

## The World According to Jim “Getting Along With People James 3:13-4:3

### Introduction

- I want to tell you the true story of a man named Jim. Jim was a standup kind of guy. Solid Christian. In fact, Jim was the leader of a movement. His pedigree was unrivaled. His qualifications were impeccable. But you would never know it. He was well respected and people looked up to him. Jim was the kind of guy you wanted to lead, the kind of guy you cheered for. And the times demanded the kind of leadership Jim offered. In many ways, he was the perfect person for the job.
- To say the times and events surrounding Jim’s leadership were difficult would be an understatement. Pressure cooker was more like it. Tough economic times. Far tougher than any of us have ever seen. Food shortages and religious persecution were routine. But on the positive side Jim led a rapid expansion of the ministry. Exponential growth in numbers. Globalization of the ministry. Tremendous growth pains. Great challenge, great reward all at the same time.
- But those challenges were a cakewalk compared to the internal bickering that threatened to undo the movement from within. The bickering started when a group within the movement called the *C-Group* began prescribing well-meaning but somewhat controversial ministry practices.<sup>1</sup> They were a fringe group but were powerful enough to gain a following. They wanted everybody in the movement to follow their practices.<sup>2</sup> They were dogmatic. They rubbed people the wrong way. They were pompous. And Jim wasn’t exactly sure about what to do about them. They were making waves and making waves at the wrong time. The movement didn’t need this distraction. Jim could sense a growing divide, things polarizing. And he felt like a gymnast doing the splits. There was increasing pressure on him to keep the movement together.
- Things came to a head at one of the regional offices in a neighboring city on the West Coast.<sup>3</sup> That particular office was led by a man named Pauly. Pauly was relatively new to the movement but God was definitely using him in amazing ways. Pauly had different ideas about how to do things; ideas that were a little too uncomfortable for some, especially the *C-Group*. They began exerting pressure on Jim. So he sent a team to visit Pauly and get a firsthand report. It so happened that at the time of this envoy’s visit another key leader was also visiting Pauly. His name was Pete. Pete was up from the southern office, Jim’s office to be exact. Pete was Jim’s coworker and right hand man in ministry. Pauly, Pete and Jim all got along great.<sup>4</sup> Great, that is, until the *C-Group* exerted their influence.
- This is where things really get interesting. While everybody was together in the West Coast office, Pete, became fearful of what the *C-Group* might say about his friendship with Pauly.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 2:12

<sup>2</sup> Acts 15:1

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 2:12

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 2:9

So he decided to endorse the practices of the *C-Group*.<sup>5</sup> Pauly was devastated. As a high profile leader of the ministry, Pete's switcheroo was like a bombshell going off in the movement. The rift, which was under the surface, was now wide open. Backstabbed. Shocked. Hurt by his friend in ministry and by what was taking place Pauly took evasive action. One day in the cafeteria, and right in front of everybody, Pauly confronted Pete over his hypocrisy and compromise.<sup>6</sup> To make matters worse, Pauly's right hand man in ministry, Barney, was sucked in to the controversy and also swayed by the *C-Group*.<sup>7</sup> Pauly and Barney began to sharply debate and dispute with one another.<sup>8</sup> Things unraveled quickly. The bickering erupted into a full fledged conflict. Jim heard about it. He stepped in. Pauly and Barney were called to Headquarters.<sup>9</sup>

- At a special emergency meeting of the board of executives Jim listened to the *C-Group* present their case.<sup>10</sup> What should he do? Jim then led a closed door session with the board.<sup>11</sup> After a lengthy discussion, the board and those who came to Headquarters to follow the meeting gathered together. Pete stood and addressed the crowd. To everyone's shock, especially the *C-Group*, Pete did an about face. He admitted he was wrong, that the *C-Group* was in the wrong, and that he was again giving his full support to Pauly and Barney and their ministry.<sup>12</sup> People were dumfounded. Pauly and Barney then stood to tell their side of the story and the place went dead quiet as everybody listened.<sup>13</sup>
- Jim knew after the duo finished speaking he would have to speak. He knew people were waiting to hear what he had to say. Who's practices were right? The *C-Group's* or Pauly's? He knew the speech he was about to make was the most important speech of his life and the defining moment of his leadership. Depending on what he said, the movement would move forward with God's blessing or crumble and fracture and disintegrate.
- That day Jim saved the movement. His words that day brought peace and healing.<sup>14</sup> He closed the rift. Because of his leadership cooler heads prevailed and crisis was averted. Because of his skill in dealing with people and in bringing peace Jim is known, even to this day, as one of the wisest and shrewdest leaders the Christian movement has ever seen.
- In fact, you know this guy Jim. His story is found in Acts 15 and Galatians 2. He's the same Jim who wrote these words. *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving,*

