

James 3:13-18

Wisdom

As in the previous chapters, James continues to deal with basic, everyday issues. These issues are important to God, so they need to be important to us.

Chapter 1 = trials and temptations in life, exhortation to not merely listen to the Word but do what it says

Chapter 2 = favoritism and the relationship between faith and works

Chapter 3 = verses 1-13 controlling the tongue; verses 13-18 wisdom, of controlling the mind

These issues are intended to build upon one another, not to stand alone. There is progression here. Progression to maturity is the theme of James. This is what a mature Christian looks like.

Verse 13

According to James, if someone is wise and understanding, how will we know it? It will be demonstrated in their lives. Much like James has told us about faith, wisdom will be evidenced in our works. Notice the progression. Verses 1-12 addressed controlling the tongue. It is wisdom (verses 13-18) that keeps the tongue under control. There is a direct link.

Wisdom is the source of what? Humility

Why is that? When I am truly wise, I recognize how small and unimportant I am without God.

The Greek word for humility *prauteti* occurs in non-biblical literature to describe a horse that is broken and trained to submit to a bridle. It pictures strength under control. Specifically Christians needs to be under the Holy Spirit's control. It is very difficult to be in a spotlight position like a military officer and remain humble.

Application: How can you show strength under control in your life?

James goes on to talk about two kinds of wisdom. What is the first type? Earthly, unspiritual, of the devil

These are strong words. Why would it be demonic/of the devil? It eliminates any focus on God, is the antithesis of godly traits, and takes God out of the picture. Wisdom can only be from one of two sources: God or man.

What characterizes this type of wisdom? Envy and selfish ambition

What would earthly wisdom look like in a person's life? He is jealous of competitors and ruthless in dealing with them (bitter envy). His passion in life is to advance his own interests (selfish ambition). He is proud of his wisdom that has brought success (boasting). He denies the truth in a selfish and boastful way. Where there are words without godly works, eventually there is disorder and every evil practice. This type of wisdom does not have its source in the fear of the Lord. It comes from the spirit (philosophy) of this world. Worldly wisdom always draws attention to the self.

In verse 14 James talks about selfish ambition. Are goals selfish ambition? What are some of the differences between a goal and selfish ambition? Goals are not achieved at the expense of others. Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, had some things to say about planning in Proverbs 1:7, 6:6-11, 10:4-5, 12:5, 14:15, 16:3, 20:18, 24:27, 27:23-27, 31:10-31.

Verses 17-18

What is the source of the second type of wisdom? It is from God (heaven) as opposed to the world.

What are the characteristics of this type of wisdom?

Pure: free of the defilements mentioned in verses 14-16. Contrast this to false purity.

Peace-loving: peace-practicing and peace-yielding.

Considerate: open to reason.

Submissive: willing to yield to reasonable requests.

Full of mercy and good fruit: actively sympathetic to needs.

Impartial: unwaveringly single-minded in its devotion to God rather than double-minded.

Sincere: without hypocrisy, true to appearances.

Heavenly wisdom manifests itself in godly works. The character of this wisdom is wonderful. It is full of love and a giving heart, consistent with the holiness of God.

Application: We have all observed brilliant senior officers who aren't Christians but they seem to be very wise in running our military. How do you reconcile that fact with this passage? People can be wise in earthly things but not wise when it comes to eternal things.

What does verse 18 mean when it says *Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness*?

As the peacemaker sows his seed (teaching about God), the fruit grows. That fruit is righteousness (in the lives of others). People committed to preserving peace must teach the Word of God peacefully to reap a harvest of righteousness. That good fruit will not come if teachers sow it in words and ways that inflame and antagonize people. Righteousness will grow only in a climate of peace.

Summary of chapter 3: The only One who can control our tongues is God. The only One who can give us wisdom is God. We are completely dependent on Him for wisdom, controlling our tongues, dealing with trials, being impartial, etc.

Application: Our world/military doesn't value humility, gentleness, or submissiveness. Can we carry these character traits into the wardroom setting? Can we lead from a position of humility? Yes! That's the way God designed it. God is in control. He will honor your humility. Servant leadership takes a while, and is not noticed at first. You don't have to sacrifice your personality. The charismatic guy gets all the attention initially. But over time people respond favorable to humility.

What has James already said about getting wisdom? James 1:5: "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."

Consider 1 Corinthians 1:20-25 "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe....We preach Christ crucified....For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

Application: Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I respect the proud man of the world more than the humble believer in the Lord Jesus?
- Do I serve the Lord without caring who gets the credit?
- Do I sometimes use questionable means in order to get good results?
- Am I guilty of flattery in order to influence people?
- Do I harbor jealousy and resentment in my heart?
- Do I resort to sarcasm and unkind remarks?
- Am I pure in thought, in speech, and in deed?

MEMORIZE: James 3:13