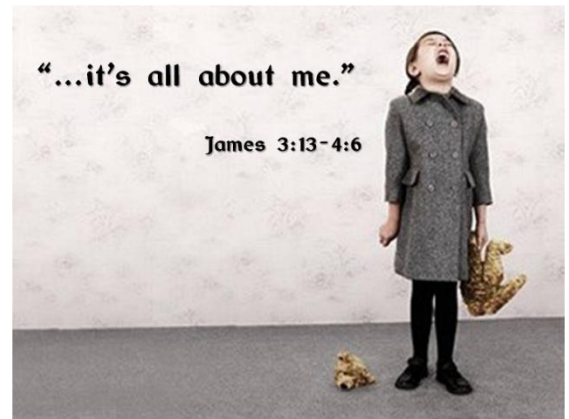


James Series #7 - "It's All About Me"
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James 3:13-4:6 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."*



We are halfway through this challenging letter. Let take a look at where we have been thus far. Right out of the gate in chapter 1 James opened up the subject of trials, tribulations, testing's and how he expected Christians to respond to them. He *expected* us to *endure*, and...imagine that, with rejoicing! Later in chapter 1 he turned to the subject of what was true Christianity, contrasting true claims to faith and false claims to faith. He goes so far as to give us a 'compact version' that you could carry around in your front pocket; One, it will manifest in our speech. Secondly, it is witnessed in our care for other believers. And lastly, it will show up in our refusal to conform to the world and its path.

In chapter 2, he 'throws down' on man's tendency to show sinful partiality when dealing with people. And then he went on in the latter half of that chapter expressing the real need for being able to produce evidence of one's faith, ...that we actually must have a faith which *acts*, a faith which works, a faith which obeys, a faith which loves. Finally in chapter 3, he goes after all of us who profess to be believers in terms of guarding the use of our mouths, and exercising such for God's glory and the blessings of others.

Now in this passage he finally gets to the root of all of the above, by looking into a man's heart. That's something most of us will avoid at all cost. We will skate around the peripherals but seldom are we willing to just stop, lift the lid and look inside! But the point of this letter in its totality is a call to manifest the real stuff and not just wear a façade of religion. And eventually it all comes down to what's down there in each one of us. Because the use of our tongues, as well as all these other spiritual attributes that James has been talking about, are simply reflections of our hearts. Unless change happens there, there will be a constant battle around us...a battle that eventually we will lose.

All that James had dealt with thus far...certainly good council and stuff we need to address, is simply symptoms of what is in our hearts. He asks now the rhetorical question of just who is wise? Who is the one who has true wisdom and faithful understanding? Plenty will claim such a mantle and lots of folks 'have the t-shirt' but few prove it through the conduct of their lives and further actually live in the meekness that is naturally inherent in the manifest of wisdom.

Firstly, what exactly is this thing "wisdom." We need to know that because many folks have a lot of different and particular definitions for stuff, and we want to be sure we are actually talking about the same thing. Wisdom is not the stuff of 'book-learnin' but rather "the natural ability to understand things and then apply them to real life situations" ...a "good sense and judgment and the ability to apply it." If there *is* a knowledge involved, it seems to be that which is acquired not in a classroom but rather in the experiences of life. So such is inherently practical its presentation.

We can gather from scripture elsewhere that this wisdom is obviously a good thing! Proverbs 3:13 says, "Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gets understanding." Certainly it seems that wisdom is both found and shared while "in movement." Meaning in the 'natural flow' and the 'rhythm of life.' Through practical life experiences...through being 'in the game' and 'doing the work'...these are where I find and share wisdom. Not in a laboratory, a classroom or a book. James just finished talking about how we deal with our mouths, and certainly our mouth is a good place to reflect whether we have any wisdom or not! What comes out of there tells the whole story!

James, in verse 13, tells us also that wise man will show himself to be wise by living in a way that actually suits a wise man. In other words, you know a wise man by the way he lives because wisdom isn't just about knowing things or even assenting to correct data. It is rather about living in a faithful, wholesome, and consistent lifestyle that levels the road before him and before others. For the believer, that life is one which pursues via the Holy Spirit the "way of the Lord." Proverbs 3:5 and 6; "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your way acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight."

