

August 30, 2020

Lesson 13

TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: **Wise Up!**

YOUTH TOPIC: **Wise Up**

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: **Two Kinds of Wisdom**

CHILDREN'S TOPIC: **Think First**

DEVOTIONAL READING

Psalm 32:1-11

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: **James 3:13-18; 5:7-12**

PRINT PASSAGE: **James 3:13-18; 5:7-12**

KEY VERSE: **James 3:17**

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: **James 3:13-18; 5:7-12**

PRINT PASSAGE: **James 3:13-18; 5:7-12**

KEY VERSE: **James 3:13**

James 3:13-18; 5:7-12—KJV

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

.....

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

James 3:13-18; 5:7-12—NIV

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

.....

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

9 Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

11 As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

12 Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Throughout history, many have risked their lives by resisting oppressive regimes, thus saving the lives of others. What motivates a person to defy evil and choose to act for the good of strangers? James compares and contrasts the consequences of using wisdom for righteousness or for evil.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Explain the value of acting with wisdom from above and with patience amidst trials.
2. Repent of actions that have been done out of earthly wisdom and lack of patience.
3. Embrace wisdom from God and seek to demonstrate it consistently and patiently.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The word translated “life” in 3:13 (NIV) is not the typical Greek word for “life” (*zoe*), which is used more than 130 times in the NT. It is a word that means “manner of life, conduct, behavior, or deportment.”

—The word for “gentleness” in 3:13 is derived from the root word translated “meek” in Matthew 5:5.

—James's contrast between wisdom that is “earthly” and that which is “heavenly” has parallels in Paul's writing. See 1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:5-6.

—“The word *patient* [5:8] does not mean that they were to sit idly by, doing nothing. Rather, the word carries the idea of endurance, bearing the burdens and fighting the battles until the Lord comes.” (*Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament (p. 734). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.*)

- James’s prohibition on swearing (taking oaths) draws from the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:33-37).
- James 3:17-18 provides a list of what might be called the “fruits of wisdom,” similar to the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5.
- Godly wisdom is good; self-indulgence is evil.
- Godly wisdom is without prejudice or favoritism; wisdom from God is pure and wholesome.

Teachers of CHILDREN

- James contrasted earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom.
- Like a tree, one with true wisdom is known by what he or she produces.
- Wisdom from God brings peace and mercy and bears good fruit.
- James states that the Lord will judge each of us for what we do or do not do.
- James states that patience during suffering is not without God’s compassion and mercy, as Job learned through his painful ordeal.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of James was largely written to Jewish Christians. There is little doubt as to the authorship of this book. This is especially so because the title of this book and the greeting already name the author. However, to which James does the book refer? It is generally believed that the James referred to is Jesus’ sibling. This James became a leader of the Jerusalem church. This same James is mentioned in Acts 15:13.

In the New Testament, four men bear the name *James*. The author of the epistle of James could not have been the apostle James who died in AD 44, since the book is believed to be from a later time—probably around AD 60. The other two people who bore the name *James* did not have the status, respect, or authority that the writer of this letter seems to have had.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

We know that the book of James was written to Jewish Christians and focuses on happenings in the

synagogue and around Jewish Christian life. In an era when people’s lives and living were dominated by segregation of various sorts, James admonished Christians to keep it all out of the church. He admonished the Jewish Christians in particular to treat everyone impartially.

In James 3:13-18, James explains that heavenly wisdom is essential and that it guides us in our living. He shows that heavenly wisdom is meek and not arrogant. James 5:7-12 was his message on patience and behavior while waiting on God. This all outlines the theme of wisdom, which teaches the reader how to act. Wisdom in the cultural and religious Hebrew mindset did not simply refer to being shrewd. The kind of godly wisdom outlined here refers to the willingness to hear God, to obey God, and to follow God’s commands.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

James: the author of the epistle of James. He was a brother of our Lord, Jesus.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Bitter (3:14)—Greek: *pikros* (pik-ros’): acrid; malignant.

Good (3:13)—Greek: *kalos* (kal-os’): beautiful; good; worthy; as an outward sign of an inward good; noble.

Humility (3:13)—Greek: *prautés* (prah-oo’-tace): mildness; gentleness; “meekness” (KJV).

Pure (3:17)—Greek: *hagnos* (hag-nos’): clean; chaste; holy; sacred.

