

James

Only Righteousness produces peace

February 05, 2012

I. Introduction

- A. **James 3:18 - 4:10** . . . And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. [4:1] What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? [2] You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. [4] You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? [6] But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [7] Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.
- B. We have been talking about the two sources of wisdom – the wisdom that comes from above and the wisdom that comes from below. As we look at this next section of James, I urge you to keep in mind that earthly wisdom promotes selfishness, and produces dissension which leads to damaged and broken relationships. Heavenly wisdom promotes love – love for God, love for others, love for what is right and good – and heavenly wisdom produces peace, which leads to healthy and harmonious relationships. I also urge you to keep in mind that the fruit of our lives reveals the source of our wisdom.
- C. Prayer

II. Only Righteousness Can Produce Peace

- A. **James 3:18** . . . And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
 - 1. Just prior to saying this, God makes it clear that there are two sources of wisdom – the wisdom from above and the wisdom from below. Since

we know that the wisdom from below is demonic, we know there is no chance that it can produce the fruit of righteousness. Only heavenly wisdom can produce the fruit of righteousness. Therefore, if we keep this verse in its context, it is telling us that the wisdom from above is the only seed we can sow in hopes of producing a crop of righteousness – and the righteousness produced is the essential ingredient for making peace and keeping peace among people.

2. However, the kind of seed that must be sown in our pursuit of peace is not the main point of this verse – though it is an important point. The **main point** God is making is that those who are committed to working toward peace, sow heavenly wisdom with an attitude, a vocabulary, and the body language of peace – regardless of how the other person or group of people are behaving or responding.
3. This is a truth we all need to hear and take seriously. Why? Because one of our great weaknesses in the face of conflict is to fight fire with fire. For example:
 - a. If you are of an aggressive, take charge, self-confident nature, you will most likely fight stubbornness with power, or resistance with anger, or uncooperativeness with a perseverance intended to wear the other side down and gain their cooperation. However, these tactics of aggressiveness are not seeds sown in righteousness for the purpose of building peace, they are seeds sown in worldly wisdom for the purpose of conquering.
 - b. If you are of a passive nature, that is, if you want to avoid fighting and you hate anger, you will most likely fight power with confused thinking and tears, making it appear as if you cannot make sense of or deal with what the other person is talking about.
 - (1) If your opponent resorts to anger, you will most likely fight his anger with a re-directed condemnation that makes his anger the biggest sin in the room, so that whatever you might be doing wrong appears insignificant by comparison.
 - (2) And if your opponent tries to wear you down with persistence, you will mostly likely cave in and give agreement – but not for the purpose of resolving the conflict. The purpose of your agreement will be to end the conversation – and that is about as far as you will go in keeping the agreement.
 - (3) However, these tactics of passiveness are not seeds sown in righteousness for the purpose of building peace, they are seeds sown in worldly wisdom for the purpose of avoiding the unpleasant side of conflict.

- B. Which brings us back to the main point of **James 3:18**: Those who live according to heavenly wisdom work for peace **ONLY** through the means approved by heavenly wisdom – regardless of how the other person or group of people are behaving or responding. And why would we work for peace only through the methods approved by heavenly wisdom?
1. **First**, because God has called us to live according to His will and His word, rather than by the world's will and the world's ideas of how to make life better for ourselves.
 2. **Second**, because God and common sense make it clear that there can be no true peace apart from righteousness. There can be forced peace or appeasement peace or feigned peace without righteousness, but no true peace. To test if you have true peace, remove all the selfish and fear based reasons for keeping the peace and see if the peace still holds. If not, you had no peace to begin with.
 3. **Third**, because we know that without true peace we will never achieve truly meaningful, mutually loving relationships.
- C. If it is God's way to resolve conflicts and work for peace though peaceful, righteous methods, why isn't it our way most often? Why do so many of us so easily switch sources of wisdom when faced with conflict?
1. The simple answer is: we are selfish, we are spiritually weak, we still allow certain fears to control us that ought not to control us, and we haven't yet made God our ultimate and constant source of security.
 2. The longer, harder answer requires us to deal very specifically with what is in our heart. How do I know? Because I know all about the sins of the flesh and the desires of the heart, and how they have influenced me to use worldly wisdom to deal with conflict.
- D. The reality is, dealing with conflict and resolving differences in a way that remains within the approved methods of heavenly wisdom is challenging to our faith in God and our self life. Let me give you two examples that test our resolve to continue using heavenly wisdom when a particular conflict tempts us to switch to earthly wisdom.
1. **First Example**: Put yourself in a setting where the other party says they want to resolve the conflict, but the resolution they are holding out for does not include what is vitally important to you or what you think is fair. What are you going to do, remain faithful to heavenly methods, or resort to earthly methods so you can fight for your rights in hopes of preventing the loss of something that is vitally important to you?

