

Sunday, February 1, 2026 pm

STUDIES IN JAMES (13)

Wisdom – Heavenly or Earthly?

James 3:13-18

Tonight, we continue our study through the book of James. In this book filled with practical admonitions, our last lesson began with a challenge that not many ought to be teachers. This led to a discussion of the power and danger of the tongue. In tonight's text, this could be a continuation of that admonition to teachers (and all) where their tongues and conduct are concerned. While these verses apply to all aspects of our lives, how we speak will be a manifestation of where our wisdom comes from.

I. Who is wise and understanding among you? (13)

- a. Is James appealing to leaders in this? Certainly, godly leaders will possess the right type of wisdom. When we are seeking direction for something, there is usually someone that we know we can turn to because they have proven themselves both by their knowledge and wisdom.
 - i. E.g., 1 Corinthians 6:5 speaks of seek out the wisdom of the mature to help with judgments.
 - ii. Hebrews 13:17 – elders watch out for your souls with wisdom.
 - iii. 1 Timothy 3:6 describes the elder as not a novice. Titus 1:9 with wisdom he is able to teach and direct.
- b. But it is something we all need. James could be rhetorical in this implying that we should ALL be seeking the right type of wisdom. We need to be examining ourselves in this.
- c. Wisdom is something we all need to pursue.
 - i. Consider Proverbs 3:13-18, 4:5-9, Ecclesiastes 7:11-12, *Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.*
 - ii. James 1:5 – if you lack wisdom ask of God.
 - iii. Colossians 3:16 – we are to let the word of God dwell within us in all wisdom.
 - iv. Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus concluded the “sermon on the mount” by contrasting the wise and foolish builder. The wise man builds upon a solid foundation.
- d. Consider this also in light of vs. 9-12 where James contrasts good and bad tongues. How do we control whether or not our tongues speak good or bad? It involves wisdom. Wisdom tells us to be quiet (James 1:19-20). Wisdom tells us to temper our words based upon our environment and what is right.
- e. Our text notes that he will show his good conduct with “the meekness of wisdom.” The word “meek” as we have noted recently means to be mild or gentle. In fact, many translations use the word gentleness (NASB, LSB). The word is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23 – gentleness) and the spirit with which we correct an erring brother (Galatians 6:1) and the same attitude we need as we give a defense for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

II. The wisdom of this world (14-16)

- a. Does NOT come from above – that is, it does not originate in the heavenly realm. I.e., it is not of God
- b. It is described as earthly, sensual, demonic
 - i. **Earthly** – things associated with our physical existence (the physical realm) – 2 Corinthians 5:1 speaks of our “earthly house, this tent”.
 - ii. **Sensual** – (natural – LSB, NASB; unspiritual – ESV) appealing to our sensual desires – 1 John 2:15-16 – the lusts of the flesh, eyes and pride. Our emotions and passions. This is the one who appeals to feelings over objective truth. He is thinking in worldly terms.

