

Jas17 – The Tongue & Wisdom James 3:13-18

Pastor Dave Shepardson Calvary Chapel Nuevo / www.wordbymail.com

Open your Bibles. Title of the message this morning, “The Tongue and Wisdom.” We’re back in James. I’m loving James. I said last message we are going back to a place that we don’t like to go and the truth is I love it. We’re in James 3 from verse 13 to verse 18. Follow me through it.

As a church leader this is one of my favorite scriptures in the entire Bible. I really mean that. This is such a clear guideline on how to make one of the most important decisions that we need to make in the community of the body of Christ and in our own lives. It deals with a subject that has tremendous impact on us personally and on the body of Christ. It’s a critical area. Every single one of us has been impacted by the subject of this message. Every church is regularly impacted by the subject of this message. It is huge and massive within our lives and within the church.

The subject is *people sharing their wisdom*. It’s so critical. It’s big. You’ve got to take a minute and really think about that. I’ve seen this impact a church more than pretty much everything. The subject is people sharing their “wisdom” with other people in the church. When someone is sharing their opinion with you, the Bible calls it wisdom. Wisdom is *the application of knowledge* in the simplest sense.

So when someone says,

Well. I think...

Here’s what I think...

What they should do is...

Whether you realize it or not, people are sharing their “wisdom” with you on a very regular basis. The question is where is that wisdom coming from? What is the source of the wisdom that is being shared in your presence maybe even out of your own mouth. Maybe out of someone else’s mouth and being poured on you.

The bigger question is how do we know? If the goal is to know what is the source of the wisdom that’s being shared, then the follow up question is how can we know? How can we discern what is the source of the wisdom that’s being poured out on us? Does it matter? Does it matter what the source is what is being shared between two people in the body of Christ? Yes! It matters!

I hope it matters to you because knowing *the source of the “wisdom” should determine how you respond to the “wisdom.”* If that wisdom has very clear signs that it is from

above you ought to pay attention. You ought to listen up and take heed. However, if that wisdom has very clear signs that it is from below, you should not pay attention. You should not take heed. And honestly you should have the courage to respond correctly, as in exhorting that person giving you “wisdom” from below.

Here’s the good news. God gives us a checklist. You can make a checklist out of these scriptures, and when someone starts talking you just go down the list. Wouldn’t it be cool to have a checklist? You could then say you have to go through it to see what the source of the wisdom is. That’s what God has for you this message!

Let’s pray. *Lord we want to know that. We want to have a checklist in our mind. We want discernment. We want to know, Lord, we want to sense, we want to discern the source of what’s being shared with us. Please, God, open our hearts and our minds and convict us, because we are talking about somebody talking, and it might be us. In fact Lord, we admit right now, at times it is us. We’re talking about our own wisdom and we’re talking about another wisdom being poured out on us, Lord. Show us God how to discern the source of the wisdom we hear. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

How does the tongue relate to wisdom? What is the connection? The tongue *reveals* the source of the wisdom. The tongue is a dead giveaway of the source. (You know, when we’re done studying the message in James, a whole bunch of us ought to talk less. Hey, I’m included when I say “us.”) The tongue reveals the source of the wisdom. The tongue is a dead giveaway.

I’m going to use a real respected scholar; you don’t hear his name much because he doesn’t have a mega church or write books. But he’s from a generation ago. He really hit his stride in the 1940’s and 1950’s. D. Edmond Hiebert.

D. Edmond Hiebert

The tongue is the instrument whereby the spirit of the inner man is revealed. The use of the tongue [shows] the nature of the spirit dominating a man, whether or not it is wisdom coming from above.

That’s what you need to know because somebody is pouring their opinion on you. And you need to have a way to say, “Is this from above? Is the chance that this is godly wisdom from above or is the greater chance that this is from below? Because whether it is from above or from below is going to determine how I respond to it.”

That’s how important this message is, that’s why it’s so big. It’s so big because churches are so impacted by people just moving through the church giving their opinions. Let’s

watch for it, and let's understand how we use our tongue reveals the source of our wisdom.

James 3 verse 13. Watch very carefully the first way that we prove wisdom from above. Here's what James does. He issues a personal challenge. It's actually like an aggressive self confrontation.

James 3:13 (ESV)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

James 3:13 (NLT)

13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.

You think you understand God's ways?

You think you've got God's wisdom?

You think you understand what's going on?

