

# **BaptistWay Bible Series for September 26: Want peace? Start here**

September 14, 2010

This week we look not merely at what our actions or attitudes say about our faith, but at our motivations as well. Specifically, we examine selfish and self-centered behaviors.

As Christians, we're promised peace. Yet peace remains an elusive dream for many of us. Instead, we find conflict—even in Christian relationships where peace should be easy to achieve.

If we'll examine these relationships, in many cases the source of conflict lies in our own wrong expectations. When we relate to one another, all too often, we're motivated by selfishness, focusing on our own needs rather than extending mercy, grace and forgiveness. The result can be nothing other than conflict.

## **Peace begins with wisdom**

In our reading this week, James connects this concept of selfless living with wisdom. "Who is wise and understanding among you?" (James 3:13). He goes on to identify two types of wisdom. Earthly, unspiritual wisdom, he says, leads to bitter envy and selfish ambition, while wisdom from heaven leads to peace.

How can we know which wisdom guides our actions? "Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that come from wisdom" (v. 13). Worldly wisdom is the "street smarts" we're often advised to adopt if we're going to succeed in life. Unfortunately, it rarely leads to true success.

Look at verse 17: “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” This kind of wisdom makes it impossible not to obey Jesus’ mandate to love others as we love ourselves. This leads not only to peaceful relationships, but true success.

### **Ask and you will receive**

Why do we argue? Why do we have conflict in our churches? Why are families torn apart by petty disagreements?

When conflicts occur, selfishness likely is involved. But selfishness is more a symptom than a cause. James suggests when we relate to one another selfishly, we act in foolishness. That’s why, when we try to exert self-control, we rarely succeed. The real solution lies in wisdom. It requires a change in our heart and soul, not a behavioral adaptation.

Remember James 1:5-6? “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

Now read James 4:3. “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

As we’ve learned, conflict in our relationships signifies the presence of selfishness. But here’s the rub: If we relate to one another selfishly, there’s a good chance we relate to God selfishly, so our prayer life should be suspect as well.

Motivated by selfishness, we ask God to “fix” our relational problems. But we really want him to “fix” the other person. We don’t seek God’s truth about the situation. We aren’t willing to turn inward and examine ourselves. We don’t want to be convicted.

Yet sin can't be removed if we don't repent, and the whole process must begin with conviction.

### **God's way to deal with conflict**

We will be judged in the same way we judge others. That fact alone should make us fall on our knees before God. James tells us if we seek God humbly, he will give us grace.

When conflict exists in relationships, if we're wise, we'll begin praying for God's interpretation of the situation. We should also read the Bible with an open heart, holding ourselves up against the truth of God's word, allowing God to show us where we're at fault.

Sadly, we may be the only person in the relationship operating by God's rules. We must accept the apparent unfairness that will result. And we must accept that God will deal with the other person as he sees fit. Our responsibility extends no further than ourselves.

We will stand before the one Lawgiver and be judged for our own actions, not those of our friends or family. Let's be wise, then, and seek peace.

Begin with self-examination. Then ask for wisdom and fix our own motivations before judging those of the people around us.

### **Food for thought**

Think of a relationship that's marked by conflict. Is it possible selfishness is at the root? What could you do to act more selflessly?

Why is our first reaction to blame the other person when conflict arises? As Christians, should that be our first reaction?

Psalm 119:165 says, "Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble." Yet Jesus told his disciples, "Do not

suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). Obviously, there’s a difference between the feeling of peace and perfect peace within all relationships. For Christians, are there situations where peace cannot be possible? If so, how should we respond?