

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 27, 2015

James 3:13-18

The Stark Contrast Between Heavenly and Worldly Wisdom

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Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

Being a Christian is not theoretical. We are not to sit around and come up with hypothetical and imagined scenarios about what my life needs to be as a child of God born by the Word of truth. Christianity is practical, that is, we are to put into practice moral wisdom that rests solely on God's Word.

In our next section of James' letter, we read the apostles' words about how to tell the difference between such genuine wisdom, and a pseudo wisdom that tries to pawn itself off as the real thing. There is stark and unmistakable contrast between the two.

Let's take a look at **The Stark Contrast Between Heavenly and Worldly Wisdom**. Worldly wisdom produces selfish living. God's wisdom produces living for others.

In Greek philosophy, wisdom was hypothetical and imagined. It was abstract and conceptual. It was not practical for dealing with the dishonest vendor in the marketplace, or the disagreeable next door neighbor. Such earthly, or worldly wisdom, leaves a lot of wiggle room for determining standards of morality that show in behavior.

James adds that such worldly wisdom also is "unspiritual and demonic." Worldly wisdom is morality not based on God's Word. Unspiritual means it is natural and shared by animals and people alike. For example, people who engage in sexual relations apart from marriage are acting out what is natural just like animals do. Such worldly wisdom is immoral because it comes from Satan.

Essentially, all worldly wisdom produces selfish living. Selfishness murders the unborn. Selfishness ends marriages. Selfishness takes from others even their good names. Selfishness "harbors bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts."

Where does all this worldly wisdom's lore we sang about in our sermon hymn lead? "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice." It leads to chaos and anarchy against God and against other people. It leads to false beliefs and other great shame and vice that goes directly contrary to the morality God requires, and the child born of God desires to manifest in daily repentance and faith in Christ. Do not boast about this false morality.

Do not deny the truth of God's Word by following Satan's lies that worldly wisdom is the way to go in life. We may think we are being wise when we lock arms and hearts with every evil practice but actually we are not being wise and understanding. We only will bring upon ourselves and others enmity and pain. Perhaps it will lead to a complete rejection of God and his will to eternal damnation.

In stark contrast to this worldly wisdom is "the wisdom that comes down from heaven." It is God's wisdom. It is wisdom that rests solely and squarely on God's Word. Almost every time I wrote the word worldly in my sermon manuscript I left out the first l and wrote wordly. But I thought, that fits. God's wisdom is wordly because he reveals it through his holy Word, the Bible.

God's wisdom produces living for others. True wisdom creates the direct opposite of selfish. Jesus Christ, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, is the power and the wisdom of God. Jesus Christ is

the most unselfish act of our loving Father in heaven. Jesus acted the most unselfish way by giving himself even to death on a cross to redeem us from sin, death, and hell. This was God's wisdom as the way to save us who cannot save ourselves.

The forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God is not theoretical or hypothetical. It is practical. Christ's sacrifice for me on the cross destroys my selfishness. It counteracts my lust for sin. Christ's resurrection lifts me up high above this natural world into the heavenly kingdom. God's Word compels me to live for Christ and to obey his commandments that guide my every thought, word and deed.

Such is "the wisdom that comes down from heaven." This wisdom is pure, unadulterated. It is of the highest moral quality and godly integrity. This wisdom brings peace. This wisdom produces peace.

It is wisdom that fears the Lord. It keeps me honoring God's representatives over me. It keeps my and my neighbor's bodies safe from harm. It keeps me pure for marriage and in marriage. It protects my and my neighbor's property and good reputation. Such wisdom knows how to be content in all situations and crushes covetousness.

All of this is the fruit that flows from righteousness. Verse 18 is best rendered, "The fruit that comes from righteousness sows in peace to doing peace."

Those who believe in Christ are connected to him like branches to a vine. Christians produce abundant fruit, good works. The result is bringing peace to others. We use the strengths and attributes God has given us not to dominate others but to help them. This will give them peace in their lives also, and possibly a chance for us to lead them also to Jesus Christ for eternal peace.

Last week we read James' words, "I will show you my faith by my deeds." There is a stark contrast between those deeds of heavenly wisdom and the abundant evil that flows from a natural, unspiritual, demonic point of origin.

So, we repeat James question and apply it to us. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life; by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." Then, we will be at peace and sow in peace to bring peace. Amen. <SDG>