

James 3:13-14 June 10, 2007

Alright good morning. Glad you are back today – hope you are enjoying the switch to summer outside. Grab your Bibles and let's turn back to James chapter 3. Last week we finished through verse 12 about our tongues. Today we'll start looking at the rest of the verses in this chapter – mainly verses 13 and 14 this morning. James 3:13-14.

TEXT

Now keep in mind that James throughout this letter has been giving us a series of tests for genuine living and saving faith. In chapter 1 he said that saving faith can be seen in how a person responds to trials. Then he said saving faith can be seen in how a person responds to temptation. And then he said that saving faith can be seen in how a person responds to the Word of God. And then in chapter 2 how a person responds to needy people or to those who are different than ourselves. And at the end of chapter 2 he really laid all this out there that basically saving faith is proven by righteous works – by good works. And then in the first half of chapter 3, saving faith is revealed by how we use our what? Our tongues. So trials, temptations, the Word, the needy, good works, the tongue – all of these are tests of living faith.

And now we come to the test of wisdom. If a person is genuinely saved he will genuinely manifest or show in his life the wisdom of God. That's pretty much the point of the rest of this chapter. In fact – **your RELATIONSHIP to God is revealed by the kind of wisdom you live out.** And there is a false wisdom as well as true wisdom and we'll see why wisdom is lived out in a moment.

So James asks that question in verse 13 – who among you is wise and understanding. Now how many of you are going to raise your hand to that?

Probably not many of us are going to hear that and just jack our hands up in the air. In fact any little wisdom we do have is probably telling us NOT to raise our hands.

But if we ask the same question in an opposite way – how many of you are absolute fools? Who among you are just plain foolish? Not many of you are going to raise your hands to that either are you?

In fact we live in a world where no fool is a self-confessed fool. Everyone is an expert in our world. Everyone knows all the answers. We live in a sea of opinions. You know that.

My dad's best friend – whenever some topic came up in conversation – would ask the question, do you know anything about whatever the topic was – lawnmowers, birds, the stock market, whatever – and whenever you said “not really,” he'd say, “well I can speak freely then.”

And that's pretty much the reality we live in. A sea of opinion where everybody is an expert and everybody has an answer.

So James is saying among all of you who are claiming to be wise and understanding – who really is wise? Who really is understanding? That's the issue.

Now the word “understanding” in the Greek here is only used here in the whole New Testament. It refers to a **SPECIALIST or a professional who is highly skilled in some area of knowing and doing.** The word for wisdom – “sophia” is a general word. But there is an important difference to understand. The Greeks used it to mean just knowledge – theory – philosophy. But the Hebrews – the Jews – infused it with a much deeper meaning than that and it had to do with **the ability to apply knowledge to the matter of LIVING life.**

So biblically speaking, to be wise like James is asking about is to know biblical truth and to apply that truth to all areas of your life. **Wisdom is TRUTH LIVED OUT.**

So when you put those together, when James asks, “who is wise and understanding?” he really just asking “who here is skilled in the art of living?” Again – “who is spiritually mature?”

Now you've got to admit, that's an important question. If you want to be good at anything, you want to be good at living life. And these guys that James is writing to think they are. They probably would have raised their hands at the first question. Remember from verse 1 in this chapter – many of them are setting themselves up as teachers they are so confident in their wisdom. So James gives them – and us – a test.

You think you are wise – you think you have understanding – verse 13, let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Its not enough to say think you have wisdom or to say you have wisdom. You need to prove it. So James puts his hand on your shoulder and mine and says, show me.

That's pretty significant isn't it. Think about what James is doing. He's asking you to prove you are wise – he's giving you a test to evaluate yourself. But notice he doesn't say – "OK – explain to me the theory of relativity." Or "describe for me the laws of thermodynamics." See you can be the smartest guy in the world – you can have more PhDs and random letters of the alphabet following your name – you can be a rocket scientist and moonlight as a nuclear physicist and still not be wise.

