

Are You Dynamite Or A Peacemaker In The Church?

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Please take your Bibles and turn to James 3, I want to read the entire chapter this morning—it is a good reminder.

Jam 3:1 - Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. 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.

Let's pray together.

Father, we have an aversion to anyone that would seek to make an open show in the flesh. Lord, I want you to give debilitating grace this morning, Lord, to make me so consciously dependent upon you. I would pray, Father, that you would save me from myself, that you would save us all from ourselves. Lord, there will be risings of thoughts, of diversion, self-deception, pride as we sit and listen to this message. But I pray, Lord, that they would be kept at a distance, not to interfere in any way with what the Spirit seeks to say through the Word of God to us this morning. Thank you for this great privilege Lord, to be with these people, please help us. In Jesus name, Amen.

This morning I have chosen a text and I have felt led to set forth a title that hopefully will be a great encouragement to you as a faith family in the upcoming days. It's something that resonates within my heart. I have worked with HeartCry Missionary Society for the last 16 years. We see the issue of variance and selfish ambition, even among some of the best of our missionaries. I've battled with that in my own heart on many occasions. So this morning what I want to do is share with you just some thoughts under the title of *Blessed Are The Peacemakers*.

The background of the text here is that you had a plethora of men that were coming forward equating a call with their ability to speak, and from the outset there was a very solemn warning issued in 3:1—*My brethren, be not masters, don't aspire to be spiritual leaders, for you shall receive the greater condemnation, the stricter judgment.*

So interesting that James would proceed and he would give this contrast between the evil tongue and the good tongue. And he shows us the nature of it and what inspires one from the other. And then you read on and you find in verse 13, and here is the emphasis of the text: *Who is that wise and understood ending man or woman among you that by his or her good conduct, let them show their works in the meekness of wisdom.* That certainly is a conduit for peace. And then the writer James precedes and he talks about what is heavenly wisdom as opposed to that which is characterized by sensuality and even demonic character. And it's interesting, brethren, that it all culminated in this precious verses scripture in verse 18. And this is the emphasis of what James is setting forth: *a harvest of peace is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

The premiere characteristic of a spiritual leader in a man or a woman is that they make for peace. We certainly believe that there are qualifications in Titus and Timothy concerning spiritual leaders that must be observed and must be followed. But from what I'm learning these days, one of the primary characteristics of a spiritual leader, whether it's the Mom in the home or whether it's

a Father over it's household, or whether it's a leader in the church in some capacity, *is do they say those things and do those things that make for peace.*

So the context of the overall passage begins with a solemn warning. James cautions those who desire to be teachers of this grave responsibility, such administration causes a man to tremble in light of a future judgment, a stricter judgment. So consider the verses on the tongue that follow. As a spiritual leader, it's not about how well he speaks, it's not about how well he articulates. They are thinking to themselves that if I'm able to interpret this scripture, to preach with smooth words, to engage people with my verbal expression, then God certainly has a hand on me to lead them. But James says, "No!" The premier qualification of being a leader is a person that makes for peace. And when considering a man as a teacher, James tells us furthermore in the text, to look for one whose life is governed by wisdom and knowledge, not just simply a knowledge of scholarship that comes to the study of God's Word, but a knowledge that is experiential in nature, that governs over the life of the individual. The nature of this wisdom is spiritual, because you see this man, this woman who has some type of leadership capacity, views things from an eternal perspective. They can see beyond. They can see what's going on behind the scenes. They've cultivated their minds, their intuitive faculty to see what's going on beyond. Whereas the knowledge or understanding speaks of a practical understanding of truth. There are two marks here of spiritual maturity, knowledge and wisdom, and both are demonstrated in a spiritual life characterized by sincerity, holiness, and meekness.

How about that as a need in this hour? Oh, now it's interesting, brethren. A proper understanding of the text reveals that there were men who thought they were qualified to teach because they could speak well, they could move a congregation with persuasive words, but there was an absence of inner character to lead the people. They could impress with enticing words of man's wisdom but they were inefficient in self-control that makes for peacemaking. So after James here, contrast divine wisdom with worldly wisdom, he tells them at the end of the chapter, once again, I reiterate that the real qualification for teaching is being, listen, an intentional peacemaker, which oftentimes in the way of implication, requires us exercising risk, by faith confronting people. And he says in verse 18 that the *harvest of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

So track with me this morning when I think on the qualifications here in Titus and Timothy of elders and deacons in the church in times past with our own small faith family, our own congregation in Sheffield, Alabama, I've stressed the importance of

looking for men who evidence those character qualities beyond those qualifications. I believe that one of the vital needs of a leader is to give and receive corrections. But beyond the biblical qualities of spiritual leaders and my personal preferences, I begin to recognize not only from the Scripture, but also in my interaction with people, *how vital it was for a man or a woman to be a peacemaker.*

I don't know where you are, but as I shared with the men the other night, my resolve at 69 years of age, if I leave anything behind to the praise of his glory, I want to leave a legacy of love, not to the tune of biblical compromise—but God, I want to do everything I can to endeavor to keep unity in the bond, not for the sake of it, but in the bond of peace.

