

James 3:13-18

Discussion Group Questions

6. In that same verse (v13), James describes a life of good deeds done in humility. Explain why humility is so important in our lifestyle as believers. Can you think of examples you have seen of good deeds done without humility? What was the outcome of those situations?
7. In what ways do we see the characteristics of verse 14-16 exhibited, even subtly, in the world around us, in the church, and in our own lives?
8. Think back to a recent difficult conversation, one that you knew you spoke out of selfish ambition. At what point in time did you realize that you were operating out of worldly "wisdom?" Did you realize that you were in error during that conversation? Were you able to resist temptation to continue on from selfish ambition? What would enable you to change course in the midst of worldly wisdom?
9. In verse 17, James describes eight qualities of wisdom from heaven. Each is truly a foretaste of heaven and is a free gift that we can give each other and the world around us. What one or more of these eight are the hardest for you to live out? Why might this area be so hard to embody?
10. James mentions the quality of peacemaking in verse 17 and ends the section in verse 18 with a proverb about peacemaking. Why is there such a need to be a peacemaker? As you look back on your own personal experience, think of a person who was a peacemaker. How did their effort, used by God, promote a "harvest of righteousness"?

May 18, 2008

LESSON 7

Dr. Jerry Nelson

For discussion following the sermon on May 18, 2008

Two Kinds of Wisdom

Key Points

In last week's text we were challenged to consider the significance and impact of our words. What we say matters, for our words truly are a reflection of our spiritual condition. James now challenges us to look to our hearts from whence our words come. What do our motivations and intentions reveal about the genuineness of our Christianity. Are we truly Christians (saved)?

"True wisdom, like real faith, is a vital, practical quality that has much (or more) to do with the way we live as with what we think or say." What is wisdom? How would you describe a wise person? Knowledgeable? True? Logical? How does James describe a "wise" person? Look at verses 17-18.

The "wisdom" of the world (and worldly ones -non-Christians) has a different origin, reflects different characteristics and has a different result (verses 14-16) than the "wisdom" of true Christians (verses 17-18). Each kind of wisdom is evident in the way we relate to one another and those around us.

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

Using James' descriptions of genuine Christianity that result in deeds (2:14-26), words (3:1-12) and now a properly motivated heart (3:1-12), am I a Christian?

Even we who are truly Christians are all tempted to act in the old ways of worldly wisdom, and many times we do so without even thinking about it. As you think back over the temptations you face to operate from selfish ambition, envy or jealousy, consider the following questions:

- Where am I most tempted to appear "better" than someone else? (job performance, spirituality, parenting, competence, education, etc.)
- What am I tempted to do when someone thinks less of me than they "ought" to?
- Who do I most sharply criticize, and why?
- How do I most readily recognize and confront sinful temptations within me before I engage in destructive conversations?
- How do I more readily recognize earthly, unspiritual thoughts and attitudes that begin to make their way into the way I relate to others?
- How do I seek to apply wisdom from above?

As you take an honest look at your own vulnerabilities, ask the Spirit to continue to enable you to identify temptations before they give way to sin, and to strengthen you to walk in accordance with "wisdom from above".

Group Preparation

In our text we find a juxtaposition of earthy wisdom and wisdom from above, and the fruit that each produces. You might want to have your group make a list of earthly "wisdom" and "wisdom from above," what kind of fruit each produces, and what effects it has on us relationally.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what way(s) is James 3:13-18 a continuation of James' main point begun in 1:26-27 and continued at least through 3:12?
2. Do you think James' remarks in this text are aimed at contrasting mediocre Christians with good Christians or are aimed at contrasting in-name-only Christians with genuine Christians? Why?
3. What should one who realizes he/she is not a genuine Christian do as a result of this text?
4. How does James define true wisdom? What else does Scripture say to further help us define wisdom? Compare and contrast wisdom and knowledge. (Make certain to emphasize the practical nature of wisdom as a relationship with God lived out in our relationships with others.)
5. The text also demonstrates the aim of all believers regarding our heart's intentions and motivations. In verse 13, James defines what a life lived with wisdom and understanding looks like. Share examples of believers that you know and how their lives exhibit or exhibited wisdom.