

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part eleven

Teaching #1824 - Sunday, August 2nd, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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DIVINE WISDOM, DEMONIC WISDOM - WHICH SEED ARE YOU SOWING IN THE GARDEN OF YOUR LIFE?

James 3:13-18 - "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. [14] But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. [17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. [18] And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Not many people want to be thought of as **fools**. In our hearts, we all want to be people of **wisdom**. And we want to be perceived to be **walking** in wisdom. Surely, if God's Word is taken seriously, this is a good goal to set: **Proverbs 16:16** - "How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver."

To emphasize wisdom's priority even more, James, in this very letter, has already elevated wisdom to the top of our prayer lists: **James 1:5** - "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

There you have it. It all seems so simple. Just ask God and receive wisdom. There shouldn't be a foolish Christian on earth. But **how** is wisdom given? Does God give wisdom the way your doctor gives you a small-pox booster? Can you grab it at the some divine drive-through, on your way to a movie on Friday night? Is **that** how wisdom comes?

Or does God give wisdom to you and me the way He gives **patience** or **courage**? Perhaps He grows wisdom in my life like He grows **faith** - putting me in **situations** where I learn to wait and trust and resist doubt and indifference?

It is amazing to see the way James speaks of **wisdom** and **faith** in almost the same terms. He knows how quickly and easily the biggest words of the Christian faith can become empty terminology - quick churchy slogans, with little or no specific **meaning** or **freight** attached to them.

Wisdom and faith are alike in this sense. They're such big, general, common terms they can mean almost whatever you want them to mean, as long as you're sincere and pious when you speak of them. So, about our faith, James has to say, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"(2:14). Or, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead"(2:26).

To understand faith at all is to recognize it isn't something you **talk** about. It's something you **show**. In fact, faith apart from works is absolutely **dead**. And James will rush on now to say the very same thing about **wisdom**: "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct **let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom**"(3:13).

There are **works** of faith and there are **works** of wisdom. Neither one is manifested in **correct theology**, though theology is very important. Neither one is manifested in correct **jargon** and **talk**. Faith and wisdom leave **footprints**. They are a way of **following Jesus** in this world as Lord. This is where James is coming from as he opens up and expands the subject of living in the good wisdom of God.

1) **WHAT DO "WORKS OF WISDOM" LOOK LIKE?**

James 3:13 - "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."

"**Let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.**" The answer doesn't seem to respond to the question - "Who is **wise and understanding** among you?" You'd think this kind of wisdom and understanding would be shown by **great knowledge** or, perhaps, **sound advice** that we give to others. And, I suppose, there are times when each of these may be a **part** of wisdom. But, if James is correct, they are never the **main** part. You and I are to show wisdom with "**works in the meekness of wisdom.**"

Godly wisdom, says James, is always **meek** wisdom. But why - why this hermetic seal of meekness around godly wisdom? James has already given us a clue earlier in this letter:

James 1:19-21 - "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

To **be** wise I must **become** wise. To **walk** in wisdom I must **receive** wisdom. Wisdom comes from God. James makes this clear in **James 1:5** - "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

There's a **God-giveness** to wisdom. We can all accumulate **knowledge**. We can grow in **expertise** in business, or sports, or management. We can all become **good at what we do**, of course. We don't need God directly for any of that. But wisdom - which James will begin to define in just a minute - only comes from **God**. James says we are to "**ask God**" for wisdom and He will give it.

How does God give it? He gives it through **His Word**. He reveals His mind and His way in His Word. But there's a catch to **receiving** wisdom from His Word - **James 1:21** - "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

So here's where we're at. James says wisdom is revealed in my life through my works done in **meekness**. Wisdom comes from God and **only** to those who receive His Word with a humble, quiet, submissive spirit. So far so good. To **be wise I must become wise**. And to **become wise I must be meek before God's Word**.

But James isn't writing just about **meekness before God**. Our whole text today is about **relationships and works of wisdom in the body of Christ**. And James' whole point is simply that wisdom with **others** is the **overflow** of wisdom from **God**. And in just the same way that **meekness** is required in **receiving** wisdom from God, **meekness** is required in **expressing** wisdom with people.

Arrogant, proud, self-assertive people can never **receive** wisdom from God, and so can never **demonstrate** wisdom with others. They can probably **get their way**. They can **win arguments**. They can, perhaps, **push to the front of the line and lead the pack**. But they can never be **wise**. Only the **meek** can have godly wisdom.

2) JUST AS THERE ARE COUNTERFEITS TO GENUINE FAITH, THERE ARE COUNTERFEITS TO GENUINE WISDOM

James 3:14-16 - "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

When James contrasted **genuine faith** with **dead faith** he gave some clear examples of the latter. Dead faith was pictured in the response given to the needy person at the door - "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"(2:15-16).

Now James paints a picture of **phony wisdom** - "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic" (3:14-15).

How do we **know** there is no wisdom here? Because there is no **meekness** in these actions. So we know it didn't come from God. In fact, quite the opposite, James says this is straight from the lesson book of **demons**.