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<sup>5</sup> Galatians 2:12

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 2:14

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 2:13

<sup>8</sup> Acts 15:2

<sup>9</sup> Acts 15:2

<sup>10</sup> Acts 15:5

<sup>11</sup> Acts 15:6

<sup>12</sup> Acts 15:7-11

<sup>13</sup> Acts 15:12

<sup>14</sup> Acts 15:13-21

*considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*

### Transition

For every Christian who has ever been a part of a church fight or a church split or even in conflict with another Christian let the words of James 3 ring in your ears. What is James trying to say?...[Slide #1]

### Big Idea

- **Religion God cares about is getting along with others**
- In the World According to Jim getting along with people matters to God. Nobody knows this better than James. In fact, it matters very little what you do for God if you can't get along with people. Real wisdom, true religion is getting along with others.

### Transition

That word “wise” is a key word in this section. [Verse 13](#). *Who is wise and understanding among you?* That's James's way of singling out leaders—teachers to be exact. Whoever wants to be a teacher must demonstrate what it means to be wise. Then James, in the verses that follow, goes on to spell out what real wisdom is. And it means getting along with people. Although he starts out addressing those who lead the flock, just like the section on the tongue last week, the application of these principles are for everyone. In other words, God expects all Christians to get along with each other—at all times, even during situations. That's the kind of Christianity God cares about. Simply stated, in this passage there are... [Slide #2]...

### Organizational Sentence

- **Two kinds of wisdom and their affects on personal relationships**
- One leads to factions and fights and friction in personal relationships. The other, true religion, leads to peace.

### Transition

[Slide #3] The [first wisdom](#). Earthly wisdom. James says this kind of wisdom **leads to relational disorder**. Look at verses 13-16. *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.* Now verses 1-3 of chapter 4. *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

### Main Points

- James sums up earthly wisdom with two words. [Verse 14](#). *Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition*. A brief word about each. Bitter jealousy, or better yet, harsh zeal is the “desire to promote one's own opinion to the exclusion of others.”<sup>15</sup> Ever seen that happen in a church setting? It's destructive. When people, especially teachers begin pursuing personal agendas

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<sup>15</sup> Reinecker, p. 735.

it leads to relational disorder in the church. It happens when teachers teach, when small group leaders lead, in congregational meetings. Bitter jealousy or harsh zeal left to fester in the heart produces relational disorder. Guaranteed.

- The second word James uses is the word selfish ambition or party spirit. It's a word that describes someone who has emotionally or physically withdrawing from the rest of the church.<sup>16</sup> Party spirit. Think about it like this. When you emotionally check out of what's going on in church, James says you're harboring an attitude that creates relational disorder within the body of Christ. You don't even have to physically rally people to your side. Just by withdrawing emotionally you damage the body of Christ.
- *Such "wisdom"* James says in [verse 15](#), *does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.* James says these attitudes, that's not "wisdom." It's a denial of the truth, [verse 14](#). It's a denial of the Christianity God really cares about. Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are earthly and unspiritual James says. Those things are nothing short of demonic. They're of the devil. And they lead to, look at [verse 16](#), *every evil practice.* They lead to disorder. That's word means rebellion. Relational anarchy. It's the kind of behavior James witnessed from the *C-Group* mentioned earlier.
- "There is an ancient tale about two people, one of whom was envious of the other. The envious person was once given an opportunity to ask a favor from the king, with the proviso that his rival would get twice as much of whatever he requested. This put the envious person in a difficult position. After much consideration, he asked that one of his eyes be plucked out."<sup>17</sup>
- There is nothing more disgusting than Christians fighting with each other, relational disorder in the Church. James gives hints of what this discord looks in [verses 1-3](#) of chapter 4. It's ugly. It is a denial of everything the gospel stands for. It is religion that makes God sick. Of all the people who should be able to get along with each other Christians should be at the top of the list.
- The goal for you as it relates to this passage is relational order—relational peace. Think about the relationships you have with other Christians. Do you have any broken relationships? Are you fighting? Have you withdrawn physically or emotionally from the body? Do you have an agenda to push? Are there traces of harsh zeal or party spirit in your heart? If you bear the name Christian you have a responsibility to end it today. Not tomorrow. Not this week. Today. In the words of the [Bree](#) the talking horse from C.S. Lewis's [The Horse and His Boy](#), "Quarrelsome creatures these humans are, there as bad as mules." Don't be a mule. Un-budging. Unyielding. Get right with your brother or sister in Christ. Restore peace. That's religion God cares about.

