

THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM – Part 2

James 3:14-18

INTRODUCTION

READ James 3:14-18

Proposition: 2 Wisdoms → 2 Sources, 2 Natures, 2 Products

Source: Where does it come from?

Nature: What does it look like?

Product: What does it produce?

Last week we studied **James 3:13** – “**Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.**”

Jesus, Paul and James make it clear that true fear of God is demonstrated by a changed life that can have right understanding of true wisdom through the work of the Holy Spirit.

I. Wisdom from Below (Folly) 3:14-16

Point Jealous, Selfish, Arrogant, Liar; Earthly, Natural, Demonic

A. Source 3:14-15a

Point – Where does it come from?

- The source of wisdom from below here → Hell? Nope.
- It comes from you. It comes from man.

Proof – **James 3:14-15a** – “**But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.** ^{15a}**This wisdom is not that which comes down from above,**”

“**jealousy**” – sometimes translated as zeal

- literally means to boil or bubble up
- there is good zeal and bad zeal

Good zeal/jealousy:

Phinehas is commended for his zeal – **Num 25:11-13**

John 2:17 – Jesus is consumed with zeal (from **Psalm 69:9**)

Bad zeal/jealousy: is “**bitter**” – root meaning is “to cut”

- animosity that leads to division

Application – How do I know if my jealousy is good or bad?

- bottom line → is the focus on self or God

“**selfish ambition**” –Aristotle used it to indicate a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means

- leads to strife and contention; factions
- a willingness to use unworthy and divisive means to promote one’s own views or interests

Illustration: Think of King Saul hearing the crowd's cries for David, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands" → bitter jealousy

“do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.”

against the truth of the Gospel – James begins this epistle with the truth - **James 1:18** – and he finishes with the truth - **5:19**

3:15a – “**This wisdom is not that which comes down from above**”

Clarification! What is our reference point? “**from below**” means below Heaven.

- Hell is below Heaven, but so is Earth.

Illustration: In **1 Samuel 17**, we have the story of David, the shepherd boy who killed Goliath, the arrogant giant of Gath. I'd like to consider the importance of the expression "**five smooth stones.**" Why more than one stone? Wasn't David a man of faith? Did he doubt that God would give him perfect timing and aim as

he used his trusty sling to take on the enemy of the Lord? (Certainly he needed only a single small pebble to accomplish his mission. But wait, there were at least four other giants (**2 Sam. 21:15-22**). They might rally to Goliath's defense if something went wrong. Perhaps David had prepared for them. Trusting the Lord implicitly, he chose one stone for the champion of the Philistines and just enough to be ready for any others if they attacked.

Why did he choose "**smooth stones**"? Well, you can shoot much more accurately with the proper ammunition. He had faith, but he also used sanctified common sense. He recognized human responsibility as well as Divine sovereignty and selected smooth stones that would fly straight to the mark.

Application: We have responsibility. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit and at the same time we have human responsibility. This is how God has chosen to unfold His plan of redemption so that He receives the greatest glory.

B. Nature - of this wisdom below **3:15b**

Point – What does it look like?

Proof – **James 3:15b** – “**but is earthly, natural, demonic.**”

He goes to three old enemies of God, of Christians, of sanctification:

1. **The World**
2. **The Flesh,**
3. **The Devil**

1. **The World**

“**earthly**” – opposite of heavenly

Phil 3:18-19 – “**For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite,**

and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”

God wants us to be in the world but He does not want us to be of the world.

Illustration: A scuba diver lives in the water but breathes the air-- he takes his environment with him. In the same way ... we are surrounded by this world, but by God’s grace and mercy we can be breathing our own environment of the wisdom of God by the power of His Word.

1 John 2:15-17; 5:1-5 – two passages about the world

- A faith that saves alone is not a faith that is alone – it is demonstrated by turning away from the world
- If you are a Christian – born again and a joint heir in Christ - you are an overcomer! Not perfectly, but the general pattern of your life is an overcomer!
- God calls you this!

2. The Flesh

“**natural**” – comes from the Greek word *psuche*, from which we get the English word psychology

- describes life in the natural world, governed by sensual appetites and lived apart from the Spirit of God

Jude 19 – “**These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.**”

- those who are against the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:14 – “**a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.**”

- by God’s grace, you are no longer natural, you are spiritual!

Application: The wisdom of God, as He has given it in His word,

is sufficient to feed, to arm, to equip, to motivate, and to govern the spiritual man.

Romans 8: 12-14 "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

3. The Devil

“demonic”

Application: James 4:7-10

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

- Jesus resisted the devil with scripture
- don't compromise
- don't negotiate

Illustration: A hunter raised his rifle and took careful aim at a large bear. As the hunter was about to pull the trigger the bear spoke in a soft soothing voice, "Isn't it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let's negotiate the matter." Lowering his rifle, the hunter replied, "I want a fur coat." "Good," said the bear, "that is a negotiable question. I only want a full stomach, so let us negotiate a compromise."

So, they sat down to negotiate and after a time the bear walked away alone. The negotiations had been successful. The bear had a full stomach, and the hunter had his fur coat!

Moral of the story – don't negotiate with the devil.

C. Product

3:16

Point – What does it produce? What does wisdom from below produce?

