

The Wisdom of Being a Peacemaker

James 3:13-18

Rev. Brian Bill

March 9-10, 2019

Conflict is everywhere, isn't it? Lady Astor once said to Churchill, "*Winston, if you were my husband, I'd put poison in your coffee.*" Churchill responded with his cutting wit: "*Nancy, if you were my wife, I'd drink it!*" We laugh at his sarcasm, but it reveals most of us are predisposed to conflict.

Humans have been at war with God ever since Adam and Eve sinned. Beginning with the conflict between Cain and Abel, which eventually led to one brother killing the other, we also find ourselves in bombastic battles with people made in the image of God. Someone said this about Christians: "*Where two or three come together in Jesus' name...there will eventually be conflict.*"

Last weekend we learned how to be wise with our words: *Control your tongue, or it will control you.* The tongue has the power to direct, to destroy and to delight.

Here's the main idea from James 3:13-18: *A worldly person breaks peace, while a wise person makes peace.*

Let's stand and read it together.

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James begins with a rhetorical question in verse 13: "***Who is wise and understanding among you?***" Wisdom is the skill of working out practically what God says in His Word. The second half of verse 13 shows wisdom is measured not by degrees, but by deeds: "***By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.***" The phrase, "***good conduct***" speaks of "*beautiful*

behavior.” The idea is “to turn back to the truth.” Unfortunately the “good life” for many today is all wrapped up in possessions, power, popularity and pleasure.

To “**show his works**” is an emphatic imperative and refers to putting “*deeds on display*.” It was also used of presenting oneself for inspection. This goes along with James 2:18: “***I will show you my faith by my works.***” Jesus equated wisdom with obedience in Matthew 7:24: “***Everyone then who hears these words of mine and **does them** will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.***”

The word “**meekness**” is not a synonym for weakness. It means “*power under control*” and was used of breaking a high-spirited horse. A wise person is a strong person under God’s control. Wisdom is demonstrated by the way we live and how we act with humility. The true test of wisdom is works, not words.

In the remaining verses of James 3, we see the contrast between the peace-breaker and the peacemaker: *A worldly person breaks peace, while a wise person makes peace.*

1. A worldly person breaks peace. Look at verse 14: “***But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.***” In our age of texting acronyms like IDK, LY, and TTYL, I came across one I had not seen before: WIIFM - “*What’s in it for me?*” Worldly wisdom is corrosive when everything is about me, myself and I. To have “**bitter jealousy**” is to want what someone else has so much we end up harboring bitterness. Selfish “**ambition**” is all about getting ahead.

We’re given the source of this kind of jealousy and selfishness in verse 15: “***This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.***” This triad of enemies is also called the world, the flesh and the devil in Ephesians 2:1-3.

- **Earthly.** For a lot of people, wisdom is measured in worldly terms, without any recognition of God.
- **Unspiritual.** In Greek this means, “*animal-like*” and speaks of survival. It has the idea of being controlled by emotions or “what feels right.”
- **Demonic.** This is strong wording meaning, “*demon-like*” and is very similar to what James said in 3:6: “***the tongue is...set on fire by hell.***”

We’re surrounded by earthly, unspiritual and demonic influences. We live in a whacked-out world, don’t we?

This week I came across a post on NPR with this headline: *“To Stave Off Decline, Churches Attract New Members With Beer.”* Another article had this title: *“Churches Serving Beer to Lure People.”* Someone took a picture of a sign outside a church that reads, *“Beer and Hymns tonight @ 6:00. Free food and beer! Kids welcome! Family friendly.”* Are you kidding me?

This is a worldly and deeply troubling trend. I’m reminded of 2 Timothy 3:1-5: ***“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”***

Speaking of worldliness, this week KWQC reported about a popular music and video app called Tik Tok. It is downloaded more than Instagram and Facebook among teenagers. While it appears innocent, predators have been using it to lure children.

According to Pastor Kyle, another app to be concerned about is Snapchat: *“It’s the one app I hear about...when kids get in trouble, it’s that one because they can keep things ‘hidden.’ Things disappear but kids take screen shots and share them with others.”*

Are you familiar with Momo? While some say it’s just an Internet hoax, others are fearful it is leading kids to acts of violence. I don’t know much about it but I did read a powerful post from Melissa Edgington recently called, “Distrust of the World Should be a Mark of Christianity.” We’ve posted it on “Sermon Extras.”

If you are shocked by the notion of Momo, then there is a whole wide world of truly terrifying things on the Internet that are going to send you into a tizzy.

Parents, even Christian parents, are far too trusting of what the world produces. If it has the label “for kids” on it, parents put it in their child’s hands without a hint of worry...Parents make decisions without stopping to consider who is producing the content that their children are being exposed to...a biblical worldview is repugnant to most who create programming and gaming for children, and they blindly trust that what some vague strangers have cooked up for their children is wholesome, edifying, and maybe more truthfully, distracting and entertaining...