The Bible scholar Alec Motyer, once said of wisdom. "Wisdom is the God-given ability to see how in all our ways we may acknowledge Him." And James is saying further, that in fact wisdom is not simply *seeing* how we may acknowledge God in all our ways, but actually doing it! That involves our fear, our awe and respect of God, but still goes further in that every aspect of our lives also reflects the *reverence* of God. In that kind of life...that kind of understanding, there is a real grasp of who I really am in light of this God.

Thus when I...as verse 14 reflects, express envy and self seeking, I cannot therefore claim that I am wise, or that I am walking out my life in wisdom. Because such just says that I *don't* understand who I really am and certainly who I am before God! So when this junk comes out of me I am in essence saying I am void of wisdom and absent of real Godly understanding. James is saying that wisdom is not only God-honoring, but self-subduing and other-centered. Saying we are wise but spewing both words and a lifestyle of self-interest and envy is "lying against the truth."

Because the fact is, wisdom or the lack of it, shows itself in its product. You can always see wisdom in what it produces. You see wisdom in its results. James tells us in verse 16. "*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*" That passage is starkly accurate and powerful. There are people who are consumed and controlled by jealousy and self and their actual lives show it by a seemingly near constant state of confusion, chaos, and yes, even evil. This of course is the antithesis of wisdom and understanding. Scripture tells us that "*God is not the author of confusion.*" (1 Cor 14:33) So we need to bear such in mind when we are dealing with decisions and priorities in our lives. God's wisdom, according to verse 17 is "*first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*" Godly wisdom is first something that Satan can never muster: *pure*.

The word "*first*" prefaces the word "pure." We can gather then that unless purity is in place, the individual is sure to be void of these other attributes. Pure is accomplished by running every aspect of our lives through the scripture and God's Spirit. When we start with purity, what will then naturally follow is "peace." And that seemingly simple gift is the sole property of the heavenly realm. Romans 5:1 tells us "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Peace with God, peace with man, peace with one's self. Following purity and peace comes the attribute of "*gentleness.*" Gentle in speech and gentle in behavior. Even if the prior traits are unable to be seen by those around us, the blessing of gentleness is evident to everyone. Then there follows an "*easy to be entreated,*" which means "quick to follow." It means to "obey easily." Again, that trait travels through a life transformation from the "bottom up" ...from the "deep inside," and rises to be seen in the "glimmer in your eyes."

Then comes the manifest of that life in the fact it is "*full of mercy.*" Mercy is something we do not deserve. And others around us do not deserve either. But we abundantly get it from our Lord anyway, and understanding that fact, *in Godly wisdom*, for the child of God, that He gives it *anyway*. Note the language herein also! Such a person doesn't just *demonstrate* mercy, but he or she is FULL of mercy. We sure know how to *receive* God's mercy, but we are often so slow to *give it out*.

The passage before us continues saying there will evidence of “*good fruit*.” Such means simply that what is being produced by our lives is 'good.' Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We are to be found *full* of God’s “good fruit.” Then there is the attribute “*without partiality*.” This is the “straight shooter” attribute. It is the person that doesn’t play politics, or move in a manner to secure status or position. He is righteous and fair with all, and has no concern as to someone’s rank or place in the worldly scheme of things. Even, *and most importantly*, himself. This is a trait of maturity which follows the others. It is a trait of righteous judgment that is found in the person of Jesus Christ, and comes to us as we become like Him. Then lastly, James says “*without hypocrisy*.” This is an overt lifestyle reality that is evident to all. He *is* what he *is*. He is privately what he is publicly. It is a trait of consistency, honesty, and godliness. It is also a trait that is crucial in all of God’s leadership.

Finally, James brings the final blessing home to each one of us who are God’s children. “...the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” This is the provincial hand of God upon each one of us that have been both born again and now walk in the peace of God; both *before Him* as well as in our *relationship with our fellow man*. It is “sown,” and in time, then harvested by each believer.

James is trying to get through to us that, on the one hand, if we are going to know true blessedness, true happiness, experience the true satisfaction and fullness of life which God has intended for us, then we need to have true wisdom, heavenly wisdom. And then on the other hand he is telling us that you really can't grow as an individual in heavenly wisdom unless you are planted in the kind of soil that heavenly wisdom grows in. And the kind of soil that heavenly wisdom grows in is a fellowship committed to living together in peace and seeking true peace in the wisdom of truth and grace. Thus both of these things are necessary in order to live the good life. It is a critical priority in this fellowship, and that is why some folks just don't stay. They are fighters and they are bitter, and they cannot seem to see beyond themselves.

