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Where to Get Wisdom James 3:13-18 Part Six

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.”** James in this passage is giving to us one more test of living faith. We have called this test the “Wisdom Test.”

How can we know whether or not we are saved? We can know that we are truly saved when we see the wisdom from above manifested in our lives. In other words when we see the wisdom of Christ manifested in our lives. This is why James gives us the challenge that we found in **v. 13**, **“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom?”** If we have in fact received the wisdom from above, if we have in fact received the wisdom of Christ, it should be able to be seen in the way we live our lives.

What we should not see in our lives is a false wisdom. Therefore after James gave us a specific challenge in **v.13**, he then takes time to describe false wisdom in **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.”** Before receiving Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God, the wisdom of this world was the only resource we had. And because of this we all experienced to some greater or lesser degree the pain, the difficulty, the futility that accompanies a life based on this wisdom which is not from above. A difficult time in our lives, a painful time, but a necessary time, because it prepared us to receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Therefore, no matter how painful our past may have been we can give thanks for our past because it is what God used to bring us to Jesus.

Receiving Christ, who is the power and wisdom of God, opens a door of wonderful possibilities for us. Let us read **vv. 17-18**, **“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.”** Notice how the verse begins, **“But the wisdom from above is first pure...”** When we receive the wisdom from above the driving force of our lives will be to be pure. This does not mean that we will live a sinless life, but it does mean that we will strive to live a sinless life. This should not be the exception in our lives, this should be the rule. Why? Because God is faithful. He will not start a work that He will not complete. Therefore those who have received the wisdom from above may stumble but they will, by God’s grace, not cease to keep striving for purity. It is the basic motivation of their lives. This basic motivation will lead us to other things. We will call these other things the “characteristics of the wisdom from above.”

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Characteristics of the Wisdom from Above

The wisdom from above is “peaceable.” What does James mean when he says that the wisdom from above is “peaceable.” “Peaceable” describes a person who is ready for peace, desiring peace, fostering peace by working toward consensus, restraining discord and pacifying the turbulent elements around them.

The wisdom from above is “gentle.” Gentle (EPIEKES) conveys the thought of respect for the feelings of others, being willing to waive all rigor and severity in one’s dealings with others.

The wisdom from above is “reasonable.” Let us read v. 17, **“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable...”** Reasonable (EUPEITHES) is found only here in the New Testament. The KJV translates it “easy to be entreated.” The NIV translates it “submissive.” Etymologically it means easily persuaded, with the implication of being open to reason or willing to listen. It has a conciliatory attitude and is ready to cooperate when a better way is shown. It is opposite of being stubborn and unyielding.

How many of you here this weekend would consider yourself “reasonable” in light of the definition that I have just shared with you. I would think that the vast majority of you would say that you are very reasonable. Even Adolph Hitler would most likely have insisted that he was in a reasonable person. And he would most likely insist on this even while he was disregarding the input of his military commanders. In evaluating whether or not we are reasonable, it is best not to consider what we think as much as it is important to consider what others think. The story of Abigail and David is an example of this.

Let us consider the story of David and Abigail in **1 Sam. 25**. In this particular story David, at this time a fugitive from King Saul, had, over a long period of time, shown great kindness to the house of Nabal, a very rich landowner. But a day came when David sent ten men to Nabal and asked a favor of him. Nabal rebuffed David’s messengers rudely. This was not a good situation. And the servants of Nabal knew this. And the servants of Nabal were right. David in response to Nabal’s rebuff instructed 400 of his men to put on their swords. David’s intent was to destroy Nabal and his household.

But while David’s men were preparing to destroy Nabal’s household. A certain servant of Nabal was provoked to action. He knew something had to be done in order to keep this situation from getting out of hand. So he went to make an appeal. And who did he go to? Did he go to Nabal? No, rather he went to Abigail who was Nabal’s wife. Why did he go to Abigail rather than to Nabal? Listen to what the servant shared with Abigail in **1 Sam. 25:14-17**, **“But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, saying, “Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them. (15) Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. (16) They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them.(17) Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against**

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our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him.” What is the characteristic of the wisdom from above that we are presently considering? The wisdom from above is reasonable. Now let me ask you, “Was Nabal, not from his perspective but from the perspective of others, a reasonable man?” And the answer is of course not. What did the servant say about Nabal? **“No one can speak to him.”** Did Abigail disagree with him?

