

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But 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. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

James 3:13-18

Genuine Wisdom

Many Christians seem to think that the mark of a good leader is his ability to communicate Biblical truth well. If a man has a good public presence, can keep the audience's attention and doesn't do anything too awful, he is a great leader. This horrendous idea doesn't just apply to those we see on TV or hear on the radio. Every year dozens of independent, Bible believing churches call a man to be their pastor based only on having asked a few cursory questions, reading a brief doctrinal statement and hearing him preach a couple of times. If he sounds good and no one gets any uneasy feelings when they are talking to the guy, then he'll probably make a good pastor. If he's boring and hard to listen to, he'll be passed over. This is folly, and it is the kind of folly James addresses in the third chapter. Genuine wisdom and godliness are not found in our speech. Just like saving faith is not found in a mere profession, so Christian maturity and wisdom are not found in the profession of it. Because someone is willing or able to stand up and teach about the Bible does not make him a mature Christian. A Godly Christian is one who has genuine wisdom.

Wisdom is the understanding that rightly applies truth to life. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge. Certainly there are many knowledgeable people who are simply well educated fools. All wisdom is not the same. There is a human wisdom and there is a Divine wisdom. Solomon clearly illustrates this in his books, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Proverbs is a beautiful collection of Godly wisdom. Ecclesiastes is a brilliant expose of the emptiness of human wisdom. In this section James exhorts the believers regarding genuine wisdom. Thus, the kind of wisdom that should be present in a mature believer is that wisdom which begins with the fear of God and rightly applies Biblical truth to daily living.

The question James asks is, who is wise and expert within the church? Far too many would answer that based on the knowledge that a person has. The wise and expert in religion would be seen as those who can answer the hard questions and are willing to stand in front of a group and teach. This is not at all the case. Wisdom and expertise are not manifest by the wise sounding words of an appealing teacher. Genuine wisdom is shown by good behavior and gentleness. I venture to say that almost everyone in this room has heard of those who have professed to be Godly men, yet they have been found to be engaged in scandalous, wicked behavior. I imagine many of you have met those who, while able teachers and upholders of right doctrine, are also mean, churlish, unkind and divisive. Despite their profession and their appearance of wisdom, they are not truly wise men. Real wisdom is that which behaves rightly and gently.

The word, conversation, in the King James is an old English word that means behavior or

lifestyle. Genuine wisdom behaves in a Godly fashion. It behaves in a way that is in full accord with the word of God. Don't be deceived on this point. Genuine wisdom is not that behavior which orders itself according to what you think the Word says. Genuine wisdom behaves itself according to the instructions received by a careful and diligent study of the Word. Wisdom is such a rare commodity because so few are willing to invest themselves in diligent study of the Word so that they will be able to order their lives by the Word. Far too many Christians have replaced Biblical truth with common sense, worldly wisdom, psychological insights, superstition, sentiment, tradition or folk religion.

Genuine wisdom behaves according to the Word. Genuine wisdom is meek. That is, it acts with gentleness in all things. Possibly the best definition I have heard for meekness is power under control. In fact, James has already given a couple of great illustrations that show meekness in action. A bridled and well trained horse is a great example of meekness. The power of that powerful creature is directed and controlled for profitable purposes. So a meek man is one who is under control. It is not that he gives way before every suggestion or opinion that comes before him. It is not that he yields to all and sundry who demand it of him. Meekness is not a milquetoast that has no gumption or fortitude. Meekness is power properly controlled. A wise man does not flaunt his wisdom. A wise man does not use his wisdom to direct affairs for his own desires. A wise man does not brow beat others with his great wisdom. Such a man has become a fool. A wise man applies wisdom to life for the edification and spiritual benefit of others, as directed by God's Word. A man that is not gentle and of good behavior is ultimately not a wise man.

As with all good things, wisdom is often counterfeited. A false wisdom can be recognized by its fruits. To understand this false wisdom, its heart must first be understood. As I mentioned last week, the real problem that James is addressing is a heart problem. There was a wisdom at work in these believers, a wisdom that was quick to speak and slow to listen, that heard the Word but did not do the Word, that played favorites with the wealthy and that made professions with no substance to back them up. This human wisdom flowed out of hearts of jealousy and self promotion. Counterfeit wisdom is the application of man made philosophies because of sinful, selfish motives. Counterfeit wisdom comes out of an evil, self seeking heart.

