

# What Does It Look Like to Be a Peacemaker?

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James's description of the qualities produced by wisdom from above (James 3:17-18) resembles Paul's list in the classic the "fruit of the Spirit" passage.

The first word "pure" denotes innocence or blamelessness (James 3:17). The seven qualities then mentioned are specific dimensions of this purity. Recall also that there is an important beatitude that precedes Jesus' words on being a peacemaker: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). You have to be pure in heart before you can ever be a peacemaker, and that purity comes through Jesus Christ, the pure one who cleanses sinners, whom we will see, and who will purify all things, produces in us a desire for living a pure life.

What does this lifestyle look like? We can put James' peacemaking list in three groups.

## **GROUP 1: PEACE-LOVING, GENTLE, AND COMPLIANT.**

Peace-loving is especially important, as it heads the list of specific virtues, and is picked up again in James 3:18. Each of us pursues what we love; we won't pursue peace with others if we don't love it to begin with. So how do we spot a peace-lover? The peace-loving person speaks with grace, isn't easily angered, seeks reconciliation and overlooks minor offenses.

The Old Testament often connects wisdom with peace: "Her ways [the way of wisdom] are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). Instead of resolving a conflict with brute force like the world does, James says being gentle and compliant (or "open to reason," ESV) is the godly way to pursue peace. Gentleness is emphasized throughout Scripture, and often in the context of admonitions on conflict and quarreling (cf., 2 Tim 2:14-26; Ti 3:2). Being open to reason or "compliant" means to defer when appropriate; it means to be willing to get along with others.

## **GROUP 2: FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS.**

Jesus spoke often of the importance of showing mercy (Matthew 5:7; 18:21-35; 23:23; Luke 10:37). James emphasized it previously in chapter 2, as he talked about the royal law of neighbor love (2:8-13). Now he links it with good fruit. Being a merciful person is a real sign of the fruit of the gospel in our lives. Those who know the depth of God's saving mercy (Eph 2:4), are mercy-showers. Imagine how many conflicts in our lives might subside if we simply showed more mercy to one another!

## **GROUP 3: UNWAVERING AND WITHOUT PRETENSE.**

*Unwavering* is only used here in the New Testament. And there's some difficulty in translating it. It carries the idea of either "undoubting," in the sense of "simple" or "straightforward." Or for being "undivided" — that is, in loyalty to God. The CSB translates it "unwavering" as James probably has in mind something like being "undivided" and not double-minded. This also fits with the next word which means "without

pretense.” It means “not playing a part”—being real. The wise person is stable, trustworthy, and transparent. Again, can you imagine how conflict in this world might look different if all parties in any given disagreement were like this?

These are the fruits of true wisdom. What a contrast with self-ambition, envy, and jealousy!

## CULTIVATING PEACE

In the final verse of James 3, the inspired writer returns to what seems to be the big concern: peace in the fellowship. He gives a Proverbial statement: “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace” (3:18). Righteousness here is practical righteousness; it means that which pleases God (cf. Jam 1:20). God made us to flourish in a context of peace. When people are not full of selfish ambition and envy, but are in harmony, great fruits of righteousness are displayed.

Our responsibility is to work to “cultivate peace” so that righteousness will be produced. The seventh beatitude (“blessed are the peacemakers”) introduces a theme that Jesus expands on in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus’ words explain all that cultivating peace means for us. First, our Lord commands that we should interrupt worship in order to seek reconciliation with a fellow disciple whom we have offended (Matthew 5:21-26). Next, He commands us to refrain from retaliating against those who hurt us (Matthew 5:38-41). Jesus then directs us to love our enemies and pray for, not against, our persecutors (Matthew 5:43-48). And He doesn’t stop in chapter 5! In Matthew 6, Jesus magnifies the importance of forgiving others in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:14). And still, He’s not done. Finally, in chapter 7, He commands us to “get the log out of our eye” before noticing the speck in our brother’s eye (Matt 7:1-5).

Clearly being a peacemaker is a big deal to Jesus! This way of life marks the citizens of His kingdom (cf., Mark 9:50). Quarles states, “The ministry of peacemaking involved putting an end to conflict by refusing to postpone apologies or restitution, refusing to seek revenge, humbly serving one’s enemies, and having a love for others that is stronger than their hatred.”

Have you postponed an apology? Are you out for revenge? Are you loving your enemies? Do you need to forgive someone? Do you need to face up to your own failures before detecting another person’s failures? By God’s grace, let’s live by Christ’s words!

There’s great blessing for peacemakers: “for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). Christians have a unique relationship with God because of the reconciling work of Jesus, as we are made sons and daughters of God now. And God calls His sons and daughters peacemakers. Further, most of the promises in the beatitudes have an end time view, so the promise here refers to judgment in which Jesus will separate His enemies from His children, calling His followers “sons of God,” who will enjoy a glorious inheritance.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has brought us peace with God. He has called us to be peacemakers now. And we do this work by God’s grace until Jesus makes all things new, ushering in total shalom, where the lion will dwell with the lamb in perfect harmony. Let’s seek “bring this future into the present” as we pursue peace in our relationships to the glory of God. Let’s show the world what kind of King we have and what kind of kingdom we belong to.