

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Where to Get Wisdom James 3:13-18 Part Seven

Let us read **James 3:13-18**, **“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 seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”** James in this passage is giving to us one more test of living faith. We have called this test the “Wisdom Test.”

How can we know whether or not we are saved? We can know that we are truly saved when we see the wisdom from above manifested in our lives. Or in other words, when we see the wisdom of Christ manifested in our lives. This is why James gives us the challenge that we found in **v. 13**, **“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.** If we have, in fact, received the wisdom from above, if we have, in fact, received the wisdom of Christ, it should be able to be seen in the way we live our lives.

What we should not see in our lives is a false wisdom which is described in **vv. 14-16**. Therefore after James gave us a specific challenge in **v. 13**, he then takes time to describe false wisdom in **vv. 14-16**, **“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.”** Having described false wisdom in **vv. 14-16**, he then goes on to describe the wisdom from above in **vv. 17-18**. He begins this verse by saying **“But the wisdom from above is first pure...”** Because this characteristic is separated from the other characteristics, we have called it the motivation of the wisdom from above. And of course those who desire to be pure will manifest it in various ways. We have called these various manifestations of this desire to be pure the characteristics of the wisdom from above.

They will be peaceable. Peaceable describes a person who is ready for peace, desiring peace, fostering peace by working toward consensus, restraining discord and pacifying the turbulent elements around them.

They will be gentle. Gentle (EPIEKES) conveys the thought of respect for the feelings of others, being willing to waive all rigor and severity in one’s dealings with others.

They will be reasonable. Reasonable (EUPEITHES) means easily persuaded with the implication of being open to reason or willing to listen. It has a conciliatory attitude and is ready to cooperate when a better way is shown. It is opposite of being stubborn and unyielding.

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This morning we will continue on in our study of the characteristics of the wisdom from above. And as we again examine this passage of Scripture, let us not forget the significance of the section of Scripture that we are studying. If we in fact profess to be wise and understanding, if we truly do possess the wisdom from above, or in other words, are truly born again then these are the qualities that should be seen in our lives and growing in our lives.

What is the next characteristic of the person who has received wisdom from above? Those who have received the wisdom from above will be “full of mercy and good fruits.” This is the only double characteristic in the list.

Mercy (ELEOS) is the outward manifestation of compassion in kindly action toward the misery of another. It does not look at what a man deserves but what he needs and will therefore produce good fruits (Luke 10:25-37). It is one of the attributes of God Himself.

Apart from God’s mercy none of us here this morning would be saved. Listen to the words of **Tit. 3:5**, “**He saved us not on the basis of our deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy He has saved us.**” When we come to the Lord in prayer and draw upon his grace that grace is only extended to us through his mercy. Listen to **Heb. 4:16**, “**Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy...**” Just as the Lord has been merciful toward us we need to be merciful. In fact we need to be “**full of mercy.**” Being “**full of mercy**” will inevitably produce what? “**Good fruits.**”

The classic biblical example of this is the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” found in **Luke 10:25-37**. In this story a man had been stripped, severely beaten and left to die by a road that led to Jericho. Clearly he was a man in desperate need of help. Do you remember what happened next? A priest who was traveling the same road to Jericho saw the man and what did he do? He crossed by on the other side. Then a second man, a Levite, traveling that same road to Jericho also happened to see him and when he saw the desperately needy man what did he do? He crossed by on the other side of the road.

You might say I would never do this? But be careful before saying this. I believe that it is very natural for us in the flesh not to extend help to others when we believe that it might somehow interfere with our plans or drain our resources. I believe that it is very natural for us in the flesh not to put ourselves in uncomfortable situations. This priest and this Levite who conveniently ignored the need of this victim had fallen into this trap. But for us who profess to have received the wisdom from above it should not be this way. Rather, in this parable that Christ shared, we should be like the next man that came down that same road.

And who was this next man that came down the road? He was a Samaritan. And the Jews despised the Samaritans. They saw them as unclean and unholy and would not have anything to do with them. But what did this Samaritan do when he saw the need of this robbery victim? It tells us that he felt compassion. And that compassion manifested itself in kindly action in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of the man who had been beaten. He personally bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put him on his own beast and brought him to an inn.

