

Let Your Wisdom Show

James 3:13-18

KV 13: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”

At the beginning of the chapter, James writes, “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” Here he was referring to those who want to be leaders within the church, but there is also a sense in which we are all teachers. We may teach our children the truths of the Bible, we may teach other members of our family or our friends, and some may even go out to teach unbelievers. Yet in order to teach others the truth, we must also live by the truth. Otherwise, how can we reinforce our teaching if our lives are not consistent with what we teach? So in order to live by the truth, we need to have wisdom. Now this applies even to those who aren’t teachers – but everyone who desires to live by the truth needs to have wisdom. As we’ll see today, there are 2 kinds of wisdom, but only one kind leads to the knowledge of the truth, therefore only one kind of wisdom leads to life.

Do you have wisdom? How can you prove it? Look at v.13, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” Wisdom is proven by good conduct. When I looked up wisdom in the Google dictionary, it read, “the quality of having experience, knowledge and good judgment.” It was interesting to me that a secular dictionary mentions that “good judgment” is part of wisdom. The world does value the virtues of honesty, integrity and morality, how much more so does a Christian need to live this way, so that even when non-Christians slander you, you will be innocent, and they will see your good works and glorify God when he comes (1 Pet 2:12). Even the unbelievers who do not slander you, may praise God when they see your good works.

Another evidence of wisdom is humility. In fact, the verse talks about “the humility that comes from wisdom.” Humility is having a mild and calm temper, it’s having a gentle spirit. It’s not a false humility, where your actions seem humble but your heart and your mind have not been humbled. Humility is not weakness either. It is in the sight of God a great price, humility is of a great value to God (1 Pet 3:4). Christ humbled himself from the throne of heaven and became as a man. He submitted to God and obeyed him, even to the point of death. His humility came from an unwavering trust in the Lord. His humility was a reflection of the kindness and compassion of the Lord, and draws our hearts to God. Likewise, when we do our good deeds in true and sincere humility, it may also draw others to God.

Good conduct and humility are evidences of the wisdom that comes from God, but there is also a wisdom that is not from above. Look at v.14, “But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.” Envy is having a rivalry or jealousy toward someone. When you are jealous that someone is blessed, or envious over some good fortune they received, you have envy in your heart. When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!” (Gen 30:1). Then, several years later, Joseph, her son, shared the dreams he had where it symbolized him ruling over all of his older brothers. They all became jealous of

him, and when they got the chance they sold him into slavery (Gen 37). Prov 14:30 says, “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.” James didn’t just mention any type of envy either, he said it was bitter envy. This means that it is a harsh, truly despicable envy over another.

Then there’s selfish ambition – the desire to be recognized and prominent. It is a selfish self-promoting spirit, where you desire to cause division and strife by slandering, backbiting and mudslinging, sometimes even secretly, against the person you’re opposed to. It is a divisive spirit that seeks to break any harmonious, righteous unity – sometimes even by subtle means like gossip or spreading false information. Have you ever seen those election campaign commercials? They shamelessly promote the candidate they are supporting, but they criticize and slander the opposing candidate. I believe I read somewhere that they have researchers try to dig into anything in the past that they can use against their opponent – even if it’s something that was said several years ago. Some false apostles tried to do this to the apostle Paul – the apostle Paul who is the author of nearly half of the New Testament: “some [said], ‘His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and amounts to nothing.’” This was their boast – that they were must more qualified to be an apostle than he was because they were trained in eloquent speech. They thought they were superior than he was. But Paul exposes their hypocrisy, proving by evidence all of his suffering and deeds for the church out of genuine love, and showing that they had not a single good deed.

Now let’s bring it home to our hearts. Notice again v.14, “But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts,” my friends, we do not even have to act on our notions. If they are harbored, if bitter envy and selfish ambition have anchored in our hearts, we are wrong. If we see with our eyes and envy with our minds, we are wrong. If we hear with our ears and slander in our hearts we are wrong. James says, “do not boast about it or deny the truth.” We betray the truth of our confession of faith, we betray the truth of our Christianity if bitter envy and selfish ambition have room in our hearts.

Where do these things come from? Look at v.15, “Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” (NIV 84 says “of the devil”). This “wisdom” is not from God, and is not of God. I like how in the NIV translations wisdom is in quotes, showing that these thoughts are not true wisdom. They’re quote-unquote “wisdom,” they really are evil practices. Now see their source. The first is “earthly.” This type of “wisdom” is worldly. It is wise about fame, power, glory and money. How to play politics. Get rich quick schemes. How to deceive others. How to look successful.

The second type is unspiritual. In other translations, this is “sensual,” and it refers to the lust of the flesh, carnal lusts, pleasures, self-centered-ness. In a Latin translation I’ve seen, the word translated here is “Animalis,” no joke. This type of wisdom is animalis, like an animal. The earthly wisdom was “terrestris,” and this is “animalis.” “Survival of the fittest” comes to mind here – but this type of wisdom produces acts that try to fulfill and cater to the flesh. While the first type originates from the world, this type originates from our very own flesh.

