

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, August 17, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES “The Wise, The Unwise, and The Otherwise” *James 3:13-18, Various*

Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom. – Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” –James 3:13-18 (NKJV)

In the biblical sense, wisdom has to do with relational things much more than with technical things. Wisdom is different from intelligence and academic achievement. Many highly trained and educated individuals have trouble getting along with others; they can be useless or abrasive. In verses 13-18, James introduces another avenue of communication that every teacher possesses... namely, his life. A teacher communicates with his lips, but also teaches with his life, which is, perhaps more significant than the first. James asks the question, *“Who is wise and understanding among you?”* (v.13). After looking briefly at the wise man’s characteristics, we will fix our attention on the man who lacks wisdom.

I. THE WISE (James 3:13)

“¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” – James 3:13

Two prominent marks of the wise person’s life are mentioned here in verse thirteen.

2 Prominent Marks of the Wise Believer:

1. **Good conduct** – The word “conduct” or “behavior” as some translations have it, can be found 13 times in the New Testament and means “to return or turn back to something.” At the root of this word is the thought of “change”... a willingness to go back to the

truth and change in conformity with God's truth. In other words, a wise person is obedient, and change is a regular feature of his life.

"¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you will know them. ²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" – Matthew 7:15-23 How you live matters and says much about your life. I may indeed say how real your faith is and may even indicated if you are a genuine believer or not. Behavior or conduct equals "fruit" and the "fruit" matters. James calls it "work" and says in *James 2:17, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works (or fruit), is dead."*

"¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." – 2 Corinthians 5:17 The "old things" that have passed away are old behaviors and ways that have given way to a the "new creations" He has created you to be as a believer. We are to be "changed"... our "ought too's" certainly change, our "want too's" may be slow to change, but must be yielded to Christ's lordship over us as His.

2. **Meekness** – Today this quality is mistaken for weakness. We tend to think of a meek person as being spineless, without spirit or discipline. But this words, as it is used in Galatians 5:23 in reference to the fruit of the Spirit or in Jesus 'beatitudes' in Matthew 5:5, refers to the process of taming or controlling a horse without breaking its spirit. In Plato's era, the term "meek" was used to describe a brilliant teacher who could dialogue with his students without getting angry. It is a word meaning "strength under control."

As this relates to the "wise" believer it is a call to life the Christian life under the control of the Holy Spirit. Allowing the Spirit of God to guide and control our behavior. As Peter says in *1 Peter 2:11-12, "¹¹ Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."*

II. THE UNWISE (James 3:14-16)

Now we turn to the opposite kind of person: the one who operates without wisdom. Here we will examine matters related to the individual who shuns wisdom... the unwise. James begins in verse 14 by identifying the hidden drives of those who lack wisdom or the unwise. James identifies two motives tucked deeply in the unwise person's heart. I always think God's Word calls us, as believers, to check our own heart, to examine our own

motives for as Jeremiah tells us in **Jeremiah 17:9**, “*The heart (of man) is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*” I believe that God’s Word, through Jeremiah, is telling us to be honest with ourselves about ourselves. Don’t kid yourself? Be honest? Check your own heart out. And given James’ words here we need to be honest enough to check our own heart motives honestly. **Verse 14** says it like this, ^{“14} *But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.*” Be truthful with yourself in examining your deeply hidden motives buried deep in your heart. Again, James begins in verse 14 by identifying two motives tucked deeply in the unwise person’s heart.

2 Hidden Motives of the Unwise: James identifies two hidden motives of the heart of the unwise

- 1. Bitter envy** – The Greek word for “bitter” was used for undrinkable water. When combined with “envy” it defines a harsh, resentful attitude toward others. The arrangement of these two words in the original text seems to indicate a jealous envy that causes bitterness. There are twins within the soul that are evil: envy and jealousy. Though they seem similar, they’re quite different.