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He then took care of him the whole night. Leaving the next day, he left money with the innkeeper and said, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.” These actions were the “**good fruits**” of “**mercy**.”

What needs did you see this past week? How did you respond to those needs? Did you find yourself feeling compassion and being moved to merciful action?

The author of one of the commentaries I read in preparing for this message shared the following story. He said that a friend of his, a woman named Olena Mae Welsh, received a note which said, “I was very excited one day when I was listening to the “Geraldo” program on TV in California. They were having a discussion about abused children, and this one man, in his 20’s, I would say - told of how a neighbor lady named Olena Welsh came and put her arms around him and told him how much God loved him and that God had a purpose for his life. He said that was the redeeming factor in his life. And the note went on to say, “I knew it had to be you.”

Is this is how you are known? As a person “full of mercy and good works?” If it is, praise the Lord because this is a mark of the wisdom from above. If it is, then praise God, this is a mark of someone who has received Jesus. What are the characteristics of someone who has received the wisdom from above? They are peaceable, gentle, reasonable, and full of mercy and good fruits. But we are not done.

Look again at v. 17, “**But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering ...**” Unwavering (ADIAKRITOS) is used only here in the New Testament and literally means not to be parted or divided, hence without uncertainty, indecision, inconsistency, vacillation, or doubtfulness. The word “unwavering” is used to indicate impartiality, treating everyone equally without favoritism. This is why this particular word is translated “without partiality” in the KJV and “impartial” in the NIV.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that the priest or the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan would have passed by the man if they had recognized him as a man of great importance or wealth? I would have to believe the answer would be, No! Let me ask you another question. Do you believe that the priest or the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan would have passed by the man if they had recognized him as a person who was very near and dear to them? And again I believe the answer would be, No! Those who possess the wisdom from above certainly will be full of mercy and good works toward all of mankind without distinctions. Why? Because the wisdom from above is “unwavering” or in other words “impartial, able to treat everyone equally without favoritism.”

Just a quick comment. Treating every person equally does not imply that we treat everyone the same regardless of the circumstances. If my son Nathan came up to me and said, “Dad, I need \$100.” And I said to him, “Why do you need a \$100?” And he said, “Dad you just need to trust me, can you give me \$100?” I would give him that money. Why? Because he has never asked me for money. He has been extremely responsible with money. He has given me no reason to mistrust him. I would gladly give him the money believing that in some way I was meeting a need in his life. (In fact I would do this with any of my children).

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But let me give you another scenario. Just this last week a man came into our church office and wanted to talk with me. His purpose in coming was in essence to ask for financial help. He was broke. And in our conversation he shared with me that he was an evangelist. He even handed me his business card. He told me that he had quit his job in order to pursue his calling of preaching the gospel in the highways and byways. I asked him if he attended a church. And he told me that he did but they had “kicked him to the curb.” He told me that they had asked him to leave. He did not ask for \$100. But if he had I would have said what, No! What I did offer him was food to meet his immediate need, I gave him some instruction about the importance of work as a means to make a living. And I also shared with him the conditions that would need to be met if he returned for further help. Those conditions were that he would have to give me the name and telephone number of the church that had asked him to leave which I would then call. I shared with him that I would attempt to find out exactly what he would have to do in order to be welcomed by their fellowship and I would expect him to do what they asked unless it were unbiblical or immoral. Did I treat him impartially? I believe I had. Why would I say this? Because if one of my own children had behaved as this man had behaved and had the experiences that this man had experienced I would have what? Treated him the same way.

The wisdom from above is **“peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering...”** and then it says, **“without hypocrisy.”**

“Without hypocrisy” (ANUPOKRITOS), literally “unhypocritical,” denotes that this wisdom is free from all pretense; it does not need to work under a mask since it has nothing to hide.

