Endurance cannot be attained by reading a book, listening to a sermon, or even praying a prayer. We must go through the difficulties of life, trust God, and obey Him. The result will be patience and character.

#### **a. Suffering reveals our approval before God**

• In vs. 3 he calls it "trying" or "testing". The word in verse 3 is one that refers to the act of proving the worth of something.

#### **b. Suffering produces experience and endurance**

#### **c. Suffering results in our conformity to Christ**

• Endurance isn't the final goal, maturity in Christ is our final goal

• Paul speaks similarly in Romans 8. God works all things together for our good, and this greater good is Christ-likeness.

### III. We Will Overcome Trials

The fact that “*let patience have her perfect work*” helps us see that God will finish His work. Believers will endure these trials, for our good and His glory.

### A. Our Response Matters

Our joy (1:2) and cooperation (1:4) is important as we respond to suffering

### B. Our Response Reveals Our Heart

Vs. 5-8 builds on this theme. Those with a God-ward orientation will trust in God in the midst of suffering. Those with *double-minded hearts* will doubt his goodness. Our response in the fire reveals if we have faith that will endure.

**Conclusion:** We will all face seasons of suffering—believers and unbelievers. Yet, none of us will experience the full weight of suffering as Jesus experienced it. He experienced suffering so that He could ultimately redeem our suffering. What is your response to suffering? It reveals something about our hearts. Do we trust in the goodness of God? Is our faith one that is strong enough to endure the furnace of suffering? If you are suffering, know in this season that God is inviting you to trust His goodness. If you are not in a season of suffering this is the time to develop a strong theology of suffering. Then don't be surprised when God calls you to use it.

Sermon Series: *The Book of James*

## The Lure of Sin

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**Scripture: James 1:12-18**

**Introduction:** How do you catch a rat? One particular way is to use a rat poison like d-Con. D-Con is roughly 99 percent rat food and 1 percent *brodifacoum*. This poison is used to thin a rat's blood so rapidly that it begins to hemorrhage. Of course you would never catch a rat if you sat out a finely decorated bowl of *brodifacoum*. It wouldn't appeal to it. That is why the deadly poison is masked by that which appeals to rats; namely, food. Led by their stomachs these rats eat what will slowly lead to their undoing.

Not only is *brodifacoum* deadly, it is also patient, which is why it is the key ingredient in mouse poison. Because of the slowness of death mice aren't able to associate it with their demise. I doubt rats have funerals, but if they did the obituary would not read death by that tasty bowl of food that *Speedy* just ate. They likely would blame another culprit for their demise.

*We are like those rats.* Killed by our own desires we look for other sources of our demise. James 1:13-18 helps us to see that God is not the one that entices us to sin; ***it is in fact our own natures that make sin so enticing.*** But, God graciously changes our natures so that we can withstand temptation.

“The magazine “*Discipleship Journal*” asked its readers to rank the areas of greatest spiritual challenge to them. The results came back in this order:

### 1. Materialism

### 2. Pride

### 3. Self-centeredness

### 4. Laziness

### 5. (Tie) Anger/Bitterness and Sexual lust

**The study noted that temptations were more potent when:** they neglect their time with God (81%) and when they were physically tired (57%)."

The survey also ranked the areas of greatest spiritual assets in resisting temptation to be "**prayer (84%), avoiding compromising situations (76%), Bible study (66%), and being accountable to someone else (52%).**"

## How Do I Resist Temptation? James 1:13

### I. THE COMMAND – vs. 13

- A. Don't blame God for your dirty old sins.
- B. A young lady wanted to marry a boy who was an agnostic. The preacher warned her not to and refused to marry them, II Cor. 6. She got married any way. Three years later, she said to this preacher, I can't understand why God ever allowed me to get into this mess. Don't blame that on God.
- C. You can't blame God for your sin. God is not responsible for temptation.

### II. THE CAUSE – vs. 14

- A. Every man is tempted. **Temptation is not a sin!**
- B. "**When** he is drawn away" – it means baiting of a trap, to ensnare, trap.
- C. "**Enticed**" – it means lured by bait.
- D. **Lust** – means desires. "Of his own lusts" - Notice the **progression** of sin in verse 15.

## God Does Not Entice To Sin

In James 1:2 we see that trials are inevitable. In James 1:13 we see that in this age temptation is inevitable.

### **A. We are tempted to shift blame for our temptation**

Notice the pattern in Genesis 3

Proverbs 19:3

In Matthew 7:1-5 Jesus teaches that we are more likely to look at specks in our brothers eyes than the log in our own

### **B. God is never the source of our temptation**

God cannot be tempted

God tempts no one to do evil

This does not mean that He will not bring trials or even test us, but he does not entice anyone to do evil.