So think about this for a moment. When you see this, and as I saw it, I reflected on church history and recalled how many divisions, separation there were. *Bloodshed could have been avoided if Christian ministers, as well as lay people would have only taken the time to reconcile their differences and exercise radical faith to promote unity.* Think about it in our own day. How many churches in our may have been kept from division leading to destruction if their leaders would have pursued the things which make for peace? How many relationships may have been spared from discord and permanent separation if men and women would have spoken the truth and love, how many people would have found motivation in the example of one another? If the people in the church had not been overcome with evil, but would have overcome evil with good, I'm not promoting a philosophy of how to win people and make friends—none of that at all. But I tell you, friend, there's so much I could have done. There's so many things I could have avoided that could have made for peace. In this very hour would have resulted in fruit abounding to the glory of God. *But oftentimes I shoot quick from the hip and the lip, and I've hurt the cause of Christ.*

Think with me for a moment. Just one passing illustration of church history. I'm so indebted to Alexander Strauch, who wrote so extensively on the importance of agape love. And if you remember, one of the books he wrote was *Lessons We Learned from the Life of R.C. Chapman*. You can think of this man's life for a moment. Charles Spurgeon said of Chapman that was a saintly man, that he ever knew, and Chapman was ever a peacemaker who walked in love so much so that at the end of his long life of 99 years, he became so well known for his loving disposition and wisdom that a letter from abroad addressed simply to R.C. Chapman. It was addressed to R.C. Chapman, *University of Love, England* was correctly delivered to him. That was a reputation he had on one occasion when someone asked Chapman, “How are

you?” He replied that he was, “heavily burdened.” The concerned inquirer was relieved when Chapman added, “He daily loads us down with benefits.” That's the right perspective. And it's interesting that after Chapman assumed the pastoral role of *Ebenezer Chapel* in Barnstaple, England, that a few of the members of the congregation did not like the change that was occurring in the church. They reacted to Chapman's leadership and gave the pastor much trouble ultimately leaving the church. But interestingly, because of the minister's relentless love for these people in the years that followed, most resolve their differences with him and many of them returned to the church. I want to be like Chapman.

There are three things that you see in our texts. Three Indispensable qualities of a peacemaker.

First of all, is godly character. Look at verse 13 again. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show my good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. This is important. Listen carefully. What does this mean? The Apostle James challenges those who believe that the qualifications of being a teacher, they believe that their speaking ability was what was called for. But he tells them that the real proof of whether they can teach is found in a godly behavior of meekness. He is saying that the benefit of those who recommend themselves by how well they spoke, that their verbal giftedness is no proof of their leadership capacity. While the real mark of leadership maturity is a life of holiness couched in a meek disposition. I'm so disenamored today with platform speakers because up close and personal, some of the men that I have gotten to know very closely, there's anything but meekness. It's all about them.

Second characteristic here in verse 17 is godly wisdom. Notice the text, but the wisdom that is from above is first, purer, then peaceable. Then gentle, willing to yield. In other words, as the ESV says, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits without partiality and without hypocrisy, in other words, the grace of sincerity. Heavenly wisdom, brothers and sisters, is to see life once again from a providential perspective. It is God centered. And it enables us to view everything through the lens of eternity. James gives us eight aspects of this divine give that are at the heart of peacemaking. Listen very carefully for the sake of time. Let me just articulate or enumerate these things in your hearing.

First of all, he says, what characterizes this wisdom is that it is pure wisdom from above. Note purifies the mind. It refers to a purity of heart. The word literally means innocent, harmless. And one commentator says the meaning here is that the first immediate effect of religion is not on the intellect to make it more enlightened, but it is to purify the heart, to make the man upright.

In a sense of and good. So peacemaking wisdom from above has good intent to help others.

