

# 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. This is the fourth Sunday of looking at James 3:13-18. Two Sundays ago, we talked about worldly wisdom and the fact that it promotes selfishness and that its primary product is dissension and broken relationships. Last Sunday we began talking about heavenly wisdom. During that study, we looked at the purity of heavenly wisdom, the peaceableness of godly wisdom, and the gentleness of wisdom from above. Today, my goal is to finish talking about heavenly wisdom. And as we begin our study today, I want to remind us that wisdom, be it heavenly or earthly, is not simply information, it is information that we use in certain ways to direct our lives – which is why the fruit of our lives bears witness to the wisdom by which we are living.

## C. Prayer

## II. A look at God's wisdom – what it is like and what it produces

A. God's wisdom is **reasonable** – that is, it is open to being influenced, willing to yield to a greater truth or a larger picture, and ready to obey. In other words, those who live according to God's wisdom are open to being reasoned with because they want to come to the truth so that they can continue doing or supporting what is right and godly.

1. Notice that the reasonableness of wisdom follows the gentleness of wisdom, and for good reason. The gentleness of wisdom takes the fight out of reasoning with others and being reasoned with – which affirms again that heavenly wisdom promotes love and unity.

2. When we live according to heavenly wisdom, we are receptive to being reasoned with concerning the things that we are not yet doing but ought to be doing, and the things we are doing but ought not to be doing.
  - a. The point here is that God's wisdom includes an attitude of openness to being persuaded to turn away from going our own way and to turn toward or return to doing what God says is right and good.
  - b. Of course, to be genuinely open to being persuaded to do what is God-pleasing, we must take seriously our need to kill off selfishness and run away from self-rule.
  - c. If we do not take dying to self seriously, then the allure of temporal happiness and wanting our own way will hold greater sway over our choices and behavior than God and His will. And when temporal happiness and selfishness hold sway, we will choose worldly wisdom over heavenly wisdom, and when we do, we will abandon reasonableness.
3. I suspect most of us can easily identify cocky rebellion and openly stubborn resistance. But what we find harder to identify – in ourselves as well as in others – is the more passive and therefore gentle resistance and well-mannered rebellion.
  - a. And again, I suspect that if we think about it, we can identify some who are so very, very nice yet who still go their own way – whether it be refusing or avoiding resolving long-standing conflicts, or making promises and not keeping their word, or doing what they want when no one is looking.
  - b. However, dressing up self-rule in manners and putting on a show of good intentions does not turn selfishness and rebellion into something commendable and good.
4. The important point here is that those who live by God's wisdom put away rebellion and selfishness, and with God's gracious help they open themselves up to receiving teaching, reproof, correction, and further training in the way of righteousness.
5. This does not mean we won't ever do something that goes against the will and word of God. However, if we are truly living according to the wisdom from above, we will not become unreasonable or closed to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the appeals of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Why? Because godly wisdom is always open to being corrected, and therefore redirected from the broad path of destruction back to the narrow path of life.

- B. God's wisdom is **full of mercy** – that is, it is full of pity and compassion, especially toward those who are less fortunate, down-trodden, faltering in their Christian life, discouraged, giving up, or openly selfish and sinful.
1. The writer of Hebrews helps us understand this truth when he says that [Christ was] made like [us] in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (**Hebrews 2:17**). The point here is that one of the reasons Christ took on a human form is so that He could understand, from first hand experience, just how easy it is to sin and how hard it is to do what we know is right all the time.
  2. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say that we have a high priest [who is able to] sympathize with our weaknesses, [because He] has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. [And because He is sympathetic, we can] draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (**Hebrews 4:15-16**). The point here is that what Christ learned about living a godly life softened His heart toward us – not in any way that makes Him tolerate our sinfulness, but in a way that makes Him deal with us gently and patiently and compassionately.
  3. So what can we learn from these two portions of Hebrews? There are at least two things required of us to be full of mercy:
    - a. **First**, we must have an honest sense or understanding of:
      - (1) how sinful we are,
      - (2) how easy it is for us to sin,
      - (3) and how hard it is for us – in some situations – to do what we know is right.
    - b. **Second**, rather than thinking, “How could he?” we must base our dealings with those who are wayward and sinful on what we know about ourselves, so that we take into account how easy it is for them to sin and how hard it is for them to do what they know is right. This is the wisdom of mercy which comes from above.
  4. However, I want to make it clear that godly mercy is not the same as the current version of tolerance popular today. Though the mercy which comes from above is compassionately merciful, it never overlooks or compromises God's truth, and it does not live in denial of the truth concerning the behavior of others.
    - a. In other words, mercy never acts as if it approves of the sinful or selfish behavior of others, nor does it imply that unnecessarily prolonged weakness and failure is acceptable to God or the church.

