

## Lesson 12     17 April, 2016

### Faith Expressed in Peaceable Relationships

#### Lesson Scope: **James 3:13-4:12**

*References in brackets refer to James 3 and 4 unless otherwise noted*

#### Lesson Focus

The history of man since the Fall is full of hatred, strife, and murder. Cain, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, slew his brother. In succeeding centuries, social conditions deteriorated as man's unrestrained selfish nature expressed itself. In the time of Noah, God destroyed the earth with a flood because it was filled with violence. Most of the people living then were unable to live peaceably with others. Man in his earthly wisdom positions himself above others and seeks to control and manipulate them for his own advantage.

The tongue, which can express hatred and stir strife, is not the root of the problem, however. The problem is rooted in man's carnal nature. Men of faith apply God's provisions for victory over the enmity rooted in human nature. They crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24). Only such persons are able to live peaceably with all men. Men of faith seek God's grace to subdue carnal passions that gender strife. They humble themselves, knowing that pride causes contentions (Proverbs 13:10).

The second greatest commandment calls the believer to love his neighbor as himself. What godly wisdom teaches, divine grace enables him to perform.

What the world calls peace is often little more than an agreement to cease fighting. They view humility as weakness. They defend themselves by using force, which they say is necessary to protect peace, but they find peace elusive.

This lesson is especially applicable to our time. Domestic strife, divorce, strained interpersonal relationships, lawsuits, racial strife, and ethnic conflicts that abound in our time indicate that many people in our world are incapable of living in peace with their fellow men. Let us learn the way of peace, lest we become involved in these conflicts.

In studying this lesson observe that peace is the work of God. Only those who by faith allow God to work in them can experience true peace. Emphasize the need of God's grace, which He gives to the humble. God is strong in behalf of those who feel their need of Him.

**Lesson Aim:** To present principles for living peaceably with others.

**Theme Verse:** [Romans 14:19](#). Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

**Lesson Text:**

### **Wisdom's Power for Peace**

James 3:13-18 <sup>13</sup> Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. <sup>15</sup> This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish. <sup>16</sup> For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

### **Man's Spirit of Strife**

James 4:1-5 <sup>1</sup> From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members? <sup>2</sup> Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. <sup>3</sup> Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts. <sup>4</sup> Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

### **God's Enabling Grace**

James 4:6-12 <sup>6</sup> But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded. <sup>9</sup> Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. <sup>11</sup> Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

## **Questions for Study**

### **Wisdom's Power for Peace**

1. How does "meekness of wisdom" affect the way we relate to others?
2. How do the traits of godly wisdom (3:17) contribute to making peace?
3. Explain how purity (3:17) and the fruit of righteousness (3:18) make peaceable relationships possible.
4. Why do partiality and hypocrisy generate strife and confusion?

### **Man's Spirit of Strife**

5. Why is the carnal nature never satisfied?
6. What steps can we take to avoid friendship with the world?

### **God's Enabling Grace**

7. Why is humility needed in order to receive God's grace?
8. How does submission to God enable us to overcome carnal tendencies?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

In 3:13-18, earthly wisdom is contrasted with heavenly wisdom. Earthly wisdom exalts man and devises ways to satisfy his selfish, carnal nature, often at the expense of others. It leaves behind a trail of strife, broken relationships, disorders, and evils of all kinds. In verse 17, we note the orderliness of godly wisdom in contrast to the confusion of its devilish counterpart. A consistent, righteous life will produce the fruit of peace with God and with one's fellow men. See Isaiah 32:17-18.

We see in 4:1-5 that the writer used pointed words to show the cause of strife and its results. Lust and the desire to serve self destroy peace. The carnal man does not know what he truly needs. He strives to obtain what he wants but is never satisfied with it once he gets it.

Pride is of the world and makes one the enemy of God. Pride makes one feel self-sufficient and independent, having no need of God.

Humility and submission bring peace and true fulfillment. God is able to provide what we truly need; we do not need to fight and war to obtain what God can readily give us. He gives His grace to the humble, who have a proper view of themselves. That—along with faith in God, expressed by submitting to Him (4:7) and by drawing nigh to Him (4:8)—makes peace possible.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Wisdom's Power for Peace**

1. Godly wisdom fosters a meekness that characterizes one's total way of life (3:13). Meekness is not weakness but a disposition resulting from

God's power at work to control the fires of anger or passion. With God's help we can relate to others unselfishly and peaceably because our carnal desires are denied. Instead of competition and hostility, the meek person displays gentleness and kindness in all his dealings.

2. Peace is impossible for those who are ruled by the sinful nature (3:14-16). The sinful nature is driven by envy, and it strives to obtain what it desires. Those who are ruled by this spirit grow more desperate and persistent when they fail to obtain what they desire.

Every person needs to be born again. In that process, God imparts the divine nature, making it possible to be free from bondage to the old nature.

3. Peace exists under certain conditions (3:17). When wisdom from above regulates one's character and conduct, peace becomes possible. The godly character that such wisdom produces abounds in righteousness. Peace will spring forth in the character regulated by wisdom from above.

4. Peaceable relationships require a personal choice (3:18). When one chooses to live by God's standard of holiness, his life produces the fruit of peace. Those who make peace and choose to be peacemakers when others are being disagreeable create an environment where peace can prevail and strife ceases.