- iii. **Demonic** – as it sounds, this word means these are the things that come from the devil himself. This is wickedness, sinful behavior – cf. 1 John 3:8-10 – he who sins is of the devil.
- iv. Qualities include;
 - 1. **You have bitter envy** – bitterness points to hostility and being resentful (Romans 3:14 – the unrighteous are bitter; Ephesians 4:31 – we are to let bitterness and wrath be put away; Hebrews 12:14-17 – bitterness can cause trouble and us to be defiled). *Envy* is the word from which we get our word *zeal*. It means an intense, burning. Context determines whether it is good or bad. Galatians 5:20 in the bad sense, it is a work of the flesh.
 - 2. **Self-seeking in your heart** – we often talk about selfishness as it relates to sin. The word is often translated as selfish ambitions – Galatians 5:20, Philippians 2:3, etc. All sin involves self-seeking as we do what we want contrary to what God wants us to be doing. James is not describing the occasional stumble, but rather one whose heart is corrupted with this conduct.
 - 3. **Boasting** – bragging. James is describing someone who proudly displays these behaviors. It is one thing to engage in sinful conduct, but it is another thing to brag about it. Yet today, in our society we so often see sinful behaviors proudly on display and even defended.
 - 4. **Lying against the truth** – we know lying is a sin (Ephesians 4:25, Revelations 21:8, etc.) and like boasting it is a common behavior in our society. Here we have one who is lying against the truth – this is one whose sinful behavior is justified in his own eyes. I think of sins like prejudice (Matthew 7:1-5) and favoritism. Later in James 4:16 he speaks of the one who *boasts in his arrogance*. *All such boasting is evil*.
- v. The results of such wisdom
 - 1. **Confusion** – these are not the qualities of unity and clarity. Some translations say, “there is disorder”. This is the same word as 1 Corinthians 14:33, *God is NOT the author of confusion*.
 - 2. **Every evil thing are there** – these are the sorts of behaviors that cause harm in an environment. When people are exploiting each other, destroying what belongs to others, sowing division, stirring up hatred and worse, you know Satan is alive and well in their lives.
 - 3. NOTE: These are qualities that are unpleasant and do not produce anything good, both for the one who has them and those who are around them. The ONLY way good can come is IF we change our disposition.

III. The wisdom from above

- a. This is the wisdom that comes from heaven. It originates with God – Colossians 3:1-2
- b. This is God’s word revealed to us –
- c. **It is FIRST pure** – the word *first* means priority. *Purity* points to something unpolluted AND undiluted. The word is described as faultless. According to Dan King (Truth commentary), the word had its origins with the quality one needed to approach the gods. In NT times it was related to moral purity and described on who is clean as he approaches God. Tied to our text, he is NOT polluted with the qualities of corruption that describe worldly wisdom. Philippians 4:8 it is a quality we are think upon. 2 Corinthians 7:11 describing true repentance concludes, “*in all things you proved yourselves clear in this matter*.” The word is also associated with chaste conduct of women (2 Corinthians 11:2, Titus 2:5 & 1 Peter 3:2). Matthew 5:8 – it is the pure in heart who will see God (though it is a different word for purity).

- d. **Peaceable** – we are not to be confrontational (as a rule, i.e. our default manner of life). The root word describes the peacemaker (Matthew 5:9), Romans 12:18 – we strive to live peaceably with all men, Galatians 5:22 – a fruit of the Spirit; & Hebrews 12:14 – we pursue peace with all men.
- e. **Gentle** – a word that means acting with kindness. Describes one who is merciful and tolerant with patience. The LSB uses the word *considerate*. Philippians 4:5, *Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand*.
- f. **Willing to yield** - open to adaptation (without compromise of course). LSB – Submissive, NASB – reasonable. When it comes to promoting unity, we need to be willing to bend when we can. So much division occurs both in the church and in the world because people become so set in their ways/views that they are unwilling to even discuss alternatives.
- g. **Full of mercy** – the consistent translation. Just as God is merciful to us (Ephesians 2:4), we must be merciful to others. In fact, remember **James 2:13** – Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.
- h. **Full of good fruits** – the one seeking to please God is going to be doing good and righteous things. Not only for God but for others as well. We have addressed our need to be doing good for others – Galatians 6:10, James 2:20 – faith without works is dead. Titus 2:14 describes us as being zealous for good works.
- i. **Vs. 18 - It is sown in peace be peacemakers.** James concludes this section by noting that it is the one who DESIRES to be right with God and man, who will do his part to promote what is good and right.

We can see the contrast in these verses and as Christians we KNOW what disposition we must seek to possess. God's word is truth (John 17:17) and has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). James reminded us earlier that we are to receive with meekness this implanted word leading to our salvation (Jas. 1:21).

The world AND we as the Lord's body desperately need to see godly attitudes prevail in all that we do AND all that we say both to one another and about one another. God's word grants us the knowledge to with wisdom live as He desires. What is the source of your wisdom? Think about it!