

FPFWC Christian Development



Faith and Wisdom in James

August 2020

Winter Quarter

August 29, 2020

Lesson #5 – Two Kinds of Wisdom

SCRIPTURE TEXT – James 3:13-18

Key Verse - The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. —James 3:17

ICE BREAKERS

1. What is wrong with the “wisdom” of a selfish and bitter person? (vv.14-15)
2. What are practical ways we can sow seeds of peace during our life?

LESSON BACKGROUND

It has been said that all of life is suffering. This idea is not all that shocking, of course. It has been articulated in many contexts around the world. As Christians, we understand that the suffering we experience is a result of sin in general.

Some try to downplay the reality of suffering. But suffering—especially in the form of persecution—is part of the Christian life. In James's day, the limited scope of Christianity shaped the types of persecution. Today, when Christianity is a global faith, persecution differs from culture to culture. In certain African nations, Muslim populations have severely persecuted Christian neighbors. In other locations, official government policy hinders Christian meetings and the formation of churches.

In the West, the matter is not quite so clear-cut. What constitutes persecution? While we are not being thrown to the lions in the Roman Colosseum or burned at the stake, subtle forms of persecution do indeed exist. These include social ostracism, which is part of the life experience of many Christians. How should we handle this kind of persecution when we encounter it?

At the beginning of our studies in James, we noted a few themes that run throughout the letter. These themes unite the disparate topics that James addresses. Wisdom is one such theme. Recall, for example, that at the outset of his letter James encouraged his readers to have patience in the midst of temptations or trials (James 1:2-4; lesson 9). This they could do by actively seeking God's wisdom (1:5). In today's text, James addresses two very different situations, both of which demand wisdom on the part of believers.

LESSON COMMENTARY –

Nature of True Wisdom (3:13-18)

3:13-14. James continued his warning about the tongue and described how true godly wisdom ("skill for living and applying God's Word") will help curtail its destructiveness in the context of a church. Wisdom is best expressed in actions (vv. 13-18), not speech (3:1-12). A person who is wise will show this wisdom by his good behavior. Gentleness (prautes, "being kindhearted in attitude and behavior without any harshness") recalls Christ's character (praus, Mt 11:29). Sins like bitter jealousy (jealousy is "powerful feelings of antagonism and hostility") and selfish ambition ("antipathy flowing from harsh rivalry") (v. 14) can be covered up hypocritically so as to lie against the truth.

3:15-16. The "wisdom" of selfish ambition (v. 14) is (1) earthly, limited by human understanding; (2) natural or "soulish" (psychikos), a term emphasizing both strictly human values and characteristics, and the absence of the Spirit (1Co 2:14; Jd 19); and (3) demonic (the work of Satan).

3:17-18. Heavenly wisdom is first pure ("free from moral defect or stain"; in this context, promoting harmony and countering hypocrisy), then peaceable, gentle, reasonable (necessary for unity; cf. 4:1). James illustrates the growth of righteousness in the church with the sowing of seed in a field. If the fruit desired is righteousness (v. 18), the seed must be sown under the proper conditions, i.e., in peace. Anger cannot "grow" God's righteousness (cf. 1:20). Therefore, the ones who sow the seed must be peacemakers.

LESSON NUGGET – What are your motives? Is there bitterness in your heart or envy? Are you speaking from God's wisdom or the wisdom of the world? Are you a peacemaker or a troublemaker? If your heart is right before God (Heb. 4:12), He will use your words to produce the right kind of fruit.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*