### **Man's Spirit of Strife**

5. Hostile relationships and frustrated desires are a loud call to examine one's affections, motives, and general spiritual condition (4:1-5). As Christians, we can get caught up in the world's ways of attempting to resolve disagreements. We need to evaluate what drives us and mortify the fleshly lusts that war in our hearts. By letting God help us to know what we truly need, we are able to pray with proper motives that are acceptable unto God. Seeking the things of the world will make us the enemy of God.

As Christians, we should pray that God would help us to love what He loves and to desire only what He knows is for our good. Jesus taught us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; then God will provide the material necessities of life.

### **God's Enabling Grace**

6. To those who humble themselves in repentance, God gives ample grace for victory (4:6-10). The proud, who feel no need of God's grace, will fail. But the humble person can receive God's grace and benefit from it. He knows he is weak and dependent on God. Submission is simply a willingness to take God's way rather than our own. We learn by experience that taking our own way is unsatisfactory in the end.

When we repent, we experience a change of mind. We acknowledge that

we have sinned and that we have lived in hopeless bondage to self. God's grace becomes available to us at that point, freeing us from slavery to the old nature and providing the power to live as God intended.

7. A close relationship with God prepares us for good relationships with others (4:8). We draw near to God as we conform our understanding to His revealed truth. We submit our will to His providential guidance. When we yield to God, He enables us to forge healthy relationships with our fellow men. "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7).

8. Peace excludes evil speaking and unfair judging (4:11, 12). Our tongues must be ruled by the law of kindness. We must judge by the Law of God, not by our own opinions. We are called to be doers of the Word and to promote that by our example and our words. God is the Lawgiver and the one qualified to judge those who break His Law.

### **Important Teachings**

1. Godly wisdom fosters a meekness that characterizes one's total way of life (3:13).
2. Peace is impossible for those who are ruled by the sinful nature (3:14-16).
3. Peace exists under certain conditions (3:17).
4. Peaceable relationships require a personal choice (3:18).
5. Hostile relationships and frustrated desires are a loud call to examine one's affections, motives, and general spiritual condition (4:1-5).
6. To those who humble themselves in repentance, God gives ample grace for victory (4:6-10).
7. A close relationship with God prepares us for good relationships with others (4:8).
8. Peace excludes evil speaking and unfair judging (4:11-12).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. How does "meekness of wisdom" affect the way we relate to others?  
When godly wisdom modifies our disposition, anger and selfishness are kept from controlling our actions. Righteous conduct and actions are the seeds from which peace can grow. The proud person does not feel a need for godly wisdom. Consequently, he employs earthy wisdom, which results in envy and strife.
2. How do the traits of godly wisdom (3:17) contribute to making peace?  
Purity in thought and word springs from peace with God and makes peace

with others possible. Such a person is gentle in his approach to others, and he responds positively when others approach him. He extends mercy to others just as God has shown mercy to him. He is sincere and fair in all his dealings. He has no hidden agenda by which he seeks to take advantage of others.

3. Explain how purity (3:17) and the fruit of righteousness (3:18) make peaceable relationships possible.

Godly wisdom begins by purifying one from selfish ambition and carnal desire. It leads him to think realistically about himself and to seek the good of others. As a result, he deals fairly and lovingly. The fruit of the Spirit comes forth from his life. These facilitate peace with others.

4. Why do partiality and hypocrisy generate strife and confusion?

Partiality generates suspicion and feelings of rejection. It violates others' sense of fairness and justice, destroying trust. It is often based on bias and prejudice.

Hypocrisy creates confusion about the real intentions of the hypocrite. When hypocritical actions become evident and the deception is uncovered, conflicts often escalate, making peace elusive.

5. Why is the carnal nature never satisfied?

The carnal nature seeks satisfaction in things that can never provide satisfaction. It mistakenly believes it will be satisfied by always getting its own way. It seeks happiness in the accumulation of material goods, but those things do not satisfy. It finds that occupying positions of power and prestige do not satisfy. Only God can meet man's need satisfactorily and completely. He knows best what we truly need.

6. What steps can we take to avoid friendship with the world?

Friendship with the world includes companying with worldly people, employing the world's methods, and copying the world's dress and customs. We must make a conscious choice to allow God's Word and our brethren in the church to help us to avoid these things.

7. Why is humility needed in order to receive God's grace?

The proud person feels self-sufficient; he does not see a need for God's grace. The humble person desires peaceful relationships with others and recognizes that he needs God's grace to achieve them. God does not give grace to a proud person, because the proud one feels no need of it and therefore could not profit by it. But God's grace at work in a humble person helps him to see his own weaknesses and to forbear with others' weaknesses.

8. How does submission to God enable us to overcome carnal tendencies?

To submit to God, we must be ready to believe that God's way is best and that our own way will fail. When we are suspicious about our own motives and are aware of the deceitfulness of our own heart, we will be open to God's Word and the help it offers. Submission to God makes us ready to receive God's help to release us from the domination of our carnal tendencies.

Giving up self is never easy. We win the strife within when we allow God to rule in our hearts.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

The order of these verses in the Beatitudes, which Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount, shows how divine wisdom does its work. The believer's heart must first be purified. That must precede any effort at making peace, for without purity, peace will be impossible.

God's mercy shown to us motivates us to extend mercy to others. Did not God make the first move to effect peace between us and Him?

### **Research Guide**

1. Read Genesis 26, the account of Isaac's approach for keeping peace with his Philistine neighbors.

2. Read Matthew 18, where we find Jesus' teaching on how to resolve offenses and deal peaceably with those who trespass against us.