Secondly, he uses the word peaceable. This wisdom inclines a man to be a passive of fire. It seeks to pray for and take the initiative to reconcile parties. A believer under the influence of this wisdom, strategizes his ways of peace on how he might restore parties recommending the best possible alternative to encourage to promote peace.

The next word is gentle. This just cuts against the grain of my flesh. I'll stop here to share this with you. It's amazing that it's true that the two greatest agents for impacting a life and changing the course of a life and offering a character are the *books you read and the people you meet*. When I came on, HeartCry and went to Eastern Europe and I saw some things that concerned me. I did not approach the brethren in a spirit of meanness, considering myself, but I had the tendency to be highly confrontational. I engaged them in much anxiousness and God used brother Paul Washer and brother Sorin Prodan to teach me to love, not to be so quick to draw, not to be impulsive but to listen, and to speak the truth. And I had to be firm about it. But to learn this dimension of approach that these confrontations are couched in the spirit of meekness is something that is distinctly supernatural. But the word here for gentle means mild. It is a word that we get to expression gentlemen from. It suggests the virtue of patience. You see the idea here? The implication is a peacemaker. His demeanor is characterized by a gracious, long suffering in seeing things resolved.

Number four, he uses the term willing to yield. This is interesting, brethren. Listen up. The world speaks of a difference and reason wins. It means easily persuaded or about this one complaint according to one man. The sense is that he who is under the influence of the wisdom, which is from above, is not stiff, stern, obstinate and unyielding. The peacemaker is willing to listen carefully without interruption, to the view of another. This applies to the home. Don't run roughshod over your wife. Be a leader, but be a loving leader and listen to her out.

Next one, he uses his full of mercy. Another character quality of this wisdom. It means the ability of brethren to feel...to feel! I have to tell you recently Adam from Poland gave me a book *Something Must Be Known and Felt* by Stuart Olyott—what a change it brings about. It resulted in almost a complete paradigm shift. I'd been tracking this area of experience of spirituality, but to know I felt Christ to make something mystical or super subjective or radically charismatic. I'm talking about something far more real than that. To be known by Christ, John Owen and Spurgeon both believed this. And rarely did they ever minister that there was not a pervasive sense of the presence of Christ that stood beside them.

What we've lost in Christianity, our ability to feel, the ability to feel under difficult circumstances, the idea is disposed to compassion. He is inclined, brothers and sisters listen to imagine himself in the same conflict of interest. It's like you cross into the shell, the body of the other. All of a sudden he begins to see things differently. And then there's good fruits, he says. It means to extend grace and kindness and a benevolent hand to those who hurt and conflict. You see, notice the peacemaker will encourage peace by often making personal concessions to restore harmony.

Then here's another characteristic: love without partiality. It means to show no favoritism due to race, sex, social status or personal relationship. True wisdom seeks to show no bias toward one party over another. We started a church many, many, many years ago in Kinston, North Carolina. The church began to thrive and grow. There were probably 80 or 90 people coming. It was so encouraging to see what God was doing. We had a young man come and he took over the church, a very gifted preacher. But he was not a peacemaker. And one of the older men in the church came to me on the behalf of the other older men in the church voicing concern. I listened to the side of the story of the young man. I listened to their side of their story and all I can say was that I'm not a part of the church. I'm not a part of the leadership. But I listened to the older man. I said, You've told me what you believe. And this young man told me what he believes, what his perspective is. But I said, *But has anybody considered what God feels and what God believes?* And I said, in case you need reminding brothers, God says, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with our brothers. See, that's another characteristic here. It means no false front. In other words, you're not sitting there nodding and agreeing, but you're really taking things here and you're seeking to assimilate those things before the Lord God. What is a proper answer? God, please give me the grace of discretion to answer this thing properly in such a way that will afford peace. There is no separation, in other words. Here's the idea here in his words, or inward intent. Once again, one commentator says what it professes to be. It denotes sincerity. There is no disguise or mask. Assume what the man pretends to be. He is. He does not give a false impression, a false assumption. Here's another characteristic of this type of person, this peacemaker. And that is there's a godly pursuit. Verse number 18. This is where it all culminates. Brothers and sisters. Don't miss this one verse of scripture this morning. Take this with you. Let it sink deep down into your heart. But James says in verse 18, *Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* James says, show me your ability to make peace. So the fruit of righteousness here. How about this is the anticipated harvest of

those who pursue peace. The best fields for reaping and harvest of gospel fruit are quiet, restful places that are not among battles, turmoil, political unrest or fiery disputes. Why? Because the wrath of man never produces the righteousness of God's while God's sovereign grace can work mightily brothers and sisters in the most turbulent context. He normally chooses his greatest work and lasting work. When the gospel is sown in peace. That's what I want.

