

James 3:13-18

June 14, 2020

The book of James is greatly informed by Jesus' sermon on the Mount. It is likely that James sat in the crowd and listened to his big brother preach. There are echoes of that sermon in James 3.

Remember when Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Matthew 7:13–14

Jesus' point is that there are two and only two paths you can follow in this life. A path to life and a path to destruction. There are not many ways to live. Just two. One way follows Jesus and the other way does not.

James talks about two ways today as well. Two ways of living. By two different kinds of wisdom. In James 3:13–18, is answering the question that so many have asked—How Shall we Live?

There are two ways.

Earthly wisdom vs. Heavenly wisdom.

Which path are you on? Remember, there are only two.

Are you on the narrow path leading to life or the wide path leading to destruction? Or to put the question in James' terms—Do you have the right kind of wisdom?

"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. [14] But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. [17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. [18] And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." James 3:13–18

PRAY

1. How to measure wisdom

If we were asked—how can you tell if someone is wise?

Vs. 13,

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

How can you tell. Do you see? By how you live.

This is a corrective to me and how I use the word wisdom. I am apt to think of someone as wise if they have wise things to say. If they are able to give good advice or counsel or have thoughtful opinions.

That is not how James is using the word wisdom here.

For James, wisdom is not measured in what you say, but how you live. Let that sink in.

This make sense, right?

What is the beginning of wisdom? What do we know it to be from Proverbs? The fear of the Lord. That is a strange phrase. To fear the Lord is to live mindful of him. To not forget him in our normal lives.

Fearing the Lord means that you are constantly aware that you live to please him. To honor him. To serve him. To remember, I am not my own. To fear God does not mean that we should cower before him constantly wondering if he loves us. We need not fear his wrath. That is not the idea.

To fear God means—

- That you will care about pleasing God in each moment of your day.
- That you will want to grow in your ability to please God.
- That you will be grieved by sin, not saying, he will forgive it is his job.
- That you will be grateful for blessings from him.

To fear the Lord means that you do not forget him in your daily life. Fearing God is living with the reality that we serve God and not ourselves. This is not just a Sunday activity, but a lifestyle.

Those that fear God will be humble toward others. That is the idea.

See what James says,

By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

Meekness is not timidity, but humility. It is an awareness of God’s greatness and our insignificance.

How do we measure wisdom?

By the advice we give?

Nope.
By what we know?
Nope.

How?

By how we live. Wisdom is measured by how we live.

There are two ways of living and two kinds of wisdom.

2. Two kinds of Wisdom

Vs. 15,

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

We will call that kind of wisdom, earthly wisdom.

Vs. 17,

[17] But the wisdom from above.

We will call that heavenly wisdom.

What does earthly wisdom look like?

Vs. 14,

[14] But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Bitter Jealousy & selfish ambition two sides of the same coin for James.

Earthly wisdom is fueled by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Bitter jealousy is when something inside us is disappointed when something good happens to someone else. And we wonder—why can't that happen to me?

Instead of celebrating a promotion, an engagement, a child's baptism, a retirement or some other victory in another person's life—bitter jealousy says—what about me?

James is speaking about relationships in local church communities.

Selfish Ambition is the desire to promote your interests, opinions, points of view over everyone else's. Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition promotes a party spirit in any church. Division is powered by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.

It is the negative word meant to dig at someone.

It is the yearning to be right at all costs.

It is the craving to have your opinion respected.

It is the desire to get people to think less of someone else.

It is the passion to pass on a bad report.

That is earthly wisdom.

More than that. James has some other descriptors.

[15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition the underpinning of a demonic philosophy.

And look where bitter jealousy and selfish ambition end up—

[16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Why?

Where the overriding desire is to have your own way—you will do anything, literally anything to keep your own way. Even justifying all sorts of evil activities—disorder and every vile practice—in a desire to promote yourself.

We know what demonic wisdom looks like—

This is wanting to grasp instead of give.

This is wanting to use rather than be used.

This is wanting to be understood rather than understand.

This is standing for your rights instead of giving them up.

This is want to be right more than anything.

This is sacrificing friendships instead of sacrificing for friendships.

This is want to be loved rather than loving others.

This is hoping to be served rather than serving others.

This is being immovable in your opinions rather than realizing they are just your opinions.

This is dividing people rather than uniting them.

This is earthly/natural/demonic wisdom

That is one sort of wisdom.

There is another kind of wisdom—vs. 17,

[17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Heavenly wisdom.

James stacks up 8 qualities of heavenly wisdom.

Purity
Peaceable
Gentle
Reasonable
Merciful
Good fruits
Impartial
Sincere

Interesting that in earthly wisdom—he only mentions bitter jealousy and selfish ambition and says—that leads to everything vile. Instead of naming these grotesque outworkings of selfishness—he leaves off.