Hypocrisy is one of the sins Jesus condemned most, four times just in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matt. 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5**). He repeatedly blasted the scribes, Pharisees, and other Jewish leaders for their gross hypocrisy and insincerity. He warned His disciples, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (**Luke 12:1**). When a group of Pharisees conspired to trick Him into criticizing paying taxes to Caesar, it says in **Matt. 22:18** that Jesus perceived their malice and said, **“Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?”** A short time later in **Matt. 23:27-28** He told a similar group, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”**

This is not a behavior that is terribly uncommon. In the latest issue of US News And World Report there was an article entitled “Lessons in Morality.” And it was about a very outspoken president of a private college in Michigan for 28 years. The article said that he had routinely, over that period of time, lashed out at the moral decline. “Honor and virtue are increasingly rare commodities,” he wrote in a scolding essay published in the school's magazine. Then three years later he wrote “cheating and lying have become acceptable.” The article went on to say that he knew more about moral decline than he let on. For two decades, he reportedly carried on an affair with his daughter-in-law. How did all this become known. It became known only after she committed suicide just last month.

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On the outside he looked very good to those that he casually met or to those who would read his articles in the campus magazine, but the truth was that it was all a sham. Is our life a sham? Certainly as a teacher of God's Word I need to take this all very much to heart. I need to be careful in what I share with you that I am not in some way misrepresenting myself. That is why I share not only certain of my successes but also my present and past failings. I want you to know me as I really am. And hopefully if you come into my home and live with me you will see the same person that I represented myself to be here each weekend.

If you are a Christian parent here this morning, this is something that you also need to take very much to heart. If you want your children to embrace Christ and to take Christianity seriously you need to lead them. They don't need to see perfection but they do need to see sincerity. They need to see a parent who is not just giving lip service to being Christ's disciple but is genuinely seeking to live for Christ.

We have looked at the motivation of the wisdom from above. We have looked at the characteristics of the wisdom from above. We will now look at the results of the wisdom from above.

The Result of the Wisdom from Above

If we live in the way that we have just shared, we are going to live a very righteous life. Let us read **v. 18, "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."** This is the New American translation, the KJV translates it "**And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.**" And the NIV translates it "**Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.**" Obviously you can see that this verse is a difficult verse to translate.

I don't particularly want to make this complicated. Suffice it to say that, though the KJV would appear on the surface to be the most literal translation, the NAS and the NIV both better capture the meaning of the words in light of the context of the book. And for simplicity I would just like to look at the NAS translation.

To make this verse come alive for us, let us simply ask the question what is the seed that is being referred to in **v. 18? The seed represents godly wisdom whose fruit is righteousness.** If we would simply live our lives according to the wisdom from above which has been described for us in **v. 17** our lives are going to produce really good stuff. But we need to know this very simple but basic truth, **our sowing must be done in peace by those who make peace. We should never think that the righteousness of God can ever be achieved when angry men are behaving angrily.**

Remember **James 1:20, "the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."** Or in other words, the anger of man can never produce the fruit of righteousness. I believe James is zeroing in on the issue of peace in this passage because there are those among his readers that clearly are struggling with their tempers.

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CONCLUSION

How do we know if we in fact are saved? How do we know if we in fact have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior? We can know as we see His wisdom and power manifested in and through our lives. We can know when we see that wisdom from above becoming more evident in all our relationships.

What are the characteristics of that wisdom from above?

The wisdom from above is “peaceable.” Peaceable describes a person who is ready for peace, desiring, fostering peace by working toward consensus, restraining discord and pacifying the turbulent elements around it.

The wisdom from above is “gentle.” Gentle (EPIEKES) conveys the thought of respect for the feelings of others, being willing to waive all rigor and severity in one’s dealings with others.

The wisdom from above is “reasonable.” It literally means “easily persuaded” and implies being open to reason and willing to listen.

The wisdom from above is “full of mercy and good fruits.” Mercy (ELEOS) is the outward manifestation of compassion in kindly action toward the misery of another. It does not look at what a man deserves but what he needs and will therefore produce good fruits.

The wisdom from above is “unwavering.” The word unwavering is used to indicate impartiality, treating everyone equally without favoritism.

The wisdom from above is “without hypocrisy.” Without hypocrisy (ANUPOKRITOS), literally “unhypocritical,” denotes that this wisdom is free from all pretense; it does not need to work under a mask since it has nothing to hide.

This is the wisdom from above and it needs to be sown in our everyday lives as we would sow seed. And if we would do this our lives would truly be righteous. But James once again reminds us that this can only happen if we are characterized by being peaceable and sow this seed in peace.

Who among you is wise and understanding (who has truly be born again) let him show by His good behavior in the gentleness of wisdom.