

“Blessed are the Peacemakers”

James 3:13-18

April 3rd, 2022

Richard was a wise man who'd retired and bought a modest home near a junior high school. He spent the first few weeks of his retirement in peace and quiet.

Then a new school year began. Three junior high boys, full of after-school enthusiasm, came down his street, beating merrily on every trash can they passed by. The crashing percussion continued day after day until Richard decided it was time to take some action.

The next afternoon, he walked out to meet the boys as they banged their way down the street. Stopping them, he said, 'You kids are a lot of fun. I like to see you express your exuberance like that. In fact, I used to do the same thing when I was your age. Would you do me a favor? I'll give you each a dollar if you'll promise to come around every day and do your thing.'

The kids thought that was a great idea and continued to do a bang-up job on the trashcans. After a few days, the old-timer greeted the kids again, but this time he had a sad smile on his face. 'This recession is really putting a big dent in my income,' he told them. 'From now on, I'll only be able to pay you 50 cents to beat on the cans.'

The boys were displeased, but they accepted his offer and they continued their afternoon ruckus. A few days later, Richard approached them again as they drummed their way down the street. 'Look,' he said, 'I haven't received my Social Security check, so I'm not able to give you more than 25 cents. Will that be okay?'

'Only a lousy quarter?' the drum leader exclaimed. 'If you think we're going to waste our time, beating these cans around for a quarter, you're nuts! No way. We quit!'

Richard, the clever old man, enjoyed peace and tranquillity for the rest of his days.

Wisdom and knowledge though connected, are not the same thing. *How do you differentiate the concepts of wisdom and knowledge?*

- Wisdom is the right application of knowledge;
- Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens;
- Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life.

The word “wisdom” first appears in sacred Scripture in **Exodus 28:3**, where God reveals He has gifted certain people with certain talents: “So you shall speak to all *who are* gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron’s garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest.”

Perhaps the most popular verse of Scripture containing the word “wisdom” is this: “The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.” *Do you know where to find that verse in the Bible?* **Proverbs 9:10.**

Clearly today's passage - **James 3:13-18** - is about wisdom. James mentions the word "wisdom" 3 times in these 6 verses. But this is not the first time the word "wisdom" appears in the book of James. James first brought wisdom into the conversation in the fifth verse of the first chapter of his letter, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

Before we look into God's Word, let's pray for Him to illumine our hearts and minds:
"O Lord, make your Word a swift Word, passing from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip; that, as the rain does not return empty, so neither may Your Word, but accomplish that for which it is given. Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen."

James 3:13-18:

"**13** Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. **15** This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. **16** For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there. **17** But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. **18** Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

We must remember what James covered in the previous verses of this 3rd chapter. James has been speaking of the tongue, and its uncanny ability to be both a force for great good and great evil. The "wise and understanding" person James mentions in verse 13 is the one who holds his tongue. Holding one's tongue is described here as "good conduct that is done in the meekness of wisdom." Meekness in the Bible is not the same thing as weakness, fearfulness, or timidity. Rather, meekness is gentleness and humility. Someone has defined it as "power under control." The meek Christian does not selfishly assert him/herself upon or over others.

James' point in today's passage is that there are two ways of life, two kinds of wisdom. One wisdom is from the earth, even the devil; the other wisdom is from heaven. Since James begins by describing earthly wisdom, so will we. Look again with me at verses 14-16: "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. **15** This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. **16** For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.

We note first of all that two descriptors of earthly (demonic) wisdom - **envy** and **self-seeking** - they're both mentioned in verse 14, and again in verse 16. Let's look at them more closely.

"Envy is the enemy of Christian living. It is the opposite of grace, for it wants to grasp rather than to give. Envy is the opposite of caring for the needy. Envy sees only its

needs and desires. Envy thinks other people should care for themselves. Left to ourselves, we all live for ourselves, and envy what others have.” (Dorani, 119) The Bible makes no provision for envy as being something to be desired.

