

James

I. Introduction

A. **James 3:13-18** . . . Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. [14] But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. [15] This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. [17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. [18] And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

B. Prayer

II. The World's Wisdom vs. God's Wisdom – Today I want to point out three truths about this portion of scripture that I believe are important for us to understand. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will compare the world's wisdom with God's wisdom.

A. The **first** thing I want to point out about this portion of scripture is that in certain areas of life and faith there is only one way to validate what we claim to possess or be – and that is through our behavior. This is such an important point for us to get, that God makes it four times prior to getting to **James 3:13**.

1. Let's review them:

a. **James 1:22-25** . . . But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; [24] for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. [25] But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

b. **James 1:26-27** . . . If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. [27] Pure and undefiled religion in

the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- c. **James 2:1, 8-9** . . . My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. [8] If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.
 - d. **James 2:14, 17** . . . What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? [17] Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.
2. And that brings us to **James 3:13** . . . Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. Or in other words, prove it! Prove by your gentle behavior that God is the source of your wisdom and understanding.
 3. Now the important point for us to gain from this is that knowing something and being able to speak it intelligently does not automatically mean we are what we know and say.
 - a. Jesus put it this way: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me" (**Matthew 15:8**). And He also said: "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds" (**Matthew 16:27**).
 - b. Luke's Acts of the Apostles put it this way: ". . . and the disciples were first called Christians (*Christ-like*) in Antioch" (**Acts 11:26**).
 - c. In other words, we are what we live. What we believe is validated by what we do. Our actions speak louder than words because our actions, especially our repeated actions, reveal what is in our heart, thoughts, desires, feelings, and intentions.
 4. May we live as those who are convinced that what we do says more about who we are than what we claim to be.

B. The **second** thing I want to point out about this portion of scripture is that James assumes we can tell what is really going on, on our insides. Notice the wording of **James 3:14** . . . But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

1. When James tells us not lie against the truth – which we might do by denying reality or trying to explain away the truth – he says it

in a way that makes it clear we have the ability to discern when we have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition on the inside.

- a. This means that we can know our motives, our driving desires, our fears, our feelings, our true view of people and situations, what attracts us and what abhors us, who and why we trust or distrust, and if we are truly moving toward God or acting against God.
 - b. In other words, we are not too dull or uneducated or unaware or incapable of discerning what is going on inside of us. We may need some help because we are not very good at discerning inward thoughts, desires, attitudes, intentions, and the like, but with that help we can identify what we are on the inside.
2. However, it is common for some of us to claim we do not know. And there are some who are so sure they do not know that they become defensive and angry when pressed to talk honestly about what is going on inside. Yet if we can know, how is it that some of us are convinced we do not know? Consider these four possible reasons for thinking and maybe even believing we don't know:
- a. **First**, we may not know because we have not asked God to search our heart and show us what is there – and of course, if we pray that prayer, we must be willing to look at and examine and seriously consider what God shows us.
 - b. **Second**, we may not know because we are looking only at the good portion of our intentions, and then assuming that whatever good intentions are there proves we have a pure heart. The problem with this method is that:
 - (1) it ignores our mixed motives,
 - (2) it ignores the way we carry out our supposedly good intentions,
 - (3) it ignores the outcome of our actions,
 - (4) it ignores any ungodly patterns (which others see but we don't because we are looking no further than our intentions),
 - (5) it ignores the way others receive what we have done,
 - (6) and it ignores the efforts others go to in trying to call us to our senses so we will look at ourselves honestly.
 - c. **Third**, we may not know what is going on inside because we do not want to know – since knowing would require having to face what is really there, and having to admit we are not as good as we want to see ourselves to be, and having to change what we do not want to change.

- d. **Finally**, we may not know because we have lived in denial so long that our ability to discern what is going on inside is too weak to be of any use. Like an unused muscle that atrophies, living in denial weakens our discernment. Yet just as a atrophied muscle can be strengthened, so our discernment can gain sufficient strength to do its job well.
 3. My point here is that according to God and His word, we have the ability to know what is going on in our mind and heart. Therefore, if we do not know, it is not ability we lack, but rather the will to know. God affirms this other portions of His word, and I wish to point us to two scriptures that do just that.
 - a. **Matthew 7:1-5** . . . Do not judge so that you will not be judged. [2] For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. [3] Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (*Judging others reveals how discerning we are, and if we do not use that same degree of discernment on ourselves, God will hold us accountable when He judges us.*)
 - b. **Romans 2:21a** . . . You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? (*You will only teach yourself the truths you teach others when you believe you need the same instruction.*)
 4. May we live as those who are convinced that what we can know what is going on inside of us and that we can correct it when it is following after evil things and support it when it is following after God.
- C. The **third** thing I want to point out about this portion of scripture is the strong language used by James.
1. In speaking to us about ungodly wisdom, or what we might call the wisdom of the world, James uses such labels as bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, arrogance, lying, unspiritual (natural), and demonic.
 2. Then, James refers to the results of following ungodly wisdom as disorder and every evil thing.
 - a. Now you may be thinking that the word disorder is not so bad, but think about this – disorder in the church is an evil thing, for it speaks of discord and disagreement among the believers, which leads to dissension and conflict, which leads to the loss of harmony

and unity. And whether the disorder is over how to do worship, theology, who should lead, church discipline, or the arrangement of the chairs and the color of the carpet, it is an affront to the oneness we have in Christ. So the fact that worldly wisdom leads to disorder among God's people is a serious evil.