Not with heavenly wisdom.

Notice something else. James doesn't so much tell us what wisdom is but what heavenly wisdom does. He is holding this up as a mirror for us asking—is this what your life looks like?

Not your son.
Not your wife.
Not your husband.
Not your friend.
Not your boss.

But you.

Heavenly wisdom is—

Speaks to attitude, action, disposition.

1. Attitude—

Pure. This is the key to all the other qualities. Pure as in faultless or blameless. No hidden agendas or mixed motives.

What does it look like to be pure? Heavenly wisdom is defined by purity—this list helps us.

Peaceable—means freedom from strife with others. This is the individual that isn't just peaceable in himself, but desires to spread it out to others.

Greater concern for peace than being heard.

Gentle—this is being fair and considerate and not exacting in his relations with others. Being willing to yield to others and being unwilling to be strict with others.

Greater concern for other's feelings than your own.

Open to reason—being easily persuaded and not holding to your opinion with an iron fist. You listen. It is not weakness or gullibility but a willingness to listen when non-negotiables are not involved.

Greater concern to listen than be listened to.

2. **Action**—Full of mercy and good fruits.

Merciful—always overlooking. Never giving someone else what they deserve.
Greater desire to show compassion than indifference.

Good fruits—always doing good to others.
Greater desire to serve others than be served.

3. **Disposition**—

Impartial—isn't swayed by money, influence, fame, but treats all the same
Great expression of acceptance of others at all costs.

Sincere—Real, authentic. Not fake.
Great expression of no hidden agendas.

This is what heavenly wisdom looks like—

This is wanting to give instead of grasp.

This is wanting to use up instead of use others.

This is wanting to understand rather than being understood.

This is standing freely giving away your rights rather than standing for your rights.

This is wanting to be loving more than anything.

This is sacrificing for friendships instead of sacrificing friendships.

This is loving others when they don't deserve it.

This is serving others and not caring if anyone notices.

This is being willing to release preferences and opinions instead of relationships.

This is making every effort to unite than divide.

This is heavenly wisdom.

The effect?

[18] And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Peace.

Do your words engender peace? Or strife.

Did you notice in both earthly and heavenly wisdom James does not focus on what we say to others as much as our attitude toward others? Do you see that?

Do you know what that means?

You can't always tell if someone is expressing earthly or heavenly wisdom ONLY by what they say. Your disposition to them is what matters.

- You could say something true but not timely, and therefore not loving.
- You could say the exact same thing in a timely way, and therefore be loving.

There are two kinds of wisdom—

Earthly and Heavenly.

If we live by heavenly wisdom—people are going to look at us and say—that is stupid. They serve others without expecting anything in return. They don't look out for their own interests but the interests of others. They are not about getting ahead but of putting others ahead.

It doesn't make sense.

Following Jesus should always look strange to the world around us.

These are the two ways to live.

Which way are you living?

Which is guiding your life?

Look into the mirror of the word.

We can look in this mirror without fear—

Freedom of self-reflection in Christ. There is safety in recognizing you fall short. Why? Because we have a solution. A person to point to. Someone who is entirely

Pure
Peaceable
Gentle
Reasonable
Merciful
Good fruits
Impartial
Sincere

I'm so glad Jesus is like this. Don't you see that makes all the difference? You can go to him without fear of condemnation.

There is a new book out that is destined to be a classic—Gentle and Lowly—by Dane Ortlund. The book is an extended description of Jesus disposition toward us. The heart of Jesus toward sinners like you and me.

Let's think about if you are convicted that elements of your life are marked by worldly wisdom. And you want to change.

How is Jesus thinking of you?

"If you are part of Christ's own body, your sins evoke his deepest heart, his compassion and pity. He "takes part with you"—that is, he's on your side. He sides with you against your sin, not against you because of your sin. He hates sin. But he loves you." Dane Ortlund

He sides with you against your sin.
That is so helpful.

Where do you see bitter jealousy and selfish ambition?

"Do not minimize your sin or excuse it away. Raise no defense. Simply take it to the one who is already at the right hand of the Father, advocating for you on the basis of his own wounds. Let your own unrighteousness, in all your darkness and despair, drive you to Jesus Christ, the righteous, in all his brightness and sufficiency." Dane Ortlund

What if you are thinking—he is giving me so many chances?

"Do you know what Jesus does with those who squander his mercy? He pours out more mercy. God is rich in mercy. That's the whole point. Whether we have been sinned against or have sinned ourselves into misery, the Bible says God is not tightfisted with mercy but openhanded, not frugal but lavish, not poor but rich." Dane Ortlund

Go to him. He is always glad to see you.

