

JAMES 3:13-18
Words and Wisdom

Week 14

People ask, "Is Jesus on the right or on the left? Is the gospel for the left or for the right?"

NEITHER ...Jesus AND THE Gospel are from above

The words of Jesus will have implications for the 'left or the right', but He is not from either. Jesus and His wisdom are "from above".

James 3:13-18

13 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 fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Review James 3:1-12

Our words are more impactful than we think.

Controlling the tongue is at the core of godly Christ-centered living because it gets to the heart.

The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart, so any discussion of our words and our speech is automatically tied to the heart. There is a direct connection, whether we see it or not.

So the question now is, "How do we deal with and see the heart transformed?"

In the last part of chap 3 James shows that there are two wisdoms: the first is earthly, natural, demonic. The second is from above and brings in the fruit of righteousness.

The question of v. 13 **Who among you is wise and understanding?** begs for the standard SS answer.....JESUS

Heavenly Wisdom is SOMEONE we meet Before it is something we practice.

James is all about WISDOM, and for James, wisdom isn't operative until it reshapes our lives. Wisdom is not simply knowing things; it is living in light of the God that we know.

"Knowledge at its deepest is living out of a deep personal relationship." – Motyer

Gen 4:1 says that "Adam 'knew' Eve" because marriage is the ultimate context of real knowledge. Such real knowledge is life-changing.

Biblical wisdom involves knowing God in every area of life so that we can say with Prov 3:

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart

And do not lean on your own understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge ('know') Him,

In our rising up and in our sitting down, as we walk along the way in every area of life we are to 'Trust in the Lord with a whole heart and know Him.' That is a life of wisdom.

In v. 13, James asks a challenging question, "Who among you is wise and understanding?"

Given the earlier context of wisdom and humility, who wants to raise his/her hand and say, "That's me!"

James indicates that the answer is displayed by certain character traits – the gentleness of wisdom. James does not prescribe specific deeds; he prescribes a posture of the heart – gentleness of wisdom. This wisdom from above is v.17 **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.**

This goes against the grain of the ancient culture. Sophie Laws notes that ‘the dominant morality of the day associated meekness with meanness and groveling. It is linked with adjectives like ignoble, abject, servile ... Epictetus names it first in a list of moral faults. (Motyer p. 131)

Remember the self-description of Jesus in the only time in which He describes his own heart: **Matt 11:28-30**

28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

We are NEVER MORE LIKE CHRIST than when we too are meek and humble of heart. Meekness denotes self-subduing gentleness, both Godward and manward.(Motyer) It is power that is restrained.

Meekness is fully recognized in the context of relationships as James illustrates in v. **16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**

Meekness puts an end to jealousy and selfish ambition, discord and every evil thing.

This context of relationship means that we are to live with God with the belief that our own walk is a community project ...It means confessing that as long as sin remains in me, and that apart from restraining grace and the rescuing ministry of those around me, I continue to be a danger to myself. (Tripp; LEAD)

WE can do as much or more damage to ourselves as “him, her, or them”. It may not always seem as obvious, but it’s true. We were involved in every bad decision that we’ve ever made. We need each other to provide restraining grace in our lives.

There are many passages in Proverbs that relate to watching over the heart and the mouth. Here’s one that is quite profound.

Prov 4:23-24

**Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.
24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth And put devious speech far from you.**

This is in line with other Proverbs and with James in drawing a line from the heart to what flows from it – words. We are to speak edifying words or words of truth in love, not deceitful devious words.

We can connect v. 1-12 with this last section of ch 3 as we refer to Eph 4

Eph 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

“Speak in love” – it does matter how it is spoken!!

Love considers Tone and Timing

Prov 15:1; 25:15 A gentle tone is the best weapon for disarming someone.

The wrong tone can cover whatever love there is in being said.

Without love, truth is just about being right and winning the argument. It is self-centered. It is building a form of self-righteousness. EX: LiG Training- “Being right isn’t always right”

Tullian T. - When someone speaks a hard truth that I don't like, I am prone to believe that he/she just doesn't like me, so I don't need to listen anyway.

Sin has so distorted our relationships that there is a natural defensiveness toward hearing certain truths. This started in the Garden...

EX: Adam: "That woman you gave me"

We are prone to channeling our inner defense attorney rather than seeking God's grace to receive correction in a way of godly wisdom.

EX: My wife, tells me anything I don't want to hear...(which is sooo rare)
If her tone is gentle and kind then I'm really forced to listen and take it in. But if it seems harsh and snippy, then I can just tune it out because she's just being picky.

The gospel gives a freedom to stop pretending so you can be real about your life.

EX: Peace Maker SS material is helpful in this area. Join us next week if you haven't been there yet.

