

James 3:17-18 'So That Everyone Knows Who We Are!'

Last week's passage from James was chapter 3:13-16: 'The Wisdom Of God And The Wisdom Of The World!' In this passage James explained that we are governed by either one of two things. Those things that "come down from above," from God, and how we respond to that heavenly knowledge. Or the wisdom of the world, meaning that unsaved world of humanity. Our view of things is governed by what it determines as to whether or not something is good and upright!

In v13 he asks, "Who is wise and understanding among you?" We saw from Psalm 111 and Proverbs 2, that true wisdom begins and ends with "the fear of the Lord." In v1 he spoke of "ambitious deceivers," while in v13, he shows what true wisdom and leadership is. But in v14-16 he speaks of that other wisdom. That other view of things, "harbouring bitter envy and selfish ambition." No, this is not about selfless humble service, but about striving to get to the top of the ecclesiastical heap, and using everything we have to get there. Like the contestants on those wretched shows 'Survivor' and 'The Summit'. The end prize is all that matters.

No, this attitude is not about the glory of God, the proclamation of Christ's gospel, or the building up of His Body, the church. When "bitter envy and selfish ambition" find a safe haven in our heart, it's all about self, and we will defend those evils at all cost! v15: "Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, (from God) it's earthly, unspiritual, of the devil." No it's not inspired by God, it's of our fallen world. Not the heavenly realm of God, but of the earthly kingdom, that natural world of fallen humanity, and their father the devil!

When such things are happening, godly leadership is nowhere to be seen! v16: "For where you find envy and selfish ambition you find disorder and every kind of evil practise." When self-promotion is our goal, and not our Saviour's message of salvation and the building up of His people, chaos reigns! Supposed Christian worship services are filled with every demonic practise. Ecstatic speech, out of control bodily convulsions, false miraculous deceptions, an evil grab for money, and an even more evil twisting of the scriptures for personal gain! Yes these are the outcomes of "bitter envy and selfish ambition;" "Every evil practise" that men and women can devise. Such is his warning to the church, and to those in positions of authority!

He now returns to that wisdom which comes from above, as we pick it up in verse 17-18, under the title: 'So Everyone Knows Who We Are!' And I hope these things sound familiar to you as we come to James second "but" of the passage. He contrasts these people to those that he has just spoken about. Yes he's just spoken about that evil self-seeking heart where "bitter envy and selfish ambitions" find a safe haven.

Well, now he points us toward that kind of person, who is indeed born of the heavenly wisdom that comes down from God! James gives us eight attributes or characteristics of what this person looks like. Those evidences within someone's life who truly belongs to God. And as the commentator explains, he again begins with the heart, and then deals with those external evidences! v17: "But the wisdom that comes from heaven, (meaning from above, from God) is first of all pure." Those who are the owners of, and have been blessed with, this godly wisdom by God's grace, will to different degrees look like this! And they will be "First of all pure." The word used in Greek is "*agern*" and it conveys the idea of chastity, or purity within a married relationship. Being totally and absolutely devoted to the one person; forsaking all others as the marriage vow says.

King David captures it beautifully in Psalm 24, referred to as the Psalm of the Ascension, as he points us to Christ's ascension into heaven. V3-4: "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." David qualifies what that purity of heart consists of: "Who does not lift up his soul to an idol and swear by what is false." That person's worship of God is "pure," it is chaste. They have a heart and mind, that is only for the living God. Their loyalty is not divided. No they do not give to another, that which belongs to God! Yes their "wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure;"

Of course the Lord Jesus Himself took up these very things in His Sermon on the mount, in Matthew 5-7. This is interesting because David says: "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." And as the Lord sits upon the side of the mountain and the crowds flock to Him, He teaches the disciples saying in Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." In that sermon, Jesus doesn't just explain that this is what they look like, but this is who they are. The blessed ones of God! And He also speaks of that "purity" of devotion and intention. There is no "bitter envy and evil ambition" amongst such people. Though of course they remain sinners, yet by God's grace their intention is "first of all pure." They have no aspirations to de-throne God in their own lives, by placing themselves upon His throne. But also, from that heavenly wisdom, their intent is to humbly glorify Him within their lives!

Brothers and sisters, it is a confronting thing to "Be still and know" that He is God, while truly examining the "purity," (or perhaps the lack there of) our own intentions! Why it is that which we do or say. Why do we act as we do? As I said last time, do we secretly want the praise? And in so doing, never give others the opportunity to use their gifts and abilities to shine for Jesus! Those others in v1 and 14-16 had hidden desires, which had nothing to do with Christ and His Kingdom. Nor the blessing and the building up for the benefit of the Brethren! Yes "the wisdom that comes down from God (that the true believer possesses) is first of all pure;" it is chaste. It desires the glory of God, the proclamation of Jesus' gospel message, and the benefit and blessing of His Body, the people in His church!