When we feel the pull towards sin and rebellion we are never allowed to shake our fist at God and say, "You made me this way". Temptation does not come from the Lord. It has another source.

### III. THE CONSEQUENCE – vs. 15

1. 1 John 2:15-17: Lust of the flesh / Lust of the eyes / The Pride of life
- A. **Sin** is the **union** of the **will** with **lust**.
- B. If you overcome temptation, you receive a **Crown of Life**, vs. 12. When you give in to temptation, you receive **Death**, Rom. 6:23.
- C. You are free to choose how you want to live, but you are not free to choose the results.
- D. You are free to have your kicks, but you cannot avoid the kickbacks.
- E. You are free to make your choices, but not free to avoid the consequences.

## Our Natures Make Sin Enticing

We are enticed by our desires.

### **A. Temptation comes from within us**

"Desire" is any intense longing for that which God has forbidden (Gen. 3:6)

### **B. Temptation is tailored to our "own desire"**

It is unique to each person.

One man might be mightily tempted by something that holds no enticement over another.

### C. Temptation wears a mask

"Drawn away" and "enticed" are fishing and hunting metaphors

Temptation rarely comes in the form of its grandchild (death)

### D. Temptation eventually brings forth death

What begins as desire turns to sin

Sin "fully grown" births death

Sin is attractive to us because we are not yet fully redeemed. James is urging his readers to not give in to temptation because it inevitably leads to death. Thankfully God is at work to change our natures.

*"James is not referring here to physical death, for then none of us would be alive. Nor is he referring to spiritual death, for then no one could be saved. The fulfillment of our lust brings about in the believer's life a death-like existence."*

#### **We Will Die To The Things Of God. We Will Die Inside.**

**Max Lucado** in his book "No Wonder They Call Him Savior," describes this state: "Guilt creeps in on cat's paws to steal whatever joy might have flickered in our eyes. Confidence is replaced by doubt, honesty is elbowed out by rationalization. Exit peace. Enter turmoil. Just as the pleasure of indulgence ceases, the hunger for relief begins. Our vision is shortsighted and our myopic, narrow-minded life now has but one purpose – to find release for our guilt. Or as Paul questioned for all of us, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" **Romans 7:24**

**Conclusion** :Apart from grace, we will have a foolish thirst for poison. Thankfully God has redeemed us from this insatiable hunger for our own destruction. We are still tempted, but through Christ sin is losing its luster. James 1:13-18 is a call to flee the lure of sin as well as a call to celebrate the new life we have in Christ.

## Performance or Mercy?

**Scripture: James 2:1-3**

We all like to shift blame. In the midst of temptation we like to blame God for our struggles. Scripture shows us that the pressure of temptation comes from our own hearts. God doesn't tempt us, but He has provided rescue from our temptation. Because of what Christ has accomplished on our behalf we can withstand the onslaught of temptation.

**Introduction:** We are naturally drawn toward those that are either similar to us or that we believe might do us some good. Even in Christian circles we seem to rejoice more - as if our cause will strengthen - when a celebrity becomes a Christian than when a poor widow does. Jesus seems to have a different heart.

D.A. Carson asks a few probing questions:

*Why is it that we constantly parade Christian athletes, media personalities, and pop singers? Why should we think that their opinions or their experiences of grace are of any more significance than those of any other believer? When we tell outsiders about people in our church, do we instantly think of the despised and the lowly who have become Christians, or do we love to impress people with the importance of the men and women who have become Christians? Modern Western evangelicalism is deeply infected with the virus of triumphalism, and the resulting illness destroys humility, minimizes grace, and offers far too much homage to the money and influence and 'wisdom' of our day. ([The Cross and Christian Ministry](#), 29)*

Our drive to place Christian celebrities on a pedestal is nothing less than the partiality that James decries in his second chapter. Our preferential treatment of those that we believe can benefit our cause is opposed to the cross-centered faith that we proclaim. In James 2:1-13 we are told not to show preferential treatment. This is no minor exhortation. It is at the heart of the gospel. There are three reasons why we are to not show partiality.

### I. Partiality Is Inconsistent With God's Redemption

The word for partiality is one that combines two Greek words, one meaning "to accept" and the other meaning "judge according to one's face". Showing partiality then has to do with giving someone preferential treatment based upon their status within society.

