

James 3:14-18
June 17, 2007

Alright good morning and Happy Father's Day. Grab your Bibles and we will continue our study of the book of James. Last week we looked at another test of authentic faith – that if your faith in Jesus Christ is authentic, you will have godly wisdom. In fact, **your RELATIONSHIP with God is revealed by the kind of wisdom you live out.** Because remember wisdom is not the same thing as knowledge. Wisdom is knowledge applied to living life. Godly wisdom then is God's truth applied to life. In fact as James implied in verse 14 when he said if you harbor bitter envy or selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast about it or deny the truth – don't claim to have godly wisdom because you don't – there are two very different kinds of wisdom in this world. And that's what we're going to see today.

And this being Father's Day I can't think of many more appropriate topics than godly wisdom. The role of husband – the role of father – make today's word from God all the more crucial for us to hear today. So let's look at verses 15-18, we'll go back and start in verse 13 to get the context from last week.

TEXT

Two kinds of wisdom. Vastly different. We got that. But our tendency in a passage like this is to read through it and, because we know all the words individually, we assume we understand the passage. But we don't really or at least we don't usually stop and think about what the words mean in context and what James is saying about these two kinds of wisdom. So let's walk through this together and kind of play Webster for a bit so we don't miss the warning and challenge God has for us today.

Remember you can pretty much summarize wisdom as being your lifestyle – it's how you live your life – it's the way you think, the filters that you interpret through, the principles you believe – which means it is going to be how you live. So in verse 15 when James says "such wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil" he is referring back to verse 14 to wisdom that is motivated by bitter envy or selfish ambition. A lifestyle driven by a "me-centric" mindset and a goal of personal gratification. That kind of wisdom, he says, doesn't come from heaven. Obviously that means it doesn't come from God. Wisdom with that motive isn't godly. So now in **verse 15** he gives us 3 words – three characteristics of that kind of wisdom. Let's look at them.

First he says it is **earthly**. That means two things. First it means **its extent is LIMITED to time and space.** It is tied to the finite system of unsaved man. It goes no higher than the mind of man. It can't take into consideration that which is more than man – that which is more than man can see. Which is the other meaning, you could say worldly. It stands in contrast to heavenly. It means **you aren't thinking about GOD'S goals, about God's standards, about God's desires.** Your thinking is earthbound. You're thinking and living as if this earth is all there is. You're not looking from God's perspective, but man's.

We see this absolutely everywhere. Do your own thing. Get yours now. Look out for number one. It's dog eat dog, if you can't run with the big dogs, stay on the porch. Do unto others before they do unto you. Have it your own way – even Burger King is into the mode of the moment – your way right away at Burger King now.

The next word in the NIV is **unspiritual**. A better word would be **SENSUAL or fleshly**. The word in Greek is always used to refer to that which **belongs to the natural world.** All of **our FEELINGS, impulses, appetites that flow from man's unsanctified heart.** What the Bible calls our fleshly desires. All human wisdom – whether it be sociology, psychology, philosophy, education – whatever it is – however they comprehend man, man's problems, and man's solutions purely from a humanistic point of view. It can only stimulate on the natural level – never a spiritual response. If it feels right do it. Obey your thirst. Go with your gut. Follow your heart.

You look at those and say I don't really ever think those mottos. None of us do. But more often than not this is the wisdom that drives us. Because we are inundated – we're saturated – by it day in and day out. **Every time we substitute the filth or even the best of this WORLD for the holiness and glory of GOD in our lives, this is the motivation – this is the wisdom we are living.** And that's a problem because of the third word.

The NIV says it is “**of the devil.**” The word in Greek is literally the adjective form of the noun demon and it’s only used here in the whole Bible. James couldn’t make it any stronger if he tried. **SATAN is the prince of the power of the air and the ruler of this world system. This wisdom is of his character and it finds its SOURCE in him.** He was envious of God and ambitious for his own glory in the beginning of time and that’s why he fell and everything we just talked about that so easily motivates and describes our lifestyles makes us just like him.

