

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JAMES

STUDY NUMBER 7 – JAMES 3:13-18

GROW IN GOOD JUDGMENT

Grab your study guide, we're going to pick up with verse 13, down to verse 18 in our study in James 3.

Our key verse is going to be verse 17. We'll be there in just a few moments.

James is concerned about the principles of spiritual growth. He's taught us in our first study that when God tests us it's for the production of more Christlikeness in our character and more fruit to be born because He's glorified in much fruit in our lives.

So God is at work, making us like Christ through the tests and the adversities we face. Then there comes temptation. Satan orchestrates that to distract us and actually to defeat us. We need to recognize the source and his purpose.

Thirdly, we learn that a daily intake of the Word makes it possible for us to cooperate with the Spirit of God who is producing Christlikeness in us. "Be doers of the Word and not just hearers only."

In our fourth study we talked about the fruitage of the Spirit being love. It's not a partial kind of love that's described in James 2:1-9. It's a love which flows without limitation. It's a love that is there to minister and bring help and healing to others. It's the fruitage of the Spirit.

Then we talked about faith and works. All works is, is a manifestation of a living faith as my life demonstrates, through the works that are performed in my life, that I truly have been saved by faith.

Then we talked together last week on a personal level about the recognition that each of us has a responsibility for the tongue that God has given us.

All of us have a stewardship and a responsibility for this little member that hides behind the pearly gates in our mouths. It's little and it can do great devastating things we learned. And only the Spirit of God can control it.

Now that brings us to wisdom. We talked about our words last week. Now today we talk about the wisdom that flows from our lives. I think in a similar way I would ask you, in response to this message today, that you not only once again tell God you've had a great week by giving Him your tongue on a daily basis. And you want to do it again this morning. But along with it, give Him your mind.

The reason that so many times things are distorted and out of place is because we're thinking the wrong things. And when our mind is filled with the wrong things then the wisdom that we give is not a wisdom from above. God truly knows how to make us wise. He truly knows how to use our tongues to speak wisdom when we are indeed controlled by the Spirit of God.

James hits hard on this in the verses that we're going to look at. You remember James is one of these who kind of takes a verse. He makes note of it and then later he's going to come back to it. We learn that when it came to the business of the tongue last week. In chapter 1:19 & 20 he said: "you know, my beloved brethren let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

Now we're talking about wisdom. If you'll remember back in chapter 1 right in the middle of talking about the test and our ability to relate to it, he said: "If any of you lack wisdom, ask from God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach and it will be given to him."

In the same way you ask God to control your tongue, today we can ask God to speak through us and to speak His wisdom to the circumstance, not something that we're tied up into but something God has given as a means whereby we might be effective in living the life he has for us to live.

Paul is dealing with the Greeks. In a lot of the cities that he went to, one of the dominant cities was the city of Corinth. And when you get to 1 Corinthians 1 you read these words [beginning] at verse 20:

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For such is the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (verses 20-21).

Then you drop down to verse 30:

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.

Do you long to be a person who is recognized by the fact that you run deep and that you speak that which God would have you learn and understand and be credible enough to be able to share that effectively with others? That's where we are now. We're talking about the whole business of God giving us wisdom whereby we might effectively relate to life.

Now pick up with me if you will at verse 13 and we'll move through these verses.

v.13 Who is wise and learned among you? Let him show by his praiseworthy way of life his works with humility of wisdom.

James asks the question, then he gives a challenge in response to that question.

QUESTION: “Who is wise and learned among you?”

How would you be characterized like that? There are two wonderful verses in Proverbs 8 that gives me kind of the picture in my mind of how I can be a recipient of divine wisdom. Listen to these verses.

Proverbs 8:34-35

Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching at my doors day by day, waiting at the posts of my doorway.

That’s the invitation of wisdom itself being personified. Saying: “Who is this person?” Well, it’s one who listens to me. One who watches at my door day by day, waiting at the posts of my doorway. Then the response is in verse 35.

Proverbs 8:35

For the one who finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord.

Who are the people that would be characterized in this way. He says, if you're going to say you're that kind of person then show by your praiseworthy way of life and your works with humility and wisdom.

There's nothing more beautiful than people who can speak in humility and brokenness the truths of the Word of God and see God use them in other people's lives. You see, when it comes to wisdom it's not what's spewing out of your mouth that's the most important thing, it's what's coming from your life.

It's being able to see that, these qualities of a praiseworthy way of life and the humility that comes as a companion with wisdom. It's a gift from the Lord.