A. The example of the rich and the poor (v1-3)

B. God pursues the unworthy and give them His riches

- God rescues those with nothing to give
- God's riches are what make one truly rich (v5)

C. Those that we assume will benefit us often do the opposite

- We not only usurp God's authority to judge but show ourselves to be miserable judges of what truly matters (v4)
- Rather than helping the cause of the gospel those who are highly esteemed by the world are the ones that oppress them and blaspheme Christ (vv. 6-7)

It is our natural bent to assume that man gives things to God instead of the other way around. Therefore, it is no big leap for us to assume that those who have the most to give are the ones that are most pleasing to God. God's pattern of redemption seems to be the opposite. Rather than helping those who help themselves, God seems bent towards helping those that have nothing to offer. We must reflect Him in this.

## II. Partiality Is Inconsistent With God's Law

Likely "royal law" is a reference to the "Torah as fulfilled and expanded by Christ."\* Those that have been redeemed by Christ will be inclined to follow after the heart of Christ. The summary of this is to "love your neighbor as yourself".

A. Discrimination breaks the Old Testament law

- "The entire law" is likely a reference to the OT law

- Showing favoritism is willfully breaking the law of God
- Breaking one point in the Law makes on a law-breaker guilty of all

B. Discrimination breaks the law of Christ

- The "law of freedom" is likely a reference to the law of Christ (similar to the royal law of verse 8)
- Believers must act and speak according to the freedom that Christ has purchased for them. Discrimination would be inconsistent with the speech and action that define this "law of freedom"

## III. Partiality Is Inconsistent With God's Mercy

The activity of those who discriminate is judging upon outward appearances and what people have, it is the exact opposite of showing mercy. Judging according to mercy reflects a heart changed by the gospel. Judging according to performance reflects a heart that knows little of mercy.

A. The cure for our discriminatory hearts is to plunge deep into the mercy of God

B. The mercy of God triumphs over naturally judgmental hearts

C. Those that are redeemed must live consistent with the mercy they've been shown

**Conclusion:** John Newton once said, "Let us not measure men, much less ourselves, by gifts or services. One grain of grace is worth abundance of gifts." James would agree. Do you measure others by grace or by performance? The answer for our judgmental hearts is to become enamored by the mercy that we have received. This is also the answer to hearts that want to pedestal certain believers. The gospel levels. May we measure ourselves by Christ and not performance!

## The Pressure of Words

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### Scriptures: James 3:1-18

**Introduction:** Time and again the Scriptures address the tongue. James devotes an entire chapter to controlling the tongue. When we consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:34 we see why the tongue is given such extensive treatment. How we handle the tongue is a great indicator of our hearts before God. Aesop shares a helpful fable to illustrate this point:

*Once upon a time, a donkey found a lion's skin. He tried it on, strutted around, and frightened many animals. Soon a fox came along, and the donkey tried to scare him too. But the fox, hearing the donkey's voice, said, "If you want to terrify me, you'll have to disguise your bray." Aesop's moral: Clothes may disguise a fool, but his words will give him away.*

Our words give us away. In James 3 we see that the tongue has power; that it is by nature hypocritical; and that it can only be transformed from above.

### I. We Must Know The Power Of The Tongue (3:1-8)

Most people want to be heard. What better way to be heard as a believer than to be a teacher of the gospel? Yet, James urges us to consider the power of the tongue. We must not be hasty in propelling ourselves into a position where the tongue is constantly used. It is powerful and as such will incur a "stricter judgment."

#### A. Control the tongue, control the man

James argues from greater to lesser in verse 2. If one can control their tongue then they will be able to control the rest of the body as well.

- As illustrated by the horse (verse 3)
- As illustrated by ships (verse 4)

#### B. Big things come from the tiny tongue

- As illustrated by a wildfire (verse 5)... Words can build or destroy
- More than anything the tongue displays the state of our hearts
- Humanity alone cannot control the tongue

If James left us here this would be a miserable message: the tongue is a deadly poison that no man can stop. Thankfully, we aren't left to ourselves.

### II. We Must Know The Pretense (Hypocrisy) Of The Tongue

The powerful tongue can be used for great good or great evil. Apart from redemption it will only tear down and destroy. Perhaps better than anything else the tongue reveals the "already" but "not yet" of Christian sanctification.

#### A. The Tongue Can Worship Or Curse (Verse 9-10a)

#### B. This Hypocrisy Should Not Be The Case (Verse 10b-12)

- James is not saying that they are unbelievers because of their hypocrisy. Note that he says "my brothers"
- James is saying that duplicity is inconsistent with a life redeemed by Christ
- Believers ought to be growing more consistent in their speech

### III. We Must Know The Source Of The Tongue's Redemption

Redeemed speech only comes from godly wisdom being imparted to us. Worldly wisdom will lead to a tongue infused with bitterness that will show itself through bragging and a denial of truth. Godly wisdom will lead to pure and peaceable speech.

