How to Practice True Wisdom

JAMES 3:13-18

9-2-2020

*** WE NEED TO KNOW HOW TO PRACTICE TRUE WISDOM.**

How? By knowing what it is and isn't.

In verses 14-18, two different kinds of wisdom are described: godly and ungodly, a true and false, a real and a counterfeit, a heavenly and a hell-sent wisdom.

I. THE EVIDENCES OF THE "WISDOM" FROM HELL (v. 14-16)

(evidences that "give away" false wisdom)

A. SUCH "WISDOM" HAS AN UNMISTAKABLE IDENTITY (v. 14a)

1. Satan's wisdom is against others - "bitter jealousy"

2. Satan's "wisdom" is only out for oneself - "selfish ambition"

B. SUCH "WISDOM" OFFERS AN UNJUSTIFIABLE COVER-UP (V. 14b)

C. SUCH "WISDOM" COMES FROM AN UNGODLY SOURCE (v. 15)

1. "Out of a sinful heart" (v. 14)
2. It is "not from above"
3. It is "earthly"
4. It is "sensual."
5. It is "devilish."

D. SUCH "WISDOM" PRODUCES UNDESIRABLE FRUIT (v. 16)

The results of worldly wisdom are disastrous!

"Confusion" = disorder; chaos.

"Every evil work" = every rotten practice

II. THE EVIDENCES OF THE WISDOM FROM HEAVEN (v. 13; v. 17-18)

A. THIS WISDOM IS FROM DIVINE ORIGIN (v. 17)

B. THIS WISDOM HAS GOD-HONORING CHARACTERISTICS (v. 17)

It reveals itself in:

1. Holiness - "pure"
2. Meekness
3. Goodness
4. Sincerity

C. THIS WISDOM PRODUCES FRUITFUL RESULTS (v. 18).

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INTRO: Context: Note previous context of the tongue - 3:1-12.

In speaking about wisdom, James is shifting just slightly, but the words he uses still point to the fact that he is speaking about the use of the tongue - the wise use of it.

Knowledge is not enough! You need wisdom to know how to use knowledge. We all know people who are very intelligent, perhaps almost geniuses, and yet they can`t carry out the simplest tasks in life. They can run computers, high tech. equipment, etc., but cannot manage their own lives, families (wives and children).

I don't believe our problem is a lack of Bible knowledge but rather a lack of putting it into practical everyday living. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom" (Prov. 4:7).

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Why? Because when you fear God you practice His word -- you are not merely content to know it.

"Wise" = moral insight and skill in deciding how to obey the truth known. (it's easy to know truth; it's difficult to know how to practice it).

"Understanding" = one who has the knowledge of an expert, specialist.

"Show" = prove. James demands that the possession of wisdom, like faith (2:14-26), must be proved by conduct.

One's works, not words, are the acid test of his wisdom.

Whereas James described the kind of works that prove real faith (in 2:14-26), now he describes the manner in which we work that proves real wisdom (3:13-18).

It's not just what you do that counts--it's how you do it!

We can do all the right things as Christians, but if we do them in the wrong Spirit (attitude) we are just as bad as if we didn't do them at all.

EX: Ladies, what would you think of your fiance if he bought you a $5,000 diamond engagement ring, but threw it at you?

* **WE NEED TO KNOW HOW TO PRACTICE TRUE WISDOM.**

How?

By knowing what it is and isn't.

In verses 14-18, two different kinds of wisdom are described: godly and ungodly, a true and false, a real and a counterfeit, a heavenly and a hell-sent wisdom. You know whenever there is a "real" in circulation, the Devil will always produce a counterfeit.

Illus. Game show "To Tell the Truth" -- "Will the real Mr. _____ please stand up."

I. THE EVIDENCES OF THE "WISDOM" FROM HELL (v. 14-16)

(evidences that "give away" false wisdom)

A. SUCH "WISDOM" HAS AN UNMISTAKABLE IDENTITY (v. 14a)

1. Satan's wisdom is against others - "bitter jealousy"

"Envying" = zeal; neutral word - can be good or bad zeal, context determines.

God-honoring zeal is good, but if the sin nature is allowed to turn your good zeal into bitter zeal against those who you feel are less than you are, then it is wrong.

"Bitter" = comes from a root meaning: "to cut" or "prick"

"This is the kind of jealousy that cannot bear someone else's popularity or success and, given the opportunity, will do anything it can to humiliate and degrade that person . . ." (Blanchard, p. 209).

