

True Wisdom

James 3:13 – 4:3

Let me tell you a story about wisdom and my brother LaVaughn. When he was about sixteen and I was twelve traveled the hour or so drive from Wardell to Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. The occasion was the first college graduation of a person from my home church. The whole congregation was very proud of Joey Newman and my mother, Mr. Collier one of our neighbors, along with other went or sent their good wishes. For some reason LaVaughn was driving and every time my mother or Mr. Collier tried to give him advice on driving or directions, my brother's response was "I know." He believed that he has everything down to a science even though he had just got his license and was an inexperienced highway driver. After all he had been driving tractors since he was old enough to reach the gas peddle and the clutch so he felt that he had everything under control. About an hour into the drive Mr. Collier told a story that I have never forgotten.

There was a dirt Dobber, an insect that looks like a wasp, but is rather harmless. They often build their nests on the side of a house or other protected location. Once there was a dirt Dobber that found what he thought was a wonderful location for his nest. The place was deep, cylindrical and dark. So he set to work. His neighbors tried to warn him that he had not made a good choice, but to each he sang, "I know...I know...I know." He finished his nest and was quiet satisfied with himself. But later the farmer came along...picked up his shotgun and "as they say, the rest is history. The insect had built his nest in the barrel of the gun, disregarding the advice of all who knew better.

James wanted us to know there is a difference between what the world calls wisdom and that wisdom that comes from God. The wisdom from above, God's wisdom, operates in a different way from the wisdom that is "earthly, sensual, devilish."

The evidences or characteristics of false wisdom are envy, strife, boasting and deceit. This reminds of us of James' warning from last week about not to be ambitious for spiritual offices. The wisdom of the world says, "Promote yourself. You're as good as the other candidates, maybe better! This may be the way you get a job in the world, but selfish, carnal promotion among God's people is not the way we ought to get a spiritual office in the church. Sad to say, a great deal of this goes on and even the Apostles argued over who was the greatest in the kingdom.

Another characteristic of worldly wisdom is strife (v. 14b) or "party spirit." It was used by the Greeks to describe a politician out canvassing for votes. The world's wisdom says, "Get all the support you can! Ask the people in the church if they are for you or against you!" Of course, this spirit of self-seeking only creates rivalry and division in the church. A third characteristic of worldly wisdom is boasting (v. 14c). Pride loves to boast, and nothing is prouder than the wisdom of humans. There is a way to report blessings so that God gets the glory, but there is also an approach that gives people the praise.

A fourth characteristic of worldly wisdom is deceit (v. 14d). The sequence is not difficult to understand. First, there is selfish ambition that leads to party spirit and rivalry. In order to "win the election" we must resort to boasting; and boasting usually involves lies!

So what are the evidences of true spiritual wisdom? They are meekness, purity, peace, gentleness, compliance, mercy, good fruits, decisiveness, and sincerity. Let's examine them one by one. Meekness is not weakness; rather it is power

under control. The meek person does not selfishly assert him or herself. The Greek word was used for a horse that had been broken so that his power was under control. The meek person seeks only the glory of God and does not cater to the praises of others. Meekness is the right use of power, and wisdom is the right use of knowledge. They go together. The truly wise person will show in daily life and “behavior” that he or she is a child of God.

True wisdom is also pure (v. 17a), indicating the importance of holiness. God is holy; therefore the wisdom from above is pure. The idea behind this word is “chaste, free from defilement.” God’s wisdom leads to purity of life. There is a spiritual purity that results in a faithful, innocent, uncorrupt, faithful relationship with the Lord (2 Cor. 11:3).

Third, true wisdom brings peace (v. 17b). If the church is pure, devoted to God, then there will be peace. “And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (Isa. 32:17). God’s wisdom says, “Confess sin and My peace will keep things together!”

The fourth characteristic of true wisdom is gentleness (v. 17c). It carries the meaning of moderation without compromise, gentleness without weakness. The gentle person does not deliberately cause fights.

A fifth characteristic of true wisdom is willingness to yield, or compliance (v. 17d). God’s wisdom makes the Christian agreeable and easy to live with and work with. The compliant person is willing to hear all sides of a question. They can disagree without being disagreeable. They are “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19). They don’t have to have their own way. When God’s wisdom is at work, there is a willingness to listen, think, pray, and obey whatever God reveals.

Another characteristic of true wisdom is mercy (v. 17e). To be “full” of something means to be “controlled by.” The person who follows God’s wisdom is controlled by mercy. “Be therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, and in His mercy He does not give us what we do deserve. Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates the meaning of mercy (Luke 10:25–37). For a Samaritan to care for a Jewish stranger was an act of mercy. He could gain nothing from it, except the blessing that comes from doing the will of God; and the victim could not pay him back. That is mercy.

