



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Peacemakers

James 3:18

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Introduction

1. In his commentary on James, David Nystrom relates several cases of churches who suppressed tensions in the interest of “keeping the peace.” For example, one church’s “new senior pastor announces to the congregation that he desires the entire staff to stay in place, but in private makes it clear to one staff member that his resignation is required.” When the resignation is announced, the man is asked if he is being “forced out.” He responds that he is leaving “in the interests of peace and the welfare of the church.”¹
2. Nystrom calls his answer a “lie.”
 - a. Not so much because the man intended one thing and said something else: He evidently did not want to contribute to a church fuss, so, to avoid that, he resigned.
 - b. But because the statement falsely represented peace: What claimed to be peace was not really peace as defined by Scripture. It was a false peace, and therefore a “lie.”
3. Nystrom’s discussion points to a need to study “peace” as it is used in Scripture, not culture. When we do, we will see that sometimes the only way to have real peace is to “disrupt the community for its ultimate good by declaring war on superficial compromises which pass for peace.”² In light of James 3:18, let’s explore that more.

Body

I. Peace Defined and Described.

- A. The Bible’s view of peace (שלום, *shālôm*; εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*) is not like common views.
 1. Typically peace is seen as “the absence of obvious tension” (Nystrom, 212).³

¹ David P. Nystrom, *James*, The NIV Application Commentary, 213-214.

² Harold S. Songer, “James,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, 12:126.

³ So, we hear comments to the effect that it’s been a good year at church because we had no outward trouble.

2. The ancient Greeks also saw it as the trait of a nation not at war, and then of relationships without discord or trouble.⁴
 3. But, “in reading the OT, one has the impression of entering another world, ... because of the new content of this idea” (Spicq, 426).
 - a) Generally, *shālôm* means “completion and fulfillment – of entering into a state of wholeness and unity, a restored relationship.”⁵
 - b) “[T]he great innovation of the OT is to make peace a religious idea: it is a gift of God” (Spicq, 427-428).⁶
 4. Two important Old Testament themes are closely connected with peace.
 - a) Covenant, focusing on the obligations to be met, including restitution if necessary, so that the relationships were as they were supposed to be.⁷
 - b) Closely connected to covenant were the ideas of justice or righteousness, the way things were when they were in line with God’s nature and way.⁸
 5. In summary, peace is an objective reality, “the creation and maintenance of a state of truth, honesty, righteousness, and justice” (Nystrom, 212; Spicq, 433).
- B. We understand it better when we see it expressed; Psalm 85 illustrates.⁹
1. In a community lament at a time when God had shown his displeasure with them, the people sought forgiveness, restoration, and revival (1-7).
 2. Then, they celebrated what that would look like in action (8-13).
 - a) Verses 8, 10 refer to “peace”; depicting it as “kissing” righteousness (10).
 - b) People at peace will “not turn back to folly” (8), will experience the nearness of salvation (9), and will practice steadfast love and faithfulness (parallel to peace and righteousness - v. 10) – just as things should be.

II. Ruled by the Prince of Peace.

A. The expected work of the Messiah.

1. Messianic texts in Isaiah highlight peace and justice and the qualification of the Ruler to bring this state into existence (Isa. 9:6-7; 42:1-4; 61:1-2)

⁴ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. & ed. James D. Ernest, 1:424-426.

⁵ *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament [TWOT]*, by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright © 1980. From BibleWorks 10. The word was also used of prosperity, being well, completeness, safety.

⁶ So, we see why the LXX, in addition to εἰρήνη (*eirēnē*), used “salvation” (σώζω, *sōzō*) and “completeness” (τέλειος, *teleios*) to translate שָׁלוֹם (*shālôm*).

⁷ G. Gerleman, “שָׁלוֹם *šlm* to have enough,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, edited by Ernst Jenni & Claus Westermann, translated by Mark E. Biddle, 3:1340, 1343

⁸ Joseph P. Healey, “Peace (Old Testament),” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freeman, 5: 206.