The third and final type is demonic – influenced and inspired by the devil. Some of these thoughts include ungodly thoughts, denying that there is a God. There is a hatred of truth, and a

love of deceitfulness and lies. Jesus said of the Jews who eventually would try to kill him, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44).” We see these lies in the media, “Believe in yourself, you are a god,” or, “There is no God,” or, “All religions lead to God,” or “Jesus is not God,” or, “Jesus blood is meaningless,” or, “You evolved from a bacteria – you’re nothing but a mixture of chemicals.” We live in a world where adulterers and murders are glorified in movies and in politics, where deception and debauchery is cool and fun. These are the 3 enemies of man: the world, the flesh and the devil.

What is the ultimate result of this “wisdom?” Look at v.16, “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” The result of earthly, demonic wisdom is to have envy and selfish ambition. Sometimes our desires will over-take our moral boundaries, and we break the law, we steal, kill and destroy to get what we want. And where there is envy and selfish ambition, there we first find disorder. We see chaos, and there’s confusion. Why are nations trying to destroy one another? Why is North Korea pointing their missiles over here? Why is there so much unrest all over the world – in Egypt, Syria, Israel. We are perplexed at the unexplainable and unimaginable evil. We heard several months ago about some drugs that caused homeless people to eat each other’s faces. Last week we heard about the Woolwich attack in which 2 men attacked a soldier in broad daylight, hacking him with meat cleavers and telling the public to take pictures.

We find every evil practice: every practice that is ethically bad, wicked and base. Practices that are destructive. There were the shootings at Sandy Hook, the gruesome abortions performed by Dr. Gosnell, and now a sexual assault problem in our military. In this ungodly wisdom, Rom 1:29-31 says, “They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, slanders, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.” Verse (Rom 1) 18 says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of the people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.” How can we find the real wisdom, when we have these 3 enemies against us. These are the enemies of man: the world, the flesh and the devil – yet we are born in the world, of the flesh, and belong to the devil. How can we escape? There is no peace in the world, only chaos, confusion, and destruction everywhere. There is no peace in our hearts, because of our sin, where there is envy and selfish ambition.

Where’s the light in this darkness? Thank God, THANK GOD there is hope! Can we all please read v.17, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” Ahhh, this is what we need. We cannot find the solution anywhere in the world. We need the wisdom from above, the wisdom from heaven. The worldly wisdom was earthly, unspiritual and demonic, but the wisdom from above is heavenly, spiritual, and from God. It is first of all pure. This wisdom is free from all fault, it is without blemish, immaculate, perfect. It is like a fresh water spring.

This wisdom is pure, and it purifies us. What is this wisdom? Prov 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” The

fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. John Gill writes about this verse: “[It] shows who the wise men are, and in what true wisdom lies; no man is wise till he fears the Lord, and he that does so is a wise man, at least then he begins to be one...it is the beginning of grace.” It is God’s grace to bring us to a conviction of your sins. For your sins, you are under the judgment of God. For your bitter envy and selfish ambition, you have violated the divine law of God. You are guilty. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Your guilt remains on your head. What will you do? In the news, in the wake of the scandal in the IRS, the headline read: IRS: Heads will roll. The IRS was guilty of wrongdoing, and people needed to pay the price. “Heads will roll” was a saying that some people will be fired. How about for our sins? Somebody has to pay.

But look! Look O sinner again at the Lord, and see what he has done! The Lord has sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay for our sins. He put all of our guilt onto Christ, and shed his blood so that he may take away our sin. Heb 9:14 says, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” Yes, Christ cleansed our consciences, our guilt is cleared. This is good news for us all! Our debt is paid! We still fear the Lord, but not out of terror. The terror of judgment has been taken away. We fear the Lord out of love, because he loved us. Children, would you do anything to hurt your parents? If you fear them, reverence them, respect them out of love, you would not rebel against them. In the same way, we fear the Lord out of love, and now that we see God, we also fear him because he is awesome, he is great, he is majestic, he is Holy, Holy, Holy! 1 John 3:2-3 says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” When we have this hope that Christ will come again, we purify ourselves. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

It is from this standpoint of purity, that we may continue. Look again at v.17, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” We are getting an in-depth, detailed look now at all of the attributes of the wisdom from heaven.

The wisdom above is next peace-loving. Have you ever felt guilty for something before? What happens when that guilt is taken away? While you feel the guilt, your heart beats, you feel anxious. But when you have been cleared, or forgiven...you breathe a sigh of relief. There’s a peace in your heart, and it’s peace from heaven. There’s a peace in your heart, that the world never gave, a peace it cannot take away. When you experience peace, you do not want it taken away. Imagine living in a neighborhood where you were afraid to go outside because of bullies or gangbangers hanging out. It’s hard to live in a place like that. But when you move to a nice quiet neighborhood, you can take a nap right outside in your lawnchair. Peace is a wonderful thing, and something we all need. Does envy rise up in your heart again? Is your selfish ambition roused? Remember James 1:12: “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” You are peace-loving now, there’s no need for envy and strife. You are in Christ, so take off that moral filth

like a dirty garment and humbly accept God's word. Heb 12:14 says, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

The second aspect of heavenly wisdom is to be considerate. In the King James version, it is rendered as "gentle." The wisdom from above is considerate and gentle. It is fair, mild, not hot tempered, and thoughtful. It's where we get the word "gentleman." Have you met a gentleman before? He doesn't raise his voice in uncontrolled rage, he opens the door, he's a good sportsman. (So guys, don't swear if I beat you in basketball). For the women, you don't have to be like a gentleman, but think about how a nurse would cherish the children she takes care of (1 Th 2:7). In order for us to teach, and to be patient with others, we need a considerate heart, not prone to quarreling or resentment (2 Tim 2:24).