Understanding (3:13)—Greek: *epistémón* (ep-ee-stay’-mone): emphasizes understanding based on building on previous knowledge; knowing; “knowledge” (KJV).

Wise (3:13)—Greek: *sophos* (sof-os’): learned; cultivated; skilled.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

- A. Be Wise and Behave
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

- A. Earthly Wisdom
(James 3:13-16)
- B. Heavenly Wisdom
(James 3:17-18)
- C. The Power of Patience
(James 5:7-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Be Wise and Behave

James 3:13-18 explains wisdom and deeds. James links heavenly wisdom with action and behavior. He extols heavenly wisdom and links heavenly wisdom with being meek. James 3:13 (NIV) asks the question, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” James tells us that if a person has wisdom, it shows in the person’s life. This is because the wisdom here refers to the ultimate wisdom that comes from listening to and doing the will of God. In James 5:7-11, we see that if a person stands with God, that person will triumph.

B. Biblical Background

The essence of this lesson is a portrait of godly wisdom. This is wisdom that comes from God and is the most important kind of wisdom. No matter how wise a person may be, if one is only wise in his or her own strength, then there is still much more to be gained from God’s wisdom. Throughout the Bible, we see how some people tried to seek God’s face, knowing that God is the ultimate source of wisdom. The wisdom that never fails is simply to trust in God, obey God, and live according to God’s Word, as seen in Proverbs 1:7 (NIV): “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Earthly Wisdom

(James 3:13-16)

Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among

you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against

the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

True wisdom does not consist of the mere accumulation of worldly knowledge but in the application of worldly and spiritual knowledge demonstrated through a godly life (verse 13). Worldly wisdom accentuates the senses and the emotions. Godly wisdom focuses on holy character traits. Worldly, earthly wisdom advocates obedience to the dictates of the human heart. Godly wisdom concurs with Jeremiah 17:9 that the human heart is deceitful above all things. Worldly wisdom holds that one must see in order to effectively believe. Godly wisdom crosses to the other side of the spectrum with the John 20:29 perspective that blesses those who have not seen and yet have believed. Worldly wisdom allows for loving one's family and friends, but godly wisdom charges us to love our enemies also and bless them (see Matthew 5:43-47). It is obviously easy to spout worldly wisdom, but godly wisdom requires a much deeper commitment and thought process.

Envy is that feeling of discontent or resentful longing aroused by coveting someone else's possessions, qualities, or experiences (verse 14). Aristotle defined *envy* as pain at the sight of another's good fortune, stirred by "those who have what we (think we) ought to have." Psychologists make the following distinction between envy and jealousy: Envy occurs when we lack a desired attribute possessed by another. Jealousy happens when something we already possess (usually a special relationship) is threatened by a third person. Envy reacts to lack, and jealousy responds to the threat of losing one's possession. Neither characteristic

is worth the energy required to expend or to respond.

False/earthly wisdom (verse 15) wears exterior clothing that covers up the true motives that lie below. Earthly wisdom may sound good on the surface, but the essence of earthly wisdom is antithetical to godly wisdom. Examples of worldly wisdom include the following: "There are no absolutes or objective truth"; "Look out for #1"; "If you can't beat them, join them"; "Trust no one over 30 . . . until you reach 31." Worldly wisdom self-promotes. Godly wisdom elevates others. Worldly wisdom seeks the highest place of honor, but godly wisdom practices humility. Worldly wisdom seeks truth in novels and business journals, but godly wisdom submits to the mirror of the Word. Worldly wisdom trusts in the bank account or the 401K, but godly wisdom trusts in treasures beyond the grave. Worldly wisdom boasts, but godly wisdom is slow to speak. Worldly wisdom says that trials will crush you, but godly wisdom says that trials will mature you. Worldly wisdom says lust is normal, but godly wisdom embraces discipline. Worldly wisdom says that "seeing is believing," but godly wisdom says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, NIV). Simply put, any thought, word, or deed that compromises our ability to love God and obey God is faulty.

Worldly wisdom arises from thought processes, maxims, or principles that focus on the sensual, natural appetites and propensities rather than spiritual influences. Demonic wisdom may contain a sliver of truth, but the result of obeying such wisdom runs counter to the concepts of Christ.

