

Daily Bible Study

“False Wisdom”

James 3: 13-15

January 22 – 26, 2024

MONDAY –We return to our study of the Book of James and pick up our text, **James 3:13-18**: *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.”* Roger Ellsworth introduces this section in his commentary by explaining life as a car trip. We will elaborate on this illustration later but for now; he states, “I don’t want to insult you, but I do wonder if you have ever thought of yourself as a car and your life as a road? You are aware, are you not, that you are moving along? You are not stationary. You are not the same age today as you were yesterday! You surely must be aware that you are moving towards a destination. The journey you are on will eventually end! And you must also realize that, just like your car, you sometimes break down! You sometimes need to be adjusted, and you sometimes need repair. And how about this—you sometimes run into other cars! There are other parallels as well. We sometimes move along at a pretty good clip, and at other times we barely creep along. We sometimes hit bumps, and we sometimes hit the ditch! If you are willing to admit that you are like a car, I have a question for you: Who is driving you? You might think you, your spouse, your kids or your boss is doing the driving. But the Bible tells us that there are only two possible drivers for our cars. James identifies them in the verses of our text. One driver is false wisdom, and the other is true wisdom.” The next two weeks we will look at Wisdom. Scripture as well as ancient philosophers viewed wisdom as an immensely important matter. But it was primarily the Jewish mind that saw wisdom not merely as an intellectual understanding but rather an acting and application of that intellectual understanding. Wisdom to them as portrayed to us in Scripture, is behavioral not intellectual. The Greek word here used by James helps us see this. The word σοφία *sophia* or “wisdom” is defined as the capacity to understand and, as a result, to act wisely. Further —‘to be prudent.’ The next couple Lord’s Days we will look at this text and see the two types of wisdom that we can use in making choices and living life. Either, we can indeed act wisely through The Lord’s leading or foolishly depending on what voice we listen to and obey.

(Meditate & Apply) Who or what is driving your car? Do you live in a way which shows that You are controlled and led by the Spirit of God? Do you understand you are moving down the road of life and either heading the right way or the wrong way but are never stationary?

(Pray): Father, help me grasp how important this matter of wisdom is. May I be led and

guided by You, Your Word and Spirit rather than the demonic, sinful, fallen world.

TUESDAY – **James 3:13**: *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.”* Before we look at the particulars of this text, let’s speak a bit more on *wisdom*. We have mentioned earlier in our study of this letter that *wisdom* means a lot to James. He understands it is key to navigating through life with its difficulties and various troubles and that it is necessary and given by God (**James 1:5**). Wisdom begins with knowing God. A blessed and obedient new life flows from a heart of true wisdom from God. Where does God put His Wisdom for us? James points often to the place from which we should and can look to find true wisdom, the Scriptures. It is plain to see that his mind was saturated with Scriptural information. It is also plain to see in our lives as well, who in fact has a mind saturated with Scripture or with something else. This is the point beloved, your life and actions, attitudes, and words reflect whether you have a heart filled with true wisdom or earthly sensual wisdom. The Scriptures contain God’s law for living, and His truth is there revealed and to be applied to the circumstances of the day. Solomon, in his Proverbs brings *fear of The Lord, knowledge of The Holy One*, and *understanding* (discernment) and *wisdom* together in a way which makes them inseparable. Our *fear of The Lord* then, is a proper reverence for one who has made Himself known and whom we therefore know for ourselves and in knowing, LIVE DIFFERENTLY. Scripture nowhere places value on knowledge that remains merely intellectual or stuck in your head. Nothing is truly known until it reshapes the life. That is why Scripture speaks of the way of wisdom as the way of obedience (**Deuteronomy 4:5–6**). *Knowledge*, at its truest and deepest, is a living out of truth. We’ve mentioned before the example of Adam and Eve. Scripture states, “Adam knew Eve” (**Genesis 4:1**). The verb *knew* is not a polite expression; it is a definition. It wasn’t God’s hesitation to use the word *sex* that puts it like this but rather that true “knowledge”, is profound and life changing. Adam knew Eve his wife, intimately and they lived out that truth of their knowledge of one another in *sex*. Marriage and sexual intercourse within it, is illustrative of true knowledge between a husband and wife. True wisdom changes a person and our individual responsibility is to seek God-given wisdom, put it as priority in our lives, and to live by it.

(Meditate & Apply) Do I have wisdom from God that has changed my life, thinking and actions? Can I connect the things I believe “make me wise” to The Scriptures and principles within God’s Word? What specific thing do I need to change in my life to be truly wise?

(Pray): Father, forgive me for the foolishness that often marks my thinking and behavior. Help me search the Scriptures, be filled with them and the true wisdom which they contain.

WEDNESDAY – **James 3:13**: *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.”* James starts with asking a direct question. He addresses the members of the church, hence you and I.