Then how can people - people like James describes in these verses - even **think** there is a shred of genuine wisdom in what they are doing? Because it frequently **works** for them. They can get their way. They can make their case. They can change what others do. There is a certain **power** in earthly wisdom. We've been learning it since we were children fighting in the sandbox and, apart from more and more time - **lots** of time - being re-programmed in God's Word, we come to see earthly wisdom as the **best way** to achieve our agendas.

That's why, right out of the gate, James says if there isn't *meekness* and *purity* in my works with others, I am not to **"boast and be false to the truth"** (3:14). **"Don, tell yourself the truth about what's really going on in your heart! Don't call it something it isn't!"**

Look at some of the others translations of that fourteenth verse:

"But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth." (NKJV)

"But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth." (NIV) Notice how we can *rename* **"selfish ambition"** into *wisdom* just so we can safely **"harbor"** it in our lives with a quiet conscience.

"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth." (NASB)

These words put a whole new spin on the words, **"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."** Don't lie against the truth. If your works manifest self-assertiveness and boasting and self-centered ambition - if you have to get your way - if you nurse grudges - if you don't manifest the kind of *meekness* with others that you will when you stand before Jesus - then **stop lying to yourself!** There is more to being a wise person than getting the results you want with others.

Here's what James knows. James knows my heart. He knows I mature more quickly in the area of *being honest with others* than I do in *being honest with myself*. That's why I have to be brutally honest in this process of *exposing false wisdom in my life*.

There is a *kind* of wisdom in pride and ambition and power. It seems to *work*. I can get my way without *sacrificing anything for the will of others*. And that's very appealing. It's also *habit forming*. That's why, if I want *God's wisdom* at work in my life, it always comes with the price-tag of telling myself the truth about my own selfish heart. Meekness is beautiful, but very expensive.

Where godly wisdom *isn't*, strife and contention *is*. That's what James is saying. And the reason we don't *heal* these rifts in the church isn't because we *can't*. It's because we don't *tell ourselves the truth*. Experts say there were over 17,000 church splits in North America last year. **17,000!** I know if you talk to the people involved they will all tell you there was no other way out, that they were contending for the faith, that God *led* them to do what they did.

But do any of us honestly believe every single one of these splits was based on principles of Christian holiness? Was every single one of them a purifying of the Bride of Christ? Was Jesus pleased with all 17,000 of them?

So what's happening here? People aren't *telling themselves the truth*. They are covering up *pride and selfish ambition* in their hearts. James would say they are lying against the truth. There's no *wisdom* in their actions because there's no *meekness* in their actions.

Here are some clues for spotting genuine wisdom at work. Genuine wisdom - godly wisdom from above - knows the difference between *personal preferences* and genuine *Biblical principles*. How quickly we can lie to our own hearts about the absolute nature of our own likes and dislikes.

Here's another clue. Genuine wisdom can be absolutely *poised firmly against sin* and still have compassion on the one *trapped in the sin*. Also, genuine wisdom knows enough to look to see if I am generating more *strife and contention* in the body of Christ than *healing and patience*.

O, how we need to pay close attention to James' diagnosis in these verses. Let's never become arrogant - pushing through all the promptings of the Holy Spirit to our own hearts. Let's not lie against the truth. What truth? The truth that genuine wisdom is manifested in works of *self refuting, Christ patterned meekness*.

3) HOW WISDOM WORKS IN THE INSIDE OF MY LIFE AND ON THE OUTSIDE

James 3:17-18 - "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.”

This may be the best roadmap for a wisdom-filled life in all the New Testament. James has been pondering the issue for a while, looking at it from all angles. This is the best he can do to sum up.

Do you want to know if you're a wise person? Do you want to know if you are full of wisdom, not the wisdom of this world, but the kind that comes down from above - from God Himself? Here's what to look for. Meek, godly wisdom does **two things at the same time in my life**. One of them is on the **inside** and one of them is on the **outside**.

On the **inside** godly wisdom makes me deathly serious about **personal holiness and purity**. James stressed this by saying the **“wisdom from above is first of all pure....”**(17).

On the **inside** genuine wisdom always errs on the **strict** side, never on the **easy or appealing** side. That's because wisdom's main concern is always **purity over popularity - holiness over convenience**. Are you a wise person? Then you will be constantly on the look out for the things that have the greatest **potential** to damage your life, even if others seem to engage in them with no immediate consequence.

On the **outside** godly wisdom is **gentle with others who either don't walk in purity or don't share my convictions**. That doesn't mean I change my own standards with whatever way the wind blows. But it **does** mean I am tender-hearted, even with those who have messed their lives up mocking the very standards I hold dear.

What a great pattern! Wisdom is **tough on personal impurity and generous with the faults of others**. That's the road of wisdom in a nutshell.

Then, in a closing reminder, James points out one specific step he knows we all need to take at different seasons in our lives. Do you want to make the rest of your days on earth good? Do you want to start **harvesting** God's blessing - multiplying it the way seed multiplies when you put it into the soil? James says it takes more than the prayer of Jabez. Find that one person, or perhaps two, with whom you know you need to make peace:

James 3:18 - “And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”