When envy is present, it usually means that love is absent. The presence of envy and strife mean the proliferation of confusion, agitation, and instability. Envy and selfish ambition (verse 16) are the monsters that destroy families, churches, organizations, and businesses. Selfishness is often easily recognized except by the one who demonstrates it. One who is selfish is excessively or exclusively concerned with oneself and concentrates on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being with little or no regard for others. Selfishness arises from concern with one's own welfare or advantage in disregard of others. This attitude gives rise to every evil work because selfishness serves as the progenitor of sin.

There are several practical signs that you or someone you interact with may be selfish: (1) when one is always talking about one's self and generally monopolizing the conversation; (2) when one feels deserving of special treatment or when placing one's self ahead of others who are waiting in line; (3) when one barely or rarely says "Please" or "Thank you"; (4) when one insists on getting his or her own way in some action or expressing his or her own opinion in a conversation—and others' points of view are disregarded; (5) when one resists accountability from an authority figure or equal partner; (6) when one has a low threshold for being taught something new; (7) when one exhibits the need to be in control; (8) when one finds it difficult to apologize; (9) when one finds it hard to offer sympathy or to practice empathy; (10) when one operates as a taker more than as a giver; (11) when it's all about "me" and not about "we."

B. Heavenly Wisdom

(James 3:17-18)

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Verse 17 forthrightly describes the characteristics of the kind of wisdom which comes from God. Above all, godly wisdom is pure. Pure godly wisdom is not mixed or adulterated with any other substance or inferior material. Pure wisdom has no extraneous and unnecessary elements and is therefore free of any contamination. Some possible sources of contamination include fear, pride, or idolatry. The second characteristic of godly wisdom is that it loves peace. Peace-loving wisdom seeks to find ways to calm conflict and to build bridges of unity rather than building walls of division. Peace-loving wisdom speaks from a perspective of maturity and sees the big picture rather than the immediate issue. Godly wisdom always considers others before speaking a word or initiating an action.

Earthly wisdom focuses on the immediate perspective, but godly wisdom honors what is everlasting. Godly wisdom has no problem with submission. Many people unfortunately see submission as a weak, negative concept. But submission is actually joining forces with another force in order for both mutually benefit from the liaison and to become better together. Godly wisdom is also full of mercy. Mercy is when compassion or forgiveness is shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. When mercy is extended, restraint is exercised and God's love can be showcased. Godly wisdom is sincere. It

is free of pretense or deceit and proceeds from genuine feelings. Godly wisdom is impartial, fair, and just. It treats all parties equally even if they may be rivals or disputants. Finally, godly wisdom bears plenty of good fruit. Since the Holy Spirit is the source of godly wisdom, then this wisdom necessarily reflects the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23a), and Paul’s discourse on love (1 Corinthians 13).

At first glance of verse 18, the concept of a peacemaker may seem rather docile and innocuous. But peacemakers are tremendously powerful people. One of the most prestigious awards worldwide is the Nobel Peace Prize. In order to qualify, one “shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.” Although most ordinary people will never be considered for an award on such a level, everyone can contribute toward peace within their own families, schools, churches, and communities. God knows we need it. When seeds of peace are sown, a harvest of righteousness can be reaped. But when there is no seed sowing, there can be no harvest reaping. Consider the following practical ways to begin living the life of a peacemaker, and feel free to add your own ideas: (1) Pray up. Ask God to use you to be a vessel of peace. (2) Sign up. Join local organizations with a history of working for peace and justice. (3) Speak up. Use your voice to make a difference. (4) Act up. When necessary, demonstrate for the cause of peace. Peacekeepers act out

of fear. Peacemakers act out of faith. (5) Love up. Demonstrate kindness even when kindness has not been demonstrated to you.

C. The Power of Patience (James 5:7-12)

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

The original readers of this writing existed in an agricultural society and would have fully understood the writer’s comparison in verse 7 linking the patience necessary in waiting for the Lord’s coming with the patience necessary in waiting for the farmer’s harvest. Both are sure, but both take time. Impatience is a sign of weakness, but patience is a sign of strength. *Patience* is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry, upset, or unfocused. Patience requires effort and work, but in the end it is worth it because it yields happiness, greater work, better relationships, and more success in general. We can practice being patient through taking deep breaths, being aware of the invented need to hurry, and intentionally stopping to notice the beauty in the details.