The third attribute of the wisdom from heaven is submissiveness. Have you ever seen a good boy? I have told this story before, but I remember when my brother Joe was a little boy, 5 or 6 years old, and whenever we went to Walgreens he ran straight to the toy section. Sometimes he would ask if I could buy the toy for him, but there were times I asked him to wait, and we will come back later to see if he wants it. Without a fight or resentment, Joe put the toy back in its place and followed me out. That was one of my most precious moments, and the next time we went, I bought the toy. We ought to be submissive in the same way to our Heavenly Father, who loves us and knows what we need. There is a sense in this word submissiveness that means one is open to reason, not stubborn – open to correction, or consideration of feedback. Do you see now, in peace-loving, consideration and submissiveness, how humility is born out of this kind of wisdom?

We move on to the fourth attribute, and I'm going in depth because they each are rich gifts of God – and this is full of mercy. We studied about mercy around 3 weeks ago, when we studied about "Favoritism Forbidden" – James 2:13 says, "Mercy triumphs over judgment." Being full of mercy means to have kindness and goodwill toward one another. It is a desire to do good to someone – like visiting the sick, relieving the poor, comforting those who may be miserable and helping the afflicted. To be full of mercy means to be full of this desire to do good for someone. When we remember the mercy God has shown us in giving his Son for our sins, we are encouraged to show mercy to others.

Not only are we full of mercy, but we are full of good fruit. We bear good fruit, and because it is full, we bear it in abundance. We are productive in the work of the Lord. Contrast this with the evil practices. The evil practices destroy, they produce no good. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22). We bear fruit in every good work, and grow in the knowledge of the Lord (Col 1:10).

The wisdom from above is also impartial and unwavering. We are not partial to others, we do not play favorites, but love our neighbors as ourselves. We also are not partial to God's word, we don't pick and choose what to believe, but we believe the whole counsel of God in the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is our guidebook, our rulebook, our standard for life. It is where we learn what to believe concerning God, and what God requires of us. In worldly wisdom, the result was confusion and disorder, there is no absolute moral standard, so the world

slips into depravity. But in the wisdom from above, we live by a divine, eternal law: the law of God. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path.”

Finally, the wisdom from above is sincere. It is true wisdom. It is the only true wisdom. Again, notice in the NIV that there are quotes around “wisdom” in v.15. That is not true wisdom, it is false and those are evil deeds. But the wisdom from heaven is genuine, and it is real. Heb 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” The word of God is living, active, and we are testimonies to the life-giving power of the word. We looked in-depth at the attributes of this wisdom. It is sourced from God, powered by God, and gives glory back to God. How can we receive it? First, again, we must fear the Lord, and put our faith in the finished work of Christ. As children of God, brothers and sisters, we are then given this promise, in James 1:5-6, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” Let us ask God for an increase of wisdom, not doubting, but knowing and believing that he gives generously without finding fault.

Look at v.18, “Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” We have been purified through Christ; through Christ we are peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy & good fruit, impartial and sincere. We are peace-makers – reconciling the world to God through the preaching of the gospel. We are peace-makers – loving our neighbors as ourselves. So we sow in peace. To sow means to plant a seed. Sowers have to plant in peace. Have you ever seen a farmer angrily throwing a bag of seed all over his field? No, he plants the seed orderly, and peacefully. So we also sow in peace. 1 Pet 3:15 says, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” When we share our faith, we do it with gentleness and respect. Gal 6:1 says, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you may also be tempted.” Even in correcting someone, we do that gently. We sow in peace, and in due time, we will reap a harvest of righteousness. Our fruits of righteousness will abound more and more, increasing in our peace, our love, joy, faith, hope. This is all for the glory of God, as we glorify God for giving us fruit, and as others glorify God in our service to them.

In conclusion, we looked at the nature of the demonic “wisdom”: it was earthly, unspiritual and demonic. It produces envy and strife, and results in disorder and every evil practice. Then we looked at the nature of the wisdom from above: it was heavenly, spiritual and from God. It produces love and humility, and results in peace and good works. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and by faith in Christ alone, we are purified from acts that lead to death, so we may serve the living God! So let’s circle back to v.13 and read that together: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good live, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” Are you wise? Let your wisdom show by your good deeds done in humility. I’ll close w/ a verse from Prov 11:30: “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives.” May you partake in the tree of life, and win souls for the glory of God!