

“Two Kinds of Wisdom”

James 3: 13-18

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their 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, demonic. 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 reap a harvest of righteousness.

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Are there any among you who consider yourself wise? What kind of images do you get when you think of wisdom, or someone who is wise? For some of you it might be your mother or your father. For some of you it might be Mr. Owl or a bent old man with a long beard. For some of you it might be a Pastor, teacher, or Grandpa or Grandma. For others, who are more influenced by movies and Television maybe Master Yoda or ObeeOne Kinobee fits your image of what wisdom looks like. What is true wisdom? What does it look like? These are some of the questions that we want to answer this morning by looking at James chapter 3 and verses 13-18. There are some professors who say that the whole letter of James deals with heavenly wisdom; that is, wisdom from above, or TRUE wisdom. [NOTE 1]

I have to say that I can't think of many times that I have heard the word “wisdom” used in general conversations over the last 10 years. Mostly, I have heard it in stories or movies dealing with swords and sorcerers, or associated with old men like ObeeOne Kinobee, Luke Skywalker, or Yoda of Star Wars fame. In those cases, it is more the adjective wise than the noun wisdom. If someone were to walk up to you right now and ask you for a definition of wisdom, what would you say? (Let people respond) [NOTE 2]

One definition of wisdom might be, learning gained over many years or simply experience. In James' view, wisdom is a moral, rather than an intellectual quality. James puts wisdom together with understanding in verse 13 to keep us from thinking of wisdom as something that is merely intellectual. In the original Greek language the word translated as “understanding” implies personal acquaintance and experience. It is book-learning PLUS practical application.

I can't count how many times I have heard someone in carpentry, manufacturing, or in the trades that is exasperated with the engineers, architects,

etc. who have much book learning but little or no practical experience. In 1986 I was a college graduate with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Geology working for a contractor as a "Carpenter's assistant." I had way more head knowledge than anyone I was working with, but there is no substitute for experience. I think we can all think of situations in which we read the manual, or had head-knowledge but it still took much trial and error and experience before we got something to work right. Examples might be the computer, tablet, or phone. You read the instructions but it is so easy to mess up one little thing and nothing works. Am I right?

When I was working as a Carpenter's assistant, the contractor would say with not such nice words, that every architect should be required to spend a year actually doing carpentry so they understood what they were asking people in the field to do. **[NOTE 3]**

So how do you know if somebody is wise or not? Verse 13 tells us that you first need to look at their works. What kind of fruit does their life produce? What Paul calls the work of the Holy Spirit, James calls the wisdom from above. In Matthew chapter 7 and verse 16, Jesus said that the disciples could know people by the fruit of their lives. One of the key things to look for, is laid out for us in the last part of verse 13: "One who is wise does his/her deeds in the humility that comes from wisdom." The real wise person will be far more aware of what he/she doesn't know than of their expertise. A book of wisdom has this quote in it, "The greater you are, the more you humble yourself." You won't find anybody who is wise bragging about how much they know. Because if a person is truly wise, then they will be very aware of how much they don't know. Nothing is worse than a professional who tries to attract attention to him/herself rather than to Jesus Christ. The person who attains wisdom is synonymous with the person who observes the law, and for James, the person who attains wisdom is also the person who remains faithful in testing. Such a person can be described, further, as one who overcomes his/her evil inclinations, "the flesh", as Paul calls it. Temptation comes, not from God, but from the evil inclinations which are part of our old selves, it's part of the flesh, the world, the sin into which we are born. This inclination, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. **[NOTE 4]** The person who subdues his/her "evil inclination" is wise; such a one is not double-minded or unstable, but is grounded in the "implanted word." James 1: 21-22 reads, "Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the Word, ...do what it says." James' theology is one of action.

Then in verses 14-16 James gives us a picture of what wisdom from below or the wisdom of the world looks like. You see, we have to be able to tell the difference between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. Earthly wisdom's aims are worldly aims and it measures success in worldly terms like money, toys, cars, boats, RV's, beautiful homes, jewelry, and other possessions. The fruits of earthly

wisdom includes jealousy, envy, faction, and confusion. Where one finds these, he/she will find earthly wisdom at work. **[NOTE 5]** James gives us these lists of words for instruction, not for condemnation. Earthly wisdom is the kind of wisdom that depends on human instinct and ingenuity. Paul knew where his power came from. He told people where he was at. He said, "I can do all things through HIM who strengthens me." Be a wise person and let go, let go, and let God! Trust in Him who is wisdom, Jesus Christ!

