

Excerpts from Life-study of James, Message 8

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION (8)

Bible Verses

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good manner of life his works in meekness of wisdom.

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, forbearing, compliant, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, without hypocrisy.

In 3:13 James says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good manner of life his works in meekness of wisdom.” In verse 13 James mentions being wise before having understanding. If we do not have wisdom, we cannot have understanding. Knowing this, in Ephesians 1 Paul prayed that God would grant us a spirit of wisdom. Whereas a wise man has understanding, a foolish person is not able to understand others.

What is wisdom? It is very difficult to say what wisdom is, because wisdom is abstract. Understanding

is in our mind, but where is wisdom? According to my experience, wisdom is in our spirit. This means that wisdom is found not in our mind, emotion, will, soul, or heart; wisdom is in our deepest part. When we exercise our spirit, stay in the spirit in every situation, and do things according to the spirit, we will have wisdom.

Because wisdom is in the spirit, we can have wisdom only by remaining in our spirit. God is the source of wisdom, and He gives wisdom. But the wisdom that comes from God reaches our spirit. Just as we need to use the proper organs for seeing, hearing, and eating, so we need to use the right organ—our spirit—in order to have wisdom.

At this point we need to compare what James says concerning wisdom with what Paul says in his Epistles. The wisdom taught by Paul was actually Christ Himself. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul says that Christ became wisdom to us from God. However, James does not point out that the wisdom that comes to us from God is Christ. Rather, his way of speaking about wisdom is very similar to Solomon's way in the book of Proverbs. James was saturated with the Old Testament atmosphere, and his way of speaking about

wisdom bears an Old Testament color and flavor. When James speaks concerning wisdom, he does not impress us with Christ. When he tells us that true wisdom comes from above, from God, his word does not have a New Testament color or flavor. It does not have the flavor of Christ. Paul, on the contrary, teaches that wisdom is Christ Himself.

James says that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God for it, and He will give it generously. According to James, wisdom is something given by God. Paul's view is different. Instead of saying that God gives us wisdom, Paul says that Christ has become wisdom to us from God. This implies a transmission from God to us. We may use as an illustration the transmission of electricity from a power plant to our homes. The power plant does not give us an amount of electricity in a container. No, the electricity from the power plant is transmitted into our homes continually. This means that there is "fellowship" between our homes and the power plant. If electricity were given some other way, there would be no need for "communication" between our homes and the power plant. In like manner, instead of being given to us, the heavenly electricity is continually transmitted into our being. In order to

receive this transmission, we simply need to turn on the “switch” of our spirit. If the switch is turned off, the transmission ceases. But if the switch stays on, the transmission will take place continually. This illustrates Paul’s understanding of Christ as our wisdom. When our spirit is switched on, the Spirit of God will be transmitted into us. The Spirit does not transmit wisdom into us as something apart from Christ. Rather, the Spirit transmits Christ Himself into us as our wisdom.

Because James was saturated with the Old Testament, his writing about wisdom has an Old Testament flavor. When we read James’s word regarding wisdom, we need to be reminded of what Paul taught concerning wisdom. The teaching of Paul is focused on God’s economy. When we read what James says about practical Christian perfection, especially what he says about wisdom, we need to be reminded that Paul teaches that Christ is wisdom from God transmitted into our spirit by the life-giving Spirit. The Epistle of James, therefore, not only serves as a balance and warning but also serves as a reminder to pay attention to God’s economy.

Recently, some brothers asked me why the book of James is in the Bible. They were wondering if this Epistle was inspired by God, since it seems to contain so much of James's own wisdom. I pointed out to these brothers that we need to understand what it means to say that the Bible is inspired by God. For the Bible to be divinely inspired does not mean that every word in the Bible is God's word. For example, the words of the serpent to Eve in Genesis 3 were not God's words. Likewise, in Matthew 16 certain words spoken by Peter were not the words of God either but Satan's words spoken through Peter's mouth. What, then, does it mean to say that the Bible is fully inspired word for word by God? It means that it is of God that whatever is recorded in the Bible is included there. Therefore, the words spoken by the serpent in Genesis 3 and the words spoken by Satan through Peter in Matthew 16 have been recorded in the Scriptures by God's inspiration. The writing of this record was fully inspired by God, although the words that were spoken by the serpent and by Satan were not themselves inspired by God. If we are clear concerning this, we will see that in the Epistle of James certain words were not spoken by God.

Along with the fourteen Epistles of Paul, we need the Epistle of James to fulfill the purpose of balancing us in our Christian life concerning practical Christian perfection and also warning us of the need to have a clear view of God's New Testament economy.

Read the verses online: [JAMES 3](#)

Read the complete message online: [Life-study of James](#)