⁹ See also Isaiah 32. There, the restoration of God’s people, with a king reigning in righteousness, is set in contrast to the demise of Egypt. Things will be better when God’s “Spirit is poured upon us from on high,” leading to a reversal of fortunes (v. 15). “Justice” and “righteousness” will prevail, the effect of which will be “peace” (16-17), allowing the people to enjoy “peaceful habitation” (18).

2. Zechariah also ties the ideas closely together (Zech. 8:12, 16-17; 9:9-10).
- B. Jesus identified with these expectations and made peace a part of his mission.
 1. In Luke 4:18-19, he cited Isaiah 61:1-2.
 2. In cases where he granted healing and forgiveness, he stressed peace (Luke 7:50; 8:48; $\sigma\acute{\omicron}\zeta\omega$, $s\acute{o}z\omega$ is also used in both texts), exactly what we would expect given the meaning of peace and nature of Jesus' mission to make things right.
 3. But, notice that he also expected his work to disrupt things on occasion (Luke 12:49-53), sensible since peace is so closely associated with righteousness.
- C. Colossians 3:1-15 shows the practice of peace, rightly understood.
 1. Verse 15 commands us to let "peace rule" ($\beta\rho\alpha\beta\epsilon\upsilon\acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega$, *brabeuetō*).
 2. This is part of putting on attitudes and behaviors necessary for right living and unity after putting off sinful attitudes and behaviors (vv. 5-9, 12-14).
 3. What must govern this are "the things that are above, where Christ is" (vv. 1-4); since he made things right, we would expect nothing else.
 4. The notion of peace "ruling" — and the things we are to "put on" — suggests that steps must be taken to let peace rule, even if that means disrupting the calm.

III. "Peacemakers Who Sow in Peace" (James 3:18, NIV).

- A. In stressing righteousness as the result of peace, James reflects the Old Testament connection, essentially echoing Isaiah 32:16-17.
 1. He has been concerned with righteousness and justice throughout the letter (e.g., 1:27; 2:1-7, 14-17).
 2. Wise people imitate God (see Jas. 3:17), living so things are as they should be.
 3. Peace is defined in terms of what is not present, but results from the effort to do the right thing by "the ones doing peace" ($\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \pi\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\nu\ \epsilon\iota\rho\eta\nu\eta\nu$, *tois poiousin eirēnēn*).
- B. In his letter, James repeatedly stresses that doing the right thing will often involve actions that are the opposite of letting things ride "in the interests of peace and the welfare of the church" (see above).
 1. The paragraph on wisdom (3:13-18) is a call to confront the sinful attitudes and behaviors that had jealousy and sectarian ambition at their heart.
 2. After exposing divisive behaviors (4:1-4), James issues a series of commands (imperative verbs) that, if obeyed, would have stirred things up:
 - a) "Submit" and "resist" (4:7).
 - b) "Draw near," "cleanse," "purify" (4:8).
 - c) "Be wretched," "mourn," "weep," "turn around [your laughter]" (4:9).
 - d) "Humble yourselves" (4:10).

- e) "Stop speaking against" and "judging one another" (4:11).
- 3. But his confrontation of peace-disturbing behavior extends to other areas of concern: the hollow use of the greeting "go in peace" while ignoring the needs of the ill-clothed and hungry is to be confronted and changed (2:14-16).
- C. Clearly, James grasped that to bring about peace meant disrupting the status quo in order to bring about the greater good, the purity that imitated God.

Conclusion

1. Does learning the Bible's view of peace make you at all uncomfortable?
 - a. Do we suffer a loss of inner peace because we have not sought to be right with God?
 - b. Do we ever ignore sins in the interest of peace?
 - c. Do we allow selfish and sectarian attitudes and behaviors to go unchecked because we don't want to disrupt the peace?
 - d. Do we understand that real peace involves righteousness and justice? That ignoring or finding ways to make dealing with some things more comfortably hinders spiritual growth?
 - e. Conversely, do we appreciate the cost involved in forgiving others so things will be right, i.e., at peace?
2. The place to begin may be in taking a matter to God and getting things right with him. Then, we can search our hearts and do the work real peace requires.

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