

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Where to Get Wisdom James 3:13-18 Part Two**

We are continuing in our study of the Epistle of James. This epistle was written so that we might know whether we possess saving faith. This epistle was written so that we might know whether or not we possess living faith. As James develops this theme he gives us a number of different tests.

We have now considered five of those tests.

The first test we examined was the “Response to Trials test” in James 1:2-18.

The second test that we examined was the “Response to the Word test” in James 1:19-27.

the third test that we examined was the “Impartiality test” in James 2:1-13.

The fourth test that we examined was the “Works test” in James 2:14-26.

The fifth test that we examined was the “Speech test” in James 3:1-12.

We are presently considering the sixth test, which we will call the “Wisdom test.”

Let us read **James 3:13-18**, **“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. (15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (18) And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”** Clearly the focus of this passage is wisdom.

There are really only two types of people in this world. Those who are wise in their own eyes or those who are wise in God’s eyes. What distinguishes the one group from the other? As we addressed this question last week we discovered that it is a genuine conversion.

Those who are wise in God’s eyes will, in obedience to the truth of the Gospel, embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Lord. Those who are not wise in God’s eyes will not embrace Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Again listen to the words of **1 Cor. 1:18-24**, **“For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.” (20) Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (21) For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.**

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**(22) For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; (23) but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, (24) but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”** So again let us ask ourselves the question, who is wise and understanding among us? It is those who have embraced Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior who are truly wise. They are truly wise because they alone have the potential to make life count from God’s perspective. They are the only ones that have spiritual life which is clear from **I John 5:11-12, “And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”** And the life that we receive in Christ certainly has the potential to be abundant. **John 10:10** says, **“The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”**

Christians alone have life and have the potential to enjoy life abundantly. This morning I would like to expand on this last statement for a moment. I just shared with you that it is those who have embraced Jesus, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God, as their Lord and Savior who have the potential to effectively address the practical questions of how we should live our lives. The reason they have the potential is because Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God, dwells within them. The reason why it is only a potential is because His presence does not automatically translate itself necessarily into expressions of wisdom.

Lynn and I, early in our marriage, had marital problems. In fact, it was through these problems that I became very serious about living my life for Christ. But even during those early days of my pursuit of Christ and His wisdom I remember Lynn saying to me, “Dale, you don’t love me.” What was the problem? Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, was living in me. I had tremendous potential but the only problem was that I had not learned how to yield myself to Him in the areas that I needed to yield to Him so that Lynn might feel as if she was loved. I needed to nurture my relationship with Christ so that His wisdom would be manifested. How do we nurture our relationship with Christ so that His wisdom becomes evident in the way we conduct our lives?

First of all we nurture our relationship with Christ and draw upon His wisdom by meditating and carefully applying His Word to our lives. Listen to **Ps.119:97-100, “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. (98) Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. (99) I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation. (100) I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Thy precepts.”** How do we nourish our relationship with Christ so that His wisdom becomes evident in our lives? It is by humbly bowing ourselves before Him as He speaks to us through His word.

**Col. 3:16** commands us to **“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within us, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another.”** None of us will plumb the depths of the wisdom of Christ who indwells us without spending long hours reading and meditating on God’s Word. Do we spend as much time with the Bible as with our daily newspaper? What fools we will be, and so remain all of our lives, if we do not take time to avail ourselves of God’s wisdom! How else can we sincerely nurture our relationship with Christ so that His wisdom will be manifested?

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We nurture our relationship with Christ and draw upon His wisdom by coming humbly to Him in prayer. Hopefully some of you remember **James 1:5**, **“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”** Anyone who asks for wisdom in the pursuit of doing the will of God will get wisdom. No exceptions! God will always keep his word. If your heart is to pursue the Lord and personal righteousness, the Lord will give you that wisdom generously and without reproach if we will simply come to Him and ask Him for it.

Do you spend as much time in prayer as you do in talking with your best friend? What fools we will be, and so remain all our lives, if we do not take time to avail ourselves of God’s wisdom!

Those who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior have received the power of God and the wisdom of God. We have within us an infinite supply of wisdom. What great potential we have! Let us get serious about tapping into these resources and let us live life as it should be lived as we humbly bow ourselves before the Lord by spending time in His Word and coming to His throne of grace in prayer.

But someone may ask, “Is it possible for true born again believers not to tap into this potential?” I would say in the short run that certainly this is possible but over the long haul I would be very surprised that this would happen. Why? Because God is faithful and will complete the work that He has begun according to **Phil. 1:6**.

Because God is faithful and will complete the work that He has begun, Christ’s presence in our lives will, over time become evident. James therefore gives us a specific challenge and that is to demonstrate the reality of our relationship with Christ by our conduct in v. 13 “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

James could have focused in on a myriad of different behaviors. But he focuses in on one particular characteristic that should be found in the lives of those who profess to be wise, that is “gentleness.” Gentleness (PRAUTES) carries the idea of tenderness and graciousness, and can be accurately translated “meekness.” If Jesus is truly in our lives we should be able, in time, to see His presence and therefore His wisdom in our gentle ways.