And of course the question is Beloved, is that our desire? Is that where our heart truly lies? Do we have that spirit within us that says, Here I am Lord, use me in any way you choose. Glory always be to you my God, "O my Rock and my Redeemer." And next James says, these people are "then peace loving." And we are again taken back to Matthew 5: 8-9: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God."

The old Commentator explains that it is indeed important to have "peace." In Romans 12:18-19 Paul said, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "Vengeance is mine," says the Lord, "I will repay." So we are to be "lovers of peace" not revenge. We ought to seek peace. When problems arise between ourselves and others, it mustn't matter who is in the right or who is in the wrong. What matters is the Body of the Lord, and that Satan does not get a foothold in His church.

And as in v18, of course Jesus takes this further. We are to be "peacemakers." When trouble and strife occurs between our Brethren, we have to come between them if needs be. And Beloved to do this, we do indeed need to seek that "wisdom of God that comes from above." When the blows are being thrown, we might end up with bruises on both sides of our face. Perhaps not physically, but maybe emotionally and spiritually. These things always come at a cost! v18 says: "Peacemakers who sow in peace, raise a harvest of righteousness." Friends though it be a difficult task, the sewers of peace grow the things of Christ's Kingdom. They labour in His Name, and they work in His fields

tending to the heavenly crop! And yet Jesus the “Prince of peace” said: “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

So yes, by all means we should seek to leave at peace with everyone, as far as it is within our power,” as Paul said. But never if the price means that we compromise the truth of the Word of God. Brothers and sisters, never before has there been such an attack upon the God the Holy Spirit “breathed” Word the Bible. And I'm not even talking about those attacks from outside of Christianity. We are all aware that more and more in Australia today, to seek to bear testimony to Him, by carrying His Name, Christian, means that we are estranged from much of mainstream society. To simply make the statement that a man is a man and a woman is a woman, (because that's how God made them, so that is how they will remain until the day they die, and indeed throughout all the eternity) no matter what is done to the external package. These ideas fall foul of much of modern thinking.

For us to simply assert that God created the universe and everything in it because the Bible says so; and that reason tells us that it is impossible for something to come out of nothing, like the so called Big Bang, we are considered to be fools. Yes, it is as we have seen before from Isaiah 5:20-21 the world and reason has been turned upside down. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight.”

So yes friends, the woeful state of the nation in which we live means that it comes as no surprise, that claiming God as the Sovereign Creator of the universe, Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and the Bible as His “breathed out” inerrant unchanging Word, brings with it tremendous enemies and ridicule!

But Brethren, the greatest danger for the Christian who is one of both word and action, comes from within the recognised church. Such as that “disorder” which we looked at last week. Do you know, that there are churches, (for want of a better description) around the world with literally tens of thousands of followers whose leaders say that Jesus was not the only Son of God, they say that He was only *a* son of God, and *we* can be the next one of those in line. They say His resurrection didn't actually happen. That the resurrection is not crucial to what we believe. Some say, that we should throw out the Old Testament because God didn't really create the world in six days. There was no Adam and Eve, there was no flood that covered the surface of the whole earth, and indeed, we can even do away with the whole of the Bible. Just as long as we have Jesus!

But the question is, How do we have Jesus without the Bible? And did not He Himself say when challenged by Satan: “For it is written.” “It is written.” “It is written.” And also: “I did not come to do away with the law but to fulfil the law.” So, no Beloved, with people who make the assertions I described above we cannot have peace, unless they repent of their heresy. “What fellowship can light have with darkness” Paul said. “Don't entertain the devil” an old translation says. Yes Jesus came to “bring a sword,” the Word of His mouth. He died in the fulfilment of it and the Saints throughout the millennia have also given their lives, for that same Word. So let us also always hold fast to it. “Peace” yes, and yet never if it comes at the cost of compromising His Word of Truth!

Yes “first of all pure; then peace loving,” and now it's “considerate.” In the NASB it's “gentle.” In the original it's “forbearing.” And Blanchard explains, that this is seeking to see the best in everyone, no matter what the circumstances are. To “bear with” them. Now friends I say this with all sincerity, I don't know about you, but often times I find this really hard to do. To “bear with,” hold my tongue and be gracious, when sometimes just dumb situations arise. The answer is obvious to us, and we try

and explain it to the other person but they just can't see the solution, try as we might! But Beloved, I know that this is not good enough. I also know how gracious you have been with me over the years. And if I look at the Cross, and remember what Jesus has borne for me, and how He continues to "bear with" me, with shame I must confess, Lord forgive me! And I'm often reminded of a little book which I read many years ago entitled 'Lord Change Me'.

Can you see? This should be our prayer. Not Lord change him or change her or change them, but Lord change me. Yes change me O Lord that I would be more like you. That I would be able to "bear with" others the way that you "bear with" me. Yes "Father forgive me, for I am the sinner." As Jesus said: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples. If you have love one for another." Yes being "considerate," gentle, "bearing with others."

