

FIRST Pure

"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable"—James 3:17

JAMES has been speaking about the use of the tongue and has been endeavouring to impress his readers with the potential powers it possesses. His remarks have led on to the evil resulting from unbridled speech, showing that *the words we speak are the outward manifestation of the heart*.

He has by the symbol of the fountain shown that the mouth and its words manifest the condition of the heart. Therefore if the heart be pure the words and works issuing from it will be pure.

He reasons that evil works are the outcroppings of a heart that is untouched by the power of the Word of God and only related to its mother earth, and therefore it brings forth that to which it is related—

"If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the Truth.

"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish: For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:14-16).

Then the Apostle goes on to illustrate the characteristics of the heart which has risen above the grovelling in the dust, which is guided by the Spirit. And he states—

"The wisdom from above is FIRST pure, THEN peaceable."

Let us observe the word "first." It comes from the Greek word *proton*, of which we hear so much in our modern atomic age. The root meaning of this word is "*firstly in time, place, order, or importance; before, at the beginning, chiefly; first of all.*"

These primary definitions certainly leave no doubt as to the emphasis which James puts on the rank of purity in Divine Wisdom.

Wherever the word "firstborn" appears in our New Testament it comes from the same basic Greek word, in these cases *prototokos*.

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NOW let us look at the word "then." Again there can be no question as to what James intended. The Greek original, *epeita*, implies "*thereafter; after that*": it is from the root *eita* meaning "*succession (in time or logical enumeration); afterward or furthermore.*"

Wherever this Greek original was used by the Spirit in our Bibles the nature of the verse leaves no room for thought that James places peace ahead of purity.

Another example of the use of these words, 'first' and 'then' appears in 1 Thess. 4:16-17—

"The dead in Christ shall rise first (**proton**), then, (*epeita*) we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds."

This is a well-known quotation and has been clearly understood by the brotherhood for years. James' words carry the same thought of order and precedence as we understand from these words. Paul here used the same original words.

Again we would like to stress the fact that purity and peace are in the numerical order of numbers *one* and *two*. And again we appeal to Paul as our witness. This time from his powerful letter to the Hebrews (7:1-2)—

"For this Melchisedec, King of Salem, blessed Abraham, to whom also Abraham gave the tenth part of all."

And then the Apostle goes on to explain the significance of the Name of this Priest of the Most High God—

"First (**proton**) being by interpretation King of **righteousness**, and after (**epeita**) that also, King of Salem, which is, King of **Peace**."

This quotation sets the stage for our understanding of why *purity, or righteousness, or holiness, precedes peace*. Melchisedec stands as a type of Christ, as Paul very emphatically illustrates, by quoting Ps. 110:4—

"The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

And Paul adds (Heb. 8:1)—

"We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."

Now let us consider this High Priest, our Elder Brother. The first reference to him was made in the curse placed upon the serpent in the garden of Eden—

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

Does this sound like peace bringing forth purity? Does it not rather speak of a CONFLICT between the serpent seed and that of the woman? Does it not convey the idea of the flesh warring against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and the carnal mind being at enmity against God?

The constant theme of the way to eternal life and salvation is the *crucifying of the flesh* and the purging out of the leaven of malice and wickedness. Purging means "to make pure." Such a conflict has always appeared as the portion or lot of those who have been held up to us as examples of righteousness.

None of the righteous have seen peace during their probationary sojourn for any very long period of time. Trial and tribulation because of a righteous course, the chastening and refining and purging of the children of God, is the badge or seal of relationship to the Father. Look at faithful Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. Was his a peaceful life which brought forth purity? Are we not instructed: —

"Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience BY THE THINGS WHICH HE SUFFERED" (Heb. 5:8).

The record of the faithful which the Apostle outlines in Heb. 11 *certainly does not speak of probationary peace in any external way*—

"And what shall I more say? Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and all the prophets—subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, tortured, trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonments, stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, slain with the sword, wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented" (Heb. 11:32-37).

Shall we call this peace? These were the righteous or pure in heart who shall see God. They obtained a good report through faith in God. Some today would call them extremists. Does purity mean being 'extreme'? Certainly the world would say that they were extremists.

Does God require the same of our generation? No man is the son of God who does not receive chastisement. How that chastising will come we do not know. But we can be sure it will be in the direction we need it most. Through it all God will require our confidence in Him.

Thus we have Jesus in the role of King of Righteousness or Purity. He is the pattern, now set in the heavens, for us to follow. He always did those things which pleased his Father. He was tried in all points like unto his brethren, yet without sin. Where all others failed he attained perfection.

He was the perfect sacrifice. This had to come first. Before his kingship in this matter could be an example for us, he had to wear the crown of thorns. As we often sing—

"The race must come before the prize, the cross before the crown" (Hymn 164).

God caused the prophet Isaiah to write (48:22)—

"There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked."

And also he tells us (26:9) that the nations will not learn righteousness until God's judgments are in the earth. Purity or righteousness is the prerequisite to peace or association with God and Christ. Christ's righteousness, his triumph over sin and death, opened the way to his position as King of Salem or peace (Eph. 2:14-17)—

the "He (Christ) is our peace, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) unto God in one Body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and came and preached peace to you which were afar off and them who were nigh."

There could be no permanent peace established until this sacrifice had been provided. Certainly the righteous had their hopes fixed upon him as a matter of faith. The righteous still anticipate his reign of peace on the earth.

That God is righteous is the first admission necessary from man; not just an expression of lip service, but a wholehearted service day by day in faithful obedience.

Christ's life and his death were a manifestation of God's purity and holiness. Paul told the Romans that Christ was set forth as a propitiation, or mercy-seat, or atonement, to declare or show the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:25). And James tells us that we also must be like-minded in service to God, both in external service and also personal conduct:

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to KEEP HIMSELF UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD."

Peace cannot precede purity! But peace does not have to wait for the age of the Kingdom on the earth. That age will be peace in the fullest sense for the elect, and in far greater measure for the earth's inhabitants, when all the powers of nature and man will declare the presence of the Prince of Peace.

During the present probationary age peace of mind is attainable and in corresponding degree as purity or righteousness increase. True it is we shall never rise to perfect righteousness or purity, but we must press toward the mark set in the person of Jesus.

Peace will come to our hearts as we permit the Spirit of God to crucify our old man, and cause this Divine force to rule our lives. And this can only come by partaking deeply and frequently of the Word of God. Read God's Word DAILY — think continually about it — don't just hurry through it as a duty, but linger long upon it as a feast of good things. *Gradually you will see that all other things can wait.*

Instead of the impatience which we naturally feel to get on with something else, will come the joy and peace that once again each day God has provided us time to consider what He has said.

But the wicked and unrighteous will not respond to any conditions of peace. They will yet do wickedly. —F.H.
