

"Wisdom from Above, II"

James 3:11-18, I

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"Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." (Jas 3:11-18 AV)

The purpose for the book of James is to prepare the church for tribulation and trials. Jesus said that we would have tribulations and trials in this world, but we are to be of good cheer in the world, for He has overcome the world. The writer of Hebrews says that none of this is joyous, but it does yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, if we endure.

Because of this, the writer exhorts us to pray for wisdom from God. But we must pray in faith without double-mindedness and wavering between two opinions. We cannot serve God and mammon and we must not be divided in our minds. The rich are not favored over the poor. We are not to be partial in law-keeping, for if we keep all the law and offend in one point we are condemned a lawbreakers. We are to be doers of the word, and not hearers only, for the word is not for our amusement, curiosity, speculation, wicked controversy, or destroying one another, but for obedience and faith.

We are not to pass our time in frivolity, but be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Even though faith is confirmed and validated in heaven, yet if it is true faith it will have legs upon the earth and its mature purpose is the work that it does upon the earth. It requires the surrendering up to God of everything that we have, even as Abraham offered up his first born child, as a pattern of God's sacrifice of His son, which we are called to emulate in our service for each other.

Envy and strife represents the self-seeking wisdom of the world. This wisdom asks not, "Who can I be a friend to; who needs a friend that I can be?" but it asks, "Why doesn't anyone be a friend to me? Who is going to look after my needs?" This latter spirit destroys friendships, schools, homes, churches, and societies. Where this spirit of envy and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. Every part of the body is to serve the body and in serving the body it finds life, for we lose our life if we seek it, and we find

our life if we lose it.

This is only accomplished by the work of the Spirit, and cannot be forced by legislation, coercion, guilt manipulation or devious means, for even our Lord Jesus gave up himself willingly and gladly for His church. Although it was the will of His Father, yet Christ did not yield to some extraneous coercion, but was moved by His own will and love to fulfill all that the Father had commanded Him.

But let us look at the text:

I. The Attributes of a fool: worldly wisdom--what a man knows naturally. Jude speaks of those who go in the way of Cain, only knowing what they know naturally.

A. The world has a form of knowledge; a form of religion; and a form of wisdom. An illusion, for the devil is the prince of illusion. Question: Are we content with a "form" a "shadow" a "reputation" for wisdom or understanding?

B. Or: it can mean "boasting of a gift you do not have." Pretending knowledge, pretending holiness, pretending some gift of the spirit. Or like Ananias and Sapphira: pretending what you do not have.

C. Worldly wisdom rejects the special revelation of God, or subordinates it to the natural, to "practical" wisdom.

1. Special revelation is found in the Holy Scriptures

2. The Scriptures reveal Jesus Christ and He is found nowhere else. A prayer for wisdom from above is a prayer to have enlightenment so that we might understand the principles of natural revelation and the specific content of the Scriptures. This means we must have our minds open: be swift to hear and slow to speak.

3. Make much of Christ; he that believeth on me shall not be ashamed!!!!

II. What are the general attributes of this wisdom from above.

A. vs. 13: Two general characteristics: good manner of life and meekness. Those that sow must be first partakers of the fruit: those that seek to teach must partake of the teachings themselves. Meekness requires that I recognized that I need the church and the knowledge that others have. Wisdom is also the ability to make value judgments, to decide what is important and what is not important. All men are sinners, but all men are not moral equivalents of each other. Charles Manson is not the moral equivalent of George Washington, though both broke the law. Washington disobeyed the Parliament of England; Manson disobeyed the law of God and natural decency. Pride gets hold of one little truth and worries it to death, destroying everything around it. Knowledge puffs up, if it is not accompanied

with wisdom.