Then *prove it by how you live*. How? How do you prove it? You prove it by living an honorable life. Can you look at a person's life and determine whether what they're saying is probably from above or probably from below? Yes. You think you're wise and you understand God's ways? Prove it by the life you live. Prove it by doing good works with the humility. If you're reading NLT it says humility and if you're reading a literal translation like the ESV it says meekness, same Greek word, of course. Prove it by the good works you do in humility.

The first thing we need to understand is that if we are operating with wisdom from above it shows in how we live. It shows in how we live and the first way it shows is by our conduct and the second way it shows, and really kind of the same – just two illustrations; it shows by the humility or the meekness of our conduct. Our good works in meekness. Here's the deal – everybody has an opinion. Everybody has an opinion. Here's what you need to know. You need to know that if you'll look at their life first you can easily decide whether you should be listening to their opinion or not. It's a pretty big deal because people love to pour their opinion out. James says if it's from above it will show in how they live their life; in their conduct and their humility.

Humility (meekness) is the opposite of pride.

Pride is arrogant and conceited.
Pride thinks very highly of itself and its own opinions.
Pride is always right.

Humility is the opposite of pride.
Humility does not think too highly of itself.
Humility does not defend its own opinion.
Humility does not have to be right – or win.
Humility doesn't have to prove a point.

The first sign of having godly wisdom is a life that is marked by humility instead of pride. Does this help? Isn't that a big one? Isn't that a big one? To say "Let me decide what this person is saying to me is from above or from below." Pride is a bad negative checkmark, humility a high checkmark. It's important for me to say, again, that James is first and foremost using a mode of communication that is in essence self-examination. And it's challenging us to examine ourselves. I'm just saying it's also a good way, not only to examine your own heart which we should do first and foremost, but it is also a good way to consider the source of the wisdom or the opinion that we are hearing. Consider the source. Honestly, this first test of pride or humility takes most opinions out. Pride is the biggest sin. Don't feel bad if you're struggling with it, because Lucifer had the same sin. God threw him out of heaven for it. Read about it in Isaiah 14:12 and following. Lucifer said I will, I will, I will, I will, I will. Five times he said I will. God says maybe you will, but not in heaven. I'll make a place where you will. We have to be very fearful of pride. Most of us are taken out in this first test of pride versus humility.

In verse 14 the check list really gets started.

James 3:14 (ESV)

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

Again, the NLT:

James 3:14

14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.

That is the broadsword through the heart, man. ***if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.***

How many people do you and I know that pour out their opinions, their wisdom when really they are covering up a sinful heart with their boasting, and their lying. They're saying and acting all spiritual but actually what's in their heart is bitterness and jealousy and selfish ambition. If you listen closely you can hear it. *Listen to what you hear*. It's a sign.

Bitter jealousy. Both versions use this phrase. "Bitter jealousy" is a hostile, resentful, self-centered envy.

Louw Nida, one of our famous Greek Lexicons says this: ***"It is a strong feeling of resentment and jealousy against others"***

And the word translated "selfish ambition" means: ***To use unworthy or divisive means to promote one's own views***ⁱ

Surely you've experienced this if you've been in a church setting for any time at all. You put bitter jealousy and selfish ambition together; it equals phenomenal amounts of trouble in the church. Discord and division in the church. You've seen people use unworthy and divisive means to promote one's own views.

James is not only telling us how to examine and know what is in our own heart. He's telling us how to examine the wisdom that we are hearing from other people. It's from above, it will show. If it's from below, it will show. If it's from above take heed. If it's from below reject. We should just write that.

Verse 14 says if bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are in your heart; don't cover it up with boasting and lying. Listen *you don't want that in your heart*. Don't cover up your bitterness and your jealousy. Confess it. Repent. Crucify it! Listen. You're not hiding anything. You're not hiding anything from God and any mature Christian around you. You're not hiding anything. So why boast and lie and cover up the truth of the bitterness and jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart? Why not confess it and repent of it and be healed and be transformed? That's the reason you came to Christ in the first place. I don't know why we protect our sins so much. Why do we protect the poison in our lives? We should just be confessing and crying out to God to save us. Notice the words "in your heart" in verse 14 again reminding us that the true problem is not with the tongue, the true problem exists in our heart. The heart is the problem. It's just revealed by the tongue.

Let's deal with it. Why is it such a big deal? Why is such a big deal that we shouldn't let this "false wisdom" cover up these sins in our heart. Well, James 3:15 says:

James 3:15 (ESV)

15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

Demonic? What is James referring to when he says ***THIS is not the wisdom that comes down from above***. He's talking about the false wisdom that's covering up the sins of pride (verse 13) bitter jealousy and selfish ambition (verse 14.) This "wisdom" is earthly, it is unspiritual and it is even demonic. That is pretty strong language, isn't it?