And he also doesn't say explain to me the hypostatic union of Christ. Or describe the differences in Calvinistic and Armenian theology. You can also be a seminary professor and be able to quote the entire Bible from memory – you can have a head full of knowledge of the deepest biblical truths and still not be wise.

James says show me. The word for show means to prove – point out – make known – to exhibit. Wisdom is not a hidden thing. It's got to be lived out here.

Now don't get me wrong. To show you have to know. You can't live it out here if you don't have it up here. You can't demonstrate what James is asking you to demonstrate if you don't have knowledge. That's assumed. But the point is that knowledge is not enough. You must not stop there. If you have wisdom you will be able to show it. And that's what James has been saying all along in this letter. It isn't enough to be just a hearer – you've got to be a doer. It's not enough to engage in religious activity. Your life needs to be transformed. Its not enough to say you have faith, your faith has to produce works. And its not enough just to know a lot of facts and info about the Bible – you need to demonstrate that that knowledge has transformed your life and caused you to become more like Jesus Christ.

That is huge. You see we as a church kind of pride ourselves on getting into the Word – on developing knowledge – even in getting our toes stepped on every now and then. But if we can't show that knowledge – if there is not visible, tangible evidence of the difference the Word is making in our every day lives, then we're not wise. We can claim it all day long – but to be wise, you've got to show it. **How?**

James tells us. He says first of all you show you are wise by a **good life**. Literally good behavior – a **good LIFESTYLE**. Its very general. **If you are wise its going to affect the way you live your ENTIRE life**. Not just the parts that have to do with church, but your whole life.

Secondly he says, "**by deeds**" – he goes from the general to the specific. By works. He identifies **the specifics of DAILY life** – the minutiae of each day. He's saying if you have the wisdom of God – if you are wise – it not only generally alters your conduct, but it specifically alters what you do. Each act in life is consistent with the whole life as evidence of the wisdom of God.

Sure you are going to fail. I am going to fail. There are going to be times when we stumble. But the overall pattern of our lives is going to be marked by goodness. That word good means an outward

good or beauty. **If you are really wise, your life is going to be characterized by goodness that people can SEE** with their eyes.

But catch this. James doesn't just say, "show me your good works." He says show me your deeds done in the **humility that comes from wisdom**. Now that word might be meekness or gentleness or humility depending on what version you are using today, but they all reflect the same word and that word has to do with **your ATTITUDE in what you do**.

Most people who think they have all the answers – who think they know everything – who would claim to be wise – come across as arrogant and selfish. This word in Greek is the very opposite of arrogant – the opposite of self-seeking. In the noun form it was used to describe a horse that had been broken. So the Greeks said it meant power under control. And in this context it means **submitted to the CONTROL of God**.

It reminds us of what we saw in **Philippians 2:3-4**

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Robert Johnstone in his commentary on the letter of James writes "I do not know that at any point the opposition between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of Christ is more marked, more obviously diametrical, than with regard to this feature of character. That the meek should inherit the earth – they who bear wrongs and exemplify that love that seeks not its own to a world that believe in high-handedness and self-assertion and pushing the weakest to the way – a statement like this cannot but appear an utter paradox. The man of the world desires to be counted anything but meek or poor in spirit and would deem such a description of him equivalent to a charge of unmanliness. But that is because we have taken in Satan's conception of manliness instead of God's. One man has been shown to us by God in whom God's ideal of man was embodied and He – Jesus – when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judges righteously."

Submitted to the control of God. Deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

I hear a lot of folks who say I'm just not a gentle person. I'm more of a harsh person – that's just my personality – how I come across. Folks James isn't arguing personality. This isn't a question about personality. It's a question about wisdom. Because James is saying that if you really are wise, it will produce deeds that are done in the humility the comes from wisdom. That's the test.

Look at WHAT you do. Look at HOW you do it. And now in verse 14, he says look at **WHY you do it**.

Verse 14 says "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth."

Here we get a little preview of where we'll go next week – James gives us the motives behind human wisdom as opposed to God's wisdom. But his point is motivation. Even in good works.