B. From the Constitution of Trinity Covenant RCUS:

1. It is the duty of church members to live sober, righteous and godly lives, labor faithfully to bring others to Christ, obey the laws and rules prescribed in the Word of God, abide by the Constitution of the Church, contribute liberally and in proportion to their means to the support of the gospel and the extension of the kingdom of Christ, attend faithfully the public services of the Church, and to engage diligently in private devotions. Members shall recognize God's sovereignty in all areas of human endeavor and shall seek to obey the laws of the civil magistrate, the Church Constitution, and the tenets of family government insofar as they conform to the Word of God. Having examined themselves, as the Scripture demands, they should regularly partake of the Lord's Supper. Parents shall present their children at the proper time for baptism and give special attention to the Christian training of the members of their household. Parents shall especially be diligent in catechetical instruction and giving attention to the training of the members of their households in the meaning and observance of the Lord's Supper.

2. There is nothing unreasonable about this, and no one will do it to perfection, but these are the duties that we took upon ourselves when we became members of the church. This provision faithfully represent the duties that every member of the denomination has taken upon itself. Some are more faithful than others, but the failure of some does not relieve any of the rest of us from our pledged duty.

III. What are the specific characteristics of Godly wisdom: beside a good way of life and meekness [spirit of obedience—not a show or doing the least to get by and fool others. vs. 17,18

A. Pure: Not contaminated: not mixed with sinful, worldly wisdom. We all do this, and must learn to guard against it. We impose ourselves and our own values on the Scriptures. As Matthew preached when he was here; idolatry was not so much a substitution of a false God for Jehovah, but the erection of other gods in addition, alongside of, before His face. Q95: What is idolatry? A95: Idolatry is to conceive or have something else in which to place our trust instead of, or besides, the one true God who has revealed Himself in His Word.

B. Peaceable. The godly man loves peace, for he recognizes the rewards of peace. We know that peace is far better than war. We know that sometimes it is necessary to go to war; but we also know what the costs of war are.

C. Gentle: fair, moderate, forbearing. A gentle person does not disturb the wound; but only as is necessary for healing.

D. Easy to be entreated: Does not demand the podium. Gives full opportunity to be heard. Does not answer before it has heard. Even Cain got a hearing; and Ahab.

E. Full of Mercy and good fruit. How different Christianity was from all the philosophies of the world! Christianity performed what the philosophers only dreamed of doing.

F. Not prejudiced: without partiality. No wrangling that comes from your own agenda. This word literally means "Not divided." or double minded. Like a woman who wishes she had married Nathan, for there were nice things about him, too.

G. No hypocrisy: Not pretended. Sincere. This word means "a reply," as you would say your lines when cued on a stage; it came to mean "Play-acting." Saying what is expected. With some people everything is a learned and practiced response. Nothing is real. An empty shell. Shallow.

IV. So we have contrasted here, two very different kinds of wisdom.

A. They are: The wisdom of this earth is earthly, sensual, devilish. It is full of envy and strife, and breeds confusion, bitterness, and every evil work. We are warned not to glory or lie against the truth if we have this bitter envy and strife in our hearts, for a bitter heart will spew forth bitter words. How different the wisdom that comes from above. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," our Lord prayed on the cross. No envy, no strife, no double-mindedness, no bitterness. Only God can give this wisdom, for it is not a flower that grows in the soil of man's sinful nature. And that brings us to our conclusion.

B. The Soil of Peace

1. Being justified by faith we have peace with God: See Romans 5:1,2. Peace with God is basic. There is no peace to the wicked. There is no peace to those who run from God. There is no peace to those who simply want to use God, for God is not an errand boy for you or me.

2. Come unto me, all ye that labor... There is rest in Christ; the soul must rest in Him and find its peace there. Works has nothing to do with salvation. They are the fruit of salvation, not the cause. Until you accept this idea, you will never have peace with God.

3. Justify is a legal term, and has to do with law. We say that a person is "justified" in saying this, or in doing this, and we mean that their action is proper when we measure it by an appropriate standard. So, "She was justified in quitting her job." "He was justified in running the red light

when taking his daughter to the emergency room." The action is said to be a just one. The man is at peace with the law and is not a transgressor. This is exactly what it means.