"Listen, this guy is my friend. I know he's prideful and I know he has some bitterness and some jealousy and some selfish ambition, but demonic? Isn't that pushing it?"

I'M not saying it's demonic... I'm reading. You can decide what God says. You can dissect that all you want. James seems to be carrying forward from verse 6 where he says the tongue is *set on fire by hell*. It seems James is saying people who are covering up these sins of pride, bitter jealousy, and selfish ambition with their "false wisdom" can very easily be used by the powers of hell to do much damage to those who are naïve enough to listen to them. To destroy other Christians in the body of Christ. Be afraid! Do not be naïve. Just because another person calling themselves a Christian is giving you wisdom it doesn't mean it's from above. You decide. Jesus said be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. Be wiser than your enemy.

Here is the increasing severity of our "wisdom from below."

#1) Earthly is referring to the "wisdom of the world." It is the wisdom that this world tries to mold us with. We see a lot of that going on right now. It is possible, that some of the wisdom you hear in churches today is the wisdom of the world. The world just pounds it out, example after example.

#2) Unspiritual means it is void of the Spirit of God. God is *nowhere* around it. It is *void of God's Spirit*.

#3) Demonic means ***"That which Proceeds from an evil spirit"***

Again, let me use a respected scholar instead of my own words.

D. Edmond Hiebert

Behind this "wisdom," marked by jealousy, [divisive] factions, and egotistical boasting, James detects the work of the demons in seeking to corrupt the harmony and very life of the Body of Christ.

Behind this so called "wisdom" James detects the work of demons seeking to corrupt harmony and corrupt the life of the body of Christ. Be afraid! Jealousy, envy,

divisiveness, egotism, pride, boasting. Scary indeed and I can tell you from much personal experience this is absolutely true.

James uses a supporting statement and it's written rhetorically, as if you would say, "Of course. That's definitely true."

James 3:16 (ESV)

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile (evil) practice.

James is trying to say of course you all know this; it isn't even up for debate. When you see disorder, division and evil actions obviously there is jealousy and selfish ambition behind all that. Obviously we know that. No James, obviously we don't. I wish we did know because then we would say, "You know what brother? What you're saying is divisive. It's disruptive. It's not making for peace, it's making for strife. You might want to consider the source of your wisdom."

You may have to get another friend, but its okay. Unfortunately, we are so easily sucked into this disorder and division by those claiming wisdom but who are actually just covering up bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.

This is a litmus test. God gave you a litmus test so you can determine if the wisdom is from God. If you detect pride, bitterness, jealousy, selfish ambition, envy; all very revealing signs that the wisdom you're hearing is not from God. And if it's not from God it's from below. It's either earthly, it's void of God's Spirit or it is influenced by the demonic. This is for us personally. For me personally. For you personally. It's for us to look at our own wisdom and say "Wait a minute. I think I see some signs of some bad stuff in there. I need some repentance." Let's be honest about the condition of our own heart.

Is there any good news here? Yes there is in the next verse. James is going to clearly contrast the evidence of the wisdom from below with evidence of wisdom from above so that you and I can tell whether what we are listening to (whether from our own mouth or from someone else) – what is the source of it. Is there evidence that the source of what I am saying is from God? Is there evidence that the source of what I am saying is from something other than God? And what I am hearing.

James 3:17 – we're going to do it in parts

James 3:17 (ESV)

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure,

We're just going to sit on these words so that you can grasp them, chew on them. First meaning first in priority. Pure meaning undefiled by sin. The wisdom from above is undefiled by sin. What kind of sin? The sin of the context. Pride, bitterness, jealousy and selfish ambition and envy. First wisdom from above is pure, undefiled by these sins. It is important to say we cannot be pure in the truest sense. The subject of these adjectives are speaking of is the wisdom a person can have at any one moment not the permanent condition of that person. It's speaking of the wisdom, not the person. James is saying if we have wisdom from God the wisdom itself will be pure, it will not be defiled by the previously listed sins. We can possess God's pure wisdom that's undefiled by sin even though we as people cannot be pure in that truest sense. If God is living in us and we've given him rightful reign and he has fully consumed us, we can have his wisdom that is pure.

