



Study Series

James: Week Seven

Bible

James 3:13-18 (NIV)

Two Kinds of Wisdom

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. **14** But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16** For where you have envy and

selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Sermon Summary

You may want to consider this section as pre-reading.

In 3:13-18 James continues to address a pressing concern in the Christian community to whom he was writing. He returns in v. 13 to those who were (or who were desiring to become) teachers in the community, urging them to show their wisdom (and, by definition, their qualifications to teach) by their lifestyle. He then identifies what their current words and actions reveal about their hearts. Remember, this was the concern in 3:11-12; the heart as the source of our words and deeds. And what does he see? "Bitter envy" and "selfish ambition". These two qualities were related to rivalry, contentious behaviour, and a partisan spirit (or an 'us and them' mentality). A good way to think about what this looks like is to consider the current political climate both here and globally, where these vices are crippling governments' ability to govern. And this is precisely James' point about the church. These kinds of vices are not just a denial of the truth of the gospel, they are demonic (with anti-kingdom outcomes) and result in the crippling of the church to do what the church is meant to do.

Instead, James urges his readers (for his focus has broadened to include the community of faith) to foster the sort of wisdom that comes from God and is marked by purity and sincerity (referring to a wholeness of heart and mind), a love of peace, gentleness, persuadability, mercy and impartiality. This sort of wisdom will lead to words and actions that promote life in the community of faith and which will facilitate the mission of the church; to make disciples of all nations.

It is the same today. If we allow a partisan spirit to shape how we function as a church, we invite divisions and disorder to enter in and we will limit our effectiveness for the gospel. God invites us to continually look beyond the walls that can bring division within churches, as well as those that can grow between the church and those we are called to share Jesus' invitation with. Without paying attention to this, we run the risk of living our faith out loud in rooms solely filled with like minded individuals, or worse, rooms empty of anyone else at all. This is too important for us to ignore as the people of God.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Marc spoke of the politics as a place where bitter envy and selfish ambition are evident, but where else have you seen these practices at work in the world, and in your own lives, and what is the outcome? Take some time to share your reflections with the group.
2. Pause to read James chapter 3:13-18. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain *why* it jumped out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Share what you've been lead to.
3. Matthew 23 sees Jesus calls out the practice of rivalry and a partisan spirit, as manifested in a religious context. Take 3-4 minutes to quickly look at Matthew 23, and share your observations of how Jesus describes the Pharisees and teachers of the law.
4. Following on from question 3, where do we see the sorts of partisan characteristics Jesus calls out in Matthew 23 at work in our church community?
5. Our mission as believers is to invite people to follow Jesus, how might bitter envy and selfish ambition, or a partisan spirit, be holding us back from more fully engaging with that purpose?
6. James 3:17 describes the wisdom from above as pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Which of the qualities of wisdom from above do you most need the Holy Spirit to grow in your heart?

Prayer

Take some time now to reflect on your answers to questions 6. Pray for each other, that the Holy Spirit would continue to grow wisdom of this kind in our hearts, and that God would give us eyes that look beyond division, and lives that serve beyond walls.