And if you notice today, I mean, we're part of a *Sovereign Grace Network*. We're part of the *Reformed Network*, whatever you want to call it, you know, but we certainly have no monopoly on peace. We know all the scriptures about peace. We can wax eloquently in expounding it, but where is the reality of it? I've never known this part of the Church of Jesus Christ. What would make the Reformed Church more fragmented than it is today? And all because everybody's got to make a point over minor issues in most cases.

So here's my conclusion this morning. Get a load of this. It is appropriate to remind ourselves of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:9. This is weighty. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. They'll make you smile—and make your heart dance. J.C. Ryle said *peacemaker means that those who use all their influence to promote peace and unity on earth in private and in public*, this is what we should desire, he said. But how disconcerting, brethren, it is that so many people are inclined to be instigators and contributors to strife. They delight in inciting contention rather than promoting peace.

I am well acquainted with such professing believers presently in my own life. One individual, for example, has a reputation of criticizing every church leader. He becomes acquainted with an infraction in a little minor point that does not sit well with him. He promotes dissension. One of my responsibilities now with HeartCry, since I have stepped down from the Eastern European Coordinator position, is my wife and I, we do the counseling. Everybody that contacts through the website, normally most of that channeled to us. The other day a dear brother, I assume he's a brother, but he's a wrangler. As soon as I got on the phone, I mean, with him, he's flaunting his intellectualism. He's quoting verses of Scripture. He's waxing eloquently as to what he believes theologically. And then he says he's been to so many churches in his area of the country and he is never satisfied because sooner or later somebody is going to say something or the preacher is going to preach something he doesn't agree with. And what he does is he takes his wife and his child and leaves the church. *So I confronted him and talked to him on the phone. I said, Brother, you're not doing your family any good. You have no idea*

the damage that your wife and child are causing because of your obnoxious pride. Now, I said some of these things that you mentioned. We've all got varying views in these minor areas, but for him, that gives you the right to create dissension and cause discord among the money. He thanked me, but obviously two days later he contacted HeartCry again and went to speak to somebody else.

So the question is asked this morning, do you want to be a peacemaker? Do you deserve brothers and sisters to take the painstaking steps to assume the role of encouraging men to reconcile their differences? Are you willing to begin the process of sowing in peace by dying to your own self-will to right wrongs with people that you have carried a personal grudge or offense toward? So you ask the question: Well, how can I become a peacemaker? How can I cultivate this character?

Let me close with this. First of all, Seek peace and pursue it in your own relationship with others. Don't get absorbed with other people's conflicts or other people's relationships. But come before God—*what is it in my life right now that perhaps in my heart of hearts there is a hurt? Is there bitterness? By the way, a lot of people, what they call hurts toward people is nothing but bitterness. Bitterness is a subliminal sin. And you call it hurt. God calls it bitterness.*

1 Peter 3:10-11. Listen to this. *For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him shun evil and do good.* How about this for a pursuit? *Let him seek peace and pursue it.* You know what the word pursue means? It means to stalk. Nobody likes to be stalked. Nobody likes to be the object of a stalker? You hear about it all the time. But this is what we're talking about because this is what should be on our side spiritually if I am literally stalking peace. I'm hunting down peace.

Secondly, determinant in your life as a Christian to be gospel driven in your pursuit of peacemaking. Now, please listen to this Ephesians 4:32 through chapter five verse to the Apostle said,

Be kind when to another tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake have forgiving you be there for followers of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also loved us and has given himself.

Notice this posture of ministry: walking in love is inspired by the love of Christ demonstrated on Calvary. I got to tell you something, brothers and sisters, the sustains and drives everything in my life. It drives my marriage and drives my mortification of sin and drives my mission. And when you read those, my autobiography of Charles Spurgeon and the year before last I read that and followed up with the two volumes set on Martyn

Lloyd-Jones by Iain Murray. You know what it was that drove them? You know what the difference was in those men's lives is they were caught up with wonder. They were intentional in setting up opportunities to contemplate the wonders of God and the premier wonder was the cross and this is what drove them was the depths of the cross, the wonders, the beauties of the atonement. And it and it fuels our fire. When I think of Calvary. And I think that Christ took the position of death to reconcile for me as an enemy of God to God himself through the merits of his son. This motivates me to be a peacemaker. Nothing sustains peacemaking any more than consistently pondering the cross one because *propitiation and propels peacemaking*.