Proof – **James 3:16** – “**For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**”

15b-16 → no verbs to place emphasis on the adjectives. It is literally “**For where jealousy and selfish ambition, there disorder and every evil thing**”

- drawing attention to the terrible product of it
- “**jealousy and selfish ambition**” results in inward rottenness
- inward rottenness produces external damage

2 Results/Consequences:

“**there is disorder and every evil thing.**”

“**disorder**” – *instability, confusion*, insurrection, rebellion

- similar to our word “anarchy”
- children will rise up (or rebel) against their parents and have them put to death' **Mark 13.12**
- wars and revolts **Luke 21.9**

Jealousy and division mean anarchy; and anarchy means a moral chaos in which every evil thing has a platform

- every man does what is right in his own eyes

Application: But God doesn't leave us there – He gives us wisdom ...

II. Wisdom from Above

(True)

3:17-18

Point – Both Wisdom and Folly call – there is conflict!

Which are you going to answer?

A. Source

3:17a

Point – Where does it come from?

Proof – **James 3:17a** – “**But the wisdom from above**”

Source → “from above” → it comes from God

Psalm 111:10 – “**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever.**”

Everything we talked about last week as we went through the wisdom books pointed to God as the source of wisdom.

Illustration: In our STBC doctrinal statement, we make a very definite point of the total sufficiency and authority of Scripture for everything we do. Documents such as this are a help in our pursuit of God, but scripture is our final authority.

Application: Part of having that realized in our lives is understanding that true wisdom isn’t discovered by man in psychology or science, but it is something revealed by God in scripture.

B. Nature

3:17b

Point – What does it look like?

Proof –

James 3:17b – “**is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.**”

7 characteristics that describe the **nature** of godly wisdom

1. pure
2. peaceable

3. gentle
4. reasonable
5. full of mercy and good fruits
6. unwavering
7. without hypocrisy

- both what wisdom is and what wisdom does

Again, in v. 17, there are no verbs → emphasis on adjectives

1st Characteristic:

“**pure**” – w/o defect or stain – same Greek root as ἅγιος (which is translated as holy)

- basic internal characteristic that produces the remaining 6 external characteristics
- the holiness and purity of God’s wisdom is the fountainhead from which all the other characteristics flow

Illustration: After a violent storm one night, a large tree, which over the years had become a stately giant, was found lying across the pathway in a park. Nothing but a splintered stump was left. Closer examination showed that it was rotten at the core because thousands of tiny insects had eaten away at its heart. The weakness of that tree was not brought on by the sudden storm; it began the very moment the first insect nested within its bark.

➔ In the same way, inward rottenness produces external damage. We can have pure lives, when we hold fast to the pure word of God. **Psalm 119:9, 11**

2nd Characteristic:

“**peacable**” – desiring and fostering peace by restraining discord

- it is listening when you would prefer to talk
- moderation without compromise
- gentleness without weakness

This kind of wisdom knows when to speak, when to remain silent, and when to forget

- does not pursue peace at the expense of purity – it will not compromise with sin to maintain peace

Illustration: George Whitefield dealt with John Wesley's confused letter entitled 'Free Grace'. He showed Wesley exactly what he believed, and why he could not accept Wesley's Arminianism, but then said, *“Nothing but a single regard for the honour of Christ has forced this letter from me. I love and honour you for his sake; and when I come to judgement will thank you before men and angels for what you have, under God, done for my soul.”*

Whitefield showed his wisdom and understanding in the defense of the truth and by being a peace-lover

3rd Characteristic:

“gentle” (different word than **3:13**) – equitable, fair, impartial

- sweet reasonableness – one who does not stand on his “rights”
- **Psalm 15** – swear to his own hurt – we would be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others

4th Characteristic:

“reasonable” – describes one who has reason and, at the same time, is open to reason

- willing to listen and learn
- teachable by scripture

NIV translation of this word – “submissive”

KJV translation of this word - "easy to be intreated." The word originally was a military term. The person easy to be intreated was a soldier who recognized the rights of the commander over him. When the orders are given he immediately submits.

5th Characteristic:

“**full of mercy and good fruits**” – attitude of compassion

- implies practical help, not mere emotion or pity
- in abundant measure

→ demonstrate by being “**full of mercy and good fruits**”

- it is the actions that follow the mercy

6th Characteristic:

“**unwavering**”

- free from prejudice, undivided!
- single-minded!
- positive form of the verb in **James 1:6-8** – “**the one who doubts**”

It is single minded – focused in one direction

- no confusions and no skepticism

7th Characteristic:

“**without hypocrisy**” – genuine sincerity

- does not hide behind a mask

Illustration: Nathanael in **John 1:47** “**Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!**”

Application: The word of God is without hypocrisy.

So we should not have hypocrisy in our lives.

C. Product

3:18

Point – What does it produce? What is the result of wisdom from above

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

“**Righteousness**” – the opposite of “every evil thing”

Matt 5:9 – “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” → Sermon on the Mount!

Psalm 72:3 “Let the mountains bring peace to the people,
And the hills, in righteousness.”

Psalm 85:9-10 “Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. ¹⁰ Lovingkindness and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

- all of the wisdom books tie in the fear of God with wisdom
- **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** – after spelling out all of the vanities of life, in his conclusion, Solomon writes “**fear God and keep His commandments**”
- self righteousness knows nothing of true peace

Application: The true peace, which Christ will realize on earth as he rules with a rod of iron (according to **Psalm 2**), right now in your heart and my heart, it can reign and dominate. That can characterize us as a church body. That can characterize how we interact with those outside the church.

Romans 12:18 “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”

We can't control other people's actions, but we can control our own actions, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And the righteousness that saved us can produce peace in our church body and peace with those outside the church so that we might be used by God to win them to Christ.