Chapter 4 continues in the same line of thinking. Looking down into the pit that is the heart of each of us, James asks the very poignant question: *from where do wars and fightings among you come from?* We tend to see such as originating "out there" someplace, but James isn't letting us off the hook. For he is speaking of those petty wars that spring up in the midst of the body of believers, as well as around us as islands of self. James lays out the truth: *these things come not from outside the man, but rather from inside him!* It's a sad acknowledgement that believers actually can go to war with one another.

Jesus declared in Matthew 12:34 that “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” So what's in there really? If the world is still in control of you, *your decisions and priorities*, then you and the fellowship you try to be a part of is going to feel the effects of such a heart. And what will result will be division and bitterness.

We all naturally expect such behavior in the world, but we are slow to recognize the danger to the body of believers. We are lulled into a false safety, believing that we are out of reach of Satan and our flesh. That things "in here" will naturally and inherently be different because there is a church sign hanging out front. But it starts with each of us individually. If we find such actions are commonplace in our lives we must, as James does, question our very standing with God and whether we have ever really known a life changing transformation. For Jesus was always all about everyone else. So how can we believe that we are like Him if it is all about me? We can be quick and easy to *receive* salvation by faith, but do we grow in grace to learn to *live by faith*?

As always, it is a healthy thing to often take pause and ask ourselves "why am I here?" Is this all about me? About getting what I want, about being recognized for what I do, and praised for what I am? Few see these actions as "lust," but James does. And he is brave enough to state it plainly, just as we should. Often, it seems that our prayers...which overflow from our hearts, are plagued with a “gimme” attitude that has no place in a believer’s life. Is it truly “thou be glorified” and “thy will be done?”

James calls this "friendship with the world." That is not speaking of having an acquaintance or seeking to shine Christ to the lost and dying around us in the world that we individually live in. We are talking *friendship*. A unity, a yoking together. The fact is, we cannot have both God and the world. We cannot walk with one foot in the world and one foot in Christ. However, accomplishing that impossible task is indeed the "brass ring" for the evangelical world today, and we generally chose our church accordingly. But let us make no mistake here! Attempts at being "luke-warm," result in God "spewing us out of His mouth." (Rev 3:16)

We also must note that this goes beyond human relationship. Further it speaks of unity or pursuit of *any* aspect that is of this world. Whether it be a job, a possession, or any earthly pursuit. For as children of God, we are not to be "of this world." It's a simple concept that gets lost in the obscurity of our own making. This does not mean we "move into the compound." But it is rather everything filtered through the concept of "*seek first the kingdom of God.*"

Jesus wasn't seeking that we "disengage." In John 17:15 he prayed "*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*" But we must be very careful not to link arms with the world under the guise of love and evangelism. God knows our hearts on this and so should we! The real test of this is not pleasant: John 15:19 "*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*"

James calls this for what it really is: *adultery*. Unity with another lover. Cheating on our first love! An illicit love affair of the flesh and the world! The living Bible renders this verse as follows: "*You are like an unfaithful wife, who loves her husband's enemies. Don't you realize that making friends with God's enemies- the evil pleasures of this world- makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy the evil pleasures of this world, you cannot also be a friend of God.*" We are reminded that no man can serve two masters (Luke 16:13). If an individual is comfortable in the mud, he is not a son, but a pig! Amos 3:3 says "*Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?*"

Thankfully, God does not leave us alone to walk through these pitfalls. He has given us a Comforter to guide us and dwell in us to keep us from being entangled in this world. Galatians 5:17 says "*The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.*"

But we can in reality push the Spirit away. When we do, we then operate alone and the "old man," the "spirit of the flesh" will step back into the driver's seat. If we operate without the conviction of conscience, then we are void of His Spirit, either through rejection of His control or because do not know Him, and thus He *will not* dwell in us.

The bottom line of the message of James here is, *if we are indeed one of His children, then why are we walking as part of the world?* It is a simple and overt directive. Even yet we sweep its reality under the rug through excuse and human reasoning.

We can pursue such a righteous and "wise" path remembering always that the Spirit of God faithfully and constantly offers more and more strength to draw us into such a disciplined life. Humility before Him...understanding indeed who and what we really are in the depth of our being, is the path to overcoming the tendencies of the flesh. 2 Peter 1:3-4 promises us that "*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*"