#### A. Worldly wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic

- Shows itself in bitter envy and selfish ambition that is accompanied by bragging and a denial of the truth (v14)

- It leads to "disorder and every kind of evil"

- This type of wisdom and speech is our default position

### **B. Godly wisdom comes from above**

- Characterized by all that is pure and peaceful

- It leads to peace

- This type of wisdom only comes from God's redeeming grace

The type of wisdom and speech that governs our life displays the work of God in our hearts. Where our speech and wisdom is worldly we see that the earthly, unspiritual, and demonic is the governing authority. Where our speech and wisdom is characterized by purity and peace we see that something "from above" has taken root and is spreading through our lives.

**Conclusion:** Aesop was correct, our speech and the type of wisdom that governs our lives displays the state of our heart. What does your tongue reveal about your heart? Are you increasingly maturing in your speech? Or do you find your tongue a "restless evil" that you cannot control? Aesop's solution was to control your tongue. James has taught us that apart from Christ, such an exhortation is impossible. Redeemed speech and wisdom only come from the work of the Redeemer. Let us cast ourselves on the mercy of our Redeemer and pray that He will continue His work of overthrowing the demonic words that occasionally flow from our mouths.

## **12 Words That Will Change Your Life**

**"Please"** and **"Thank you."** When you use these three words, you are treating others like people and not things. You are showing appreciation.

**"I'm sorry."** These two words have a way of breaking down walls and building bridges.

**"I love you."** Too many people read "romance" into these words, but they go much deeper than that. As Christians, we should love the brethren and even love our enemies. "I love you" is a statement that can carry tremendous power.

**"I'm praying for you."** And be sure that you are. When you talk to God about people, then you can talk to people about God. Our private praying for people helps us in our public meeting with people. Of course, we never say "I'm praying for you" in a boastful way, as though we are more spiritual than others. We say it in an encouraging way, to let others know that we care enough for them to meet them at the throne of grace. Give God your tongue and your heart each day and ask Him to use you to be a blessing to others.

## Honey, Why Do We Fight

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### The Pressure of Conflict

**Scriptures: James 4:1-10**

We all face conflict. Most of us hate it. James is blunt about the source of our conflict. This is both painful and helpful. We can overcome the pressure of conflict by identifying its source and pursuing the humility that sets pleasing God as its chief aim.

**Introduction:** I usually start at the same place when doing marriage counseling. I begin by asking the couples to express the greatest source of their difficulties together. Their answers are diverse. Usually it has something to do with money, sex, children, or some other outside stressors on their relationship. Occasionally it will be more specific things like a lack of trust, spiritual differences, or extended family issues.

Most couples counseling spends a majority of the time attempting to iron out these differences. While there is value in doing this, James seems to take a different route. He gets straight to the heart of conflict. We like to blame things like our anger on something else. We think to ourselves, "If this would change then I would no longer be angry".

James would have us look at the source of our conflict instead of merely focusing on the triggers of conflict. Conflict is a result of the fall. Therefore, it - like the fall - touches every aspect of our lives. It is not only marriages that are wracked by conflict. It is every human relationship and institution. Therefore what James has to say to us is vital to everyday living. In James 4:1-10 we see the source of our conflict with man, our conflict with God, and the source of our conflict resolution.

#### I. The Source of our Conflict with our Fellow Man

In 4:1 James shows the source of our conflict is in the "cravings that are at war within you".

A. The source of all relational conflict is a failure to please God

- As seen in our inordinate desires (4:2)
- As seen in our lack of asking (4:2)
- As seen in our asking with the wrong motives (4:3)

B. Quote from Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, page 49

"Failure to please God - our failure or the other person's or both - is the ultimate cause of all relational conflict. Bank on it: whenever there is conflict, one or both parties are not pleasing God."

This is actually really good news. Conflict is confusing. We could spend our entire lives attempting to unravel the specifics of relational conflict. Thankfully, the Scriptures make it simple. At the heart of all relational conflict is a failure to please God. This truth can redirect us to focus on what really matters; namely, pleasing God.

#### II. The Source of Our Conflict with God

In 4:4 James quickly moves into our conflict with the Lord. This helps us to see that the lines between conflict with God and man are often quite blurry.

