

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

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

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. Or 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**, we then 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.”** From this passage we learn that false wisdom is motivated by **“bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.”** We also learn from this passage that false wisdom is **“earthly, natural and demonic.”** Or in other words, those who possess false wisdom are cut off from God’s resources. They are oblivious to their predicament. And the forces of darkness are committed to keeping it that way. Finally we see the result of false wisdom in **v.16**, **“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”** This is something that we have all experienced to some greater or lesser degree. 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 who according to **1 Cor. 1** is the wisdom of God and the power of God. Therefore, no matter how painful our past may have been, we can 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, opened 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 to be pure. This does not mean that we will live a sinless life, but it does mean that we strive to live a sinless life.

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This should not be the exception in our lives, this should be the rule. Why? Is it because of our own personal goodness that this is so? And the answer is absolutely not. Rather, the answer is God's faithfulness. He is at work in us to will and work His good pleasure and I don't care how messed up we might be, his purposes will not be thwarted. 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. That basic motivation will lead us to other things. We will call these other things the characteristics of the wisdom from above.

### 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.

A person who is peaceable would be a person who would not only be easy to work with but whose presence promotes peace. The truly wise do not perpetuate conflict by their selfishness, but cultivate peace by their humility. Listen to the words of **Phil. 2:1-4**, **"(1) Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, (2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (3) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."** Do you want to be a peaceable person and to manifest this wisdom from above? Then let us practice humility. If we would do this then we should be able over time to become quite skilled at conflict resolution.

Every relationship will have conflict if there is in fact closeness. That is assuming of course that both people have an active thought life which is actually working independently from the other. Do Lynn and I have conflict? Of course we have conflict. But if we are in fact drawing upon the wisdom from above if we are in fact drawing upon the wisdom of Christ, then we will be able to resolve our conflict peaceably.

The enemies of conflict resolution are attack and withdrawal. Those who are characterized by the wisdom from above and who would be described as peaceable will not fall victim to either of these enemies.

How can we profess to be operating by the wisdom from above when the conflicts we have with our wife, child, or coworker boils over into heated exchanges. It just cannot be done. The person who is peaceable is a person who is ready for peace, desiring, fostering peace by working toward consensus, restraining discord, and pacifying the turbulent elements around it.

How can we profess to be operating by the wisdom from above when we withdraw from conflict and never seek to resolve those conflicts. It just cannot be done.

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A couple had just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Someone asked the husband the secret of their marital bliss. “Well,” the old man drawled, “the wife and I had this agreement when we first got married. It went like this: When she was bothered about something she’d just tell me and get it off her chest. I would become angry with her, I would take a long walk. Pausing and thinking about it further he concluded his statement by saying, “I suppose you could attribute our happy marriage to the fact that I have largely led an outdoor life.” Someone might say that this man was peaceable. This is not the word I would use to describe him. I believe that a better word might be “pitiful.” They stayed married but the marriage was not a good one. A peaceable person’s policy will never be to withdraw when conflict arises, but rather he will be ready to make peace, desiring, fostering peace by working toward consensus, restraining discord and pacifying the turbulent elements around it.

Will a person who is peaceable always be able to have peaceful relationships? And the answer is of course not. What does the Scriptures teach us? **Rom. 12:18** tells us **“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”** Just because we may want to live at peace does not guarantee that we will be able to accomplish this. But if it is not accomplished, it will not be hopefully because of us and our own unwillingness to work at it with in a spirit of humility. The first characteristic that James lists for us in this passage of the wisdom that is from above is that it is peaceable. What is the next characteristic?

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. In the Septuagint this adjective is used mostly of God’s disposition as King. He is gentle and kind. We see this every day. We woke up this morning with a comfortable chill in the air. We perhaps went outside and got the newspaper and saw the gentle rays of the sun peeking up over the horizon. We heard the chirping of birds or perhaps the crowing of roosters. What a wealth of beauty and blessing and this was even before we ate breakfast.

But having said this I want to make it very clear to you that though the Lord is presently “gentle” in his relationship with mankind as their creator waiving all rigor and severity in his dealings with them, He will at a future appointed time exercise judgment.

