

STUDIES FROM THE EPISTLE OF JAMES – PART 6

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Date: 18-02-2024

Scripture: James 3:13-18

James 3:13-18 (NASB)

¹³ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Often, when I'm preparing, I look at different translations, and if you would give me the permission, I'd like to read this again from the New Living Translation, then we'll put both of them together and see what God has for us.

¹³ If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. ¹⁵ For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. ¹⁶ For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. ¹⁸ And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

We've been in James now for the sixth week, and each week we've tried to recap what has happened in previous weeks. We've done that intentionally because there's no better way to memorize than repetition.

Week 1: We looked at the kind of audacious statement made by James to consider it pure joy when we face trials and temptations.

Week 2: We looked at the characteristics of faith. What are things that are part of our faith that need to be part of Christian living? How do we concentrate our lives to make sure that what comes out of our faith is Christian behavior? James then outlines for us, from the first chapter right down to the fifth, five or six behaviors that need to be part of our Christian living. First, the faith that we have is obedient to the word of God. We cannot just be hearers. We cannot just listen to the word of God, but we've got to listen and then do what it says.

Week 3: We then saw that faith removes discrimination. We don't discriminate between people, for all are the same in God's agenda and God's view.

Week 4: Then we saw that faith proves itself by works. The faith that we have must produce good works. It is not that we need works for our salvation, but having been saved, the result of salvation is to see good works that emanate from us.

Week 5: Then we looked at faith and how it needs to control the tongue.

Today, we look at what faith needs to do in terms of wisdom. And in this passage, James is talking about two types of wisdom: wisdom that is earthly and wisdom that is heavenly. And he contrasts them both. He talks about the earthly wisdom that is natural and demonic. However, he says that the wisdom from above is pure, it's peaceable, it's gentle and reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits and unwavering without hypocrisy.

The bible has many, many examples of how men have operated in earthly wisdom.

- In Genesis 11, the passage about the Tower of Babel – it seemed like a wise thing to do, but it ended up in failure and confusion.
- Abraham and Sarah decided to use earthly wisdom in fulfilling the promises of God that they would have a son; and Ishmael was the result.
- When David volunteered to take on Goliath, King Saul thought that he should put his own armor on David. And there was poor David trying to walk with this huge armor and not being able to do anything.
- The disciples – when they had this huge multitude of people whom Jesus was talking to, thought that it would be a good idea to send them back to their villages so that they could go and eat. And Jesus then decided to feed them with five loaves and two fish.

Earthly wisdom didn't amount to much.

In this passage, there are three aspects of wisdom that James is talking about.

1. The origin of wisdom – both earthly and godly wisdom.
2. The characteristics of wisdom.
3. The results of wisdom.

1. The Origin of Wisdom.

James v.15 tells us that the wisdom that comes not from above is earthly, sensual and devilish. Earthly, natural, sensual – the use of the senses, and demonic, as the NASB would put it. As believers we know that when we are tempted, it comes to us from three areas – the world, the flesh and the devil, as we see in Ephesians 2. And James uses those same enemies when he says that earthly wisdom too, is earthly, is natural and is demonic.

Earthly wisdom: In fact, Paul would go even further when he contrasts this earthly wisdom. In 1 Corinthians 1:20 he asked this question: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debate of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" And in v. 21 he adds that all the wisdom of the world could not point to God.

Why is it, beloved, that humanity's wisdom falls short? Why is it that James is telling us to bank on godly wisdom? Because human wisdom always comes with limitations. We are limited by logic, our own logic. We are limited by our reason, the things that we can understand. And then we try to understand everything from a very finite point of view. Why is godly wisdom so good? because then we trust in a God who is infinite, who has no limitations, who's omniscient. So, manly wisdom comes to nothing while God's wisdom will endure forever.

Natural wisdom: Man's wisdom finds its root in the natural things. In other words, it is not based on the spiritual. What is he talking about? He's talking about the new nature that you and I have as Christians. When we come into saving knowledge of what God has done for us, what Jesus did on Calvary, the bible tells us that we have a new nature, one that is spiritual.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says that we are a new creation, and therefore, we have a new nature; not one that was steeped in our old self with all its evil, but a new creation that reflects the glory of God. That's the nature that he's saying that we should have as our foundation in wise decision-making – the wisdom that comes from our new nature.

Demonic wisdom: This wisdom that comes from beneath is also demonic or devilish. Those are harsh words! But James is a two-holster guy. He always comes at us as hard as he can. It's not for the weak-hearted. He shoots straight from the hip. He says, "Worldly wisdom is demonic." Right from Genesis 3, we see how Satan has been trying to thwart the will and purposes of God, trying to put his own wisdom into our thinking. And so often, he wins that battle. But James is saying: You cannot allow him to win. You must not allow him to win. Because the wisdom that we need to operate in is a spiritual wisdom.

Do you remember the encounter that Jesus had with His disciples, especially with Peter. Jesus was telling His disciples how He must suffer. He was going to Jerusalem, He would suffer, and then He would be killed. Peter actually took Him aside and told Him, in no uncertain terms, "This will not happen to You. This must not happen to You." And Jesus' words to him – some of the harshest words that Jesus has ever used. "Get behind me, Satan. You're a stumbling block to me, for you do not mind the things of God but the things of men."

Satan will always try and come to us with his demonic wisdom to make us think that what we are doing or suggesting or planning to do is good. but God says that good is not enough. Godly is the key. We have to operate in the godly realm. We've looked at the origin of wisdom and we've said that earthly wisdom that is earthly, natural, and demonic is not from above, while the wisdom from God finds its origin in heaven. And so, as ones who are connected into God, he tells us that we need to avail of this godly wisdom that He gives to us.