He says if you harbor **bitter envy**. This is a **self-centeredness that produces basically a RESENTFUL attitude toward everyone else**. This person lives in a "me" kind of world whether they acknowledge it or not. It is a self-focused world and bitter envy is what they convey to anyone who threatens that little world. They resent anyone who threatens their territory – who threatens their accomplishments – who threatens their reputation, who threatens to crowd their little slice of this world. Basically, anyone who differs from me is a foe. Anyone who differs from me is wrong. And anyone who differs from me and is successful, I am jealous of – bitter against.

Well that's going to create an atmosphere of competition and conflict. So when James says "**selfish ambition**" it basically means **PERSONAL gratification at any cost**. Doing what you do for what you can get out of it alone. A proud, love-less, self centered motive for life.

And don't kid yourself into thinking you can't do good works with those two motives. You bet we can. That's why James doesn't just say show me your good works and I'll call you wise. He says show me your deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

And he goes on to say that if you're running around boasting that you have the wisdom of God but the character of your life is proud – is loveless – is self centered – basically **if you are motivated by bitter envy and/or selfish ambition – then stop boasting about it. Stop claiming to have wisdom which you're not LIVING because you are denying the TRUTH.**

I hope you really get a sense of how crucial this is. God's wisdom is the best thing for us. So obviously we need to know if we are wise.

So here are a couple of tests. What do you do and why do you do it?
If we're not living a life of obedience to God's Word, then we're not wise.
If our lives aren't characterized by gentleness, meekness, humility, then we aren't wise.
If you are motivated by self, you aren't wise.

So practically that gives us 2 really **practical applications** for life. When you are making decisions, first ask – **is this in obedience to what I know is in SCRIPTURE?** If not, it's foolish – get rid of it. Second – **am I doing this for totally SELFISH reasons?** If so, it's foolish. I better change my motivations or I'm only going to bring harm to me – to others – and eventually dishonor God.

There you go. But listen – this is so much bigger than that. I know that you might take this passage, this sermon even and go – ehh, whatever. No big deal. Maybe I'm ok not being wise. Maybe I'm content with doing things the way I've been doing them. Please please listen to me.

Remember **when James says who is wise and understanding among you, he's setting up another TEST of authentic faith.** He's giving you another way to see if your faith is real – if you know Jesus – if you truly are saved. Those two application questions are just an outflow of the point. That **if your faith is real, you will have godly WISDOM.** And if you have godly wisdom, by definition, that wisdom will affect your life. Here's why I say that.

Proverbs 9:10 as well as Psalms 11:10 says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Fear there is reverence – awe – it is seeing God for who He is and then seeing ourselves in light of Who He is. And that is the only starting point for salvation.

In **John 16:13** Jesus says "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." And a few verses before that he says the Holy Spirit's job is to convict you in regard to sin and to convict you in regard to righteousness. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the one who equips us with the wisdom of God and the only way to have the Holy Spirit is to be saved for

2 Cor 1:22 says that God “set his seal of ownership on us (who are Christians), and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

1 Cor 1:30 tells us that for those who are truly saved, Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God.

You put all that together and God is telling us that if you have Jesus, you have wisdom.

If you have the Holy Spirit, you have wisdom.

If you are saved, you have wisdom.

And James is saying if you have wisdom, it will show in your lifestyle. It will show in your good works. And it will show in why you do them.

So this isn't just about whether or not you want to be wise or not or whether you want others to think you are wise or not.

James is scared to death that any of us might think we are already saved when we are not and end up standing before God to hear him say, depart from me, I never knew you.

So he says **if you faith is authentic** – if your salvation is real – then you will live by the wisdom of God. In other words – **your life will be a consistent – not perfect – but consistent pattern of you APPLYING what you know of God's Word**. And if you look at your life and you see either a lack of lifestyle that reflects God's Word OR a motivation in life that is selfish and bitter envy, then don't deny the truth – either you need to repent and come back to your relationship with God, or you don't have a relationship with Him at all.

Folks I know that James is hard. But I'd rather you be mad at being questioned again but get right with Jesus than to be content and end up in Hell. James is saying again, Don't just be a hearer week after week. Be a doer of the Word. Let's pray.