- b. But James does not stop with pointing out disorder as a natural outcome of following the wisdom of the world. He goes on to say that following after ungodly wisdom leads to **every** evil thing. That is strong language, for the qualifying word every says there is no evil that is not included in the natural results of following after the wisdom of the world.
3. In speaking about Godly wisdom, James again uses strong labels. Listen as I read them: pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruit, unwavering, without hypocrisy. Even if we treat these words as if they were simply a list of good qualities, it is hard to ignore the implications for us Christians of the words James uses to describe the natural results of following Godly wisdom.
4. So why the strong language? After all, this is written to Christians. So why speak to them as if they are doing something horrible, awful, and terrible and as if the good they are to do is beyond their reach?
5. It is possible that God, in speaking through James is simply exaggerating His point to make the point. But I doubt that that is the case. I believe James uses this strong language because he is looking at sin and righteousness through the eyes of God. Or we could say that James is seeing reality more nearly as God sees it. Let me give you two examples to help you see what I am talking about.
 - a. **Isaiah 6:1-5** . . . In the year of King Uzziah's death **I saw the Lord** sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. [2] Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. [3] And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." [4] And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. [5] Then **I said, "Woe is me**, for I am ruined! because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."
 - (1) Jesus makes it very clear that we cannot see God without a pure heart (**Matthew 5:8**). The writer of Hebrews says the

same thing a bit differently when he says: “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (**Hebrews 12:14**).

(2) And the implication of Isaiah’s experience is that when a person with a pure heart sees the Lord, that person sees his own sin and evil heart more nearly as God sees it. Look at Isaiah’s words: “Woe is me, for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips.” Isaiah was not exaggerating his situation, he was speaking of it as he saw it.

b. **Hebrews 5:11-14** . . . Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. [12] For **though by this time you ought to be teachers**, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. [13] **For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.** [14] But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice (*habit*) have their **senses** trained to **discern** good and evil.

(1) The point of this passage for us today is that when we make it our aim to grow up in the faith, to daily and monthly and yearly become more and more like Jesus, our ability to perceive and assess right from wrong, and our ability to judge right and wrong more nearly as God does is greatly increased.

(2) In other words, we become more sensitive to the evil of evil and the good of righteousness – which leads to the use of strong language for that is the only language that can describe what we see and believe and feel about good and evil.

6. Now I am not dismissing the fact that James is speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but that does not change the fact that James, himself, saw good and evil more nearly as God does.

a. And it does not change the fact that if we think these words are excessive, we are not yet seeing sin and righteousness as God does.

b. And if these words are not ringing true in us, why not? Because we have not taken John’s words seriously enough: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [3] And everyone who has

this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (**I John 3:2-3**).

7. The point I am trying to make here is that the purer we are inwardly and in relation to our fleshly desires, the more sensitive we become and the clearer we see the ugliness and heinousness and destructiveness and offensiveness of sin to God. And the more we see the evil of sin through eyes unclouded by double-mindedness and hearts no longer hardened by desiring what is not of God, the more we feel the ugliness of sin and the stronger our language becomes regarding sin – especially our own sin. And the more we flee sin and put it out of our lives, the more we long for a truly pure heart within and the character qualities of a godly person.
 - a. So though James’ words seem excessively strong to desensitized ears, they ring true to ears that are sensitized by serious progress in purity within and godliness without.
 - b. Therefore, if we are to be this sensitive to the evil of sin and the goodness of righteousness, we must follow Paul’s instruction to the church in Corinth: “Therefore . . . let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (**II Corinthians 7:1**).
8. May we live as those who treasure a pure heart, so much so that we weep over our own impurity of heart, sinful thoughts, and ungodly behavior, and we rejoice over righteousness wherever we find it – be it in ourselves or in others.

III. Conclusions

- A. We’ve looked at three points from this portion of James:
 1. Behavior is who we are and therefore it is the only validation for what we believe and claim to be.
 2. We can know what is going on inside our heart, mind, desires, intentions, and the like. If we do not know, it is our fault.
 3. Purity of heart and mind makes God’s strong words about sin and righteousness sound true and accurate and good to our ears.