

James 3:13-18 Be Slow to Speak – True Wisdom

This you know my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, *slow to speak* and slow to anger. James 1:19

Verses 13-18 continue the second major theme by showing that holy conduct is the proper way to display wisdom.

3:1-12 The tongue is a dangerous instrument for showing wisdom.

3:13-18 Holy conduct is the proper way of showing wisdom.

Verse 13

James challenges us to demonstrate our wisdom by our lifestyle of gentleness as opposed to our bold (and sometimes arrogant) words. When we do this we will be modeling our Lord.

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls.”

Matthew 11:29

Verse 14

Believers who wish a higher status in the church often seek some prominent role which will satisfy their fleshly ambition.

“A man who dares wield the truth of God as an instrument to satisfy his own envy and self-seeking...is guilty of ‘triumphing over’ the truth. That is, he arrogantly tramples down the truth as if it were a thing subordinate to his own personal ambitions...”

Such conduct is a lie against the truth, since this conduct only pretends to be in submission to the truth.” (Zane Hodges, James)

Verse 15

This wisdom is not from God but exhibits three characteristics:

Earthly – This wisdom is worldly as self-promoting teachers are really plotting their own advancement.

Natural – (sensual, KJV) – This word literally means *belonging to breath* and speaks of the sensuous nature with its subjection to appetite and passion.

Demonic – This wisdom is inspired and encouraged by the spirits who serve Satan. The end is not edification but destruction.

Verse 16

There are always two inescapable outcomes of jealousy and self-seeking:

1. *Disorder* – This word means instability, a state of disorder, disturbance, or confusion. It is the same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14:33, “*God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the Saints.*”
2. *Every evil thing* – Evil things are said and done and thus the work of Satan becomes evident.

Verse 17

The wisdom from above – Godly wisdom stands in stark contrast to worldly wisdom. It has seven characteristics:

1. *Pure* – This word hints of God’s holiness. It literally means chaste or free from defilement. God’s wisdom leads us to purity of life.
2. *Peaceful* – It is concerned about harmony among the brethren. It is peace based on holiness not compromise. We don’t promote peace by dismissing or covering up sin. We realize true peace by confessing sin and experiencing God’s forgiveness.
3. *Gentle* - It is kind or tender. This same word is used in Philippians 4:5, “*Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.*”
4. *Reasonable* – Literally *willing to yield or compliant*. There is a willingness to listen, think, and pray about issues instead of simply being stubborn.
5. *Full of mercy and good fruits* – Webster’s Dictionary defines mercy as *compassionate treatment of those in distress or compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender*. This is perhaps an echo of James 2:13. Note also Hebrews 4:16, Titus 3:5, and Luke 10:30-37. *Good fruits* echoes James 1:22-24 and 2:14-26.
6. *Unwavering* – God’s wisdom brings strength from above.
7. *Without hypocrisy* – Literally *undisguised or sincere*. When God’s wisdom is at work there is openness and honesty.

Verse 18

When we demonstrate the heavenly wisdom of verse 17 we are like a sower in a field. Our behavior (seed) results in *the fruit of righteousness* since righteousness among believers grows and flourishes when we dwell together in peace. (Psalm 133:1)