

4-28-24 Finding Community (Growing Together in Christ)

Texts: James 3:4–11, 17–18; Proverbs 1:2

Application Point: Christians are called to live active lives in our communities, speaking honorably about others, yielding to others, and establishing orchards of peace for the purpose of harvesting righteousness.

Conflict is everywhere, isn't it?

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."

There is no way we can find community and grow together in Christ if we are warring with each other. Now listen closely, I didn't say if we have conflict we can't grow in Christ. Conflict is inevitable, but how are we handling that conflict is the question. Too often we are warring with each other, we are entrenched in our stubbornness, unwilling to give ground. It is more important to us to be right than righteous.

Conflict leading to warring begins in our heart and is revealed by our tongue.

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! 4 Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies! Psalm 141:3-4

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit. Pro. 18:21

Questions to ask yourself...

1. When I speak, what does it say about my relationship with Jesus?

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:26-27

- Do they learn that I'm real in my relationship with God or I'm a fraud?
- Are you an open book for the ways of Jesus or the Devil?
- Do you practice what you preach?

2. When I speak, what do others learn about Jesus?

- **Read James 3:1.**
- Your words teach others about who matters most in your life. There is a caution given here to teachers. Be careful what you say because you will be judged more strictly.
- Which statement best fits your life: People come to me when they want to hear about the hope we have in Jesus or people come to me when they want to hear about someone else?
- Are you someone else's place of refuge and strength or are you someone's garbage can?

3. When I speak, what do others learn about me and my priorities?

- Read James 3:2-5.
- How many wars, whether they were in a family, in a church, in a community or between countries were started by the tongue?
- What does my little member (tongue) say about me and my priorities?
- How do I respond when someone does something completely contrary to what I would do?
- How do I interact with those that don't believe the same things I do, politically, socially, or about what they believe about Jesus? Never mind sports related, that is exempt. (It's a joke!)
- When I speak what can others gather about what is most important to me?

4. When I speak what happens to others?

- Do they get burned? (Read James 3:5-6.)
- Do they get poisoned? (Read James 3:7-8.)
- Do they get confused? (Read James 3:9-12.)
- People can tell a lot about you from the words that come out of your mouth. What do your words say about you?
- The tongue has the power to direct, to destroy and to delight.
- If we want to find, and build community, if we want to grow in Christ together, we must make a choice. We can either be worldly and break peace or wise and make peace.

Read James 3:13-18.

James begins with a rhetorical question in **verse 13**, “**Who is wise and understanding among you?**” (ESV)

Wisdom is the skill of working out practically what God says in His Word. Knowledge and understanding will result in wisdom.

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.**” (ESV) 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 for presenting oneself for inspection. This goes along with **James 2:18**: “**I will show you my faith by my works.**” (ESV)

Wisdom is demonstrated by the way we live and how we act with humility. The true test of wisdom is works, not words. Wisdom is found when godly knowledge and understanding are applied. The fruit of our works are wisdom.

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.

- **Read verse 14.**
- In our age of texting acronyms like IDK, OMY, 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 envy** (jealousy)” is to want what someone else has so much we end up harboring bitterness. Selfish “self-seeking” is all about getting ahead.
- We’re given the source of this kind of jealousy and selfishness in **verse 15 (Read verse 15)**.
- It comes from the world’s belief system, our flesh, and the devil.
- 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.
- Especially those of us that are parents. If we believe what Jesus taught, then we must 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 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).
- Look where worldly, fleshly, and demoniac wisdom takes us, **read verse 16**.
- 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.**”
- 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?”

2. A wise person makes peace.

- **Read verse 17.**
- **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.

- **Gentle.** This has the idea of being forbearing. Are you gentle and reasonable with others or would people say you’re harsh?
- **Willing to yield.** Do you have an open-minded attitude, or do you always need to be right and have things your way? (Uh-Oh, now I am meddling!)
- **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...”**
- **Without partiality.** Do you treat people the same or do you show favoritism to a few?
- **Without hypocrisy.** Are you genuine or would people say you’re hypocritical?
- **Read verse 18.**
- **We must sow peace.** The word “sown” 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. **Psalms 34:14 says, “Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”**
- 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, another believer, or a friend?

“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.” Hebrews 12:15

- 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 hurt to turn into hate. You can become bitter or better. The choice is up to you.

Conclusion

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 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.
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"?
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **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.
3. **Help others in conflict.** How can God use you to build bridges between people who are in conflict?
 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."**