Proverbs 4:11

I will guide you in the way of wisdom and I will lead you in upright paths.

Isn't that a great couple of verses? A promise from the Lord. If you feel shallow, if you feel unprepared for life in its depth and the richness that can come through an intimate close relationship with the Savior, then he says you can come and God will grant it. "I will guide you in the way of wisdom and I will lead you in the upright paths."

How could you be characterized? We use the term maybe instead of wisdom, we use the term "good

judgment.” How is it that you organize your life? And you plan, under the guidance of the Spirit, to be effective and to maximize the time you have and to be fruitful in the process. You grow in good judgment. And that too comes by experience and dependence upon the Spirit of God.

The bottom line is doing God’s thing that demonstrates the wisdom in his life and his character.

He’s the one that provides three things:

Doing the right thing, when it is what God wants done, you’re doing the right thing.

Secondly, you do it at the right time. You’re not pressed, not stressed, and you’re not anxious or worried and upset. You’re doing it at the right time.

And thirdly, the biggest one of all, you’re doing it in the right way. You are daily patient with the Lord as He works and as He moves.

I kind of felt like when I read this passage in James this week and was preparing my heart for my message earlier in the week that I was reading the apostle Paul. You’ll find a similar contrast for the wisdom which is from below and the wisdom which is from above in this passage to the flesh and the Spirit in Galatians 5. Listen to the apostle as he pens these words to the Galatians.

Galatians 5:16-18

But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Then he goes into the works of the flesh.

Galatians 5:19-21

... sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things ...

Then he turns right around and he says the opposite of that is the fruit of the Spirit, beginning at verse 22.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. ...

That's the contrast. You want a life that is characterized by good judgment and filled with

wisdom, then ask the Spirit of God to control your mind to the point that He is producing in your mind the thoughts that will spill out into a life of wisdom and beauty, and freedom for the glory of God.

v.14 But if you are having bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, stop boasting and lying against the truth.

Evidently there were some problems. And there were some that had “bitter jealousy.” There were some who were characterized by “selfish ambition” or he would not have given a present negative command at the end of it. James says, “stop boasting.” In other words, this is something you’re doing now stop it.

It’s awfully hard isn’t it, sometimes to have our hearts laid bare before the Lord and to own up to what really goes on down inside? We can say nice things, can’t we?

All of those things can happen, but deep down inside only God knows your heart. He knows what you’re thinking. He knows what motivates you. And He knows how deeply desirous you want to be the center of attention. You want to be the one who’s appreciated. You want to be the one who’s always loved. And so the focus is all on you. And the Lord knows that. It’s going to be a painful process but I tell you, He doesn’t share that with anyone. So it’s quick to learn the Lord’s ways and the wisdom that He would be surprised.

“If you are having bitter jealousy.”

How did it get bitter? Well it got bitter by past hurts and interpersonal hurts and pains, of feeling neglect or something of some sort. Or words that were critically said off the spur of the moment that you haven’t been able to deal with.

Bitterness is probably the number one problem in the marital counseling room. Unprocessed things that fester to the root of bitterness which the writer to the book of Hebrews says: “can spring up and spoil many.”

May God speak to you about that today—that your own heart is pure. You long to display His wisdom because your heart is pure and you want what He wants. Then He says not only “bitter jealousy” but “selfish ambition in your heart.”

John the Baptist is right: “He, Christ, must continually be increasing and I must be decreasing.” I have to get out of the way! If each of us would make that kind of commitment, our marriages would be the richest marriage in the world of letting Jesus Christ shine through both of us for the glory of God.

So what does he say? “Stop boasting.” “Stop . . . lying against the truth.”

It’s hard to accept it. But stop it! Let’s get real and deal with the “bitter jealousy” and the “selfish

ambition” of always wanting to be the center of attention and learn that real joy comes when you put Jesus first, others second, and yourself third. This is real wisdom from the Lord.

This is actually what William Barclay says:

... in the end the person who lives this way is more eager to display itself than to display the truth. And it is interested more in the victory of its own opinions than in the victory of the truth.

Now notice what he says about it in verse 15.

v.15 This wisdom is not the wisdom coming down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

Boy, he never has a problem describing it, does it? If your heart is filled with “selfish ambition” and “bitter jealousy” then don’t lie about it. Let’s be truthful. Then recognize that the wisdom that flows from that kind of attended heart that has been exercised over the fact that these things are present, we’ll be released from them. And in humility and brokenness, seek God’s face afresh, asking Him to demonstrate the true wisdom. This kind of wisdom he says, “is not the wisdom coming down from above.” What does that tell you? There is a wisdom that comes “down from above” and God is ready to give it to you. When you ask for it, when you seek His face, He will respond in a way that God will get the glory. It is “earthly, unspiritual,

demonic.” You’ve got the world, the flesh, and the devil right there in those three things.

