

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 11

April 7, 2002

READ James 3:13-18

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

The book of James can be viewed thus far as a series of contrasts:

1:8 Doubter vs. Believer

1:9-10 Rich man vs. Poor man

1:22 Listener vs. Doer

1:26-27 Vain religion vs. True religion

2:1-13 One who shows favoritism vs. One who loves

2:14-26 Professing believer vs. True believer

3:1-12 Uncontrolled tongue vs Controlled tongue

James would say the proof of reality is in the testing. James would say words come easy and are not worth much, in fact, words can be very harmful. James would say a religion that you can't see in action is deception. James would say that real faith results in tangible action.

Now we come to a section where we look at true wisdom – godly wisdom, or the wisdom that comes from heaven. Godly wisdom includes knowledge, but also the right attitude. According to verse 13, what does wisdom from above look like? Godly wisdom produces humility in the heart which results in a life of service to others. Godly wisdom is not as much philosophy as action. A truly wise person with a genuine understanding of God will be a servant.

But verse 14 says there can be something else that can motivate and drive men's actions: bitter envy and selfish ambition. Instead of a humble servant's heart, there can be a driving, pungent desire to be important, to have position, to be admired, and to have a following. Such conditions in the heart are revealed in boasting, or placing oneself above others, judging others, and putting others down. Such boasting can sometimes sound impressive, and even spiritual, but in reality it is a lie against the truth. The truth is this: we are all unworthy sinners who have received mercy and grace. Anything of worth that we have has come from God. A person

who has this true understanding of his position shows mercy to others. Out of humility, he will edify and build up others instead of tearing them down.

In verse 15, James addresses the source of such so-called wisdom. First, it is not from heaven. There is a wisdom, that may even be in the church, that does not have its source in God. This section is James is a call to discernment. We need to closely examine the words of advice and counsel that come out of our mouths as well as others. This carnal wisdom is not from God, but rather has its source from the earth, not from the Spirit, and from the devil. This ungodly wisdom results in a lack of peace and order, and all kinds of other evil practices. What was Satan's downfall? It was that he had an ambition to take the place of God. What is man's essential problem? It is that he rebels against the Lordship and authority of God. God is a God of order, peace, and control. This whole subject of godly wisdom is related to issues of authority, submission, humility, and service. When people desire control, and have a self-serving, self-promoting agenda, and they want a recognized place and position, instead of wanting to serve others, then it doesn't matter how much they know, or how religious or pious they appear, or how many lessons they have taught, or seminars they have attended, unless they show with their life and actions consistent humble service to others, then they do not possess godly wisdom.

Do you want to know if you truly has the wisdom of God? Do you want to know if you are sharing God's wisdom with others? Don't just listen to the words that come out of your mouth. Look at your actions and attitude toward others. How do treat your spouse and children? What kind of person would the neighbors say you are? How about your parents and extended family? Do you demonstrate a servant's heart in your actions and attitude? Do you demonstrate a humble and submissive spirit toward leadership; at church, toward the government, at home, at work?

Verse 17 then gives the characteristics of godly wisdom. Let's look at an extended definition of each word, and then offer a description of godly wisdom based on those definitions.

First of all pure – the word means factual, absolutely completely true. Wisdom from God is not at all tainted with insincerity, or falsehood, or any misleading. It is true through and through.

Then peace loving – harmonious, free from conflict and strife

Considerate – forbearing, patient, mild, gentle, and not overly strict

Submissive – easy to be persuaded, ready to obey or submit

Full of mercy – a full measure of pity or expression of compassion and mercy

Full of good fruit – full measure of beneficial works and actions

Impartial – without judgment, partiality, or criticism

Sincere – without pretence – its for real, not an act

If wisdom is from God, it is first of all completely truthful and based in fact. This excludes false doctrine, gossip, unfounded information about others, and unsubstantiated second hand information. One who truly has God's wisdom will be careful to get to the whole truth of a matter. And he will look at that truth, regardless of its advantage or disadvantage to himself.

The wisdom from God will also be free from harshness, quarreling, and fighting. It will promote true unity and harmony. This excludes debate and argument as a legitimate means of sharing God's wisdom. It will be balanced, not overly strict or narrow, but will rather be full of compassion and mercy. It will be quick to listen, slow to speak, and even be willing to be changed or persuaded for what is best. It will be packaged with

practical beneficial action, and will come across without criticism or smugness. It will not be overbearing, but rather sincere and approachable. Godly wisdom comes from an honest, transparent, real person. Wisdom from God is as much about manner, emotion, and presentation as it is about the content.

This means the contrary is also true. If someone brings so-called spiritual counsel or wisdom, and it is harsh, unyielding, of little practical value, overly strict, not completely true, presented for the promotion and advantage of the one presenting it, not willing to listen, not willing to be persuaded for the best, is overbearing, judgmental, critical, or hypocritical, then if any of this is true, then it is not from God, but is from the flesh, or the devil, or based on human passion and not God's Spirit and truth. I believe we have an obligation to evaluate ourselves first, and every ministry that we submit ourselves to by this scriptural criteria.

Finally, verse 18 says that if we want to have righteousness result from our life and counsel to others, we will sow wisdom from God in a spirit of peace. Our goal in sharing truth is to promote peace with God and with one another.

Does this mean that truth never divides or causes controversy? Absolutely not. Jesus said that His gospel will sometimes even break up families. His own earthly family disowned Him when He walked the earth, and at one point thought He was crazy! The point is this. Wisdom that comes from God promotes harmony, unity, and peace among those who receive it. And the only way to harvest righteousness is giving the truth with a sincere, loving, humble servant's heart.

It doesn't matter how much Bible knowledge we have unless along with our learning we are cultivating a servant's heart and placing other's interest and welfare ahead of our own.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is it ever appropriate to debate with others concerning Biblical truth?
2. What is the scriptural way to handle disagreements with others?
3. What should be our demeanor and response toward ministries that promote controversy, debate, and strife?
4. What is the difference between being uncompromising and unloving? Is there ever a place to compromise for the sake of unity and love?
5. What is the relationship of truth and love?