

WISE ATTITUDES

© 1997 by Mark Beard

Text: James 3:13-18

It's safe to say that we all have had and will have our fair share of ups and downs, good times and bad, heartaches and joys. But it is also obvious that not everyone has the same attitude about life's variations—not even all Christians. Even in the ranks of Christianity we can find attitudes ranging from one extreme to the other. There are those who are very Christ-like in their attitudes and there are those who only *think* that they are Christ-like, but their attitudes betray them.

■ Someone wrote, “One man gets nothing but discord out of a piano; another gets harmony. No one claims the piano is at fault. Life is about the same. The discord is there, but so is the harmony. Study to play it correctly, and it will give forth the beauty; play it falsely, and it will give forth the ugliness. Life is not at fault.” (Hewett, 39)

It is amazing how our approach to life and its problems shapes our lives. Our *attitudes* cannot be hidden—nor can the effects of our attitudes be concealed. They will be revealed eventually.

In this passage James addresses unChrist-like attitudes such as jealousy, bitter envy and selfish ambitions as well as the effects of these attitudes. But he also offers a look at the blessings of godly attitudes before he concludes.

But let us first look at the fruits of what James calls earthly wisdom.

I. EARTHLY WISDOM PRODUCES UNCHRISTLIKE ATTITUDES (vv.13-16).

A. James challenges those who claim to be wise (v.13).

He is very clear when he points out that they should support their claim to wisdom by the way they live. They should show their strength by their control. They should be meek.

■ The word “meekness” comes from the Greek word *Prautes* that means “gentleness,” but not a passive gentleness growing out of weakness. The word was used to describe a horse that had been broken and trained to submit to the bridle. (Barclay, 241-42)

Often we consider those who are successful in life to have the most wisdom. However, those whom God consider wise are actually those who pattern their lives after His word and submit to His authority.

B. Notice the marks of human wisdom (v. 14).

■ The feelings of our hearts will surface somehow.

JEALOUSY—“Someone who tends to be suspicious, resistant and given to rivalry.”

SELF-SEEKING—“It's the motive that drives people to push themselves to the top.” (Swindoll, 120)

■ Senator John Ashcroft said, “The most important thing my dad ever taught me is that there are more important things than me.”

-- John Ashcroft, United States senator. Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 2.

If it is in your heart don't pretend it's not—get it out! Don't be arrogant in the face of your own sins. Don't deceive yourself by manipulating the truth to cover your own error.

C. What is the origin of this so-called earthly wisdom (v.15)?

1. **It is NOT from above.** True wisdom comes from God.
2. **It is EARTHLY.** “It views life from the limited viewpoint of this world rather than from heaven's vantage point.”
3. **It is NATURAL, or SENSUAL.** It is “soulish” meaning, “fleshly, not related to the Spirit of God.”
4. **It is DEMONIC.** It is of the devil, the way he wants you to think.

(Swindoll, 121)

D. Note the *results* of this so-called wisdom (v.16).

1. It produces DISORDER. It destroys unity in the body.
 2. It produces EVERY EVIL PRACTICE or worthless activity.
- Earthly wisdom produces UNGODLY ATTITUDES.

However...

II. WISDOM FROM ABOVE PRODUCES GODLY ATTITUDES (vv.17-18).

In contrast to “earthly wisdom” which is *not* from above, James points out the attributes of the “wisdom that comes from heaven.”

A. Wisdom from above is first of all PURE (v.17a).

This purity refers to the absence of sinful attitudes and motives. This is *first in importance*. It is opposite of the self-seeking attitude mentioned in v. 14-16. Purity is one of the first things a person loses when they begin to fall away from God.

■ One commentator writes, “The pure in heart will know God so intimately that they will see Him come to their rescue when tempted or come alongside as their closest friend when facing trials. Purity clears our vision to see Him at work in everything we do.” (Swindoll, 127)

B. Next, wisdom from above is CONSIDERATE or PEACEABLE (v.17b).

This is definitely not a natural attribute of man. This is brought about by the presence of holiness in one's life. Holy people are peaceful and considerate people.

■ Isaiah 32:17, “And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.”

C. Wisdom from above is also GENTLE (v.17c).

■ Matthew Arnold called this gentleness a “sweet reasonableness.” It is characteristic of one who is "easily persuaded" not because they are weak but because they are cooperative.