- a. The truth is, the methods you select will reflect what is most important to you. If you select methods that are designed to get the outcome you want, you are showing that your desired outcome is the most important thing to you.
 - b. But God says that more important than the issue itself or the resolution is how you deal with resolving the issue. Why? Because remaining faithful to God and His heavenly wisdom in the face of conflict is far more important than resolving your differences in a way that pleases you.
 - (1) Don't get me wrong, resolving differences and reconciling relationships are very important.
 - (2) But more important is remaining faithful to God and godliness throughout the process of resolving the dispute.
 - c. The point of this first example is to show you how easily we are tempted to switch sources of wisdom when faced with just your average conflict.
2. **Second Example:** Put yourself in a situation where the other person simply will not resolve an ongoing conflict between the two of you. And when I say ongoing, I mean an unresolved conflict that has gone on for months or even years. As if this were not bad enough, let's say this person who refuses to work out a particular conflict with you is someone near and dear to you. And let's say that the issue in dispute is near and dear to your heart. In other words, the other person is someone you are counting on to love you and the issue is something that you are counting on to make your life better or happier or more secure or something else that is vitally important to you. And because the other person will not resolve the dispute with you, you not only have to live with the other person, you have to live with an ongoing unresolved conflict over an issue that is dear to your heart. What are you going to do?
- a. This example is more challenging than the first example because in this example we are closing in on the kind of issues that touch our most important, our most hallowed, and our most treasured beliefs, values, dreams, longings, and expectations of life. Some call these the matters of the heart.
 - b. And when the matters of our heart are challenged in the this way; when someone we are counting on to love us just will not love us in some particular area, the strength of our faith in God and the quality of our commitment to godliness are tested to their limits. And when we are tested in this way, it soon becomes clear:

- (1) what we hold most dear – God’s way or our way?
 - (2) who we love the most – God and those nearest and dearest, or self?
 - (3) who we trust the most to manage the matters of our heart when they are being threatened – God or self?
 - (4) which wisdom we prefer when we are not getting our way on an issue that is vitally important to us – heavenly or earthly wisdom?
3. What I am trying to show you in this second example is that when conflict rises to the level of threatening the matters of our heart, our commitment to God is under severe attack and our commitment to heavenly wisdom is being powerfully challenged.
 4. But I am also trying to show you that when conflict rises to this level, it is no longer the issue in dispute that weighs heaviest on your mind, it is the potential loss of what you hold to be vitally important to your well-being that directs your choices and behavior.
 - a. And when you respond to this level of conflict by choosing earthly wisdom over heavenly wisdom, it is because something other than God and His ways are more important to you.
 - b. And when something other than God is more important to you, you will stop trying to resolve the issue and start fighting to protect whatever “matter of your heart” is being threatened by the conflict.
- E. Are you beginning to see why these words of **James 3:18** are so vital to our spiritual health and our understanding of **James 4:1-10**.
1. When God asks: “What is the source of quarrels and conflict among you?” . . . and then answers, “Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?” . . . He is simply restating what He has taught us in **James 3:13-18**.
 - a. You see, it is our un-resisted or un-dealt with fleshly desires, along with those things we hold dear – which we ought not to hold dear, that drown out the voice of God and divert our eyes from heavenly wisdom to earthly wisdom so we can deal with conflict in a way that secures our own happiness.
 - b. And in response to this foolishness on our part, God comes and tells us that we are to do our best to resolve conflicts, restore relationships, and work for peace through the means – and only the means – approved by heavenly wisdom, regardless of how the other person or group of people are behaving or responding.

2. Though this may be hard for you to see, given your current spiritual condition, it is still true: how we go about seeking to resolve our differences is more important than getting to a resolution. Or in other words, the spiritual condition of your heart and the godly quality of your character is more important than getting even most of what you want from your most precious relationships.
- F. Now you may be thinking that by making the process of conflict resolution more important than the resolution itself, I am saying that the issue in dispute no longer matters. Nothing could be further from the truth.
1. Living together in peace is so important to God that He gave His only son to become the means by which we, rebellious sinners, can gain forgiveness and live together with God in peace for eternity. And while still here on earth, God says that making peace with those we know have some dispute with us is to come before worship.
 2. So yes, resolving conflicts and living in peace is very important to God and to us.
 3. However, and this is the point of today's teaching, what matters more is you and me, not the other person, but you and me doing what is right – and doing what is right includes remaining faithful to heavenly wisdom during the process of seeking resolution and conciliation when conflict arises.

III. Conclusion

- A. **James 3:18** . . . And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.