James then tells us the source, or the fountain of this wisdom. We have three enemies all working together against righteousness and Godliness. This is not to deny the reality that what you do comes out of your heart and is who you really are. Rather, this is to help you understand the forces at work to oppose the reign of the Word of God in your heart. These three forces are the world, the flesh and the devil. This counterfeit wisdom is not heavenly; it is earthly. This counterfeit wisdom is not spiritual; it is fleshly. This counterfeit wisdom is not Divine; it is demonic. The world is the natural system of this age. It is the socio-political, moral perspective that dominates.

The world is most easily understood as the general culture around us. Now, not everything about our culture is as evil as it could be. Parts of our culture are good and praiseworthy things. However, this world, the popular culture, is the outworking of the beliefs and philosophies of groups of Satan dominated unbelievers. No matter how you slice it, those who do not know God and who have no use for Him are those who produce the vast majority of popular culture. These

are they who are still under the domination of Satan, blinded and dead in their trespasses and sins. The majority of what is popular in the world today comes from those who are under Satan's control.

The flesh, the natural man, is who we are before salvation. It is the state of our person without Christ, without grace, without transformation and with no ability to understand the things of God or to do that which pleases God. The flesh is the blind man, dead in trespasses and sin. After salvation, we are made a new man, alive in Christ and able to discern spiritual things because of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. However, we are like Dr. Frankenstein. We have a fascination with that corpse of the old man. We continually carry it around with us and, we often bring it to life again. The flesh is the embodiment of our sin, guilt and destruction and is the opposite of that which the Spirit has done in us.

The devil is our adversary, the initiator of rebellion against God, the first to fall from grace and the prime mover in leading men to first turn to sin. When the devil, Satan, fell, a host of other angels rebelled with him. Consequently, there is a vast army of mighty spiritual beings who are living in constant opposition to God and who are seeking the destruction of men. Satan and his hordes are actively seeking the worst for every person on the planet and for mankind as a whole.

These three enemies, Satan, the flesh, and the world, team up together to oppose the work of God in our lives. The three work in concert together, sometimes tag teaming and attacking one at a time, sometimes ganging up to attack all together. Counterfeit wisdom is not from God, it is the wisdom of these three enemies. It is the wisdom that comes from those who do not know God, do not love God and are at enmity with God. Counterfeit wisdom comes from a wrong heart and is the wisdom of those who reject God.

At this point, it is not always easy to tell if the wisdom comes from a right heart or a wrong heart. The one standing up front teaching a powerful section of Scripture appears to be operating in Godly wisdom. To help us discern, James shows the results of counterfeit wisdom. Counterfeit wisdom will always produce certain things. Counterfeit wisdom, because it is sourced in a jealous, self promoting heart, will always produce disorder and sin. Verse 16 ties together with verse 14. The jealous, self promoting heart will always create disorder and sin. What is in the heart that relies on counterfeit wisdom? Bitter envying. One lexicon offered the word "virulent" to explain bitter. Virulent. That conjures up images of masses of people wearing little white paper masks, hospitals overflowing, news media issuing warnings and showing maps covered with little red dots showing the affected areas. Something virulent is both destructive and infectious. This is a poison, a venom that will sicken all it touches. This is why the apostle warns in Hebrews to rip out every root of bitterness. Many will be corrupted by a single root of bitterness.

The heart that relies on counterfeit wisdom is a heart that has a particularly dangerous form of jealousy. This bitter envying is a zeal, a passion for ones own self promotion and one's own good. It is that which fights for its own gain, which sees its rights and position and recognition as something to be vigorously sought after and fought for. False wisdom comes from a heart with bitter envying and virulent passion for one's own gain.

False wisdom comes from a heart of strife. In Philippians 2:3 Paul warns that nothing be done through strife. We know all about strife. As Americans, we have crafted a form of government that specializes in strife. Every two years we are inundated with strife. Strife is electioneering and politicking for a position of influence, prominence or power. It is working to draw a group of supporters to oneself to further one's agenda. Now, for a political system we could certainly do a whole lot worse. Instead of enduring politicians launching lies and slander at one another, we could be enduring factions launching bullets and rockets at one another. Believers, this may be fine for peaceful transfers of power within a nation, but it has no place in the church or the Christian life. We are not to do anything through strife or vainglory, but with humility we are to consider others as more valuable than ourselves.