In verses 17 and 18, James gives us a picture of what true wisdom, heavenly wisdom, looks like. But, in Jesus we have the perfect example to follow. Jesus was wisdom, come down to earth. Jesus personified wisdom. James' list of words is almost overwhelming. I said, "almost" because if we read carefully, at the beginning of verse 17 it says "wisdom from heaven." James is telling us that wisdom is not something that a person can attain, but that it is a gift from God. In the first chapter James tells us that if we want wisdom, all we have to do, is go to the Lord in prayer and we will receive it. By our prayer we facilitate the filling of ourselves with the Holy Spirit, or, as James would say, "with wisdom." The Holy Spirit, Jesus said to the disciples, will guide you into all truth. For James, the Holy Spirit is the "wisdom of God." **[NOTE 6]**

The list of words that James uses to describe wisdom from above are: pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. That is quite a list, isn't it? It reminds me of Galatians 5, where Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit.

The way James describes it, the only really wise person is the one who places God in the center of their life, who serves Christ as Lord and master, and who keeps the intellect in subjection to the will of God. In true wisdom, there is a wholeness, which brings the heart and head, feeling and thought, and words and deeds together. A Christians number one asset is his/her good life. **[NOTE 7]** Like the old cliché, "actions speak louder than words." In verse 13 it says, "Show by your good life that your works are done in the humility that comes from wisdom." The best witness that we have to non-Christians, is changed lives. No one can argue with changed lives. That is also why a personal testimony I valuable. People can't argue with your experience or your feelings. We may quibble over words and talk like a wise person, but time will prove our words by our deeds. We have to practice what we preach. I think the greatest compliment one could get, would be for someone to say of you, "He/she really walks what they talk." One of the Elders at Voice of Hope Church in Wayland before it closed would say, "Your walk talks and your talk talks. You better be sure that your walk talks the same way that your talk talks." I put it in the notes so you could think about that one.

In the past twenty years we have had ring side seats to TV preachers learning that one's actions outweigh their words. Josh McDowell, a speaker and author, said

one time during a presentation that if he ever gets in trouble with a crowd, or things start to break down or go sideways, he simply changes gears and gives his personal testimony. Every time that he has done so, it has produced good fruit. He recalled one time when he was talking to Marxists in South America that they began to pound the tables with their silverware in protest, so he changed gears and began to give his personal testimony. Only seconds later the whole place was listening intently. Now I'm not saying that this will happen every time, or that it will ever happen to you. My point is that one shows by his/her good manner of life, that he/she is wise.

Okay Pastor Rick, so that's what wisdom is and how it reveals itself. But why should I want to be wise? The purpose of seeking wisdom from above as far as James and the Bible are concerned, is clearly to have appropriate relationships. A good relationship with God, a good relationship with His people, and to relate well with the world as well. The purpose is a harvest of righteousness. Verse 18 is a highly compressed sentence. It makes a little more sense if we expand it a little. "We are all trying to reap the harvest which a good life brings. But the seeds which bring the rich harvest can never flourish in any atmosphere other than one of right relationships between people. The only people who can so these seeds and reap the reward are those whose life work it has been to produce right relationships." Seek first in your lives the wisdom of God, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and you will reap a reward in Heaven. That doesn't mean necessarily that life here on earth will be all roses, there is plenty of pain and suffering to go around as we learn during our prayer time every Sunday. But it does mean that we can have a hope that never proves to be an illusion. That God rewards those who seek Him and a right relationship with Him and His creation. **[NOTE 8]**

So there are two kinds of wisdom. Worldly or earthly wisdom, which leads to possessions and pride and arrogance. And Heavenly wisdom which results in right relationships between us and God and between us and God's people. Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Choose heavenly wisdom. Spend time reading your Bible! Spend time in prayer! Seek heavenly wisdom and you will be blessed! James says, that your life will produce good, good deeds, good words, good fruit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. May we all strive for heavenly wisdom, wisdom from above. Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Two Kinds of Wisdom” based on James 3: 13-18 Given at Doster Community Church on July 23, 2023

- I. What’s your definition of wisdom? (I want you to actually respond, the question is not rhetorical)
- II. James puts wisdom together with “understanding” in verse 13. The word translated “understanding” implies personal acquaintance and experience. For James, “Wisdom” is book-learning plus practical application.
- III. A person who is wise produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their life. “One who is wise does his/her deeds in the humility that comes from wisdom.” As you grow in wisdom you become more aware of the great amount that you don’t know.
- IV. The person who subdues his/her evil inclinations is wise; and such a person is not double-minded or unstable, but rather grounded in the Word.
- V. Earthly wisdom produces fruit like arrogance, possessions, jealousy, envy, faction, and confusion.
- VI. Heavenly Wisdom produces fruit that is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere. The fruits of a “Spirit-filled life” are the fruits that heavenly wisdom produces: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22).
- VII. The best witness we have to non-Christians, is changed lives! No one can argue with changed lives. Get to the place where you have a good handle on your personal testimony (your story about what life was like before Jesus and how it is now with Jesus (commitment and surrender).
- VIII. So what are you going to do about it? Please write down an “I will ...statement” about what you will do this week to focus on “heavenly wisdom”.