He has told them they need to pray to God for wisdom if they lack it. He also knows that these things are not always true of “Christians” so he calls them to examine themselves. He is saying that a person who is truly wise and understanding is skilled in righteous living. Your answer to his question reveals both your character and condition of your soul. James tells us that a wise and understanding person demonstrates in what he says and by what he does that he possesses *wisdom* and therefore, God Himself. The word *wise* (Sophos) is a general word speaking of knowledge but as mentioned earlier, to the Jew it meant careful application of knowledge to personal living. The word *understanding* which appears only here in the New Testament, speaks of specialized knowledge belonging to an expert, skilled tradesman or professional. *Let him show* is an aorist active imperative, which is a command. Prove it, James says to the professed wise and understanding. How are we commanded to prove it we may ask, *by good conduct...* The King James Version has “*good conversation,*” which back in A.D. 1611 meant “lifestyle.” James says an exemplary lifestyle is what demonstrates wisdom and understanding. Finally, *that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.* Your *works* or deeds are the activities and endeavors you are involved in; they affirm your noble conduct and whether or not you are wise. But it is not merely what you say and do but how you say and do it. We read that *works* of a truly wise person are performed in a humble, gentle (*meek*) spirit. We learn from this verse that it is the genuine Christian with true Godly wisdom that has the proof in his actions that he is controlled by The Spirit and humble and gentle in his holy living.

(Meditate & Apply) Is there any proof in my life that I am wise and understanding? Is my lifestyle an exemplary one which points all who see me to Jesus? What specific areas of my life do I need improvement in gentle, meek humility?

(Pray): Father, may I by your strength show in my life the power that comes from genuine meekness and humility. May I serve others with a spirit of gentleness like Jesus did.

THURSDAY – James 3:14: “*But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.*” The opposite of a humble, gentle spirit controlled by wisdom is a heart filled with *bitter envy and self-seeking*. We see a stark contrast here with **verse 13 and 14**. In Galatians, we find Paul also brings this contrast out. He mentions among the fruits of the Spirit “gentleness and self-control” (**Galatians 5:23**). But in listing the works of the flesh he mentions, “selfish ambition ... and envy” (**Galatians 5:20–21**). Tragically, there are people in the church who are characterized by *bitter envy and self-seeking*. James describes envy with the adjective *bitter*. He used the adjective a few moments earlier when he discussed the *bitter* water of a spring (**Verse 11**). The word means sharp, pointed, that which is penetrating to the senses, a pervasive smell. It is envy of the worst kind; harsh, sharp, cutting with no feeling or concern for the objects. It pretty much is the opposite of the royal law, quoted in **James 2:8**, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*”. Those whose lives are filled with worldly wisdom are inevitably self-seeking, where their interests, ideas, and desires are the standard for determining who they like. If a person serves their ends they are considered

friendly but if someone threatens their selfishness with truth they are the enemy. They are quick and ready to fight for their rights and easily feel threatened by others. As Alec Motyer comments, “It is more this sharpness of spirit in personal relationships, this over-concern for one’s own position, dignity, rights or whatever, that James has in mind. There is a sharpness of self-interest, that easily leads into the formation of parties and cliques, which is the inner force of the word translated as *selfish ambition*: ‘an inclination’, says J. H. Ropes, ‘to use unworthy and divisive means for promoting one’s own interests.’ If we stress the word ‘divisive’ then we see the meaning exactly.” People who are consumed by envy and selfishness usually talk about this to anyone who lends a listening ear. James says, “...*do not boast and lie against the truth.*” A person filled with the world’s wisdom is also without doubt an arrogant individual. James says do not be arrogant because everything you say when filled with human wisdom is contradicted by the truth. Every time they open their mouths to vent their feelings, they deceive themselves. To James anything other than the life of humble, gentle self-submission and peace is a denial of the truth. To sum it up, James is saying if a person claims to have God’s wisdom and be a Christian but has a life characterized by self and bitter envy, he might claim to be saved but he’s not for he is living lie.

(Meditate & Apply) Is my life filled with selfishness? Am I arrogant and bitter with envy? Am I a divisive person? What specifically can I change to promote others interests, not my own?

(Pray): Lord, help me change to love and serve You and others in my life rather than myself.

FRIDAY– James 3:15 “*This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.*” James spells out for us three basic characteristics of false wisdom. The NIV correctly puts “*wisdom*” in quotation marks to indicate that this wisdom is not genuine. The text explains the three characteristics of this so called wisdom which are; *earthly* (of the world), *sensual* (of the flesh), and *demonic* (of the devil). *Earthly* stands in contrast to what God originates in heaven. The beast coming up out of the earth (**Revelation 13:11**) defying that which is holy and heavenly is an example. When God’s Spirit is absent from earthly matters, sin is present. *Sensual* illustrates wisdom which only relates to the fleshly, corrupted, “natural man” who as Paul informs us, cannot even accept the things of The Spirit of God (**1 Corinthians 2:14**). *Demonic* points us to the true originating source of human wisdom, Satan himself. Back to Monday’s illustration explaining your life as a car trip, when we allow ourselves to be driven and filled by false wisdom, we are allowing Satan to slip into the driver’s seat. People may think there is no way that the devil can drive them but remember he does not come as an ugly, ferocious creature but rather he comes in the dress of “wisdom”.

(Meditate & Apply) Would I say my life is predominantly driven by earthly or heavenly wisdom? What can I do to help ensure that demonic wisdom is not what shapes my life?

(Pray): Father, help me be filled and guided by Your Word and Spirit with heavenly wisdom.