No! Rather than Abigail going to Nabal to reason with him, she makes preparation with the cooperation of Nabal’s servants to go to intercept David and his men without ever talking to Nabal. In **1 Sam. 25:23-31**, we see Abigail actually going to David and talking with him. Why would she do this? She did this because, though she knew her husband to be unreasonable, she was hoping that David would be quite the opposite. Let us read the verses, **“When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David, and bowed herself to the ground. (24) And she fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the blame.”** She bows before David. She gets right down in the dust and asks David to take revenge on her because she is Nabal’s wife. This was extremely wise. Then she apologizes for the fact that Nabal is a fool and a brute. She appeals to David to consider what she has to say in vv. **24-25**. Let us look at this appeal. It begins in the latter part of v. **24** and continues through v. **25**.

“And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. (25) Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he (Nabal means worthless). Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.” After preparing David to hear her appeal she goes on to present three different arguments before asking for forgiveness in v. 28.

She first of all pointed to the leadings of God by which David had been kept from committing murder in the first part of v. **26** **“Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, since the Lord has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand...”** How was this accomplished? It was accomplished by this encounter with Abigail.

She then points to the fact that God is the avenger of the wicked. She does this by expressing the wish that all the enemies of David may become fools like Nabal. Look again at v. **26**, **“... now then let your enemies, and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal.”** What are the implications of this wish? It is quite simple. In the OT fools were typically identified as rebels against the Lord. And, as rebels, would ultimately be judged by God.

And finally she draws attention to the gift that she has brought. It was David’s request for some food from Nabal that started this whole thing. And now she is pointing to the honoring of that request as her third argument for forgiveness beginning in v. **27**, **“And now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord.”**

After these three arguments she makes an appeal for forgiveness in v. **28** and look how magnificently she does it. **“Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you all your days.**

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(29) And should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. (30) And it shall come about when the Lord shall do for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and shall appoint you ruler over Israel, (31) that this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the Lord shall deal well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.” Let me ask you a question, “From her words to David would you consider Abigail a person who was pursuing peace? Would you consider her a peaceable person? And the answer would have to be, “Of course!” But how will David respond to her? Would he prove himself to be reasonable? Would he be “open to reason, willing to listen?”

Look at **1 Sam. 25:32-33**, “**Then David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, (33) and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed, and from avenging myself by my own hand. (34) Nevertheless, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male.” (35) So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and he said to her, “Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request.”** David was, very fortunately for Nabal’s household, what? Reasonable.

Moving from biblical history to American history, I would like to give you another example of this from the life of Abraham Lincoln. As the story goes, in order to please a certain politician, Lincoln issued a command to transfer certain regiments. When Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, received the order, he refused to carry it out, saying the President was a fool. When Lincoln was told of this, he replied, “If Stanton said I’m a fool, then I must be, for he is nearly always right. I’ll see for myself.” As the two men talked, the President quickly realized that his decision was a serious mistake and without hesitation he withdrew it. A teachable, open spirit is often a major key in defusing conflict. And all the people said amen.

Prov. 12:15, “**The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to wisdom.”** Are we open to listening to others? Are we open to receiving counsel? Would people describe us as reasonable. Or are we like a fool who basically projects the attitude of, “It is my way or it is no way.”

Though being reasonable should manifest itself in our willingness to listen and embrace those things which make sense, it does not mean that we have to give up our theological or moral integrity. Certainly David was certainly not being asked to do this by Abigail. In fact quite the opposite was true and David acknowledged that to her. And though being reasonable should manifest itself in our willingness to listen and to embrace those thing which make sense, it does not mean that we have to necessarily accept the opinions of others as better than our own. If this were the case, then Abraham Lincoln would not have even had to go and listen to Stanton’s reasons. But it does mean, that when it comes to theological, moral, or practical matters, we will exalt the opinions of others to such an extent that it is very unlikely that they would leave a conversation with us ever thinking that we were not open to listening, that we were not open to reasoning.