From time to time we all could use an attitude adjustment (verse 9). First Thessalonians 5:18 provides a spiritual template for how the disciple should respond to life: “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (NIV). The opposite of giving thanks is making complaints. It has been said that a grudge is an aging complaint still being held against another person. The longer we carry a complaint against another, the greater the probability that it will become a grudge too heavy for us to handle. Complaining often gives birth to resentment, but we are called to “be hospitable to one another without complaining” (1 Peter 4:9, NRSV).

When going to court, it never helps to complain. Likewise, as long as God is the judge, complaining only leads to complications. In his book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer instructs his readers on the characteristics of God as a judge. As judge, God is one with authority and His decisions are final, no matter what humanity may say. As judge, God alone is the one with ultimate authority. Not only can God state the verdict, but He can also carry it out with enforcement if necessary. As our judge and maker, God is our Lord and owner. As judge, God is the personification of what is good and right. As judge, God loves justice and fairness and loathes all ill treatment of one person by another. “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?” (Micah 6:8, NIV). Micah 6:8 calls for us to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. The Righteous Judge is one with the wisdom to distinguish between truth and falsehood. In the judgments of God, there is no jury present, but God has the final say.

There is great value in facing suffering

(verse 10), even though contemporary culture does not embrace suffering for its potential virtue. Even church culture elevates the exact opposite of suffering and prefers pleasure, prosperity, blessings, and convenience. First Peter 4:1 tells us, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin” (NIV). Suffering is a necessary aspect of spiritual maturity. In the process of God’s extending love to us, we are not exempted from pain, suffering, affliction, and persecution (see 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 3:12; Colossians 1:24; Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 2:10; Isaiah 43:2).

Poet Robert Browning wrote a poignant verse about suffering:

I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chatted all the way;
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow;
And ne’er a word said she;
But oh! The things I learned from her,
When Sorrow walked with me.

Suffering can remind us of our limited humanity and can definitely increase our prayer life. Suffering can help us understand what is ultimately important and can help us to be more sensitive and to more effectively minister to others who are hurting. Suffering received and endured can have a powerful effect on our spiritual maturity and can add unprecedented depth to our character.

There is great power in perseverance (verse 11). *Perseverance* is persistence in doing something despite any difficulty or delay in achieving success. Perseverance requires endurance,

patience, and persistence in the process. In order to realize a dream that is before you it is first necessary to *visualize* it. To visualize your dream is to figuratively see it, hear it, and feel it. Next, there is a need to *agonize*. This means to endure the discomfort of wrestling with the vision and pressing past the pain to move to the next place in the process. Then, there is the need to *familiarize*. Get acquainted with your dream and learn all about it. Then, *strategize*. Make a plan and a specific goal with a specific result in mind. Finally, *organize*. Get together with likeminded people to move forward with your purpose. As time progresses there may be a need to *revise*, so be sensitive to the voice of God to make sure you are still following that quiet voice of divine direction.

This warning against swearing in verse 12 places the central focus of the passage on the necessity for simple, clear, understandable communication. Verse 12 is very similar to Matthew 5:37, where Jesus says, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (NIV).

No matter the situation, there is no way to ignore the importance of clear communication.

As is seen in this passage, the book of James deals with practical issues of everyday life. Much can be gleaned and applied as we look to the Word of God for insight and illumination.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

We gain divine wisdom as we seek the face of God through prayer, Scripture study, fasting, and the wise counsel of mature disciples. Godly wisdom offers to us guidance and direction when we are not sure which way to go. Godly wisdom offers us divine discernment to assist us in accurately assessing our surroundings. Godly wisdom gives us the confidence to conquer our fears and to press toward our goal with the assurance that God will always make a way despite all external circumstances.

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to operate our lives with the mind of Christ so that our choices will be wise as we listen to and learn from Your still, small voice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 24-30, 2020)

Two Kinds of Wisdom

MONDAY, August 24: “Wisdom about End-time Signs” (Matthew 24:3-14)

TUESDAY, August 25: “Wisdom for Speaking a Prophetic Message” (Jeremiah 38:1-6)

WEDNESDAY, August 26: “Wisdom in Knowing Hearts without Blame” (1 Thessalonians 3:6-13)

THURSDAY, August 27: “Wisdom in Speaking Clearly” (Matthew 5:33-37)

FRIDAY, August 28: “Living Gracefully with One Another” (1 Peter 4:7-11)

SATURDAY, August 29: “Wisdom in the Prayer of Faith” (James 5:13-20)

SUNDAY, August 30: “Acting Wisely with Patience and Love” (James 3:13-18; 5:7-12)