As Christians we should have at least enough wisdom to understand that we cannot trust this world. The Bible clearly teaches us that we are not home—we are aliens in a world that seeks to destroy us...If we believe the Bible then we must let it inform the way we think and act...If we believe what Jesus taught then we have to take a few steps back and view parenthood through the lens He created for us: this world is bad. Really bad. And the last precious little things we should trust it with are our children.

*These are strange times for raising children. We can't do it without Bibles in our hands and God's Word in our hearts. We need knowledge of the Truth before we can combat the lies. And we need a deep down, urgent sense of how little trust that this world deserves, especially when it comes to our children. And in all of this, still, we can parent with optimism: Jesus is our hope and our children's salvation. **"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"** (John 16:33).*

Worldly wisdom leads to some pretty foul fruit in verse 16: ***"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."*** This is the second time James speaks of envy and selfish ambition. Paul describes a similar situation taking place within a church in 2 Corinthians 12:20: ***"...perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder."*** The word ***"disorder"*** describes instability, chaos and confusion, a ***"tumultuous anarchy."*** Remember the truth of 1 Corinthians 14:33: ***"For God is not a God of confusion but of peace."***

I'm reminded of the Tower of Babel. The people of the world, leaning on worldly wisdom, decided to come together to work their way to heaven. They were filled with pride and God disapproved of this ***"vile practice"*** scattering them and confounding their languages as a result.

Another example of breaking peace took place when Carl Ericsson, a South Dakota man in his seventies, was sentenced to life in prison after admitting murdering a former high school classmate. After the murder, Ericsson's secret came out. For over 55 years he had nursed a grudge towards a classmate, Norman Johnson, who pulled an embarrassing locker room prank on him. This prank planted seeds of resentment, which continued to grow for over half a century. After harboring bitterness in his heart for so long, Carl Ericsson rang Johnson's doorbell one day and shot him dead. (From Preaching Today, August 2012)

Some time ago, a magazine posed an intriguing question: “*If you could push a button and thereby eliminate any person with no repercussions to yourself, would you do it?*” Sixty percent answered yes. One man asked an even better question, “*If such a device were invented, would anyone live to tell about it?*”

Friend, have you been pushing any buttons lately? Are you nursing a grudge? Are you a peace-breaker? If so, you are operating according to a worldly worldview.

A worldly person breaks peace, while a wise person makes peace.

2. A wise person makes peace. Verse 17 spells out the contrast between the wise and the worldly: “***But the wisdom from above...***” This takes us back to 1:17 where we read, “***Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...***”

Here’s the big difference. Wisdom from below comes from *reason*. Wisdom from above comes from *revelation*.

Instead of bitter envy and selfish ambition, biblical wisdom operates very differently. We see this in verse 17: “***But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.***” Worldly wisdom crowns self; heavenly wisdom crucifies self.

There are two main distinctives of wisdom from above.

- **Pure.** This is the first quality and refers to holiness. Jesus put it like this in Matthew 5:8: “***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.***”
- **Peaceable.** Purity speaks of one’s relationship with God and peaceable characterizes our ability to get along with others. “***Peaceable***” is literally “*peace-promoting*” or as one translation puts it, “*peace-loving*.” If you find yourself always looking for a fight, something’s not right because peace follows purity.

James lists six other qualities that describe a peace lover. As we walk through them, take an inventory to see how you measure up.

- ✓ **Gentle.** This has the idea of being forbearing. Are you gentle and reasonable with others or would people say you’re harsh?

- ✓ **Open to reason.** Do you have an open-minded attitude or do you always need to be right and have things your way? Abraham was open to reason when he compromised with his nephew Lot, giving him the best land in Genesis 13:8-9: *“Then Abram said to Lot, ‘Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.’”*
- ✓ **Full of mercy.** The word “*full*” means to be stuffed or “*controlled by*.” Are you compassionate with those who are hurting? Do you look for practical ways to help? Luke 6:36: *“Be merciful as your father is merciful.”*
- ✓ **Good fruits.** Do you see spiritual fruit in your life? Check out Galatians 5:22-23: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”*
- ✓ **Impartial.** Do you treat people the same or do you show favoritism to a few?
- ✓ **Sincere.** Are you genuine or would people say you’re hypocritical?

In verse 18, James uses another metaphor, comparing wisdom with a seed that is sown. The root of godly wisdom results in some very attractive fruit: *“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

I see two responsibilities in this verse:

- **We must sow peace.** The word “*sow*” is the word for “*planting by scattering*.” When God grows purity and peace in us, then we can plant it in others.
- **We must show peace.** The phrase “*make peace*” literally means “*to do, to create, to work*.” Peace must be actively made because it never happens by chance. Left to ourselves, we drift toward divisiveness. Peace must be pursued until we have it, and then guarded so we don’t lose it. Psalm 34:14 says, *“Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”*

If the root is right the fruit will be right. If the root is wrong the fruit will be foul. In 1930, *The Chicago Examiner* ran a story about a man named Harry Havens. After one of many arguments with his wife, he shouted, *“All right, if that’s the way you feel, I’m going to bed. I’m going to stay there for the rest of my life and I don’t want to see you ever again.”* He ended up staying in bed with a blindfold

around his eyes for seven years! The article concludes by saying he got up when the bed started to feel uncomfortable.

