

## ***How to Restore a Wounded Relationship, Pt. 4 (Jas. 3:17-18)***

### **I. REVIEW: RECOGNIZING WHEN THE SPIRIT OF A RELATIONSHIP IS WOUNDED**

- A. The Lord is establishing the second commandment (to love our neighbor as ourselves, Mt. 22:38) in the Church as He empowers His people to enjoy healthy relationships. The spirit of a relationship can be wounded at various levels, from being slightly injured to deeply broken.
- B. We are to do all that we can to restore relationships. Living peaceably involves having a spirit of goodwill with all people—in one’s marriage, family, workplace, friendships, neighborhood, etc.  
*<sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18)*
- C. ***Go to your brother***: Jesus taught us to go to our “brother” to make an appeal, both when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15) and when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24). Every believer is to take initiative in reconciliation instead of waiting on others to do their part.

### **II. OVERCOMING BITTERNESS AND HEALING RELATIONSHIPS (JAS. 3:13-4:12)**

- A. James addressed relational conflict—how it occurs, how healing comes to our relationships and hearts, and how people contribute to their own wounding and bitterness (Jas 3:13-4:12). He pointed out that a significant source of our relational conflicts and the anguish, pain, and bitterness that follows is our desires and expectations that are outside of God’s will.  
*<sup>1</sup>What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures [desires or expectations] that wage war [create anguish, pain and bitterness] in your members?  
<sup>2</sup>...You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. (Jas. 4:1-2, NASB)*
- B. The *whole* story of someone’s bitterness and emotional pain includes both how they were *mistreated* and how they *responded* to the mistreatment.
1. There is an “*enemy on the outside*”—this speaks of people who mistreat us. When someone blocks our goals of honor, comfort, money, relationship, promotion, inclusion, etc., it can cause frustration and anger in us, sometimes leading to offense and bitterness.
  2. There is an “*enemy on the inside*”—this speaks of our response to the mistreatment. James identified our envy and self-seeking as the cause of much of our pain (Jas. 3:14).
  3. We are both *victims* and *agents* of our offense and wounding. We are victims when we are mistreated; we are agents when we respond wrongly and allow our mistreatment to become a festering wound of bitterness. The injustice done against us does not produce bitterness; rather, it is our wrong response to the injustice that produces bitterness.
  4. Nobody can make us bitter by what they do to us. We only become bitter when we respond wrongly. When tempted with bitterness we often focus on forgiving the person who mistreated us—the *enemy on the outside*. James called us to focus on the *enemy on the inside*. Healing for our own heart includes addressing our own negative emotions.

- C. James pointed out two main *causes* of relational conflict—bitter envy and self-seeking (v. 14). He contrasted the two types of *wisdom* (perspective of conflict)—heavenly and earthly (v. 15).  
***<sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup>This wisdom [perspective] does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. (Jas. 3:14-16)***
- D. ***Unfulfilled expectations***: Offenses in the heart arise from our unfulfilled expectations or desires (Jas. 4:1). We all have some expectations or desires that are outside of God’s will or timing. James identified these expectations as having their roots in bitter envy or self-seeking (Jas. 3:14). Varying measures of negative emotions are present in our heart throughout our life.  
***<sup>12</sup>Hope deferred [expectation unfulfilled] makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes [expectation fulfilled], it is a tree of life. (Prov. 13:12)***
1. ***Envy***: Many offenses and emotional pains are rooted in envy—the *expectation* of having what another has (their role, honor, money, possessions, abilities, friends, life situation).
  2. ***Self-seeking***: Many offenses are rooted in self-seeking—the *expectation* of gaining a better position, more honor, recognition, or money; of being included or invited to join the team; or having a deeper relationship with someone than they desire.
- E. ***Confusion***: This includes broken relationships and the pain and anguish that follow (Jas. 3:16).
- F. ***Do not boast and lie against the truth***: This is one of the most important principles in healing relational conflicts, having a good marriage, and building team relationships (workplace, etc.).
- G. Many focus on forgiving those who mistreated them, without acknowledging their own desires that contributed to their pain. It is not enough to forgive people who mistreat us. We must address the issues in our heart that allowed our response to mistreatment to escalate to bitterness.
- H. We naturally seek to rationalize or minimize our desires that come from envy and self-seeking. Some will say, “I am sensitive” or, “I am just broken” or, “I struggle with insecurity and rejection,” but will not acknowledge that some of their negative emotions are sinful and not in God’s will. They have an appearance of humility in acknowledging their brokenness, but come up short of getting free, because they do not acknowledge or repent of their self-seeking desires.
- I. The Bible teaches that the foundational response to being mistreated is to entrust the results of the conflict to God’s leadership, knowing that He will answer in His way and His timing.  
***<sup>23</sup>...when He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23)***
- J. When someone mistreats us, verbally or by their actions, we are to commit the situation to the Lord as we make our appeals to that person (Mt. 5:23-24; 18:15). We can have peace, knowing that God is watching and will intervene in His way and in His time, as we live before His eyes.