Do you rejoice when others succeed? Or do you have secret envy and criticism? Do we feel bad when others fail, or glad?

We are not in competition with each other!!

2. Satan's "wisdom" is only for oneself - "selfish ambition"

"Strife" = selfish ambition; Illus. of people who in striving to climb the corporate ladder step on all others to do so.

This word describes one who works, but for selfish advantage--what he can get out of it.

Also means - saying/doing anything it takes to accomplish my Purpose or get my own way.

Illus. of people who work only for pay/$.

It describes one who works to promote a definite cause (even a good cause) in an unethical manner.

The end does not justify the means.

On T.V., in the movies, in magazines, etc., the "wise man" is portrayed as the "clever guy," "tough guy," "the smart operator," who knows how to bribe, cheat, lie, speak harshly, etc., as he practices his "sophisticated" worldly wisdom of selfish ambition.

B. SUCH "WISDOM" OFFERS AN UNJUSTIFIABLE COVER-UP (V. 14b)

You know when you are bitterly zealous and when you are being divisive because of personal ambition, and James is now telling you not to compound your sin by justifying it -- by
1) boasting about it or
2) denying it (by lying against the truth)

Men will go to great lengths to try to hide their true selves from each other and even from their own eyes.

"Glory not" = don't take pride in your supposed superiority over others. You are not to boast about your type of wisdom which does not know how to behave even in defending a good cause.

"Lie not" - By your wrong attitude your are denying the truth you claim to possess and defend.

A bitter and selfish attitude is never justified!

We are deceived into believing the lie of the Devil that we are justified.

C. SUCH "WISDOM" COMES FROM AN UNGODLY SOURCE (v. 15)

1. "Out of a sinful heart" (v. 14)

2. It is "not from above"
Only good and perfect gifts (things) come from above (1:17).

3. It is "earthly"

"Earthly, sensual, devilish" - correspond to the Christian's 3 enemies: "The world, the flesh, and the devil" (Eph. 2:1-3).

"Earthly" = limited to this globe; not in God's heaven.

Cp. Paul's rebuking the Corinthians. "The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God" (1:20; 2:5-6)

I am not saying that the world does not have knowledge - it has a great deal. The problem is that there is not a whole lot of wisdom. Man is unlocking the secrets of the universe (built into creation by God), yet he does not know what to do with them.

4. It is "sensual."

"Sensual" = "from the soul" (the immaterial part of man as it relates to this life - that part of man that he has in common with animals). The spirit of man is the immaterial part of man as it relates to God.

5. It is "devilish."

"Devilish" = inspired by evil spirits; demons who carry out Satan's work.

APPLI: When you are acting with bitter zeal, and selfish ambition, you are actually a puppet for Satan.

Even if you supposedly are acting so for a "noble cause," he is laughing all the time.

"James detects the work of demons in seeking to corrupt the harmony and very life of the Body of Christ" (Hiebert, p. 232).

D. SUCH "WISDOM" PRODUCES <u>UNDESIRABLE FRUIT</u> (v. 16)

The results of worldly wisdom are <u>disastrous</u>!

"Confusion" = disorder; chaos. Jesus used this word to describe the disorder and instability of the world in the last days (Lk. 21:9). "You shall hear of wars and commotions."

Instead of promoting harmony, this "wisdom" causes disruption; instead of creating a closer fellowship, it destroys it.

Illus. Church business meetings.

"God is not a God of disorder but of peace." (I Cor. 14:33).

Illus. of a Christian on a talk show who was defending Christ (against the blasphemous "Last Temptation of Jesus" movie), but in an uncontrolled, impatient manner. He said great things, but the manner in which he said them made his <u>emotions</u> stand out above his message, and no one understood him.

"Every evil work" = every rotten practice

"evil" = foul, rotten (used of rotten fruit), good for nothing

APPLI: Instead of a church, family, friendship, etc., growing, it becomes rotten.

Your attitudes (bitterness, strife) will result in actions! (practices)

No sin is isolated or benign. Sin like cancer is malignant. It spreads and destroys. It will always work its way out.

Because of bitter zeal and selfish ambition: Satan fell, Cain killed Abel, Absalom stole the hearts of Israel, Haman erected his own hanging scaffold, and the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to Pilate.

The result of such action is splits - split relationships: split families, split friendships, split churches.

