

TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

Bible Background – JAMES 3:13-18; 5:7-12

Printed Text – JAMES 3:13-18; 5:7-12

3 ¹³ If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.

¹⁴ But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.

¹⁵ For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

¹⁶ For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.

¹⁸ And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

5 ⁷ Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in

the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen.

⁸ You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

⁹ Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

¹¹ We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

¹² But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.

-----New Living Translation

Lesson Introduction

In James 3:1-12, James admonished those who would be wise teachers of scripture to control their tongues and described anyone who could exercise that control as “perfect.” He gave several analogies of the power of the tongue and the damage that an uncontrolled tongue brings to people's lives. Wisdom says that a heart that is truly committed to following God cannot spew out words that both curse man and praise God. He challenged those who follow Christ to conduct themselves in all ways that demonstrate the righteousness of God.

Background: The thesis of the book of James, Jesus' half-brother, can be found in James 2:17: that faith alone without works is dead. This is not contradictory to Paul's

treatment of faith or the claim central to the Reformation that justification is by faith alone. Like John Calvin, the Reformation theologian, said, “We dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them.” Instead, we know that true faith is always accompanied by good works, and the book of James reminds us of what those good works look like. This does not mean that as Christians, we work to earn God’s approval, as such work will never yield the result we want, which is perfection. Instead, faith links us to Christ, who justifies us and sanctifies us. As we look to the wisdom that James teaches us, let us remember the right relationship between faith and works: that in the life of the Christian, they are distinct but inseparable. The book itself is referred to by some as the New Testament book of Proverbs. Such a characterization is not unfounded. Here, proper patterns of Christian behavior are set with an emphasis on the commitment that the Christian is to have to the poor, the widow and the orphan, those whom the Lord has expressed a special care for.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2019-2020, p. 603

Two Types of Wisdom

James 3:13-18: In verse 13, James continues his teachings of Godly works as demonstration of Godly Wisdom and asks, who seeks to be known as a wise and enthusiastic teacher? It takes meekness and humility for that.

In verses 14-16, James describes the type of wisdom that is to be rejected. This negative path is defined as having bitter envy and strife in one’s heart. The phrase “bitter envy” is translated from the Greek *pikros zelos*. It is no coincidence that *zelos* looks a lot like the English word “zeal” for it is translated as “zeal” and not “envy” in other places in the New Testament. And zeal is not necessarily a bad thing. But when modified by the word *pikros*, which means harsh or bitter, it signifies that strong, self-seeking push to seek high position and to overtake those for whom one may feel acute jealousy. This attitude leads to strife (Gr. *eritheia*) which is selfish ambition where one will say or do practically anything to accomplish selfish ends. Don’t boast of this or feel superior over others that you think you have outdone by using such tactics. This type of attitude denotes earthly wisdom and is not of God, poorly represents Christ and quite frankly, is demonic!

This type of strife is found in many organizations and in some churches. Folk who practice envious and self-seeking behavior cause rivalry and detrimental division all because of their desire for personal gain. We must make an intentional decision to avoid moving in this path which is the devil’s footpath. We must stay connected to Jesus who is our source of help to walk in Godly wisdom.

Godly wisdom has the opposite results of earthly wisdom. It is pure, without ulterior motives and self-seeking ambitions. It promotes peace that comes from the assurance that all is well with God. It is full of gentleness, mercy, blessings, and is equitable and sincere. It cultivates the peace of God. The actions and relationships of a Christian should permeate with love and peace.

◆ *When have envy and covetousness blinded you to your love of neighbor?*

Endure!

James 5:7-12: Here, James exhorts the faithful brethren to be patient until the Second Coming of Christ. In verses 1-6 James outlines the many injustices and the suffering that the poor and powerless endure at the hands of the rich and ruthless. He answers the implied question of the saints, ‘How long must we endure the wickedness and how long will they continue to prosper at our expense?’ During today’s turbulent times, many are now asking the same question, ‘When, Lord, how long?’ The Second Advent is closer now than then and it is later than we think. Satan’s reign of terror may last long, but not forever. We can be assured that Jesus will return at the appointed time and set everything right.

James encourages the saints by reminding them of how the farmer waits patiently for the harvest after the proper rain has occurred and the fruit is ripe. We must be patient and steadfast for the Master will indeed come. He also reminds them to not turn on one another with conflict and complaint, noting that others may have even greater complaints against them. Don’t get tripped up because “the Judge is just around the corner” (MSG).

He reminded them of the prophets of old who spoke God’s word to the people and endured much suffering for the Lord’s sake. They were seldom respected and often were at odds with the rich and powerful of their time. They were mistreated and some were even executed, but through the end, they persevered and displayed steadfast courage in the face of tremendous odds. And, finally he presented the example of Job who was patient, uncomplaining and never renounced his faith and thus, was ultimately rewarded by God’s mercy and compassion. God can always be depended upon.

And since we know that God cares, down to the last detail, we must show our patience and humility in the words that we speak. James exhorts the saints to not be so impertinent as to throw out frivolous oaths in God’s name just to verify or emphasize one’s truthfulness. We should consistently conduct ourselves in such a way that a simple ‘yes’ means exactly that, and a simple ‘no’ means “no”. (Matt. 5:34-37).

◆ *Think of a time when the Lord alleviated your suffering, whether through a friend or other means.*

Conclusion

The book of James encourages us to apply Godly Wisdom in all that we do daily. We are called to have purity of speech, yield good fruit, flow with mercy, avoid bitterness and strife, and to seek the sanctification that only Holy Spirit can offer.

Sources:

Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation, Carol Stream, Illinois.

Nickelson, R. L. (Ed.). (2019). Many Faces of Wisdom. *Standard Lesson Commentary*, 67 (Summer Quarter), 441-448. Standard Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO.

Ogbonnaya, A. O. (Ed.). (2019). Wisdom. *Precepts for Living*, 22(Summer Quarter), 600–608. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2019-2020.

August 30, 2020 – Bible Study Guide 13

Lesson for Next Week – September 6, 2020 – Study Guide 1

ISSUES OF LOVE

Bible Background ♦ GENESIS 37

Printed Text ♦ GENESIS 37:2-11, 23-24, 28

Devotional Reading ♦ PSALM 105:1-6, 16-22