True wisdom is characterized by good fruits (v. 17f). People who are faithful are fruitful. God’s wisdom makes life full. The Spirit produces fruit to the glory of God (see John 15:1–16). The lawyer in Luke 10:25–37 was willing to discuss the subject of neighborliness, but he was unwilling to be a neighbor and help someone else. God’s wisdom is practical; it changes the life and produces good works to the glory of God.

True wisdom is evidenced by decisiveness (v. 17g). The word suggests singleness of mind. When you have God’s wisdom, you can be decisive and not be afraid. Wisdom from above brings strength from above.

Lastly James says that true wisdom is characterized by sincerity (v. 17h). When God’s wisdom is at work, there is openness and honesty, “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). “Faith is living without scheming.”

There is a real contrast between the operation of God’s wisdom and the operation of the wisdom of this world. We are to evaluate our own lives and ministries in the light of what James has written. While the local church is an organization, it cannot depend on the “Madison Avenue” methods that make secular businesses succeed. God’s ways and God’s thoughts are far above us!

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

Worldly wisdom will produce worldly results; spiritual wisdom will give spiritual results. Worldly wisdom produces trouble (v. 16): envy, strife, confusion, evil works. In James 4, James dealt with the evidence of people following worldly wisdom: there were “wars and fighting” among the believers. Wrong thinking produces wrong living. Jealousy, competition, party spirit—all of these contribute to confusion. The Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is a good illustration of this fact. From a human point of view, the building of the tower was a wise thing; but from God’s viewpoint, the project was stupid and sinful. The result was confusion and worthless works.

God’s wisdom produces blessing (v. 18). God produces fruit in our lives, and fruit has in it the seeds for more fruit. Usually it is the seed that is sown, but here it is the fruit that is sown. As we share the fruit of God with others, they are fed and satisfied, and they in turn bear fruit. The Christian who obeys God’s wisdom sows righteousness and peace. The life we live enables the Lord to bring righteousness and peace into the lives of others.

Lot followed the world’s wisdom and brought trouble to the camp of Abraham; but Abraham followed God’s wisdom and brought peace. Lot’s decision led to “good-for-nothing works,” and everything he lived for went up in smoke at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham’s decision, in the wisdom of God, led to blessings for his own household and ultimately for the whole world (read Gen. 13). “Happy is the man that finds wisdom, and the man that gets understanding” (Prov. 3:13).

Then James asked the age old question, but, why are we at war with one another? We belong to the same family; we trust the same Savior; we are indwelt

by the same Holy Spirit—and yet we fight one another. Why? James answered this question by explaining that we relying on our own wisdom and are at war with ourselves (James 4:1b-3). The war in the heart is helping to cause the wars in the church! The essence of sin is selfishness. Eve disobeyed God because she wanted to eat of the tree and become wise like God. Abraham lied about his wife because he selfishly wanted to save his own life (Gen. 12:10–20). Achan caused defeat to Israel because he selfishly took some forbidden loot from the ruins of Jericho (Josh. 7). “We have turned every one to his own way” (Isa. 53:6).

Often we veil our religious quarrels under the disguise of “spirituality.” We are like Miriam and Aaron who complained about Moses’ wife, but who really were envious of Moses’ authority (Num. 12). Or we imitate James and John who asked for special thrones in the kingdom, when what we really want is recognition today (Mark 10:35–45). In both of these instances, the result of selfish desire was division among God’s people.

Selfish desires are dangerous things. They lead to wrong actions and they even lead to wrong praying (“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures,” James 4:3, NIV). When our praying is wrong, our whole Christian life is wrong. It has been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get our will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth.

People who are at war with themselves because of selfish desires are always unhappy people. They never enjoy life. Instead of being thankful for the blessings they do have, they complain about the blessings they do not have. They cannot get along with other people because they are always envying others for what they have and do. They are always looking for that “magic something” that will change their lives, when the real problem is within their own hearts. Instead of seeking God’s

will, we tell God what He is supposed to do; and we get angry at Him if He does not obey. This anger at God eventually spills over and we get angry at God's people. Most church splits have been caused by Christians who took out their frustrations with God on the members of the church. Many a church or family problem would be solved if people would only look into their own hearts and see the battles raging there.

God made us a unity; mind, emotions, and will should work together. James stated the reason we are at war with ourselves and, consequently, with each other.¹
² ³ If we really want to live as God has designed us, then we need to seek God's wisdom and will and not our understanding. When God's wisdom is at work, there is a sense of humility and submission, and you want God to get all the glory. You have no desire to compare yourself with any other Christian; because you see only Christ—and compared with Him, all of us still have a long way to go! Or you may end up like Mr. Collier's dirt Dobber, building you home at the wrong place and at the wrong time.

Thank God for God's eternal truth.

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jas 3:13

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:828

³Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters of James and Peter*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 90