James will now build on this thought by moving to a more extensive discussion of wisdom as it impacts relationships. He begins with an examination of “false wisdom.” Let us read **vv. 14-16**, **“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. (15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”** Hopefully this morning, as we begin to examine this section of Scripture and begin to understand false wisdom, the Spirit of God will use the Word of God to nurture our relationship with Christ so that more of His wisdom would be seen in our everyday conduct.

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### FALSE WISDOM

He begins by discussing the motivation of false wisdom. Look at v. 14, **“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.”** James directs our attention to the **“heart.”** That is where both unbelief and belief, sin and righteousness originate. Jesus said to the disciples on the road to Emmaus in **Luke 24:25**, **“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”** Philip told the Ethiopian Eunuch, **“If you believe with all your heart, you may be saved”** in **Acts 8:37**. And Paul declares, **“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”** in **Rom. 10:9**. The Lord also made clear that **“Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders”** in **Matt. 15:19**. This is the reason why Solomon warned, **“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life”** in **Prov.4:23**.

Of several sinful motives behind human wisdom, James mentions only two here: The first is ‘bitter jealousy’ (PIKROS ZELON). “Bitter jealousy” when literally translated would be “harsh zeal.” Those who are bitterly jealous can not stand to see others in possession of the position and influences they desire.

The story is told of two men who lived in a certain city. One was jealous and the other covetous. The ruler of the city sent for them and said he wanted to grant them one wish each, with this provision, 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 jealous 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 a while, and then asked that one of his eyes be put out.

In the church this type of person might pray, “Lord, I would sooner your work was not done at all than be done by someone better than I can do it.” In the family it might express itself by a sibling wishing that his brother or sister would not be loved at all if it would mean that his brother or sister would be loved more than himself. At work it might be expressed when an employee would rather have his fellow worker fail in the particular project rather than succeed and receive an honor that he himself may not enjoy.

Those who are “bitterly jealous” find a certain delight in the defeats, setbacks, and misfortunes of others who they see as perhaps prospering beyond themselves. And in addition to this, they will experience a significant degree of pain when others might be honored and not them.

James then goes on to give a second motivation of false wisdom. And it is “bitter jealousy’s” evil twin. Look again at **V. 14**, **“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart”** The word translated “selfish ambition” is the Greek word “ERITHOS.” This word denotes a hired servant, one working for a cause for pay. The basic thought of the term seems to be that of one who, for personal advantage, works to promote a definite cause in an unethical or selfish manner. Whereas “bitter jealousy” focuses upon the negative response to the promotion of others, “selfish ambition” focuses on the promotion of ourselves at the expense of what is right.

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Understandably, the word became closely associated with those who sought high political office or other positions of influence and power. It was used of personal gratification and self-fulfillment at any cost, which are the ultimate goals of all fleshly endeavors. It has no room for others, much less genuine humility. It is that ultimate self-elevation rampant in the world today which is the antithesis of what the humble, selfless, giving loving and obedient child of God is called to be as an expression of the wisdom of Christ.

Sadly this spirit can be found in the church. Listen to what Paul wrote in **Phil. 2:12-18** “**Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, (13) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, (14) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. (15) Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; (16) the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; (17) the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. (18) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.**”

These men may have been in competition with Paul, but Paul obviously was not in competition with them. Paul’s concern, as well as our concern, should not be to make sure others are not advanced or that we are advanced beyond the advancement of others, but rather that the purposes of Christ and the welfare of others is promoted. When this takes place then we have cause for rejoicing. It is then, and only then, that we will be truly blessed.

### CONCLUSION

False wisdom is not determined by whether or not we profess to have wisdom and understanding. It is determined by how we conduct ourselves. Those who are truly wise will find their lives characterized by deeds done in the gentleness of wisdom.

Those who lack this quality, those whose heart is more concerned about themselves rather than the Lord and others, those whose heart is characterized by “bitter jealousy” and “selfish ambition” though believing themselves to be wise, have deceived themselves.

Listen to **V.14**, “**But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.**”

How are we blessed with life and life abundant? It begins with humbling ourselves before Christ as Savior and Lord. It continues as we seek to serve Him by advancing His purposes in this world and caring for the needs of others before our own. This is the way of blessing.

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A lawyer once approached his brother who was a simple farmer. And he said to him, “Why don’t you go out and make a name for yourself and hold your head up high in the world like me?” the brother pointed to a field of wheat and made the point that the only stalks of wheat that held their heads high were the empty ones! And so with us. If you want your life loaded down with blessing give yourself up to Christ so that His life can be lived through you.