The Difference Between “Envy” and “Jealousy”	
ENVY	JEALOUSY
Envy is felt when we mourn empty hands because we don’t have what someone else has.	Jealousy is felt when we have full hands and are threatened because we fear someone will take away what we have.
Envy usually requires two parties; ¹you and ²the one you envy or want what they may have that you don’t	Jealousy usually requires three parties: ¹you, ²what you possess (<i>sometimes a person, i.e. spouse, friend, etc.</i>), and ³the one you fear may take it
Envy begins with nothing	Jealousy begins with much
Envy is about something you don’t have but want	Jealousy is about something you already have but fear losing
Envy is painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage	Jealousy is that unpleasant emotion you feel when you think someone’s trying to take what’s yours or what you think rightfully belongs to you

James portrays the unwise as literally being embittered with “jealous envy”... plagued by the twins. It really speak of the kind of person that is uncooperative and competitive, given to rivalry.

- 2. Self-seeking ambition** – The hidden motive drive a person to push his way to the top, without consideration of others, often pushing others aside or stepping on them to get to the top. The word(s) translated in verse 14 as “self-seeking” is sometimes translated as “strife.” It refers to selfish ambition that engenders antagonism and factionalism. The Greek word came to describe anyone who entered politics for selfish reasons and sought to achieve his agenda at any cost (i.e. even if that meant trampling others to get there). We are told in God’s Word in **Philippians 2:3**, “*Let nothing be done through*

selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

James not only identifies these hidden motives buried deep in our heart, that reveal a lack of wisdom, but he also identifies at least five (5) characteristics of the unwise in verses 14 and 15. Notice James’ words in verses 14-15, “¹⁴ *But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.* ¹⁵ *This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.*” Wow! You talk about some powerful words that speak to how we live. In the two verses, James indicates five characteristics associated with false wisdom or the unwise.

5 Characteristics of False Wisdom:

- 1. Arrogance (v.14)** – “Arrogance” is the justification of one’s sins. The word translated in verse 14 as “boast” or “boastful” and sometimes translated as “arrogance” literally means “to boast over wrong; to be proud in spite of wrong.” James is going to tell us in the next chapter, in **James 4:16**, “*But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*” A prime example of this kind of false world wisdom that causes us to miss out on God and His best for us can be found in one of the saddest letters in all of the New Testament to a “lukewarm” church in **Revelations 3:14-22**, “¹⁴ *And to the angel of the church of the Laodicean write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:’* ¹⁵ *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.* ¹⁶ *So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.* ¹⁷ *Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—* ¹⁸ *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.* ¹⁹ *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.* ²⁰ *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.* ²¹ *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.* ²² *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””*
- 2. Self-deception (v.14)** – James describes the unwise as lying against the truth in verse 14. When jealousy and ambition prevail in our heart, we lie to ourselves. This characteristic leads us to alter our standards in conformity with our deteriorating life patterns. That’s the same as changing the ruler to accommodate an improper measurement! God calls believers to a different standard. I love how the Apostle Paul says it in **Philippians 2:1-4**, “¹ *Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,* ² *fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.* ³ *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.* ⁴ *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

3. **Worldly (v.15)** – False wisdom has a horizontal scope; it looks to the earthly, worldly, standard, earthly measure of success, earthly counsel, earthly motives, and earthly method. James tell us in verse 16 that this kind of “false” wisdom doesn’t come “from above” meaning it doesn’t come from God, but rather from here... this world... is “worldly,” earthly, fleshly. James uses the word “earthly” in verse 15 in reference to this present world system. Listen close to how the Apostle Paul describes the wisdom of this world (earthly wisdom) in **Romans 1:18-22**, *“¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools...”*
4. **Carnal/Fleshly (v.15)** – This word James uses in **verse 15** is the word “sensual”... *“¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual...”* The word translated as “sensual” in **verse 15** has reference to the natural or most base and animal instincts of man, our carnal or fleshly nature, and here relating more especially to the mind, a wisdom in accordance with, or springing from, the corrupt desires and affections. Sometimes this word is translated as “unspiritual” as opposed to someone who thinks spiritually. James has in mind here the earthly or worldly wisdom that is often control by our fleshly or carnal desires... motivated by our human appetites. Paul gives us special insight into this idea in **Romans 8:1-11**, *“¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (to be carnally minded is to be unspiritual and to be spiritually minded is to be spiritual) ⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”* Listen, that is an important passage of scripture for us as believers! That is how we are to live... not according to the “flesh” but according to the Spirit.
5. **Demonic (v.15)** – Okay here is the last characteristic of this false wisdom that James give us and it’s a tough one... notice **verse 15**, *“¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from*