A. God is in conflict with the world system

- Here "world" refers to the fallen world system
- God is opposed to the fallen and idolatrous desire of the world

B. God is in conflict with us when we make friendship with the world

- He calls it adultery
- God is to be our lover and not the fallen world system

C. God is jealous for our affections

The same disordered affections that cause our conflict with our fellow man also cause conflict with our Husband. We cannot have hearts that ask of God in order to "spend it on [our] evil desires" and still expect to be a friend of God. Scripture is clear "the world's friend becomes God's enemy."

### III. The Source of Our Conflict Resolution

James outlines a few heart attitudes that will lead to conflict resolution between us, our fellow man, and God. These heart attitudes may not resolve every conflict but they will certainly put us in the favorable position of pleasing God.

A. It all begins with grace

- Grace is never received by the proud
- Grace is the balm the humble long for

B. Grace-drenched humility

- Submits to God
- Resists the devil
- Seek purity
- Directs our emotions
- Leads to exaltation

Humility is the path to resolving conflict. Humility will rightly value God above self and therefore the pull of the world system will lose its luster. Humility will also cause us to pursue godliness in the midst of conflict. It will help us confess our sin before men and God and will also assist us as we strive to continue pleasing God in the midst of inevitable human conflict.

**Conclusion:** In his book, [Seeing with New Eyes](#), author and biblical counselor David Powlison reflects upon the hope of James 4.

*One of the joys of biblical ministry comes when you are able to turn on the lights in another person's dark room....I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility (and the accompanying fear, self-pity, hurt, self-righteousness) who really understood and reckoned with their motives. James 4:1-3 teaches that cravings underlie conflicts. Why do you fight? It's not "because my wife/husband..." - it's because of something about you. Couples who see what rules them - cravings for affection, attention, power, vindication, control, comfort, a hassle-free life - can repent and find God's grace made real to them, and then learn how to make peace.*

The bluntness of James' diagnosis can be hard to swallow, but it is also filled with grace. May we acknowledge our role in conflict and pursue pleasing God in the midst of conflict whether we are at fault or not.

## Retaliation or Rescue?

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### Scriptures: James 5:1-11

**Introduction:** It is natural to want justice. It is even natural to desire retaliation. Yet we know that God is going to make all things right. He will bring justice. This truth shapes the way we respond to injustice. When we are wronged the Scriptures encourage us to respond with patient endurance instead of sinful retaliation.

In times of great distress we can be tempted to pursue our own retaliation. Yet the truth that God is going to set all things right charts for us a different course. There are three implications from this truth that James outlines in this text. First, because God is making all things right we must be sure that we are not on the wrong side of His bringing of justice. Secondly, we must trust in His coming rescue and not our own feeble attempts at retaliation. Lastly, in the midst of suffering we must strengthen our hearts.

### I. Be on the right side of God's rescue (5:1-6)

James addresses the rich. He likely is not actually speaking to the wealthy but to them who benefit from the oppressed believers present. It is a warning not to be on the wrong side of God's rescue.

A. Those who trust in riches will suffer the same fate as their fading treasures (5:1-3)

- Ruined & moth-eaten
- Corroded

B. Mere wealth isn't the problem here, extortion is (5:4-6)

- Unfair wages

- Living in luxury in a day of slaughter
- Condemnation and murder of the righteous

For God to bring justice it means that oppressors and wrongdoers will be condemned. Such a truth urges us to turn to Christ in repentance and belief.

### II. Trust in God's rescue (5:7-8a)

Those that are presently oppressing the believers in James' day will eventually come to justice. In light of this truth we are to trust in God's rescue and not pursue our own means of retaliation.

A. Be patient because the Lord is coming (5:7)

- As seen in the farmer

B. His rescue will be precious (5:7)

- As the precious fruit that the farmer so patiently waits for
- This also implies working as we wait

### III. Strengthen our hearts as we wait for God's rescue (5:8b-11)

Not only must we wait but we also must strengthen our hearts.

A. The coming of the Lord is at hand (5:8b)

- This implies that we must be ready for His coming and not found sleeping and inactive

B. Not complaining (5:9)

- We are tempted to complain as we wait for rescue
- Such complaining puts us on the wrong side of God's rescue

C. Consider examples (5:10-11)

- Consider the prophets (5:10)
- Consider Job (5:11)
- Consider the Lord's character (5:11)

**Conclusion:** When we pursue our own retaliation it reveals a heart that does not trust in the Lord's ultimate rescue. The same is true if we find ourselves in bitter despair when we experience oppression. The Lord Jesus faced a great injustice than we ever will. During this time He absolutely trusted in the Lord. By doing this He secured our rescue. May we continue to trust Him and His rescue instead of fighting for our perceived "rights"!