Here's a proper approach to reconciling with the person. Before anyone reconciles, someone must take the position of death. Death to reputation, death to rights, death to opinions, I'm going to take the position of death to see God magnified in my attempt to reconcile with this person. And that's exactly what God did. He took the initiative to take the position of death in the person of his Son, to reconcile us to himself.

Are you interested? David Miller, you know, he sits in his wheelchair, you know, and he'll say something and it's kind of cutting edge. And then he will cut his eyes back and forth because he can't move anything else in his body and he will say: *Are you interested?* I hope you're interested this morning about being a peacemaker.

Here's the third and final thing I press upon your heart and conscience this morning. Remember that peacemaking will often require a confrontation and may result in rejection. You have to stand up and speak the truth, not arrogantly, but in a spirit of meekness. And often it may result in rejection. Galatians 2:11-14, you remember there is Peter being swept away by the influence of Judaism. The Bible tells us in verse 14, *But when they saw that they did not walk up rightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said it to Peter before them all.* Paul speaking. *If now being a Jew, live after the manner of Gentiles and not as to the Jews, why compel the other Gentiles to live, as do the Jews.* It took fortitude to confront Peter, but here's the thought. Our spiritual maturity is often measured in ways that are foreign to our own way of thinking. One of those ways, brothers and sisters, is to exercise, as John Piper oftentimes uses his term, *exercise risk taking faith in assuming the role of a peacemaker to reconcile two brothers who are at odds with one another.* If Jesus blessed the peacemakers and called them the children of God on the Sermon on the Mount, what should we think of He considers being a peace forsaker?...You'll not always be, always be received. As a matter of fact: *sometimes people will turn on you*, but your supreme motive in any attempt to

make for peace hears that God would be glorified. Now we sit there and most of you would affirm what I just said, but let that sink down into your heart. *This is not about us. It's not about our acceptance. It's not about promoting our glory. It's about him.*

Have you heard the story of what is behind the Nobel Peace Prize? In 1866, Alfred Nobel invented dynamite and built up companies and laboratories and more than 20 countries all around the world become a multi-millionaire. He amassed a considerable fortune after Nobel's brother died; the newspapers made a mistake and read an obituary for Alfred rather than his brother. In the obituary, they stated that he was known for creating the most destructive force known to mankind: Dynamite. So when Nobel read the obituary, he decided that he didn't want his family name remembered for destruction. Perhaps you know this part of the story, but on November 27th, 1895, Nobel signed his final will and testament at the Swedish Norwegian Club in Paris, where Nobel died. And on December 10th, it was discovered that, according to his will, his vast wealth was to be used for five prizes, including the Nobel Peace Prize. The prize for peace was to be awarded to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and for the holding of peace congresses. Just before his death notice, just before his death, he confided in a friend. *I want to be remembered for peace, not destruction.* I ask you this morning, friend, is that **what you want to be known for? Peace or selfish ambition and an instigator of strife? And sitting silently by when somebody in your presence tears your brother apart is not promoting peace it's aiding and abetting dissension. I ask you this this morning: What do you wish to be remembered for? Dynamite or peace? The dynamite of a contentious spirit or a disposition of peace.** It is best to remember that a peacemaker is not overcome with evil, but overcomes evil with good and a peacemaker who lives in peace with all men. Romans 12:18. A peacemaker refuses to be argumentative, but be gentle unto all men. 2 Timothy 2:24. A Peacemaker speaks the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). This individual is a peacemaker, looks after the interests of others (Phil 2:4). He or she is willing to exercise risk taking faith to establish peace (Ro. 14:19). This is my pursuit.

Who will go with me?

You say, *Well, what you're saying this morning, in my opinion, reeks of compromise.*

All right. That's what you want to believe? I'm not going to violate my conscience. And once again, I reiterate what I said at the beginning of the message today. *I'm not promoting peace at the tune of biblical compromise.* But much of what's going on today

and dividing local churches and dividing the church at large around the world is our own selfish ambition that we've got to promote. We've got to protect, even if it means fragmentation in the body of Christ.

Let's pray together, Father in heaven, so grateful that you were so intentional and in taking the position of death in the person of your Son to reconcile us to yourself, that we might taste the sweetness of death to our self, death to our rights, death to our reputation. That in this matter of pursuing peace, the excellency, the power and may be of you and not of us, make every effort that we administer in faith. In faith. ometimes the fight of faith redound to your glory. In Jesus name, Amen.