2. The Characteristics of Wisdom (both earthly and godly).

3:17 says, "The wisdom from above is first of all pure. It's also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere."

What is this wisdom, and where has it come from? These characteristics are found in Jesus, the One whom we have invited into our hearts.

1 Corinthians 1:24 says, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

1:30 "but by His doing, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God."

So, the first step towards true wisdom is making sure that we are in Christ Jesus. Now, we could all say at this point: I'm a Christian; Jesus resides in my heart. But if we were to look a little further at some of the things that are earthly and say, "I find these earthly qualities in me," then there's a disconnect. Somehow, while we have Jesus in our hearts, we've not yielded full control to Him. So, it's a good time to check and say: Lord, have I surrendered all? Have I given every area of my life to You? Not just my Sundays, but my weekdays, time when I'm at work or I'm traveling, the attitudes that I have, the behaviors that I espouse, all of that. Are they godly?

The characteristics of wisdom from below are jealousy and selfish ambition, and the wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle. So, we look at these things – jealousy and selfish ambition. And we must ask ourselves: Are these present in our lives? And it's not a point where we chastise ourselves and say, "O my goodness. I've slipped again," and all that kind of thing. No! The word of God convicts, never condemns. "Therefore, now there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." But the Holy Spirit comes alongside of us and says, "Here's an area that you might want to change. Here's

an area where I still don't have control." And so, then we willingly acquiesce to that kind of talk and give ourselves to Him.

3. The results of wisdom.

What are the outcomes from worldly wisdom and godly wisdom? Worldly wisdom produces nothing but trouble. In v.16 – envy, strife, confusion and evil works. What contributes to this confusion? Jealousy, competition, a party spirit, and confusion actually sets the stage for every evil work, as James puts it in 3:16. On the other hand, God's wisdom produces blessing. Confusion on the one hand, blessing on the other. In v.18, James calls it fruit, the fruit of righteousness.

There's a big difference between human-made results and God-given fruit. Fruit is the product of life, and fruit has in it the seeds for more fruit. It replicates. The Christian life is all about sowing and reaping. The Christian who obeys God's wisdom sows righteousness and not sin.

I love the way Dr. Warren Wiersbe puts it. "What we are is what we live. Who we are is what our behavior reflects. And what we live is what we sow and what we sow determines what we reap." How true! If we operate in God's wisdom, we sow righteousness and peace and we receive blessing. But if we live in earthly wisdom, we sow sin and war and we reap confusion and every evil work. It is a serious thing to be a troublemaker in God's family. And that's what happens when we operate in earthly wisdom. One of the sins that God hates is that of sowing discord among brothers and sisters.

Proverbs 6:16-19 says

¹⁶There are six things the LORD hates—
no, seven things he detests:

¹⁷haughty eyes,

a lying tongue,

hands that kill the innocent,

¹⁸a heart that plots evil,

feet that race to do wrong,

¹⁹a false witness who pours out lies,

a person who sows discord in a family."

But Proverbs 3:13 tells us, "Joyful is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding."

Why is godly wisdom so important?

The obvious answer is because God is involved. But let me give you three things for you to think about.

- It's important because God sees all things. Therefore, He knows the big picture.
- He sees all the players and knows their motives. While you and I can deal with one or two people, we never know how many other people are involved. But God does. God sees all the players in the picture of our lives and what their motivations are.
- God wants the very best for you. There's nobody who wants something the best more than God does for you.

Application:

So, the question for us this morning, in terms of an application would be to ask ourselves: How are we operating? Are there areas in my life where I'm operating in worldly wisdom? Have I yielded to spiritual wisdom? Am I confident that I'm operating in spiritual wisdom?

We don't have to go very far to find the answers to that. James provides that himself. He says, "If we say to ourselves – are these attributes, qualities, or dispensations present in my life? and he gives us a list: Is there bitterness that we are harboring? Jealousy, selfish ambition, arrogance, lies, disorder, strife, any kind of evil? Are any of these things in us? Because if they are, then we are operating in worldly wisdom.

Then we can also ask the question: are these attributes missing in our lives? Are we missing purity? Are we missing peace? are we missing gentleness? Have we become hard and calloused? Are we being unreasonable? Do we have mercy? Are we dealing with people and situations mercifully?

Then, do we see fruit in our lives? it's a good litmus test for us to see if there is fruit. And the good news for us, when we come to a juncture like this and say, "I can see a lot of stuff that is worldly in my mind. What do I do?" James already addressed that in the first chapter. In v.5 he says, "Does anybody lack wisdom? They should ask God, who gives generously and without reproach, and it will be given. But ask without doubting." Just need to ask God: Lord, would you give me wisdom in this area? For I feel that I'm operating in a worldly manner. I need Your wisdom. But ask boldly. He gives without any reproach. And don't doubt.

I like the line where the songwriter says:

Believe in His promises, God cannot fail,
For what He has said He will do.

And He says, beloved, that He will give to each one of us wisdom; even now, right now. And maybe this is a good time to just say, Lord, would you turn the spotlight on my life? would you show me the areas which I need to hand over to you? Then ask for forgiveness and invite Him to give you His godly wisdom in that area.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we realize Lord, in the light of Your word, that we have strayed, that there are areas in our lives where we have depended on worldly wisdom. We are sorry for that. we ask for your forgiveness. But Lord, today you have shown us that You willingly give your wisdom to us. We pray that in every area where we have gone to worldly wisdom, we now ask that your heavenly wisdom would sit there so that the decision-making, the behavior that emanates from it would be godly. Lord, truly our heart's cry is to be able to reflect you well. But we know we can only do it if we allow you complete sway in our hearts. So take charge. We yield to you this morning and we pray this prayer as always in the beautiful majestic name of Jesus. Amen.