The heart that is passionately seeking its own gain and trying to draw a group of supporters to its own cause is a heart that will follow the foolishness of counterfeit wisdom. The result of this counterfeit wisdom will always be disorder, causing confusion, chaos and uncertainty within the church. Be warned, be wary; don't follow the folly of the wisdom that seems right to the world and to your own flesh. It will result in confusion and all manner of sin. If I had time this morning, I could overwhelm you with a long listing of the sins that have run rampant in churches in which there was confusion and disorder because of counterfeit wisdom.

The result of false wisdom is that true wisdom is pushed to the side and ignored. Men and women begin to operate in selfishness and begin to follow their own hearts and minds instead of God's Word. Consequently, the church becomes infested with all manner of different sin, and the church is rendered ineffective or even worse unable to confront and correct sin. This is a horrible tragedy! False wisdom results in disorder and disobedience.

What is genuine wisdom? James gives 8 points to help you identify true wisdom. First genuine wisdom is pure. This word pure is not the most common one used in the New Testament. This word pure is used eight times and refers to that which is clear, chaste and sacred. It comes from the word we translate holy and is used here to describe Godly wisdom. James says this wisdom is from above. Genuine wisdom then is that which is pure, clean and holy before God. It is wisdom from God that is in line with the character and perfections of God. Genuine wisdom is holy, pure wisdom. Out of that sacred wisdom comes the rest of these things.

Pure, genuine wisdom is peaceable. It is that which seeks peace. Rather than spoiling for a fight, pure wisdom seeks peace. It does not turn aside from that which is wise, in to avoid conflict, but it is a seeker of peace. Instead of causing chaos, contention and division like pseudo-wisdom, pure wisdom results in peace; it makes peace and leads men to live in peace with one another.

Pure wisdom is also meek. As we have already looked at, this wisdom is controlled. It is not out of control or unbridled. Pure wisdom is properly directed for Godly ends. Pure wisdom is easy to be entreated that is, it is quick to listen. Pure wisdom doesn't assume it has all the answers, and it doesn't offer the answers without first hearing the matter. Pure wisdom is a skilled listener, ready to receive additional wisdom. Pure wisdom is merciful. It is filled with mercy. Wisdom is not harsh and quick to condemn. Wisdom is patient, ready to overlook and endure for others benefit. Pure wisdom is fruitful, full of good fruits. Pure wisdom doesn't produce

chaos and sin; pure wisdom produces fruit to the glory of God. It is not partial, playing favorites, nor does it make superficial judgments. Pure wisdom is sincere and without hypocrisy. Pure wisdom does not put on a front to impress others. Pure wisdom does not act as if it is righteous while it secretly harbors sin. Pure wisdom does not strive for men's applause, and it does not live by men's acclaim. Pure wisdom has the right motives and the right heart.

Does any of that sound at all familiar to you? So much of what James proclaims as the marks of pure wisdom are corrections to the errors that were plaguing this church. From foolish words, to judgmentalism, to favoritism, to conflict in the church, to false professions of salvation, James is offering the solution to the sins that plagued this church. The correction to all these problems is a heart that fears God, and does not seek self promotion. The solution is a heart filled with wisdom instead of bitter envying and strife.

The last thing we see here is the result of pure wisdom. Pure wisdom produces peaceful righteousness. Pure wisdom peacefully sows a seed. Pure wisdom is not quick to fight; it is peaceful and the seed it sows is sown in peace. When that seed grows and flourishes, it bears fruit. The fruit is righteousness. Wisdom produces a great flourishing tree, whose branches bear righteousness and under whose boughs there is peace. Do you want peace and righteousness to reign in your life and in this church? Then get wisdom.

I will close with three verses. The first two are from the pen of King Solomon. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7) "How much better it is to get wisdom than gold!" (Proverbs 16:16) Nothing is more valuable and worthwhile than wisdom. It is the chief thing, so do all you can to get wisdom. How do you get wisdom? I will give the first step for you to consider this morning. That comes from James in the first chapter of this book. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given to him." Cry out to God to give you wisdom.