When you speak in an unloving way, it gives someone a reason NOT TO LISTEN TO YOU.

Truth & Love = life giving words

EX: BAP was a good example of the dynamic of community. The cast was committed to making everyone look good and do his or her best. You are on stage without a net but you do have other people there to catch you if there's a mistake. Usually the audience doesn't even notice. The amazing thing about theater is that after rehearsal, the director gives notes on what needs to be improved, and people listen and seek to apply what was said.

IMAGINE DOING THAT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

"WELL, I didn't sign up for that in the church".

REALLY? Have you read the one another passages in the bible???

EX: Sadly, too many churches are just the opposite of being a life giving community. People are waiting for you to mess up as pastor, leader, SS teacher, ministry coordinator, etc so they can come and "speak the truth in love." (speaking for a friend).

Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are not just small harmless weaknesses. They demonstrate arrogance and a denial of the truth.

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

When the heart is bitter and selfish, then lies against the truth come out of the mouth. The lies flow from the issues of the heart.

"Jealousy = strong feelings" and combined with "bitter" means we can expect something bad. It has a sense of being ready to fight or being quick to feel threatened or easily offended. What James has in mind is a concern over one's own position, dignity and rights. (Motyer p. 132)

Those traits are difficult for us to see in ourselves, but are pretty easy to see in others.

"I am just 'standing for truth", but he/she is being stubborn and divisive."

After showing the need for a purified heart v. 1-12 and that wisdom shows whether or not it is present, v. 13-14, James brings us to a point of decision - Which wisdom will guide our lives?

DOOR #1 WISDOM THAT IS earthly, natural, demonic, OR

DOOR #2 – Wisdom from above which is peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Two questions that can be used as we read much of the book of James...

Is our situation more dangerous than we think? **YES**

Is the solution **SIMPLER** than we think? Yes, but not necessarily easier

I'm struck by the reference to "demonic." The problem is more serious than we think.

The wisdom is not always easily identifiable. The "natural man or woman" does have common grace insights. Satan can masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor 11). But eventually the true origin will become evident through the characteristics that are manifested:

Jealous ambition and division VS peaceable, gentle fruit without hypocrisy

"There is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever, with acute brain and skillful tongue; but his effect, nevertheless, in any committee, in any church, in any group, is to cause trouble and to disturb personal relationships. It is a sobering thing to remember that the wisdom he possesses is devilish rather than divine." William Barclay

Are you that guy or gal? What would those who know you say??

One author calls these 'Well-intentioned Dragons'



We should not be surprised that this happens in the church. Scripture speaks to the need for peacemaking and conflict resolution in numerous places.

v. 18

Either harvest ('fruit') is a summary of the covetable characteristics named in verse 17, with righteousness as the seed from which they grow, or else righteousness describes the life in which they come to harvest. Now a seed needs its own proper conditions for germination, growth and fruitage. However good the seed, it cannot thrive out of its environment.

Peace is the soil and those who make peace are the green-fingered gardeners.

A harmonious fellowship of believers is the soil out of which grows the whole life that is pleasing to God. (Motyer p. 137)

WISDOM / TONGUE TEST:

IT reveals our hearts, our source of wisdom, and makes us run to Jesus so that he can get our hearts in the right condition.

TRY TO KEEP THESE "LAWS" FOR ONE WEEK

DON'T DO THESE:

- 1. Don't gossip (confess someone else's sins)**
- 2. Don't complain about anything.**
- 3. Don't blame shift or make excuses.**
- 4. Don't defend yourself.**
- 5. Don't boast about anything...**

DO THESE:

- 1. Speak only good about others.**

2. Thank God for his plan for your life.
3. Admit it when you are wrong or sin.
4. Rejoice, you're worse than you think!
5. ...except in your weaknesses (2Cor.12:9)

The church is full of saints and sinners and saints who sin.

The Heavenly Wisdom commended by James is described with several adjectives:
Pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy

WHO IS THIS KING OF GLORY?

Heavenly Wisdom is Someone we meet Before it is something we practice.

These traits are fully manifested in Jesus, and they are ours IN Jesus, but we must draw near to Him so that our hearts can abide and rest in Him. God invites us to draw near so that we might enjoy and experience these traits in a relationship with him.

"The purity that comes from belonging to God is the fount from which other goodness flows." Dan McCartney

The only way to keep from becoming a 'well-intentioned dragon' inside the church is to flee to the arms of the Father at the feet of Jesus, who gives us access to the throne of grace.

The only safe place for us when we are caught up in earthly natural wisdom apart from Christ is in the arms of the Father, at the feet of Jesus, who gives us access to the throne of grace.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

This only happens when we know and are known by the ONE who is the Prince of Peace.
Amen

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