■ William Barclay wrote, "The man who is gentle (*epiekes*) is the man who knows when it is actually wrong to apply the strict letter of the law. He knows how to forgive when strict justice gives him a perfect right to condemn. He knows how to make allowances, when not to stand upon his rights, how to temper justice with mercy, always remembers that there are greater things in the world than rules and regulations."

D. Wisdom from above is WILLING TO YIELD (v.17d).

This is very similar to being gentle. It is all about being reasonable. If one is in authority he or she must be gentle. If one is under someone else's authority he or she needs to be reasonable or willing to yield. We are to yield first of all to the Lord, but also to those who have rule over us. Can you work out problems without anger?

C. Wisdom from above is FULL OF MERCY and GOOD FRUITS (v.17e).

Nothing from above is harsh or cruel. What comes from God is merciful and filled with compassion.

■ Miguel de Cervantes said, “Among the attributes of God, although they are all equal, mercy shines with even more brilliancy than justice.” (Hewett, 346)

Through God we are able to have pity on others. But also we are able to reach out and help—this is good fruit.

F. Wisdom from above is WITHOUT PARTIALITY (v. 17f).

It is unwavering. Unwavering (*adiakritos*) is defined as impartial; no prejudice; straightforward. James is very firm on the point that a Christian should not be double-minded or divided. There is strength only in stability.

G. Finally, wisdom from above is WITHOUT HYPOCRISY (v.17g).

■ Our modern word “hypocrisy” comes from the first century term hypocrites, used to describe a person who was an actor. In Greek Theater, actors normally played several parts by simply wearing a different mask for each character. Today when we use the word hypocrite, we mean anyone who wears a mask, who pretends to be someone he or she is not.

True wisdom is never two-faced or deceptive. It is completely and simply honest. (Swindoll, 129)

This is and should be different from the world's wisdom and system.

III. ATTITUDES BASED ON TRUE WISDOM YIELD THE GREATEST BLESSINGS (v.18).

A. Whereas worldly wisdom produces problems (v. 16), godly wisdom produces PEACE (v. 18).

Notice that James refers to the *fruit of righteousness* being sown here in verse 18. Only God can produce this fruit in a person's life.

■ Warren Wiersbe writes, “The Christian life is a life of sowing and reaping...The Christian who obeys God's wisdom sows righteousness, not sin; he sows peace, not war. The life we live enables the Lord to bring righteousness and peace into the lives of others.

What we *are* is what we live, and what we live is what we sow. What we sow determines what we reap. If we live in God's wisdom, we sow righteousness and peace, and we reap God's blessings. If we live in man's worldly wisdom, we sow sin and war, and we reap ‘confusion and every evil work.’” (366)

B. Righteousness will only be present in a climate of peace (v.18).

We as a church or as Christians can only grow in righteousness and true holiness if we are at peace. This is why Satan wants Christian people to be at odds with each other.

CONCLUSION

■ In the movie *The Poseidon Adventure*, the ocean liner *S.S. Poseidon* is on the open sea when it hits a huge storm. Lights go out, smoke pours into rooms and, amid all the confusion, the ship flips over.

Because of the air trapped inside the ocean liner, it floats upside down. But in the confusion, the passengers can't figure out what's going on. They scramble to get out, mostly by following the steps to the top deck. The problem is, the top deck is now 100 feet under water. In trying to get to the top of the ship, they drown.

The only survivors are the few who do what doesn't make sense. They do the opposite of what everyone else is doing and climb up into the dark belly of the ship until they reach the hull. Rescuers hear them banging and cut them free.

In life, it's as if God has turned the ship over and the only way for us to find freedom is to choose what doesn't make sense: lay down our lives by serving, supporting, and sacrificing for others.

-- Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 2.

In life we are constantly faced with two different directions to take. However, when a Christian faces a choice about how he/she should live there is clear direction given. We can follow the path of earthly wisdom that cultivates the *attitudes* of a fallen heart, or we can follow after godly wisdom that gives and develops within us a godly and wise attitude. It is our choice.

References

Barclay, William.

Hewett, James S. (Ed.). (1988). *Illustrations unlimited*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

Swindoll, Charles S. (1991). *James: Practical and authentic living*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing.

Wiersbe, Warren (1989). *The Bible exposition commentary, Vol. 2*. Wheaton: ILL. Victor Books.