above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.” James is saying that the unwise person’s thoughts resemble something demonically influenced. From a human point of view, such thinking might appear to be astute and brilliant when in reality it is misguided and dangerous. When James speaks of this kind of wisdom as being “demonic” he is directly linking it to Satan and his forces, saying it is generated by Satan’s forces. Perhaps, this is why scripture and especially the Paul says to us in Ephesians 6:10-13, *“¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”* And the great disciple Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:8-9, *“⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”*

The results of refusing true wisdom: Verse 16 serves as a severe warning and admonition for us concerning conducting our lives with this kind of false wisdom or unwisely. James tells us in verse 16, *“¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion (disorder, disharmony, chaos, antagonism) and every evil thing are there.(all full variety of petty, worthless, good-for-nothing things)”* Wow! Seek God’s wisdom daily!

LESSONS FROM SOLOMON

In 2 Chronicles 1, we find Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, in contact with God. This favored monarch had a bright future ahead of him, one not yet scarred by compromise. God said to him in 2 Chronicles 1:7, “... Ask! What shall I give you?” Instead of asking for fame or fortune, Solomon asked for “wisdom and knowledge” to rule God’s people (v.10). God gave him these gifts in unprecedented measure. Under Solomon, the Hebrew nation experienced remarkable growth and prosperity. But in the passing of forty years, Solomon changed, and the wisdom he first treasured he later ignored. **His life was a tragedy that underscored a harsh reality: Wisdom granted is different from wisdom appropriated.** The child of God is not immune from succumbing to the life-style described in this study; we must daily and carefully manage our Christian walk daily.

The unwise person featured above is contrasted in James 3:17-18. When we look at him, we really see the type of individual that we, by nature, are inclined to be. But if we are to produce the fruit which is different from that produced by false wisdom, then something must come into our lives from above which is unnatural to us. God must pipe into us His life-giving water; the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit goes to work and waters the barren desert of our lives, it is remarkable how our unproductive characters can produce beautiful, luxuriant growth and fruit. In the remainder of this study we will consider the wise person and the characteristics of true wisdom that permeate his life, affecting his personality and behavior. We’ve already noted that

the prominent signs of the wise man are his good behavior or conduct (this term having its roots in the idea of “change”) and meekness (having in mind strength under “control”). Essentially, these are the seeds from which comes the crop of true wisdom.

III. THE MARKS OF TRUE WISDOM (James 3:17)

James tells us in James 3:17, *“¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”* Although he could have mentioned many more such marks, James specifically mentions seven. Each of these produces a corresponding character trait.