One of the sins that God hates is that of sowing "discord among the brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19).

II. THE EVIDENCES OF THE WISDOM FROM HEAVEN (v. 13; v. 17-18)

A. THIS WISDOM IS FROM DIVINE ORIGIN (v. 17)

True wisdom comes only from God.

I Kings 4:29 - "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore."

Prov. 2:6 -"For the Lord given wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

Eccles. 2:26 - "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit."

I Cor. 2:6, 10 -"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought . . . But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

B. THIS WISDOM HAS GOD-HONORING CHARACTERISTICS (v. 17)

It reveals itself in:

1. Holiness - "pure"

"First, pure" - points out that the inner quality is of utmost importance! God is primarily concerned with what we are and only then with what we do.

"Pure" = holy, set apart from contamination unto God.

We need to practice a lifestyle that flees away from inner contamination. We need to develop a delicate sensitivity to pollution of any kind.

(A pure person will have pure words
thoughts
actions)

2. Meekness (v. 13b; v. 17)

v. 13 "Meekness" - is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) so it cannot be manufactured by man.

Meekness is not weakness but power under control. The Greek word was used for a horse that had been broken so that his power was under control.

II Tim. 2:24 - "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.

I Pet. 3:15 - "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

a. Peaceful personality

"Peaceable" - seeks to restrain discord, and promotes "right relationships between man and man, and between man and God."

**But note: it does not pursue peace at the expense of purity! It will not compromise with sin to maintain peace.

Illus. Abraham Lincoln has been called a man of velvet steel.

What we need to be are Christians with steel convictions but with velvet attitudes in dealing with others.

b. Gentle personality

"Gentle" = a considerate person. Respects the feelings of others.

It's the disposition of a superior to an inferior who will listen to his speech when really it is an earsore to listen.

c. Reasonable personality

"Easy to be entreated" = reasonable; easily persuaded when one learns that he has been wrong.

Describes one who is open to new light, and is willing to learn from others.

It's not a stubborn know-it-all.

The only one who ever lived who didn't ever change his mind, or take advice, or revise his opinions was Jesus Christ because He was God incarnate!

Many people think that stubbornness is conviction, and that they are always right and never wrong. When God's wisdom is at work, there is a willingness to listen, think, pray, and obey whatever God reveals.

Are you teachable?

3. Goodness

a. "Full of mercy"

"Mercy" = compassion that leads one to help. One who withholds judgment, knowing it belongs to God.

"Full" = shows that heavenly wisdom is characterized by an abundant measure of mercy.

b. "Full of good fruits"

The phrase "full of . . . good fruits" stands in contrast to "every evil work" (v. 16)

4. Sincerity

a. Undivided

"Without partiality" = undivided. Not being "two-faced" toward people. Not one who is always looking to choose sides to join (Ex. Corinthians's sin - chap. 1)

It is the direct opposite of the duplicity of an uncontrolled tongue as described in v. 9-12.

b. Unhypocritical

"Without hypocrisy" = true wisdom is free from all masks because it has nothing to hide. It is genuine and sincere! What he says is what he is.

C. THIS WISDOM PRODUCES FRUITFUL RESULTS (v. 18).

"The fruit of righteousness" = the fruit that righteousness produces can only be sown by peacemakers.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov. 15:1)

Col. 4:5-6 - "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

Eph. 4:2,3 - "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

We all want to see fruit. But if your attitude is not that of heavenly wisdom, you will see none.

Paul urged us in Eph. 4:15 to always speak the truth "in love"

When you speak in true wisdom, you never have to shout.

When you teach, if you speak in a tempestuous, harsh manner, your students will not receive what you are saying. (ex. Mad-dog - a teacher I had).

**Don't throw out seed (Ex. "Hey, bud, get saved or go to hell" "Turn or burn") but plant it in love and care.

Righteousness is no sudden growth but is the product of seed sown in peace.

Our lives are lives of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7). The way you sow is just as important as what you sow!

If we live in God's wisdom and sow righteousness in peace, we will reap God's blessing. If we live in man's worldly wisdom and we sow in discord and selfishness, we reap "confusion and every evil work."

. . . What do you want to reap??

Conclusion:

"Right relationships are the soil in which the reward of righteousness alone can grow . . . nothing good can ever grow in an atmosphere where men are at variance with each other" (Barclay, p. 62).

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace!
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy."