

Studies in James

James 3:13-18 & James 4:1-12

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The Message

James 3: 13 - 18

We started our studies in James by looking at trials and temptations, when we considered how wisdom enables us to face trials with “pure joy” (James 1: 2), and how wisdom is a gift from God (James 1: 5). The application of wisdom that we looked at in the first chapter of James would seem to be wisdom working inwardly - applying specifically to us as individuals, since it addresses how we respond to our environment. However, in the latter part of James 3 that we are studying tonight we can see that there are two kinds of wisdom - earthly wisdom (James 3: 13 - 16) and heavenly wisdom (James 3: 17 - 18). The application of wisdom being discussed here is wisdom working outwardly - cascading into our lives and those around us.

Heavenly wisdom is seminal in that it produces fruit, and accomplishes God’s purpose once it begins to germinate.

Why would James be inspired by the Holy Spirit to talk about wisdom on two separate occasions? Scripture covers topics several times if they are particularly important, and we must examine ourselves and ask what kind of wisdom are we applying in our lives? The wisdom of the world or the wisdom that comes from God? We can clearly see the contrast between these two types of wisdom, particularly in the light of what we know of the Fruit of the Spirit.

James 4: 1 - 12

Chapter 4 turns the focus onto the corporate body of believers, highlighting areas of concern. James describes them as “adulterous people” (James 4:4), which reminds us so much of what we studied in the series on the Prophets.

We need to establish the root cause of this behaviour, which we can sum up in one word: “Pride”. Yet James continues by calling for immediate action in rooting out this sinful attitude, and proposes ten commandments which are also a wonderful model of prayer:

Ten commands found in James 4: 7 - 10; A model of prayer.

- i. Be under obedience (submit) to God (James 4: 7).
- ii. Stand against (resist) the devil (false accuser, slanderer) (James 4: 7)¹.
- iii. Approach (draw near) God; He will approach (draw near) you (James 4: 8)².
- iv. Cleanse your hands (deed) - sinners (James 4: 8)³.
- v. Purify your hearts (thought) - double minded (James 4: 8).
- vi. Be in distress (full of heaviness of mind) - repentance (James 4: 9).
- vii. Mourn (grieve) - repentance (James 4: 9).
- viii. Weep (bewail) - repentance (James 4: 9).
- ix. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to shame - humility (James 4: 9).

¹ See also Ephesians 6: 11 - 18; 1 Peter 5: 8 – 9.

² See also Hebrews 10: 22.

³ See also Exodus 30: 17 – 21.

- x. Be humbled in the presence of the Lord; He will lift you up (James 4: 10)⁴.

Verses 11-12 remind us of what we studied in James 2: 12 - 13.

Questions

1. How can we deal with “bitter envy” and “selfish ambition” (James 3: 14)?
2. Dwell on the attributes of heavenly wisdom and seek through the coming week to make them a reality in your lives.
3. What produces Peace in our lives (James 3: 18; Romans 14: 19)? How is this Peace different to the peace people understand in the world?
4. Meditate carefully on James 4: 7 - 10. It seems that this is a tool James has given us so that through prayer we are further enabled to live the life God would have us live.

⁴ See also Matthew 23: 12.