4. With respect to God, how can we be just with God? How can we say that the law does not condemn us. We try!! Oh, how hard we try!!

a) You can be justified before man's law in one of several ways. Each of these is a legal defense against the penalty of the law:

(1) You can show that you did not do the act, that is you are innocent of what you are accused. This defense will not help you in the day of God's judgment. In ten thousand ways, you and I have demonstrated that we are guilty before the law. We have not loved the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We have not loved our neighbor as our self. We have not sought His glory; we have been in rebellion to His word. Have you honored your father and your mother; have you loved your neighbor's life; have you maintained clean and wholesome thoughts; have you used this world's goods in the way that God requires; have you loved truth and not misrepresented yourself or your actions; have you kept your heart before the Lord; for all these things the law requires upon penalty of death and judgment? Paul brings in the verdict: All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; no one does good; no, not one.

(2) You can attack the law. If the law was not in effect when you committed the alleged act; then you can be justified. Or the interpretation given by the prosecution may be in error. This is commonly done in religious circles today, as men try to substitute their own laws for the laws of God. The Pharisees did this, adding prohibitions about eating, drinking, and ten thousand regulations that they added, to try to protect the law of God. Then, in keeping their own commandments, they thought they were keeping the commandments of God. You can keep your own commandments; but you cannot keep God's commandments without the Spirit of God and the faith of God's elect. We can keep commandments about what to eat, drink, wear, etc., or ten thousand commandments about outward things. But how can I love God? How can I pray for my enemies? How can I love my neighbor as myself? God is a Spirit, and my soul must be righteous before him, not just outward things? How can I be just with God? His

law was written on tables of stone; his words are forever settled in heaven. How can I set aside his law? Heaven and earth may pass away, but his words shall never pass away. So we cannot show our innocence, and we cannot set aside God's law. So what shall we do?

(3) There is a third way to be justified before the law. And that is to show that the law has been satisfied. When the law is satisfied, then nothing further can be required. When the murderer is strapped into the electric chair, and the chaplain speaks to him for the last time, when the official activates the switch sending the current through his body; when the doctor pronounces the criminal dead, and the warden stamps the words, "Sentence executed" across the records, then the law has nothing more to say to the criminal. The law has been satisfied.

b) That is exactly the meaning of the words of Romans 5:2. By faith we have access into the Grace of God. God's grace provided for the satisfaction of the law, so that those who believe might be justified.

(1) Faith teaches me that Christ died in my place: the death of Christ is my death. It is not enough to see Christ dying for the sins of the world: I must render a verdict against my own sins. I affirm the death sentence against myself: I no longer belong to myself; I no longer have a life. Listen to the words of Paul in Galatians 2:19-21. "I through the law, am dead to the law." Hallelujah!! Across my record in heaven are stamped the words, "Sentence Executed" Perhaps there is a note: "Near the city of Jerusalem, about the year 27 A.D., on a hill known as Golgotha, or Calvary, the sentence of death was carried out. The law was fully satisfied."

(2) But I am still alive! I am alive in a way that I have never been alive before, because now I have peace with God. Before I lived in sin and death: in wars and fightings that are described in Chapter 4 of James. But now God is not angry with me anymore. I do not have to find ways to try to make him happy with me. I do not need to find ways to secure his approval--What a sad thing it is when young people fret and stew to try to find ways of gaining the approval of their parents!!! We do not have to do that with God!

(3) It is by faith that we have access into this grace. Simply by faith. Not by works. Not by adding commandment to commandment; for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. We have peace, because Christ died for us.

(4) The access is by faith. There is no other door into this garden. Faith in Christ, and his finished work. Faith which lays hold on the promises of God and lives for his praise and glory.

c) It is this peace with God that is the soil and ground of righteousness. It is this soil of peace that produces the works that are pleasing to God: for they are works of thanksgiving and praise. God is not pleased with my sacrifices: he provided the only sacrifice I need: the sacrifice of Christ. Nothing else will turn away his wrath and give me peace. And without this peace, there is no real righteousness, only the tawdry, cheap, and filthy garments of my own righteousness.

Amen and Amen.

God bless you.