

3. 9-19-21

Sermon: Watch Your Attitude

Scripture: James 3: 13- 4: 3, 7-8a CTW Ps 1

Hymns: 734, 486, 552

Theme: Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. In order to do that we all have to keep check on our attitudes! What safeguards do we need to put in place in order to achieve that?

We like to think of ourselves as wise, and we are quick to justify our role in conflicts. But James is just the kind of counselor we need – one who will not allow us to deceive ourselves and who will bring clarity to the issues.

I. For Christians who want to learn true spirituality, James cuts to the chase.

I enjoy James because he is very upfront with his translation of the duty of man to God. This passage deals with one of the fundamental questions of life anyone must face:

A. How can I hope to have God-honoring behavior when it flows from my evil inward character? How can my heart be changed from its selfishness? Is there any hope for me?

Now James addresses this hope saying that there is a spirituality available from God. This is to be distinguished from Paul's focus in **Romans 3**, where he writes about the impossibility of attaining a righteous standing before God, left to our meager human abilities. "We have all sinned and fallen short..."

James is writing about the impossibility of living the Christian life (for example, controlling our tongues) by our own resources. He points out plainly that we are to gain our wisdom from God, asking for God's provision, living in friendship with God, drawing near to God, and being lifted up by God.

It is all from God; it is all attained by reliance on God. It is a spirituality that comes because God gives us more grace, which we can't live a Christian life without...we cannot go it on our own!

That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (4:6). Though his focus is different than Paul's emphasis in **Romans 3**, James' message is just as much of a statement of God's grace.

The first question **Paul** wants his readers to consider is **"Who among you is wise and understanding?"**

James invites people who are **supposedly** wise and understanding to step forward and identify themselves. He is primarily speaking to those who think they are wise enough to teach others. **Hahaha, James is talking to me!**

B. James wants to inform them (and us) of what true wisdom means. What James discloses here is more of a description than a definition of wisdom. Still, he describes it as humble submissiveness to God, resulting in a life of goodness, purity, and peace with other people.

II. James will explain this with three aspects of wisdom:

1. First, the Nature of Wisdom: Here, the question, "Who among you is wise and understanding?" must be faced. Some do not concern themselves with true wisdom but only want the **status of being thought wise**. James' question will expose them for what they are. However, the question is an invitation to those who aspire to be wise, and his answer will **divulge the way to achieve their aspirations.**

2. Then We Look at James' answer about the requirement of true wisdom: In line with his previous instructions, James again requires actions that support words. Who claims to be wise? Let him show it by living a life of goodness.

Today the phrase "the good life" has come to mean a prosperous, pleasurable life. **That is not what James means**, because he is talking about another matter: **moral goodness – "good conduct" or "good behavior."**

For James, **Genuine wisdom**, like faith, is a practical matter; it shows itself in how one lives. James says, "Let him show by good behavior his deeds by the humility of wisdom." Wisdom, then, is not something I will merely possess in my head; if I am wise at all, it is something I will demonstrate by my conduct.

3. Finally, the personality of wisdom should be taken to heart; the wise deeds will be done in humility. Humility is the character trait underlying the Christian behavior described in the entire letter; this is the trait to cultivate if we would take James' teaching to heart.

Therefore, James' idea of humility – "meekness" and "gentleness" -- is worth exploring. Today in the world, these traits are misinterpreted as a touch of weakness, gentleness, and passivity, **which is not valid in James's requirement of active obedience.**

The Christian virtue of humility is modeled after the ministry of Christ, who served others, sacrificed himself, and placed Himself wholly at the Father's disposal in perfect trust and obedience.

This seems to be James' own concept of obedience. Humility is first the **teachability** by which **we accept "humbly" the Word of God in verse 1:21.** But James emphasizes that humbly taking God's Word entails **doing His Word.**

Humility is, according to James, a submissive readiness to do what the Word says of deeds done in humility.

Third, James shows in our current passage that in humility toward God, we will become humble (and gentle) and live at peace with one another.

The opposite of humility is an unwillingness to learn and a refusal to yield. For James, humility surrenders oneself in **ready teachability and responsiveness to God's Word**, resulting in a good and unselfish life of peace with other people.