The writer of **Proverb 14:30** notes, “A sound heart *is* life to the body, but envy *is* rottenness to the bones.” Envy is a work of the flesh; it is not a fruit of the Spirit. “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (**Galatians 5:26**). Believers in Christ are to rise above mere carnality and live as godly men. “For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? (**1 Corinthians 3:3**)

The story is told of two men who lived in a certain city. One was envious and the other covetous. The ruler of the city sent for them and said he wanted to grant them one wish each - with this proviso, that the one who chose first would get exactly what he asked for, while the other man would get exactly twice what the first had asked for himself. The envious man was ordered to choose first, but immediately found himself in a quandary. He wanted to choose something great for himself, but realized that if he did so the other would get twice as much. He thought for awhile, and then asked that one of his eyes be put out. In the church, this type of person could honestly pray, “Lord, I would sooner your work was not done at all than done by someone better than I can do it.”

Over the years, you’ve heard me say that the opposite of biblical love is not hatred; rather **the opposite of biblical love is self**. Living a life centered upon self is not the recipe for holiness; instead, it is a true mark of demonic wisdom. Christians are to be other-oriented, not oriented upon or from a focus upon self.

James says you may be intelligent, but if you are envious of others’ gifts and are seeking your own selfish ends, you are not wise. Further, if you are creating discord among the people of God through envy and selfish ambition, applying your intelligence to being critical of others, you are being inspired by the devil.

James uses other descriptors to describe earthly wisdom.

- Chief among the remaining descriptors is **boasting**. The professing believer in Jesus has no need to make sure everyone else knows the gifts they gave to the church or some other ministry came from them. Drawing attention to self poisons motives for giving in the first place.

A sightseeing bus was making the rounds through Washington, D. C., and the driver was pointing out spots of interest. As they passed the Pentagon, he mentioned that it cost taxpayers millions of dollars and it took a year and a half to build. A little old woman piped up: "In Peoria, we could have built the same building for less, and it would have been completed even sooner than that!"

The next sight on the tour was the Justice Department building. Once again the bus driver said that it cost many millions to build and took almost two years to complete. The woman repeated: "In Peoria we would have done it for less money, and it would have been finished much sooner."

The tour finally came to the Washington Monument, and the driver passed by without saying a word. The old woman shouted to the driver, "What's that back there?" The driver looked out the window and then said, "Search me, lady. It wasn't there yesterday."

Lying (distorting the truth) and creating confusion are additional descriptors for earthly wisdom in this passage. **But James also gives descriptors of godly wisdom in this passage.** Look again with me at verse 17 - "...the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

- **"Pure"** is the first James uses. This means "morally pure." One commentator notes this means to be so absent of self that one can see God.
- **"Peaceable"** is listed next. "The peace of the church is not more important than the purity of the church. If the church is pure and devoted to God, then there will be peace." (Wiersbe, 364)
- **"Gentle"** or considerate. This describes the kind of person who though wronged and possessing the "right" not to bend nevertheless forgoes his rights.
- **"Willing to yield"** means a person is submissive and open to reason. He/she is fair minded, forbearing, and slow to tangle. Passive-aggressiveness is the manner this type of conflict appears as. It's expressing negative feelings indirectly. Something wrong is afoot if the cellphone grapevine is activated against someone else, or social media posts speak of someone without identifying who is actually being maligned.
- **"Full of mercy and good fruits"** means to be controlled by mercy. God in his grace gives us what we do not deserve, and in His mercy He does not give us what we do deserve.
- Verse 17 concludes, **"without impartiality and without hypocrisy."** When earthly wisdom is at work, there may be insincerity and pretense. When heavenly wisdom is at work, there is openness and honesty. No clandestine meetings, nobody left out of gatherings, and nobody attempting to pollute the purity and

peace of the church - all that means what verse 18 teaches, "...the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Jesus refers to His followers as "peacemakers" in **Matthew Chapter 5:9**. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." That should be the label for each of us professing to trust in Jesus Christ. We surely wouldn't want the opposite implied by **Matthew 5:9** - "Cursed are the troublemakers, for they shall be called sons of Satan."

I close with another illustration of wisdom.

A lion is bold. But he's smart too; he's wise. When the lion and his pride are camped out next to an important water-hole, and a herd of elephants come to get a drink, the lion looks the other way. He doesn't go picking fights with elephants.