The Scriptures teach us that not only is He loving and does not want to punish our sin, but those same Scriptures teach us that He is just and must punish our sin. The sin of the world will be ultimately dealt with at the “Great White Throne Judgment” which is described in **Rev. 20:11-15**, **“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. (13) And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every one of them according to their deeds. (14) And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”**

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This judgment will be exacting and it will be rigorous. It is so exacting that the writer of Hebrews tells us in **Heb. 10:31**, **“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** Not one single sin will be left unaccounted for.

Recently I was told by someone that they had shared the gospel with one of their friends. And in sharing the gospel this woman friend was asked this question, “If you were to die today and go to heaven and God were to ask you why should I let them into my heaven what would you say?” She responded because the Lord loved her. Of course the Scriptures tell us that the Lord loves her. In fact the Scriptures teach us that He loves the whole world. But this does not mean that the whole world is saved.

If the Lord could excuse our sin because he loves us, Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, would never have had to die on the cross. Jesus died on the cross in order to satisfy the debt of sin that we owed so that the Lord could offer us the gift of salvation that we must receive by faith. **“For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no one lest should boast.”** (Eph. 3:8)

The Lord is presently dealing with this world in gentleness. If He weren't we would have been incinerated a long time ago. But His present dealings with mankind has a purpose. Listen to the words of Paul in **Acts 17:30-31**, **“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, (31) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”** God is dealing gently with the world in order that the world might have the opportunity to repent.

And how does the Lord want us to deal with the world in our daily lives? The Lord wants us to treat the world in the very same way He does. He does not want us in our personal relationships with our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, coworkers, neighbors or friends to exact a pound of flesh for every perceived transgression. In fact, quite the opposite. He wants us to be quick to forgive those who owe us a debt. He wants us to be magnanimous.

Listen to the parable in **Matt. 18:23-35**, **“...the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. (24) And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.”** (a talent amounted to no less than six thousand denarii. At the rate of six denarii a week it would take a laborer a thousand weeks or 20 years to earn just one talent. Therefore in order for him to earn 1,000 talents he would have to work 20,000 years. This is a significant debt. **(25) “But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. (26) The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.’ (27) And the Lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. (28) But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ (29) So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’**

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**(30) He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. (31) So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. (32) Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. (33) Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' ”** And of course the answer to that question would be, “Of course.”

The Lord one day will be very exacting in terms of every sin that has ever been committed. But for right now, as he is waiting for men to come to repentance, he is dealing with mankind with gentleness. He is asking us to show respect for the feelings of others, being willing to waive all rigor and severity in one's dealings with them.

You might be thinking to yourself, this is me. My life certainly is characterized by gentleness. But be careful. I believe, perhaps I am wrong, but I believe that people who know me would say that I am a gentle person. But let me share with you my perspective. I believe that I have much to learn about this area.

I remember numerous times at the dinner table when our children were smaller that I would be sitting at the table wanting very desperately to have some peace. I wanted to very desperately to relax. And about that time, when this need was probably reaching its apex, I would hear one of my children smacking. How did I respond? Did I show respect for my child's feelings, quietly encouraging reminding them that it is a polite thing to learn to eat your food without smacking. No, I believe that on many more than one occasion, I would turn to the offending child and with a disapproving glare, speaking with firmness say something like, “Stop smacking!” Not very eloquent but it communicated my point. Did it help? I don't think so. Do my children smack while they are eating now? I don't think so. At least they don't do it around me. But the whole thing was totally unnecessary. If they are not smacking today it probably has nothing to do with my sharp reprimands, but more to do with them simply growing up and becoming adults.

Why did I behave like I did? I believe it was selfishness. I believe there were many times I came to the table more concerned about my feelings than the feelings of my children. And rather than cutting them slack, forgiving them any difficulty they might have been causing me, I nailed them to the wall. This was not the wisdom from above.

### CONCLUSION

How do we know if we in fact we are 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 that the wisdom is from above becoming more evident in all our relationships.

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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 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.

Who among you is wise and understanding (who has truly be born again)? Let him show by His good behavior in the gentleness of wisdom.