Next is "submissive." The Commentator explains that this doesn't mean that we lay down so that people can walk over the top of us. In Greek the word means compliant, in the NASB it's reasonable, and that's probably the best explanation. This attribute of "God's wisdom from above," explains that we must be willing to see the other person's point of view. As he said at the start of the letter in chapter one: "Quick to listen and slow to speak." Not to accept falsehood, but willing to see the other person's side of things. The opposite would be, to be unyielding. Like a wall of stone.

I guess we can be like this at times. Yes that person, who even when gently shown that their position on something (whatever it may be) is clearly wrong, but they will never admit it, because they want to win the day! Friends as Christians, we can't be this way. And if we find ourselves doing this we need to repent, and confess to that person with whom we are dealing. Yes we need to be willing to listen, willing to "submit," to be reasonable, and genuinely so!

Next James says that we ought to be "full of mercy." Yet again from Matthew 5:7: "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy." Clearly this speaks of having a forgiving heart. In v1,14-16, men had "bitter envy and selfish ambition in their hearts." Whereas both Jesus and James, say that our hearts should be "full of mercy." But what does he mean? Well, it's simply that we be ready and willing to forgive. We spoke about this some weeks ago at Bible study. That the person who holds onto the anger and hurt, is the one who is in effect, being held in bondage. And Satan rejoices at such things. And as it was also mentioned at study that we don't have to forget, but we do have to forgive. And particularly so for our own sakes!

Now Beloved, I'm not going to make comment on the road that your lives have taken. They are pains that only you and God know about. But He doesn't want you to live with that pain. Jesus died to take that pain away. But somehow we need to be able to cast such things aside, by forgiving whomever it is that has wronged us. Only then will we truly be set free from that pain! And notice that he says: "Full of mercy." So not only is God's "heavenly wisdom" about forgiveness, it is also about acts of kindness. Yes being "full" of the desire to do good works."

Ephesians 2:10: "For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." We each of us have a purpose in Christ. And part of that purpose, is the task of being "full of mercy." Showing kindness to others for no other reason, than being merciful. Because in doing so, we reflect the infinite mercy that God has poured out upon us, through His Son Jesus! Yes "full of mercy and good fruit."

Friends, clearly that's what I have just alluded to. In v11-12, James asks "can fresh water and bitter water come out from the same spring?" "Can olives come from fig trees?" "Can figs come from grapevines?" And of course the answer is no, these things are an impossibility. Jesus said in John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much

fruit.” And v8 of John 15: “This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” So yes the recipients of these things do receive our acts of merciful kindness, and that's a blessed thing. But that's not the end goal. And this is something that has become greatly confused today, as we have seen before. Those “merciful” acts have become the ends in themselves. That's not the gospel! The goal is that the fruit which falls from us, (as the branches which grow from Christ the vine) show that “we are His disciples.”

Yes glory be to God, that's the goal! To make Jesus known, in other people's lives. God's merciful and mighty act of deliverance, when He brought the Israelites out of Egypt. What was it ultimately all about? Exodus 14:4 says: “And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” Over 250 times God speaks of His Glory and gaining Glory for Himself. That's the goal. Glory be to God, so that humanity would bow down before Him! Just as Pharaoh was, and all powers and authorities will be forced to do! Amen!

And the final two attributes are “impartial and sincere.” We've dealt at length with impartiality before. Treating everyone the same regardless of their social standing or position. Because we are all equal in Christ. Equally condemned because of sin, and equally saved by Grace, from God through Jesus!

Last of all is “sincere.” It simply means genuine. Not full of ambitious hypocrisy. He really brings us back to where he began, doesn't he? That “purity of heart.” That “purity” of intention. And really this last attribute of godly wisdom, should underline them all. Because without “sincerity” in each of these things, they're all vanity, empty, meaningless!

Beloved what has James been doing in all of these things? Well he has been painting a picture of Jesus. And largely, even using the Lord's own words to do so. Because who is “pure of heart” and intention? Who is “peace loving” even “the peacemaker, that has sown in peace and raised a harvest of righteousness?” Who is “considerate and submissive?” “Even unto death on a cross?” Who is “full of mercy and good fruit?” Who is “impartial and sincere?” Well of course it is Jesus! Dear friends, I don't know if this was James main intention, but that's what he has in effect been doing. Simply showing us a picture of Jesus. And he is calling us to be more like Him. And in contrast to those deceivers in v1, and 14-16 and the myriad of them that abound today. So that in our reflection of Him and this His godly wise attributes, we would show all of our world, (our family and our friends etc) that we really are his disciples. Yes that everyone would know who we are. As we seek to show them Jesus. Amen!

Let's pray!