### III. EIGHT RESPONSES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HEALING RELATIONSHIPS (JAS. 3:17-18)

- A. James identified eight responses that express heavenly wisdom (biblical perspective) in relational conflicts. These show us the way to heal relationships and to live in freedom with a vibrant heart. (Note: You are not to enable someone to abuse you by coming back to them with an open heart).  
*<sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. <sup>4:1</sup>Where do wars [quarrels, NAS] and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure [desires or expectations] that war in your members? <sup>2</sup>You lust and do not have...you fight. (Jas. 3:17-4:2)*
- B. **Pure:** We are to respond with *pure motives* in seeking the good of others, and *purity of insight* (without distortion) into how even a small residue of envy and self-seeking in us contributed to the conflict. Purity includes acknowledging our negative desires with humility. Having a pure heart doesn't mean that all of our negative desires are gone, but that we are honest about them. This includes taking responsibility for our deficiencies that contributed to the relational conflict.
- C. **Peaceable:** We are to respond in a peaceable way instead of with accusations, complaints, anger, sarcasm, etc. We are to respond this way even when someone has intentionally undermined, lied about, or mistreated us. It is natural to resist people who do not treat us well, or to speak negatively about them instead of responding peaceably to them in a spirit of goodwill.
- D. **Gentle:** It is important to maintain a gentle tone in our communication in restoring a relationship. We are to make our appeals in a spirit of gentleness, aware of our own failures and deficiencies.  
*<sup>1</sup>If a man is overtaken in any trespass [even mistreating you]...restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)*
- E. **Willing to yield:** We are to be willing to yield to the appeal of others to change our attitude and to do things their way, even if it may not be the absolute best way. This speaks of seeking to be accommodating and agreeable, instead of stubborn and resistant to what others want and think.
- F. **Full of mercy:** Showing mercy means acting generously towards others. We are to be merciful with the failures and deficiencies of others in relational conflicts. We are not to have a spirit of revenge that seeks to punish the other person for his failures in his relationship with us.
1. Being *full* of mercy includes not requiring their perspective of the conflict to be 100% accurate. We seek to hear what they say even if only 10 % is accurate and 90% wrong.
  2. A response of mercy covers and overlooks the wrong responses of others (Prov. 19:11). Treating someone with mercy and kindness is not the same as quickly trusting them.  
*<sup>8</sup>...for "love will cover a multitude of sins." (1 Pet. 4:8)*
  3. Mercy triumphs over judgment as our hearts are liberated and the healing process begins, and the people who acted wrongly may be restored to obedience and confidence in God.  
*<sup>13</sup>Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:13)*

- G. **Full of good fruits:** We are to follow through with actions on our intentions to be merciful to our adversaries. Wisdom, like faith, must be expressed by good deeds in our life (Jas. 2:14-17).
- H. **Without partiality:** This includes not showing partiality to ourselves or to others who bless us. We must not hold our adversaries to a higher standard of judgment than we hold ourselves.
1. Paul emphasized this in Romans 2:1, warning us not to judge someone for an action while violating the same biblical principle ourselves, though perhaps in a different way.  
*<sup>1</sup>...you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Rom. 2:1)*
  2. James warned against showing partiality to people who give us favors (Jas 2:1-9).  
*<sup>1</sup>My brethren, do not hold the faith...with partiality. <sup>2</sup>For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings...<sup>3</sup>and you...say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there”...<sup>4</sup>have you not shown partiality... and become judges with evil thoughts? (Jas. 2:1-4)*
- I. **Without hypocrisy:** This speaks of being genuine, sincere, and true to appearances, with no show of pretense to “appear to be kind” in order to gain an advantage. We are not to present ourselves as forgiving and kind to a person, and then later act and speak negatively against that person.
- J. James asserted that the eight responses in verse 17 are like a “seed” whose fruit, or harvest, is righteousness. As we sow this “seed,” we will see the growth of righteousness in our life and our relationships. It often takes a while to see the harvest, once we begin responding in the right way.  
*<sup>18</sup>Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas 3:18)*
1. **Those who make peace:** Jesus promised a blessing to all who consistently seek to restore peace in relationships that are in conflict (Mt. 5:9), including their relationships.
  2. **Sown in peace:** We are to respond with a peaceful spirit to those we are in conflict with.
  3. **Fruit of righteousness:** You will sometimes inspire others to respond in humility and righteousness as they see your merciful response to them in the midst of a conflict.
- K. If we truly love our friends, we will not simply justify their complaints of mistreatment. We should help them to identify even a small residue of envy or self-seeking in their heart; this helps them in a practical way to grow in righteousness and heal relationships. Some friends offer non-biblical advice, encouraging them to fight for “their rights.”

**IV. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (e.g., FCF FRIENDSHIP GROUPS)**

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?