### Transition

In [verses 17-18](#) James tells us what that true wisdom looks like. He describes it's affect on personal relationships. The difference between the first wisdom and this second wisdom, heavenly wisdom, James calls it, is striking. [[Slide #4](#)] Heavenly wisdom, James says, **leads to peace in personal relationships.** *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then*

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<sup>16</sup> Davids, p. 151.

<sup>17</sup> Adin Steinsaltz, [Simple Words: Thinking About What Really Matters in Life](#) (Simon & Schuster, 1999), p. 126

*peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*

- Can you see how relational this wisdom is? Every single word James uses here has a relational component. In other words, the Christianity God cares about is Christians getting along with each other. From God’s perspective, you’re not really wise, I don’t care how much gray hair or how much experience you have, you’re not wise until you can get along with people—until there is peace in your personal relationships.
- Look more closely at [verses 17-18](#). True wisdom is described by a string of relational words.
  - Wisdom is *pure*. “The word implies sincere, moral and spiritual integrity.”<sup>18</sup> The relational aspect of purity comes out in 1 Timothy 5:1-2. *Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.* There’s the word. Purity. It’s treating others with integrity—like the way men are to treat younger women—as sisters—with absolute integrity. Is that how you treat people?
  - Wisdom, James says, is peaceable or *peace-loving*. Do you love peace or discord?
  - He says wisdom is also *considerate*. The word means gentle or non-combative. Elsewhere in the New Testament it’s translated meek, like the Beatitudes. Matthew 5:5. *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.* Are you non-combative or do you like to stir things up?
  - Next. Wisdom is *submissive* or compliant or willing to yield. Do you willingly yield to others?
  - It’s *full of mercy* or merciful James says. Again, same word is used in Matthew 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.* Do you show others mercy? Are you full of compassionate love for others in need? The other side of mercy is *full of good fruit*. Mercy doesn’t just see a need. It meets the need with good deeds. It bears fruit.
  - He says wisdom is *impartial* or undivided or harmonious. James has already talked about how grievous and destructive partiality is in 2:1.
  - And lastly he says wisdom is *sincere* or without hypocrisy. This word is often teamed up with love like in 1 Peter 1:22. *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*
- All these words are relational words. The Christian characterized by heavenly wisdom, who exudes these character traits, is free from relational discord. They are in a state of relational peace. That’s why James can say in [verse 18](#). *Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.* Getting along with others means peacemaking. In other words, “peace is the soil and those who make peace are the green-fingered gardeners.”<sup>19</sup> Those who make peace in their personal relationships, who plant peace in the church and with each other, live to see that peace grow into a crop of righteousness. I like how one commentator put it. “To ‘raise a harvest of righteousness’ demands a certain kind of climate. A crop of

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<sup>18</sup> Reinecker, p. 735.

<sup>19</sup> Motyer, p. 138.

righteousness cannot be produced in the climate of bitterness and self-seeking. Righteousness will grow only in a climate of peace."<sup>20</sup>

- Which begs the question? What kind of crop are we producing? As a church, are we planting peace that leads to righteousness? Or by our earthly wisdom are we producing relational discord—the absence of peace?

### **Conclusion**

- It's tempting to think when reading through a list of virtues like this that all James wants from us is to be moral. Be this. Be this. Be this. Yes, God expects us to get along with each other. But it's so much more than that. As one of my professors has said, "At the heart of Christianity, what we find is neither a philosophy nor a system of morality, but a gospel: good news."<sup>21</sup>
- We meditate on the words of Hebrews 13:20 at the end of every service. *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.* The assumption underlying all that James says here is that without Jesus none of us are at peace. We've rebelled against God through our sin. And yet, the God of peace, who through the blood of his Son, has made peace with us if we hold to his promise by faith. Without that peace, between you and God, you'll never be able to be at peace with others relationally. This morning, as we prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper, turn your hearts to the God of peace.

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Constable, *Commentary on James*.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer, in an interview with *Trinity* magazine Kevin Vanhoozer, "Experience the Drama," *Trinity Magazine* (Spring 2006), p. 19-21.