Which is why **verse 16** is next. James says for where you find envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Disorder is another very strong word in Greek. James used it in chapter 1 verse 8 and in chapter 3 verse 8 about the impact of double-mindedness and the impact of an out of control tongue. It means **confusion that comes from INSTABILITY**, from chaos. It **creates strife, CONFLICT, and restlessness.** And we see it all around our world – anger, bitterness, law suits, divorces, people unable to get along with people – that’s the result, that’s the legacy of earthly wisdom.

Which leads to the last phrase: “and **every evil practice.**” And this is really interesting because it isn’t actually a word for evil, it’s a word for **USELESS. Worthless.** He isn’t talking about its passive or active malignancy but about its good for nothing viewpoint. There will never be any true gain coming from it.

So here’s the deal. **You live your life for YOURSELF. You make decisions based on the world’s wisdom. And I’ll make you two promises. You are going to have all kinds of PAIN and conflict in your life. And you are going to accomplish nothing that’s WORTHWHILE.** Your life is going to be a waste.

This is so practical. You have a pattern of confusion or disorder in your life? You seeing little to nothing of lasting eternal value come out of your life? You know something for certain – you’re living your life based on wordly wisdom. Because that’s what it produces.

James asks us here – are you wise? He says look at what you do and why you do it. Then he reveals the false wisdom that motivates and controls so many people. And then he gives us the alternative. Look at **verse 17.**

The first word there is **pure.** It is set apart from the others because it is **talking about MOTIVE.** James is setting up a contrast to the motive of false wisdom. It means **sincere spiritual INTEGRITY.** It means clear or clean from vices. So it isn’t motivated by bitter envy. It isn’t motivated by selfish ambition. It isn’t motivated by arrogant self promotion or prestige or a desire for power or money or applause or whatever. It is motivated by purity. **The deepest part of a believer WANTS to do God’s will, wants to serve God, wants to love God.** That’s the starting point of godly wisdom.

Then James moves into the characteristics of this wisdom. First is **peace-loving.** That means what it says – **godly wisdom promotes peace. You know why? Because it isn’t SELFISH.** Any time Nicole and I get into an argument, it is because at least one of us is being selfish. Godly wisdom promotes peace because it isn’t about me.

Then **considerate.** Most other versions use the word **GENTLE** here. The truth is this word in Greek may be one of the hardest to translate into English that there is. It conveys the idea of entering into whatever happens with an attitude of humility, of courteousness, of kindness, of patience. It has the idea of stepping in to be a corrective with tenderness. It is more of a word that we feel than we define.

Next is **submissive.** Other version say **reasonable** or open to reason. That means literally **willing to yield.** The opposite of stubborn. A good way to think of this in terms of wisdom as a lifestyle is being **TEACHABLE.**

Then you’ve got **full of mercy.** This really means a **concern for people who suffer expressed both in FORGIVENESS and COMPASSION.** The evidence of a pure heart will be a concern for others, a love for others, a desire to give to meet the needs of others.

He says full of mercy and **good fruit.** Obviously that means good works, spiritual deeds, **WORKS that honor God.** Just like James spent half of chapter 2 on – that if your faith in Christ is authentic and real it is going to

produce works in your life that show it – so if you have godly wisdom, it is going to produce good fruit – good works – works that honor God in your life.

Then it is **impartial and sincere**. Impartial isn't really implying without bias as much as unwavering. It's only used here in the New Testament and it means **UNDIVIDED in commitment**, no shifting. And sincere means what you think it means – **without hypocrisy**. Not phony. Not fake. No pretense. No mask for one group and another mask for someone else. Simply real. **AUTHENTIC**.

You put all that together and you have the answer to what we saw last week. James asked "Who is wise and understanding among you?" He said "let him show it by his good life – by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."