First of all, it’s “worldly.” Why? They rule God out of the whole equation so it’s worldly, it’s earthly, it’s produced by this world.

Secondly, it’s “unspiritual.” It’s produced by the old nature. The flesh that Paul describes in Galatians 5.

And thirdly, it’s “demonic.” It’s straight from the pit. If Satan can get us distracted and divided, he will destroy us.

And these kinds of things are there—if they’re not dealt with—will produce the result. You say, how can I recognize him? Genesis 3 is the greatest passage of all.

Genesis 3:4-5

And the serpent said unto the woman You shall not surely die for God doeth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as God knowing good and evil.

That’s the kind of wisdom He has to accomplish His purposes of getting us to act with His wisdom.

The Lord, I think, really hits this strong with Isaiah the prophet. And when we open up to it, we are going to be better people. We’re going to be more cooperative and

more sensitive to how God is working in our lives to make us like His Son.

That familiar passage, I love it so much I've memorized it.

Isaiah 55:8

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” sayeth the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

These wonderful statements are a description of God's frustration with us because of our inability to be humble enough to ask for what He can provide that you might negotiate life in joy and in victory.

Can you this morning say: “My way is not the best way”? Can you say this morning: “My way is not the right way”? Can you say: “My way is not God's way”? Then you're opening up your life to discover what that way is. And in humility and brokenness, God starts in a marvelous way to speak through you.

Notice verse 16. Reason.

v.16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is disorder and every evil thing.

That's the stuff that turns people off so quick among believers. When they can see the seething undercurrent of competitive spirit, of "jealousy," of an agenda, "selfish ambition," the Spirit of God is grieved and then He's quenched. And there's no freedom any more because these ugly things are actually seething under the surface.

1 Corinthians 14:33

God is not the author of confusion but of peace as in all churches of the saints.

"Jealousy and selfish ambition"—why are they there? Pride. Criticism. Lying. Anger. Malice. Discouragement. Bitterness. The ugly list goes on and on and on. Enough of that.

Here's the key verse.

v.17 But the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, kind, obedient, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free from insincerity.

There's eight things that describe a "wisdom . . . from above." Let's let the Spirit of God instruct us with these.

When you're operating with the wisdom from below, then you're saying in the test "God sure doesn't like you."

Then you're saying in the temptation "Boy, God made me this way."

Or on the Word "Who needs the Word?"

On love, "only those who love me."

On works, "I'll take my chances."

And on the tongue, "I believe in free speech."

That's the kind of wisdom that comes from below. Now, take those same things and be a person today who wants to grow in good judgment. You want to be characterized as a person who speaks. People respect it because it's a wisdom that comes from a very deep heart. One that is broken before the Lord. Now watch these things because they're just a perfect picture of the Lord Jesus Christ when you see each one of them.

If you want wisdom, God's willing to grant it. What's it going to look like? First of all it's "pure." Pure in motivation. Pure in a desire to please God and honor Him.

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Paul constantly exercised himself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. The

direct contrast of that would be “bitter jealousy” and “selfish ambition.” But here with wisdom it’s “pure.” There are not these hidden things that are seething underneath.

Second, it’s “peaceable.”

The work of righteousness will be peace, the effective of righteousness, quietness and assurance.

Listen to Isaiah 26:3.

Isaiah 26:3

I will keep him in perfect peace this mind is stayed on thee.

It’s peace inward. Do you know its right, there’s peace. There’s peace outward because people around you understand that that’s right. And there’s peace upward because God’s smiling, He’s happy. That’s the fruitage of a purity which comes from the wisdom and the peace that passes all understanding.

Proverbs 3:17 is such a great verse.

Proverbs 3:17

Her ways are of pleasantness [that’s wisdoms] and all her paths are peace.

Right relationships between man and man and between man and God is what he's talking about in Proverbs 3.

True "wisdom." The closer together they come the closer you get to God. The false "wisdom" drives people apart and produces strife. The true wisdom is characterized by "peace."

Third, it's "kind." I don't need to stop there long but just to say that word in the Greek text was also included in the fruitage of the Spirit in Galatians 5 that we read earlier. But it's also characterized in the words that characterize love in 1 Corinthians 13. It's a sweet reasonableness about you that needs to be there. It's a characteristic of patience and gentleness, not to try to force your own agenda or your own opinion but to demonstrate a patience that is truly kind.

