

Last week we talked about how to control our tongue. With the title, a brother came to me and said, “You got me! You are preaching on my biggest problem.” And I told him, “Yes, it is my biggest problem, too.” I am sure that most of you agree that it is not easy to control the tongue. James even said that no one can tame the tongue. The tongue is a fire of our body. However, we must remember that the tongue is the best part of our body, too. We have helping hands. We have beautiful feet that carry the good news, but isn’t it our tongue that actually praises God and witnesses about Jesus? As James says, “*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness*” (v9). It is up to us whether the tongue is our best or worst part. How do you use your tongue? Do you praise God, or do you curse men? Again, no one is perfect. We all make mistakes with our tongue. We may easily hurt someone, and we also get hurt by someone. If that is true, what shall we do? There is a way to control our tongue; that is by controlling our minds. In our minds we are to seek God’s kingdom and righteousness. We need to keep our minds pure and holy so that the Holy Spirit uses our tongues in his way. This is what we learned last week, but a remaining question is “how can we control our minds”? Today’s text shows one of the ways. It is by wisdom.

I am not surprised to hear about wisdom since it is the one of the most common words in the Bible. “*Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her*” (Proverb 8:11). “*Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding*” (Proverbs 4:7). As a matter of fact, wisdom is what every religion talks about. For example, in Buddhism wisdom is an insight or understanding. By understanding human beings, particularly human sufferings, Buddhists believe that they can experience nirvana. In Hinduism, wisdom is a peaceful state of mind and soul which can be achieved by praying to the god of wisdom (*Ganesh*) or by meditation. All great teachers in history taught about wisdom because wisdom is supposed to make us better. But not all wisdoms are the same. Some are actually false and bad. We need to know the wisdom that our Bible teaches us, something more precious than any jewel.

James presents two kinds of wisdom – one coming from above and the other from the world. One is heavenly wisdom and the other is worldly or earthly wisdom. Here I must clarify, by earthly or worldly, I mean the opposite of heavenly. You will see that worldly and earthly wisdom within our context is the one from the devil. We can distinguish heavenly and earthly wisdoms by looking at their characteristics. Earthly wisdom is characterized by “bitter envy.” The word “envy” (ζήλος, *zelos*) can also be translated as jealousy or zeal, which is not necessarily bad. We need to have good zeal or passion for God’s kingdom and ministry, but when it is toward others, it may criticize people and often causes bitterness. Likewise, “selfish ambition” is a part of our sinful nature, wanting our own way and doing our own thing. It doesn’t care about other people, but it creates the only “me” syndrome. “Jealousy” and “ambition” are indicators of arrogance. Those who have this kind of wisdom tend to boast about who they are and what they have, and they deny the truth of God. Such wisdom belongs to the world. “*Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil*” (v.15).

So, what happens if we follow this kind of wisdom? *“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice”* (v.16). Those who have earthy wisdom will cause disorder and evil things. How will that happen?

You know the word “philosophy”, don’t you? “*Philo*” in Greek means “love”, and “*Sophy*” means “knowledge.” So, philosophers are those who seek knowledge. They love to debate because they have great knowledge. They don’t want to be slow to speak. It is natural that those who have knowledge will speak more, and those who speak more will make mistakes with their tongues. Particularly, if knowledge is from the world, that knowledge will be more envious and selfishly ambitious because that is what the world teaches us. Earthly wisdom teaches us how to possess more; how to succeed over other people; and how to have more power than others. The more that knowledge that comes from the devil, the more selfish it will be. Those who have earthly wisdom are usually successful and wise from a worldly point of view. They normally have a skillful tongue, too, but their effect in any committee, in any Church or in any group may cause trouble and drive people apart. Wherever they go, a relationship may be broken. There seem to be always fights and disputes because of their selfish ambition. Again, such wisdom belongs to the devil. Hear what John says about it, *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world”* (1 John 2:15-16). We need intentionally to hate worldly things that will cause divisions and disorders. We should not follow the pattern of the world.

Then, what is true wisdom? True or heavenly wisdom is characterized by “humility.” The Greek word for “humility or gentleness” (πραΰτης, *prautes*) is used to describe a well-trained horse. As we learned last week, a horse is strong but it is controlled by a small bit in its mouth. Likewise, those who have heavenly wisdom in humility will be able to control their tongues. They are the ones who can *“show it [wisdom] by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom”* (v.13b). Besides humility, heavenly wisdom reveals other virtues. *“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”* (v.17).

The first and overarching attribute of wisdom is its purity. It means morally blameless, just as a virgin bride is getting ready to meet her Lord, Jesus. The wisdom that is free from any stain or blemish would be incapable of producing anything evil. Purity comes first because it is important in many ways and it often paves the way for the others. Those who are pure in their hearts follow the proverbs: *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”* (Proverbs 1:7a). *“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil”* (Proverbs 3:7). They will continue to offer themselves as pure and holy offerings to the Lord. Then, James arranges the remaining seven virtues in two groups. The Greek words for the first four virtues all begin with an ‘e’ sound – peace-loving (*eirenike*), considerate (*epieikes*), submissive (*eupeithes*), full of mercy (*meste eleous*). Then, the last three words begin with an ‘a’ sound – good fruit (*karpon agathon*), impartial (*adiakritos*), and sincere (*anupokritos*). This sorting helps us to understand.

James begins with the quality of *peace-loving* because our nature brings disorder and evil things. The way of heavenly wisdom is always pleasant and peaceful (Prov.3:17) because it is also

*considerate* and *submissive*. Being *considerate* or *gentle* means to be willing to yield. Similarly, *submissive* means to be persuaded easily. It does not indicate one easily swayed or compromised. Rather, it indicates the one who is more teachable and willing to adopt the instructions based on truth. And they are willing to show *mercy* to their neighbors. Those who have true wisdom will follow the footsteps of the Lord, who is truly considerate, gentle, meek and merciful. They also produce good fruits to others.

The second-to-last attribute is “impartial”, which means “undivided”, not having double minds. It possesses a singularity of purpose in its trust in God. “Sincere” implies “without hypocrisy.” Those who have heavenly wisdom will not compromise with evil but they will keep the truth of God. They are faithful. They keep the same dedication, the same love and the same commitment to the Lord. As we seek heavenly wisdom, we will be *pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere*. We will have a holy and devoted life. As we possess heavenly wisdom, we bring peace wherever we go. In his final comment, James not surprisingly focuses on peace. This is what we need for today’s church and community, too, “*Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness*” (v.18).

As we hear and watch the news this day, we feel that so many things are missing in this world, not enough grace, not enough encouragement, not enough compassion, not enough hospitality. Everything seems to be brutal and selfish. There seems no more peace. How can we make this world and this community better? Where can we find those missing virtues? They come from those who have heavenly wisdom, someone like you. Good fruit doesn’t come by “bitter zeal” or “selfish ambition.” Good fruits come by sowing good virtues. Those who are pure and peace-loving will bring purity and peace to home, to the church and to the community. Those who are faithful and sincere will bring faithfulness to wherever they are. A good relationship comes by considerate and submissive people. Those who have heavenly wisdom will reap a harvest of righteousness. Brothers and sisters, God called you wherever you are. In your home, in your job, in your church and community, you are sowing the seeds of purity, peace, gentleness, humility, mercy and faithfulness. As you are faithful to the Lord, you will witness the fruits are growing from your seeds. It will be such a blessing for us and the glory to God. Let’s pray!