This is that wisdom. This is the lifestyle of he who is wise and understanding. Not that you have all of this all the time. Not that you even have all that you ought to have. All of us need more and will always need more. But that you have some – in fact that you have most – you have enough to show the life of God within you. And if you don't see this much – if you see more of the first half than the last half of this passage – then the evidence isn't there.

And then the last verse – **verse 18**. This is a really tricky verse to translate – not because the words aren't there – but because the grammar doesn't immediately make sense. The NIV says, "peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." But that kind of hides the right progression.

The NAS has a better translation; it says "the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

The peacemakers James just described in verse 17 sow the seed of true wisdom and its fruit is what righteousness. There it is again.

True spiritual wisdom is not what you KNOW; it is the way you LIVE. And you are only wise if you live a righteous life. And as you live a righteous life, the actual wording of this verse makes sense. It literally would say "the fruit of righteousness is sown" – which explains why they turn this all around. You sow seeds, not fruit. Fruit – the harvest – comes after you sow. But on the other hand, fruit that is harvested becomes the seed for the next crop doesn't it?

There is a commercial on tv right now that shows this beautifully. The Liberty Mutual commercial that shows someone doing an act of kindness for a stranger and someone else sees that person do that which encourages that person to do an act of kindness for someone else later in their day and someone sees that person do that which encourages that person to do an act of kindness and on and on. That's what James is saying. That as you sow the fruit of righteousness – which here is equated with true wisdom because wisdom is truth lived out remember – **as you sow the fruit of righteousness it produces MORE righteousness.**

That is the wisdom of God. In contrast to the wisdom of this world that produces nothing that lasts – nothing of value – nothing that is eternal. Instead - that is the lifestyle of a believer.

Question – how can I gain this true wisdom? Dads – how can you be this kind of father? How can you leave a legacy of wisdom for your kids? How can you lead your family with godly wisdom?

Let me give you a statement that has three parts that is going to sound so obvious and simple you'll roll your eyes. You ready?

Wisdom comes FROM God THROUGH a relationship INTO your life.

Now here's what it means.

First – **recognize that wisdom comes from GOD.** In these verses James says the wisdom that comes from heaven. In James 1:5 he says, if you lack wisdom, ask God. In Proverbs chapter 8, wisdom is being personified and is speaking in the first person and you can read the whole chapter about it but in verse 22 & 23 wisdom says:

22 *"The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old;*

23 *I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.*

Wisdom comes from God. To get it, you must pursue God. You must know God.

To get it then – since it starts with God – **you must have a right RELATIONSHIP with God.** The only way I can know God is through the Lord Jesus Christ and through Him I can come to the wisdom of God. And when I am in a right relationship with God, I respond to God rightly. Which is a holy fear. Turn to Psalm 111:10.

What is a fear of God? It is a compelling heart attitude of adoring worship. It is reverence. It is awe. It doesn't mean I sit in a corner shaking. It means that I exalt and worship God rightly. If you want wisdom, God has it. To get it, you must have a relationship with Him of worship.

Lastly, it has to make it into your life. **Wisdom is perfected by OBEDIENCE.** The next line in Psalm 111:10 says if you have good understanding – if you have wisdom – you will follow his precepts. You will do them. You will live them. His wisdom will work itself out in how you live your life. You will obey God.

Listen wisdom is to be found in God and nowhere else. And unless the quest for wisdom brings a man into a relationship with God and then brings that man to his knees in awe and reverence of God, acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord in a commitment of obedience – then that man without those things is a fool no matter how much he knows.

The truth is this world offers us a wisdom of its own. We know it. We've seen it. We've lived it. And it can never lift us above the dirt on which we stand. It is earthly. It is unspiritual. It is of the devil. But we have wisdom that is from above. And we can live it. We can have lives like James described in verses 17-18. Lives marked by purity – by peace – by gentleness – by teachableness – by mercy – by good works – by integrity – by authenticity – lives that make a difference for eternity in our families, our jobs, our schools, our friendships, and our world.

That wisdom is ours if:

We KNOW God.

We FEAR God.

We OBEY God.

The question today is will you?