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Being reasonable means that we must treat the ideas, the thoughts and the feelings of others as a treasure that needs to be considered carefully before discarding them. If Nabal would have done this, I don't think any of his servants would have had any problem going to him. This is why I have said to you that I believe that it is much more important what others think about us in this area of whether we are reasonable than what we think about ourselves.

An area that I am particularly concerned about is in our homes. I am concerned about the relationship between husbands and wives. Does your spouse consider you reasonable? When you are approached with a concern, whether it is about the children, or about your finances, or about your vacation, or about whatever. Do you treat those concerns with respect? Do you treasure those thoughts, and consider what has been said? Or do you brusquely brush their thoughts away with statements, like "You shouldn't feel that way," "You shouldn't think that way," "You shouldn't act that way." Hopefully if a wife were to approach her husband and say to him, "I am concerned about our son." he would pursue a better understanding of that concern. The husband might ask, "Why are you concerned?" Rather than cutting her off and saying, "Our son is doing fine." If the husband says something like this, he has effectively exalted his opinion above hers and ultimately cut her off from any sense that he is open to reasoning, or listening.

Even as I am sharing this some of you might be nudging your spouse. This is not what you want to do. Hopefully you would be considering your own responses to various attempts your spouse has made to communicate with you.

Yes, I am concerned about the relationship between husbands and wives in this particular area. But in regards to the family, the most challenging relationship in respect to this area seems to be the parent-child relationship. I believe it is common for parents to look at their children as being unreasonable. And I believe that it is common for children to consider their parents as unreasonable. Whether you are a parent or a child, if you profess to have the wisdom from above, then know this, the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and what? Reasonable!

When your parent comes to you and says to you, "I would like you to come home before 10:00 o'clock on week nights" what do you want to do with their idea? You will want to treat it as a treasure. Rather than immediately protesting, which is exalting your reasoning above your parents. Why not simply ask them why they want you to do this? Let them give you their reasons.

They may tell you that they are unable to go sleep until you have come home and that this is making it very difficult for them to function the next day. This to me would sound like a very compelling reason. Hopefully, unless you would have a more compelling rebuttal to that way of thinking, you would yield to their request. You might say something like, I certainly don't want to cause a problem for you by my staying out past 10:00 o'clock. I will be glad to be home before 10:00. " If you were to do this, I would think that you would be viewed as very reasonable.

When one of your children come to you and says that they would like to go over to someone's house and spend the evening. Rather than just simply saying, "No!" It would seem that it would be much better to share your concern with them, inviting their input. You might ask, "Do you think you can do this and still get your school work done?"

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Hopefully your child would say something like, “I have gotten all my school work done. I know that I have a test that I have to prepare for in history next Monday but I have set all day Saturday aside to study for it. And right now I know that I have A’s and B’s in all my classes. I really believe that everything is under control.” If the parent has no basis for challenging what has been said, it gives the parent a tremendous opportunity to manifest how truly reasonable they are. They hopefully would say something like this, “Go and have a good time, just be sure to be back by 10:00.” If this is the kind of exchange that would take place I would think that clearly the young person is going to view his parents as what? Reasonable. He will think that is thoughts, his ideas, his opinions are valued.

CONCLUSION

How do we know if we in fact our saved? How do we know if we in fact have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior? We can know as we see His wisdom and power manifested in and through our lives? We can know when we see the wisdom that is from above becoming more evident in all our relationships.

What are the characteristics of that wisdom from above?

The wisdom from above is “peaceable.” Peaceable describes a person who is ready for peace, desiring, fostering peace by working toward consensus, restraining discord and pacifying the turbulent elements around it.

The wisdom from above is “gentle.” Gentle (EPIEKES) conveys the thought of respect for the feelings of others, being willing to waive all rigor and severity in one’s dealings with others.

The wisdom from above is “reasonable.” It literally means “easily persuaded” and implies being open to reason and willing to listen.

Who among you is wise and understanding (who has truly been born again) let him show by his good behavior in the gentleness of wisdom.