Are you blinded by any bitterness in your life today? Do you have any unresolved anger toward your spouse, your kids, your parents, your boss, or a friend? Hebrews 12:15 makes clear we must do whatever it takes to not let a root of bitterness grow in the soil of our souls: ***“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”*** When bitterness is allowed to breed, it will always lead to an offspring of antagonism, which will hurt those around you while destroying yourself in the process. It’s like swallowing a bottle of poison and waiting for the other person to die.

Don’t allow your hurts to turn into hate. You can become bitter or better. The choice is up to you. Claim the promise of James 3:18: ***“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*** That’s better than staying in the uncomfortable bed of bitterness.

It’s easy to talk about the importance of peacemaking, but until we put peace into practice, it’s just words. Here are four action steps.

1. Make sure you’re at peace with God. If you have not yet put your faith in Christ, the Bible says you are at war with God (Ephesians 2:3). It’s time to have a peace conference with the Prince of Peace. There is no way to have the peace of God until you know the God of peace.

On Thursday I met my friend Gerad Hall for lunch. Gerad and his wife Missy attend Edgewood on Saturday nights. I struggled to find a place to park until I spotted some open space right across from the restaurant. I was pretty proud of my parallel parking as I deftly steered into the tight space. When I got out of the car I noticed I was outside of the white lines but didn’t think much of it. I went into the restaurant to wait for my friend. About a minute later I looked up and saw an officer writing a ticket and putting it on my windshield. I immediately ran outside to plead with the parking police. First I asked if I could just move my car. She said it was too late. Then I begged for mercy and she said I was outside the lines, thus breaking the law.

I almost lost my sanctification until I realized she was giving me what I deserved. I wanted mercy but what she gave me was justice. After lunch, when I was driving away, I noticed a bunch of other cars parked outside of the lines with no ticket on

their windshields. My desire for fairness almost put me in the bed of bitterness. Then it hit me; no matter what anyone else did, I was wrong. I had purposely parked outside the lines. I broke the law and my penalty was to pay a \$20 fine.

Officer Friendly was simply enforcing the ordinance. A price had to be paid. The only way I would have gotten out of it would be if Gerad, who is the stewardship rep for Moody, had offered to pay my fine. He didn't even offer.

Listen. You've also gone outside the lines of God's law. A price has to be paid. The Bible says the fine for sin is death. Thankfully Jesus paid the price and the penalty for every one of your sins. It's time to repent and receive what He has done for you when He died in your place. Will you believe and receive Him now?

2. Be at peace with those around you. Do you need to make things right with someone you're in a fight with? Is there anyone you need to forgive? Do you need to ask for forgiveness?

I wonder what would happen if our entire church would make a public commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution? Would you be willing to adopt this pledge I've adapted from Ken Sande's book entitled, "The Peacemaker"?

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict (Matthew 5:9; Luke 6:27-36; Galatians 5:19-26). Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on his grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles:

Glorify God — Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love, as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude (Psalm 37:1-6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:2-9; Colossians 3:1-4; James 3:17-18, 4:1-3; 1 Peter 2:12).

Get the Log out of Your Own Eye — Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes

and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused (Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 19:8; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 John 1:8-9).

Gently Restore — Instead of pretending conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner (Proverbs 19:11; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:29; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 5:9).

Go and be reconciled — Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matthew 5:23-24, 6:12, 7:12; Ephesians 4:1-3, 32; Philippians 2:3-4)

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing conflict resolution is an assignment, not an accident. We will remember success in God's eyes is not a matter of specific results, but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know His infinite love (Matthew 25:14-21; John 13:34-35; Romans 12:18; 1 Peter 2:19, 4:19).

3. Help others who are in conflict. How can God use you to build bridges between people who are in conflict? Let's be like Francis of Assisi, who prayed, *"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon."*

4. Lead others to be at peace with God. Ephesians 6:15 refers to believers having their feet fitted with *"the readiness that comes from the **gospel of peace.**"* 2 Corinthians 5:18 says we have been given the ministry of reconciliation as if God were making His appeal through us to others. Proverbs 11:30: *"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise."*

Our theme for Easter weekend is, “Encounter Jesus.” We will have three services on Saturday, April 20 at 3, 5 and 7 p.m. and three on Easter Sunday at 8, 9:30 and 11 a.m. Will you begin praying now for one person to invite? Who’s your one?

As a way to help us know how to best equip you to go with the gospel, we’ve put together a very brief survey. Would you take it out now?

We’re asking you to tell us how likely you are to recommend Edgewood to your neighbors, coworkers, classmates, friends, or relatives. This information will help us get a bearing on how we’re doing in our Go value and how we can better equip and empower you to extend personal invitations.

The ushers will come down and hand out pens if you need one. Simply raise your hand. As we complete the survey, our worship team will sing, “*Give Me Your Eyes.*”

Survey/Song

As you leave today simply take your survey and place it in one of the baskets just inside the gym doors [At end of the 8:00 service, there will be a basket on the stairs at the back of the gym].

Benediction

Receive this closing benediction from Philemon 6: “*I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.*”