III. The problem James is addressing, then, is not that teachers are spreading false doctrine.]

A. James addresses the issue of arrogance, which can be present even when correct doctrine is being taught.

I can be correct in my doctrine down to the last detail, and I can be consistent in my orthodoxy; I can have the reputation of having a thorough grasp of theology and be regarded as a protector of the faith, but my teaching may still be earthly, unspiritual, of the devil, resulting in disorder and every evil practice by stirring up suspicion, slander, distrust, and contention within the Christian community.

Verse 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

Verse 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

B. The Source of Wisdom. The wisdom James wants his readers to seek is said to come from heaven. Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. It is used in **John 3** to describe being born "again" or born "anew." The sense is indicated by the verb "come down" and by the contrast to be adjective in 1:17, where every good and perfect gift was said to come from above and then explicitly from the Father. Wisdom is now declared one of those special gifts from above and then explicitly from the Father.

C. The divine origin makes the gift more important than mere location. In New Testament usage, earthly wisdom is inferior to the heavenly origin.

James makes this more specific: bitter envy and selfish ambition are also unspiritual, denoting a natural source devoid of God's supernatural Spirit.

Finally, to leave no doubt about envy's evil source (jealousy) and ambition, James says they are demonic: of the devil.

Here, James intends to point us to a pearl of wisdom from heaven, in contrast to wisdom from hell, a knowledge far superior to any wisdom we find in ourselves naturally and undoubtedly superior to anything that comes from demons.

D. Since true wisdom comes from outside ourselves and from God Himself, we must examine where our reliance is placed. It makes sense of what James has already prescribed for a life of faith. It requires from us an active prayer life – to ask for wisdom as 1:5 commends. It requires of us a conscience dependence on God – in the humility prescribed in 3:13. True wisdom can only be had by people who live in active reliance on God.

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

IV. The Expression of Wisdom.” What will genuine wisdom look like in a person’s life? James describes both the false wisdom and the true, and in each case, he lists identifying attitudes and actions.

A. Regarding false wisdom, we can understand why jealousy (envy) and selfish ambition are the characteristic attitudes. They are the opposite of the humility entailed in admitting one’s need and relying on God for the wisdom one lacks.

The adjective “**selfish**” describes a harsh stance of demanding to be recognized as wise instead of being willing to learn. The noun “**jealousy**” reveals the motivation as envy. The second noun, “**selfish ambition,**” expresses the sinful desire for personal glory – wanting a teacher’s status so that others will have to learn from me.

It is valuable to remember that James has been addressing people who gather in Christian assemblies and function as teachers. His words shine a spotlight on the craving for self-glorification in many who work in Christian ministry.

B. The resulting actions of **false religion** are also identified: disorder and every evil thing. James always sees the connection between inward stance and outward practice.

Genuine faith will manifest itself in deeds, and the same principle holds true in the contrasting demonic realm. The devil’s false wisdom will manifest itself in practices of disorder and every evil thing.

17But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

In 3:17, James deliberately points out what wisdom from above looks like. It is first of all pure and only then the other qualities. His term pure speaks of holiness and provides the immediate contrast to every evil practice. The reason for valuing wisdom is that it will lead people to do what is morally right.

Today, it is more urgent than ever before that Christians learn James' passion for purity. **Will we do what is right simply because it is the right thing to do?**

Verse 18: And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James summarizes in 3:18 that the "fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." This connects peacemaking and righteousness (cf. Jesus in Mat. 5:9,10) and suddenly reveals why the disorder in 3:16 is so objectionable to James.

The opposite is not a morally neutral order but a morally sufficient peace. James wants peace for the church because peace is the context in which righteousness can flourish.

This is the opposite side of what James said in 1:20, that human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Again, **James writes out of a passion for righteousness.**

V. CONCLUSION: How to Know and Love Jesus!

A. At the heart of the Christian faith is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to Really know and Really love Christ.

What is this relationship like? The Bible describes it using human language and human analogies. It is a relationship of the closest possible intimacy. It is like that of a parent and child (Luke 1; Romans 8).

It is good for us therefore to always be evaluating our relationship with God, but we must always endeavor to use the

standards set in scripture, rather than the lesser standards we use here in the world.

Amen? Let us pray...