7 Marks of True Wisdom in the Life of a Believer:

1. **Purity** – We are told, *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure...”* James says it not only stands first in a list, but also first in importance. This wisdom produces “purity” (freedom from defilement; absence of pollution, cleanliness). This applies not only to moral cleanliness, but to motive cleanliness. It produces pure motives.
2. **Peace Loving** – James uses the word “peaceable.” This God-authored wisdom give rise to a peaceable attitude that, when indwelling us, causes us to guard against alienating others or creating ill will. This quality is foreign to us because by nature we battle with others and set people at distance from ourselves. When peace is woven into the fabric of our lives, we no longer wish to be abrasive or injurious; instead, we become soothing, healing influences.
3. **Gentleness/Meekness** – Here James uses the word *“gentle”* which may also be translated as “meek”... again, this is a nuanced word. This term appears in verses 13 and 17; however the meaning in each case varies. In verse 13 it refers to “control.” Its usage in verse 17 is much more difficult to translate into English. Some have rendered it “tolerant, equitable, or moderate,” yet those words fall short. It’s a bit easier to create the idea of this Greek term by taking an indirect approach. One who is gently/meek does not fight for every last legal right that may be his or hers. In fact, he or she know how to be flexible when it is wiser to forfeit his or her right and submit. God’s wisdom produces tolerance, along with the capability and willingness to acquiesce or give in.
4. **Reasonableness** – James says this one is *“willing to yield.”* The term used here appears only once in the New Testament... here. It comes from two Greek words that combine to mean “easily persuaded.” The original term described someone who was teachable, compliant, or easily persuaded, and who willing submitted to military discipline or moral and legal standards. For believers, it defines obedience to God’s standard. Wisdom from above cause its recipient to become conciliatory, agreeable, When the Spirit of God captures a human heart, He softens it, allowing him to become open and teachable... cooperative.
5. **Full of Mercy and Good Fruits** – In the first century, the Greek-speaking world used *“mercy”* to describe the feeling one person had for another who had fallen into a bad situation. By contrast, in the New Testament the word was used in a broader sense to include those who experienced bad situations by their own fault and rightly suffered severe consequences. Whereas mercy is the attitude, good fruits are the corresponding actions. Anyone can feel pity for someone who did not cause his own trouble, but the real test comes when mercy is to be show to one who is responsible for his

circumstances. Wisdom that show itself in the form of mercy produces good fruits toward others.

6. **Unwavering** – James uses the words “without partiality” to describe the next mark of true wisdom. The Greek word occurs only here in the New Testament and denotes a consistent, unwavering person who is undivided in his or her commitment and conviction and does not make unfair distinctions. In using this word, James was suggesting a faithfulness to principles. When operating from a basis of true wisdom, a person will act according to fixed scriptural principles regardless of his situation. He is capable of making a sound, biblical decision and standing by it.
7. **Without Hypocrisy** – In Greek theater, the hypocrite was an actor who played two roles, each with a corresponding mask. Behind the mask bearing a smile, he would speak humorous lines to make the audience laugh. Behind the other mask, one bearing a frown, he would speak tragic lines, causing the audience to feel sadness and sorrow. James contrasted hypocrisy to divine wisdom, which does not change face. Divine wisdom does not claim to be something it is not.

IV. THE RESULTS OF TRUE WISDOM (James 3:18)

“¹⁸ Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”-James 3:18

The seeds of gentleness or meekness and good works (v.13)... which bear the fruit (characteristics) of purity, peaceableness, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy with good fruits, principle, and integrity... result in peace. James conveyed his thoughts in these words, *“Now the fruit of righteousness is sown (literally seeded) in peace by those who make peace.”* “Peace” refers to “horizontal harmony,” which results when one person is rightly related to another. This peace is not theological, but relational. When we live according to the true wisdom, we can maintain peaceful relationships without violating God’s standards. By contrast, the individual who disturbs the peace between himself and others will know nothing of living a righteous life-style.

The Produce of True Wisdom:

1. **The produce of true wisdom is righteousness** – Remember “righteousness” may be defined as “being rightly related to God” so it is fruit or produce that always produces right relationship with God.
2. **The produce of true wisdom is sown/seeded by those who are peaceable** – That is, by those who have themselves made peace with God and are operating...living in that peace relationship, fully committed to Him and controlled by Him.
3. **The produce of true wisdom is to produce the same peace in others** – That is they produce or introduce “peace” into the lives of others by not only teaching them how to be at peace with God, but how to live in peace with other. Once our vertical relationship is right then our horizontal relationships may also be right.