

October 12, 2004  
Pentecost 18

*"Who Wants To Be the Peacemaker?"*

### **JAMES 3:13-18**

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*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. <sup>16</sup> For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*

"Who wants to be the peacemaker?" I can remember cringing in pain when my dad spoke those words. Of course you know the context. Brothers and sisters are fighting and arguing. Dad steps in to soothe the tensions and solve the problems. And always my dad said the same thing when arguments arose, "Who wants to be the peacemaker?"

Why did I cringe at these words and not like them? These words challenged me. I knew I was a Christian who loved Jesus and was baptized in the name of the true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They challenged me to be like Jesus and be the first to say I am sorry. My sinful nature did not want me to do that. That old sinful self wanted to continue the fight, or get the best of a brother or sister in an argument.

**Who will be the peacemaker?** That's the question we want to ask ourselves this morning as we look more carefully at these words of James that tell us, "Peace makers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."

#### **1) Peace makers say no to what comes from below**

The Christian peacemaker who follows in the footsteps of Jesus the Prince of Peace wants to say no to what comes from below, in the deepest recesses of the human heart that has been corrupted by sin. James talks about two kinds of wisdom. The wisdom that comes from below harbors bitter envy and selfish ambition. The Christian says, "I don't want that kind of thinking or wisdom in my life."

The really smart people are the ones who learn to put into practice what they believe about showing kindness and love to other people. As James says in verse 13, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that come from wisdom." I have always admired wise people. They seem to have an ability to gather the facts and put them together in a logical way. Perhaps you have known people who are geniuses, walking encyclopedias who have all the answers, but they cannot do the simple tasks of life such as boil a pot of water. Wise Christians are the ones who take what they know from the Bible and humbly put it into practice in their daily lives. They think of other people more than themselves.

If you and I are going to be wise Christians who says no to what comes from deep within our sinful nature, then we need to know what it is that causes us to have fights with people and not get along with them. James tells more about this wisdom that comes from below that keeps us from being a good peacemaker. "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth."

The Greek word for "envy" is the word *zelos* from which we get the word zealous. There is nothing wrong with having zeal. Jesus had that love and zeal for the temple when he drove out the moneychangers. We like people who have zeal and show enthusiasm. This word is used most often in the New Testament to describe a zeal that comes from down below in the bad part of sinful nature. It is a zeal that often combines itself with selfish ambition. In 2 Corinthians 12:20 Paul tells the people of Corinth that he is worried about the selfish ambition and zeal that was ripping up the congregation. "For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be... I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder." Selfish ambition and bitter envy get into the church when people get into fights and quarrels over tiny little things.

This is a true story. One of mission churches in California was planning a big meal for the dedication of their new church. There was a major fight over whether they should have carrot sticks and celery sticks on the relish plate or just celery sticks. We feel like standing up and saying that could never happen in my church. But it has happened in your life. Some of the arguments you had with a brother or sister, or husband and wife, have been so foolish, even more foolish than celery sticks and carrot sticks.

When wisdom comes from down below and pumps out bitter envy and selfish ambition, you cannot even begin to imagine where it can lead to. James tells us, "Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every evil practice." Look at what happens in the political arena when selfish ambition takes over. Soon, people are attacking each other and total confusion reigns. Look at what happened to King Solomon. When selfish ambition took over his life, and he married wives of other kings, he even provided places in Jerusalem where they could worship their false gods. This was a man who was noted for his wisdom in the early years of his carrier. You have heard it said, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Chaos and disorder can even take over a family when selfish ambition and angry feelings cannot be controlled. How many families do you know where there is constant fighting and strife because people are controlled by the wisdom that comes from below? Stubborn pride, greed, selfishness and jealousy prevent them from simply saying, "I am sorry." Look at the family of Jacob. Jacob loved to shower attention on his second youngest son Joseph. And we get the impression that Joseph liked to go out in the field and boss his older brothers around. That family was in shambles. The moms were the worst. Leah and Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah, struggled to put their kids the number once place of attention for Jacob. Even the disciples of Jesus argued among themselves as to who was the greatest in the kingdom of God. Jesus had to put a little kid in front of them and tell them true greatness does not come with satisfying selfish ambition, but serving.

What makes this wisdom that comes from within us, from below, so bad, is that it has the power to bamboozle us and make us think that we are doing the right thing. James says,

“Do not boast about it or deny the truth.” Think back to the arguments you had when you were kids. Dad came into the room and said, “What’s going on here?” What was the next line of conversation? What did one of the kids say? “He hit me first?” or “He said something bad about me.” “She won’t share with me.” There is that awfully ugly attitude to make yourself look good, even though your sinful nature is kicking out all sorts of selfish ambition and anger. Every time you justify being mad at your wife to yourself or others, or mad at your husband, or fighting with a brother or sister, or taking advantage of someone at work, you are really boasting and telling the whole world what a great person you are and what a rotten person the other person is. Such an attitude denies the truth, James tell us.

A pastor was preaching a sermon about anger. One man shook the pastor’s hand and said, “Great sermon pastor, I sure wish my wife were to hear it.” It is easy to see selfish ambition in others, and anger, and jealousy and strife, but it is so hard to see it inside of ourselves. We need to say no to this wisdom that comes from below, from the fetid halls and corridors of the human heart. We want to be the first to raise our hand and say, “I want to be a peace maker.” Let’s now focus on the wisdom that comes from above and say yes to that wisdom.

## **2) Peacemakers say yes to what comes from above**

Listen to these wonderful words from James. “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” The wisdom that comes from above is pure. Everything the heavenly Father planned to rescue you from the selfish ambition, quarreling strife, petty arguments, foolish behavior, is absolutely pure, without fault and without error. I know that the times I sinned in my arguments with a brother or sister, or the times I showed selfishness in my marriage, or the times I thought of myself first, have all been forgiven by the perfect plan to have the blood of Jesus cleanse me from all sin. The faith to believe in Jesus’ payment for sin was given to you by God as free gift of his grace, and it is pure, because it comes from God. The waters of baptism that put Christ on you were placed there in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Lord has not only developed a pure plan to rescue you from the results of your sinful nature, but also developed a pure plan for you to have a better life, what James called a “harvest of righteousness.”

God’s plan to make you a new person in Christ is a pure plan. It involves creating in you a desire and longing to be a peace loving person. In the book and movie “The Twin Towers” the character Gollum is always talking to himself, wanting to do what is right one minute and then taken over by evil the next minute. The very fact that there is a person inside of you who cares about being a peacemaker is evidence you are a new creation in Christ. You wanted to be a peacemaker when you were a kid and you still want to do it as an adult because you are born again and you are covered by Jesus robe of righteousness. One woman once told me that they did not mind fighting in their marriage, because it was so much fun making up. Some of the happiest moments in my childhood came when we decided to listen to my dad’s words and we volunteered to be a peacemaker. Imagine the tears of joy when Joseph was able to forgive his brothers and the peace and harmony came back into the fractured and fragmented family.

"Peace makers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." One of the blessings of learning how to make peace in your family or where ever it may be is the harvest of righteousness that comes with making peace. Galatians says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self control." I like to ask people contemplating which one of these fruits they would prefer in their marriage. I have never been able to answer that myself. Love, joy, patience, kindness, and goodness, what a basket of precious fruit! When you reflect the righteousness and peace you have in Jesus, by how you treat others, then there is a harvest of righteousness in your life and in their life. "Who wants to the peace make?" Let's answer that with two words, "I do." Amen