Next - James 3:17 (ESV)

17 wisdom from above is then . . . peaceable,

Checklist – is this promoting peace? Wisdom from above desires peace, promotes peace, seeks peace. Wisdom from leads to peace not to strife. And we need to have the courage to ask ourselves if the words we are hearing (out of our own mouth or someone else's) are leading to peace or to strife. You need to say to yourself, "Wait a minute, what did I just say? Because that doesn't sound like that is going to lead to peace. I think I just slandered somebody. I think I just spoke evil about someone. I think I just encouraged some kind of division or discord. God help me, I repent!" And when we hear somebody else say that we just ask if it's spiritual, earthly or demonic wisdom that you're giving me. Wisdom that leads to peace, wisdom that leads to strife reveals where the wisdom is coming from.

Next - James 3:17 (ESV)

17 wisdom from above is . . . gentle,

The word can also be translated courteous or considerate. It conveys the thought of "***Having RESPECT for the feelings or opinions of others***" A pretty easy checkmark. Are you having respect for the person you are lambasting? Are you creating peace? Do you have these sins? Again, it's a pretty easy question to answer if you'll just listen to the words coming out of someone's mouth, including your own.

Wisdom from above is pure – peaceable – and gentle, meaning it has respect for the feelings and opinions of others.

Next - James 3:17 (ESV)

17 wisdom from above is . . . open to reason,

You're probably thinking nobody has all those qualities. No, they don't. But if God is using them in your life this is what it looks like because God's wisdom is all of these things.

Some translations it "is willing to listen or willing to yield." Here's the deal with this word. It's the opposite of being stubborn, unyielding and prideful. The opposite! If you are always right, then you are most probably not operating in the wisdom from above. What this word means is "not stubborn, not demanding your way or your opinion, not being so sure you're right." Being reasonable, being willing to listen or yield.

Wisdom from above is pure – peaceable – gentle – and open to reason.

Next - James 3:17 (ESV)

17 wisdom from above is . . . full of mercy and good fruits,

The NCV translates it this way, ***always ready to help those who are troubled and to do good for others***

Again, it's the sign of a life, it's the conduct. Does this person have mercy in their life? Mercy is the compassion that leads to action. Are they the type of person that is always looking to do good for someone else? Are they always looking to give to someone else? Are they always looking to meet another's needs? Then there is a very good chance when they speak, and if they speak in humility and with these other attributes that you can actually say, "You know what, I think that may be God. I think I need to pay attention to that. "

Are you getting the idea here of how we make decisions over what the source of the wisdom is that is being shared with us? And if they're not, and you see those sins, if they are actually speaking slander and division and discord, then shut it down. Listen, I'm not saying this is happening in our church because we have seen it happen. We've seen it happen big, the church has been taken out – by our fingernails we were hanging on once-the second time we handled it better, but both times very brutal. In large measure, this is not occurring here. It is happening somewhere in your life though. Someone is pouring out their wisdom on you, and it's actually from below. All you have to do is *listen to what you hear and watch what you see*.

God's wisdom is full of mercy. God's wisdom is doing good at all times. God's wisdom is pure – peaceable – gentle – open to reason – full of mercy and good fruits.

Next - James 3:17 (ESV)

17 wisdom from above is . . . impartial

The word means without discord or division. And it can also mean consistent or unwavering. It is not moved. Wisdom from above is not moved, it does not vacillate. It does not take one position at one time and another position at another time. Wisdom from God does not create division or discord and it is not moved. It does not, in essence, take sides.

Wisdom is pure – peaceable – gentle – open to reason – full of mercy and good fruits – and impartial.

Finally - James 3:17 (ESV)

17 wisdom from above is . . . sincere.

It means not hypocritical. Wisdom from above is not wearing a mask. It is not telling one person I love you, I love you and then going to another person and saying they are the biggest, “pinhead jerk” I’ve ever seen in my life. Wisdom from above is not hypocritical. Wisdom from above is sincere. Wisdom from above has no hidden agenda. Wisdom from above is not saying one thing to you in order to get something from you and then saying another thing to another person to get something from them. Wisdom from above is sincere; it is straight forward and genuine. It is sincere.

Wisdom from above is pure – peaceable- gentle – open to reason – full of mercy and good fruits – impartial – and sincere.

And if you see those signs in what somebody is sharing with you there's a good chance that it is wisdom they have received from God. Listen up. If not, then not! We must choose what to listen to and what to reject. The Word of God tells us, we just need to have the courage to apply it to our lives.

