

James 3:13-18

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Verse 13: “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.” This rhetorical question is meant to encourage introspection. If you were to ask the average person on the street if he is wise and knowledgeable, probably nine times out of ten the person would say, “Yes.” But James equates knowledge and wisdom with a good lifestyle characterized by good works and meekness.

Certainly it is not the case that nine out of ten people lead truly good, moral lifestyles characterized by good works and meekness. Thus, most people could not be rightly called “wise and knowledgeable.” True wisdom comes from the Father above (James 1:5), and, as stated many ways in the book of Proverbs, can only come from a healthy fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 2:5; et al.).

Verse 14: “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.” Envy and strife is not something to boast about. In fact, the only way that envy and strife can come about is if one or more people are prideful: “Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom” (Prov. 13:10). It is a flat out lie to believe that one can be prideful, envious, and a lover of strife and be right with God.

Verses 15-16: “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” The false, so-called “wisdom” that nine out of ten (or more) people possess is not true wisdom at all. It is self-ascribed “wisdom.” It is purely self-centered. It is not concerned with what is right and wrong, but what feels good. It satisfies the temporary earthly (worldly), sensual (fleshly) desires, and it is from the Devil.

Envying and strife are telltale signs that a person is caught up in all the wrong things. He is not concerned with spirituality. Rather, he is only concerned with his own selfish, sinful desires. Consequently, if someone or something were to stand in the way of his selfish desires, he will react in bitter envy and strife, stooping to whatever means necessary to satisfy himself. Thus, “confusion and every evil work” has its seed in false, sinful “wisdom.” (See also 1 Cor. 1:18-31 for Paul’s discussion of true wisdom vs. worldly “wisdom”).

Verse 17: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” Those who practice true spiritual wisdom are those whose lifestyles can be summed up with the following Christian virtues: purity of life, peaceableness, gentleness, approachable, merciful, bearing good fruits, impartial, and not hypocritical. Take any one of these out of the equation, and it becomes clear that a person is not a true, faithful Christian. At the very least, he’s a struggling one that needs to reclaim his Christian priorities, and it is quite possible that he is a

phony, practicing a faith that is feigned, something that both Paul and Peter warned against in 1 Tim. 1:5 and 1 Pet. 1:22, respectively.

Verse 18: “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” Jesus stressed this in the Beatitudes when He said: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Mat. 5:9). If only we took this more seriously, the church would be in much better shape, and so would the world!