- b. Rather, with compassion, kindness, and patience, mercy sees the truth for what it is, and when it ought to speak that truth, it speaks it with love.
    - c. True, godly mercy is a challenge, because added to our zeal to correct those who are wrong is a strong desire for life to be better or happier or safer or simply more our way than it is when someone keeps doing what is wrong. Therefore, we do not stop at offering correction (I am speaking of dealing with adults here), we move from offering to insisting on change – which opens the door to the use of anger, force, and even hostility to gain cooperation.
  - 5. A scripture portion that has helped me with mercy is found in **Colossians 3:12-14** . . . So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; [13] bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. [14] Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.
- C. God’s wisdom is full of **good fruits**. The good fruits of heavenly wisdom stand in stark contrast to the **every evil thing** produced by worldly wisdom.
- 1. Fruit, by nature, is the outcome or product of life in a plant or vine or tree or person. What our mouths speak and our lives produce is the fruit of our lives. What people see in us and how they experience us is the fruit of our lives. Lets look at two specific portions of scripture related to bearing fruit.
    - a. **Galatians 5:22-23** . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law [condemnation].
    - b. **Ephesians 5:8-10** . . . For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light [9] (*for the fruit of the Light consists in **all** goodness and righteousness and truth*), [10] trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.
  - 2. Jesus makes two important statements about fruit which we are wise to seriously consider.
    - a. **John 15:4-5** . . . Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. [5] I am the vine, you are the branches;

he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (*We need divine help*)

- b. **Matthew 7:16-18** . . . You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? [17] So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. [18] A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. (*Our fruit confirms which wisdom we are following*)
  3. If our lives – in one or many areas – are not bearing the good fruit of righteousness or producing godly living in the home, the community, the workplace, and the church, then we are not living by the wisdom that comes from above.
- D. God's wisdom is **unwavering** (NASB) or **impartial** (KJV). It might seem as if unwavering and impartial are completely different translations of the same Greek word – which by the way, appears only in this one verse in all the NT. However, impartiality is one quality or one facet of the word unwavering. And I think as we look at the implications of being unwavering, you will see what I mean.
1. For a Christian to be unwavering, we must be faithful, steady, consistent, not willingly or repeatedly fluctuating between doing what is right and doing what we know is wrong, not double-minded, not mixed-motivated, no double-standards, but steady in our commitment to God's truth and His righteousness. Two scripture examples:
    - a. **Deuteronomy 5:32-33** . . . So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. [33] You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess.
    - b. One more example from the scripture of unwavering: It is said of Jesus Christ that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (**Hebrews 13:8**).
  2. The challenge we face is that wavering starts at an early age. Consider: we begin choosing worldly wisdom in relation to wavering when we begin lying against the truth (**verse 14**). And we begin lying against the truth when we begin judging ourselves by a more lenient standard than we use when judging others.
    - a. In other words, this dishonesty in self-judgment – which starts early in life – is our first, self-approved step toward partiality,

double-mindedness, double-standards, and every other **wavering** between truth and falsehood that goes on in our lives.

- b. And because we start wavering so early, we have years of hardening our conscience and heart against the truth that calls us to stop wavering between good and evil. It is this dulled, hardened conscience and resistance to the truth, in certain areas, that we bring into our adult, Christian life – and if we do not deal with it honestly and fully, we will continue to waver in some things, which means we are choosing earthly wisdom in those things.
  3. Sadly, blindness to or acceptance of our own waverings between sin and godliness in one or more areas is too common. Personally, I have believed for many years, and still believe that this is one of the big hurdles that prevents us, as individuals and as a church, from rising higher spiritually than we have. Obviously, my teaching has not been enough to change this. Which means we need help – and the only one I turn to for this kind of help is God. And so:
    - a. I urge you to plead with God to show you your double-standards; and keep praying until you are free of willful wavering between good and evil.
    - b. I urge you to ask those around you to speak truth to you about your double-mindedness and double-standards – and to act on that what they say as if your eternal life depended on it.
    - c. And I urge you to read the Bible as if it were talking to you, about you, with the purpose of measuring **all** your thoughts, words, and deeds according to what you read.
- E. Before looking at the last word in this list of characteristics describing heavenly wisdom, I want to review the list from the beginning: the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering – and that brings us to **without hypocrisy**.
1. Hypocrisy is pretending to be something we are not. It is putting on a false face or presenting a false appearance so as to conceal our true identity. Within Christian circles, hypocrisy is putting on a show of righteousness and doing good to others to gain some advantage for ourselves. This means that hypocrisy is not an accident. It's on purpose, and the purpose is rooted in selfishness and pride.
  2. A positive word we could use for “without hypocrisy” is “sincere.” To be sincere means to be without questionable or knowingly ungodly motives, both within and without. This means heavenly wisdom is

free of pride and the selfish pursuit of one-sided gain at the expense of the other side. Why? Because godly wisdom never fails to promote love for God and love for one another, and it never gives up trying to be at peace with all men and bring peace where peace is absent.

3. Remember what we learned about worldly wisdom? It promotes selfishness and produces dissension and broken relationships. Heavenly wisdom is totally the opposite. And that is why we end its list of characteristics with these two words: WITHOUT HYPOCRISY.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Earthly wisdom feeds selfishness and breeds conflict that one or both sides refuse to resolve – or at least avoid resolving.
- B. Heavenly wisdom will only seem wise to those who are committed to dying to self, killing off selfishness, and living as much as they know how for the glory of God and the good of others.
- C. May we pray diligently for God's enlightenment while carefully examining our hearts, thoughts, words, and deeds to see if in any way or in any area we are living according to worldly wisdom. If we are, may we run from that wisdom, reminding ourselves that for all its promises, at its core it is demonic. And may we run to heavenly wisdom, reminding ourselves that it was this wisdom which brought Christ to earth and which made Him the sacrifice for our sins so we could regain peace with God. And if we value heavenly wisdom for what it has done for us, may we treasure it in our own lives for what it will do to bring glory to God and to bless those around us.