Finally James says there's one other thing he wants to point back to. And I love this. Jesus did this too in Matthew 6 in the Lord's Prayer he pointed back to the forgiveness section. James does it here. He points back – James 3:18 – look what he says, he deals with one of the top results, the number two priority of a life that is guided by Godly wisdom.

James 3:18 (ESV)

18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

He says he just want to expand one thing he just said. ***a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.***

James says one of the primary traits of those who have wisdom from above is they are peacemakers. They make peace. They make peace. Where there is strife they bring peace into the situation. Where there is conflict they bring reconciliation into the situation. And they sow righteousness. A harvest of righteousness by sowing peace. They are peace makers.

That's one of the top signs, James is saying, that you'll see in those that have wisdom. Find a person who's sowing peace and there's a real good chance that you can get some wisdom from above from them. Find a person who is sowing conflict – zero chance – at least not while they are sowing conflict. Zero chance.

Here's the good news. If we detect in our own life words and actions that are pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere we can say, "Lord, there is a very good chance that you have a hold of me. And that when I'm speaking to someone else and I'm speaking your words of wisdom, there's a pretty good chance that the wisdom I am sharing is from above."

But we have the guts to look at own lives and say, "Uh-oh Lord. I see some pride, some bitterness, some jealousy, some envy, some selfish ambition; I better keep my mouth shut. Cause when I speak it's probably not going to be from you."

This is what James is trying to say. It's a great practical list, isn't it? It's a great list! We should print it up, make it a bookmark and put it in all our Bibles, so we can just pull it out as a strong reminder.

What do we do? First of all open your eyes and your ears. I've been saying it all message. Let me just say it one more time. *Watch what you see.* What does that mean, what I am seeing in that person's life? What does it indicate? *Listen to what you hear.* What does that mean? What they just said, how does that fit in this scale. Because where it fits in this scale determines how I respond to it because it reveals the source of that they're saying. This is hard core.

Finally, each of us must be afraid. We must be fearful of seeing signs that indicate that the wisdom that we have is from below. And we must be willing to repent, and say "God,

I don't want to cover up my sin of pride of selfish ambition, of egotism, of jealousy, of bitterness. I don't want to cover it up, I want to be healed."

This is a hospital for the sick. Jesus didn't call the righteous, he called sinners. That's us. "God I want to be healed! I want to be healed! And then I want to have your wisdom."

Let's look at t James 1:5.

James 1:5 (ESV)

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Let's pray. *Lord we just want to sit in your presence right now. Right now we want you to do your business with us. We want you to do business with us right now, Lord. (Just sit. Wait on God. I promise he will speak to you. Drop the pride in your heart. Drop the defensiveness and the egotism and say something like this.) "God, is that me? Are the words coming out of my mouth revealing that the wisdom I have is earthly or void of your Spirit? Or even demonic? Am I sowing wisdom in pride, bitter jealousy, selfish ambition or Lord, am I desiring to be laid open on your altar to be cleansed by your blood? To be transformed, so that when I speak Lord, it will be words that are pure, undefiled by my sin nature. Words that are peaceable, words that bring peace. When I speak may they be words that are gentle. May I see what the other person is saying, put myself in their shoes. Lord not that I would accept sin or not address sin, but allow me to be gentle to see their opinion. Lord Jesus convict me if I think I am always right. Crush me, I give you the privilege. Just crush the pride out of me. Help me to know that I am not always right, and that thinking I am just proves I am not And help me to give wisdom that way and help me to be full of mercy and compassion that brings action. Full of good fruits, Lord. God may I be impartial, not two-faced, not picking sides, but may I have pure and peaceable wisdom from you Lord. And finally God, may I be sincere, may I be open and may I call sin, sin. And give me the power to repent and confess and beg that you transform me. I beg you to transform me right now, Lord. Change my heart so that the words coming out of my mouth will change. I bring my black, sin filled heart to you. And I pray Lord that you would take it and nail it to the cross and that you would replace it with a heart of flesh, your heart. A new heart. Make me a new person Lord, give me new life. Transform me enough that it will show in the way I speak and the wisdom I give. I come before you open and honest Lord and I pray you would do your work in me."*

(There is no hope without the new life of Jesus Christ in you. There's no hope until you are born again, until you have set aside your old life, until you have allowed Jesus to pay

for your sins on the cross and received him as your Savior, and made him your Lord. And so the last thing I would say is, repeat the best prayer in the Bible.) “Lord save me. Lord save me from my sin, save me from myself. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and transform me. In Jesus’ name, amen.”