"Obedience" is the fourth word. Being "doers of the word." How do you prove your obedience? You've learned to be comfortable under authority. You've learned how to submit to authority and you've learned how in the process not to be rigid as Barclay would say or austere. "It is willing to listen, willing to be persuaded, skilled in knowing when to wisely yield."

To him a heart of obedience.

Number five is "full of mercy." It's a person who is merciful.

Matthew 5:7

Happy are the kind and merciful for they shall be shown mercy.

“Mercy” as part of life.

Then number six is kind of like it gathers it all up and says “full of . . . good fruits.”

Ok, take the other eight manifestations of the Spirit in Galatians 5 and put them in there. All of those words are the kind of fruits that the Lord wants to see from us.

Number seven, “impartial.”

You’ve already run into that with me in chapter 2, haven’t you? It’s not partial love. It’s being a person who’s characterized as freed from all of that and you have fixed principals. You have firm conviction. You have singleness of mind. It’s the opposite of being double-minded.

And then number eight, what a way to wrap it up. “Free from insincerity.” There is not hypocrisy there. It’s the “wisdom from above.”

This word, freedom from hypocrisy is the word for guile. It’s putting on a show or playing a game.

Do you remember in John 1 when the Lord has His first encounter with Nathanael as he's picking the twelve? He says of Nathanael, as he's walking toward him, "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile!" And Nathanael just about goes up in smoke. "How did you know my name in the first place? How do you know I'm characterized as a person without guile?" In other words, I'm the real deal. I'm genuine. I'm honest. How did you know that? The Lord says, don't sweat it Nathanael. You're going to see greater things than this later on.

I want to ask you something. If Jesus walked in the door back there and He's starting down the front, and He sees you sitting over here. He says "Hey! There's so-and-so! He is a person in whom there is no guile! He's the real deal!" Would you like that? Man I would wish He could point to the guy behind the podium and say "Hey, there's a guy in whom there is no guile! What you see is what you get. There's not any phoniness or hypocrisy in his life.

That's the result of learning to live with "wisdom from above."

You are genuine. You're transparent. You're honest.

Our last verse.

v.18 And the fruit of righteousness is being sown in peace for those who are making peace.

You make peace by being those who are receiving daily the wisdom that comes from the Lord and the Lord alone.

Are you ready to join Solomon in delighting the heart of God? At the beginning of his administration he asked God for wisdom. He didn't ask for money. He didn't ask for longevity. None of these things. What impressed the Lord about Solomon was he asked for what God delighted to give, it's the wisdom that comes from above and it has His fingerprints all over it.

Would you join me today in the pursuit, not only of a controlled tongue, controlled by the Spirit, but a person who's living by the wisdom that comes from above and the world will know it.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Wisdom reflects your level of maturity.

LESSON #2: There are two kinds of wisdom: 1) "from above" and 2) "earthly, unspiritual, demonic."

LESSON #3: Is the wisdom from above characterizing your life?

LESSON #4: Of the eight characteristics of the wisdom from above, how many are now present in your life?

LESSON #5: Wisdom comes from maturity and experiences.

STUDY NUMBER SEVEN - GROW IN GOOD JUDGMENT —
JAMES 3:13-18

KEY VERSE 3:17

v.13 Who is wise and learned among you? Let him show by his praiseworthy way of life his works with humility of wisdom.
v.14 But if you are having bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, stop boasting and lying against the truth.
v.15 This wisdom is not the wisdom coming down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.
v.16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is disorder and every evil thing.
v.17 But the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, kind, obedient, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free from insincerity.
v.18 And the fruit of righteousness is being sown in peace for those who are making peace.

NOTES

QUESTIONS:

1. Read James 3:13-18 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. How can a wise person show his wisdom, according to verse 13?

3. What does James ask us to do in verse 14?

4. What is the result of envy and strife in verse 16?

5. Describe the “wisdom which is from above,” according to verse 17.

6. What does James mean by “free from insincerity” in verse 17?

7. By whom is “the fruit of righteousness . . . sown in peace,” according to verse 18?

8. What do you think “the fruit of righteousness” is in verse 18?

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Wisdom reflects your level of maturity.

LESSON #2: There are two kinds of wisdom: 1) “from above” and 2) “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”

LESSON #3: Is the wisdom from above characterizing your life?

LESSON #4: Of the eight characteristics of the wisdom from above, how many are now present in your life?

LESSON #5: Wisdom comes from maturity and experiences.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:
