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The Genuine Need For True Wisdom

James 3:13-18

Introduction

1. What does it mean to be wise?
2. How does a person become wise?
3. How can you tell when someone is wise?
4. There are those among the Christians to whom James is writing who think themselves wise.
5. In this portion of his letter, James contrasts two kinds of wisdom.
 - a. One is characterized by envy, selfishness and disorder (vv. 14-16).
 - b. The other is above all "peace loving" (v. 17).
6. One is from above, heaven, while the other is from Satan himself.
7. This evening, I would like for us to take the time to learn about the true wisdom which comes from above.

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I. The Challenge To Demonstrate Wisdom and Understanding

A. A QUESTION FOR US ALL TO CONSIDER

"Who among you is wise and understanding?" (James 3:13a, NASB95)

1. At the beginning of this letter James wrote, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5, NASB95).

2. Now he asks the brethren “Who among you is wise and understanding?”
3. What does it mean for us to be “wise and understanding?”
4. It means that we try to see and do what is right in the different situations in which we find ourselves.

Slide 3**B. EVIDENCE OF OUR WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING**

“Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

(James 3:13, NASB95)

1. James tells us that wisdom and understanding are seen in practical terms.
2. True wisdom is seen in a lifestyle that pleases God.
 - a. “Let him show by his good behavior. . .” (NASV)
 - b. “Let him show it by his good life . . .” (NIV)
3. Not only does this true wisdom produce “good behavior”.
4. It also produces “deeds done in the gentleness (meekness) of wisdom.”
5. The “gentleness” or “meekness” (*prautēs*) of which James writes is not timidity, indecisiveness, a lack of confidence or shyness.
6. Both Moses and Jesus were meek.

“Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.” (Numbers 12:3, NASB95)

Jesus said, “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29, NASB95)

7. How do we know if we are “wise and understanding”? Are we gentle, meek?
8. We know that God is in control and that He will help us do what is right in our lives.

Slide 4**II. False Wisdom**

A. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE ?

“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.” (James 3:14, NASB95)

1. “Bitter”

- a. It regards its opponents as enemies to be annihilated rather than friends to be persuaded.
- b. This was the attitude of the high priest and his associates toward Peter when they saw the people bringing their sick and afflicted to Jerusalem for Peter to heal (Acts 5:17).

“But the high priest and those with him . . . were filled with jealousy” (Acts 5:17)

- c. It also describes the attitude of the Jews toward the apostle Paul in Pisidian Antioch when they saw the crowds coming to hear the word of the Lord (Acts 13:45).

“But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy.” (Acts 13:45, NASB95)

- ❑ James saw this bitter jealousy as the result of Christians who could not stand to see others in possession of the position and influences they so desired.

2. Selfishly ambitious

- a. It is more eager to display itself than to display the truth.
- b. It is more interested in the victory of its own opinions than in the victory of the truth.
- c. It is similar to those rival brethren in Rome who according to Paul “preach out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment” (Philippians 1:17)

3. Arrogant

- a. Its attitude is pride in its knowledge, rather than humility in its ignorance.
- b. If we are to be true students of God's Word we should work to be far more aware of what we do not know than of what we know.

4. Fanatical

- a. James said that if we have false wisdom, we "lie against the truth."
- b. We are so determined to have others accept what we are saying that we will respond to them with anger and violence than with reasoned conviction.
- c. This is what happened to Paul time and again on his missionary journeys.
 - 1) In Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were driven out of the district (Acts 13:50).
 - 2) In Iconium, there was an attempt to mistreat and to stone them (Acts 14:5).
 - 3) In Lystra they stoned Paul until they thought he was dead (Acts 14:19).

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B. WHERE DOES IT COME FROM ?

"This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic." (James 3:15, NASB95)

1. "Earthly"

- a. This wisdom is not from heaven or from God from whence comes "every good thing and every perfect gift" (1:17)
- b. It belongs to the way of life of this world.
- c. It measures success in worldly terms.
- d. It is the opposite of everything that is heavenly.

2. "Natural"

- a. Though this word is derived from the Greek word for "soul" it speaks of that which is in direct opposition to anything "spiritual"
- b. Paul wrote "but a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- c. Jude indicated that such people cause divisions because they are "worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit" (Jude 19)
- d. This wisdom thinks of nothing more than personal gain or survival.

3. "Demonic"

- a. Literally the word means "pertaining to demons"
- b. This wisdom is not "from above" (from God) but is from the devil himself.

Slide 6**C. WHAT ARE ITS RESULTS ?**

"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing." (James 3:16, NASB95)

1. "Disorder"

- a. Instead of bringing people together, it drives them apart.
- b. Instead of producing peace, it produces strife.
- c. It is what happens when God's people focus on pursuing their own selfish concerns and causes rather than the good of the whole body.
- d. Instead of producing peace, it produces strife.

2. "Every evil thing"

- a. Wisdom that produces "bitter jealousy" and "selfish ambition" will also produce every kind of evil practice.

- b. It is because people are more concerned about themselves and what they want than the Lord or the church which He died to save.

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III. True Wisdom

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17, NASB95)

A. PURE

1. This is our starting point when we seek the wisdom from above.
2. Our hearts are wholly devoted to God.
3. We are focused on serving Him.

B. PEACEABLE

1. Worldly wisdom causes us to look down on others with contempt.
2. It takes delight in hurting others with clever, cutting words.
3. Because wisdom from above is peaceable, it produces right relationships.
4. Because we have peace with God, we have a sense of well-being.
5. Primarily, wisdom from above is found in people who . . .
 - a. “Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace”
(Ephesians 4:3)
 - b. “Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another”
(Romans 14:19)
 - c. Work to “be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18).
6. True wisdom always works to bring us closer to one another and ultimately closer to God.

C. GENTLE

1. We are considerate, willing to yield to others.
2. Even though justice gives us the right to condemn, wisdom that is gentle moves us to forgive.
3. When we are gentle, we temper justice with mercy.
4. It is the ability to extend to others the kindness we wish to receive ourselves.
5. According to the apostle Paul, this was the same attitude characterized our Lord.

“Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ . . .”
(2 Corinthians 10:1).

6. It is a trait required of those who oversee the Lord’s church (cf. 1 Timothy 3:3).

D. REASONABLE

1. A teachable, open spirit.

“On one occasion Abraham Lincoln, to please a certain politician, issued a command to transfer certain regiments. When Secretary of War Edwin Stanton received the order, he refused to carry it out, saying the President was a fool. When Lincoln was told of this, he replied, “If Stanton said I’m a fool, then I must be, for he is nearly always right. I’ll see for myself.”

As the two men talked, the President quickly realized that his decision was a serious mistake, and without hesitation he withdrew it.

2. We are easy to persuade.
3. We aren’t weak-willed, nor are we stubborn.
4. We are willing to listen to reason and appeal.

E. FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS

1. Mercy is compassion in action.
2. Sometimes we may see a person in trouble and say, "It is his own fault; he brought it on himself," and as a result feel no responsibility to help him.
3. God, however, showed us mercy when we didn't deserve it (Romans 5:6-8).

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8, NASB95)

4. Jesus pointed to mercy as a key indicator of a godly person
 - a. Parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35)
 - b. Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)

F. UNWAVERING (IMPARTIAL)

1. True wisdom is not prejudiced.
2. It does not take one position in one situation and another position in a different situation.
2. It is consistent in its undivided loyalty to God.

G. WITHOUT HYPOCRISY (SINCERE)

1. Wisdom from above is literally "without hypocrisy".
2. So many people are not what they seem to be.
3. Wisdom from above is honest; it never pretends to be what it is not.
4. What you see is what you get, no pretense.

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IV. The Effects of True Wisdom

“And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:18, NASB95)

A. A HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. Lives lived in conformity to God’s will.
2. Conduct which is pleasing to God.
3. It includes all the virtues James has just listed.
3. It is the opposite of “every evil thing” (v. 16)

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B. LIVES WHICH EXPERIENCE THE PEACE OF GOD

1. Paul wrote to the Philippians of “the peace of God which . . . guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).
2. Jesus said that those who create such an atmosphere are assured by their Lord of their reward:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God”
(Matthew 5:9).

Conclusion

1. When you and I demonstrate the true wisdom from above in our lives, we find them to be lives which are stable, trustworthy and transparent.
2. Others will find us to be people who can be relied upon for advice and counsel.
3. My question for each of us tonight is this. Are these characteristics found in us?
4. Would God consider you wise?
5. If not, are you willing to do something to change that?