



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Wisdom: Check Your Heart

James 3:14-16

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Introduction

1. A friend of mine who teaches high school history posted on Facebook a 1913 picture of the 50th reunion of veterans of the Battle of Gettysburg (1863). All were reaching forward to shake hands with their counterparts who had fought on the opposing side.
2. The picture reminds us of a time when sharp differences between people erupted into violence. The Civil War was a time when our country was so divided politically that Americans were trying to kill each other.
3. Political strife is not the only kind that sometimes leads to violence. History records that religious strife has sometimes become violent, too. James 4:1-2 indicates that such may have been taking place among the believers to whom he originally wrote his letter.
4. Differences, which are normal, often lead to strife because we focus so much on our own agenda, or that of "our side," that we stop submitting to God's way and allow the demonic, earthly view of things to control us. James challenges us to resist that way and live wisely, in peace.

Body

- I. The Benchmark for Evaluating Wisdom (3:13).
 - A. To review, recall the paragraph's theme sentence with its emphasis on meekness.
 1. Meekness (*πραῦτης*, *prautēs*) involves "a healthy understanding of our own unworthiness before God and a corresponding humility and lack of pride in our dealings with our fellow-men" (Moo, 132).
 2. It is "a yielding of oneself in ready teachability and responsiveness to God's word" (Blomberg & Kamell, 171, citing George Stulac, *James*, 134).
 - B. In using the word, James shows how to tell whether we are pursuing wisdom.
- II. Anti-Wisdom (3:14-16).¹
 - A. Declared: "It's all about me" (3:14).

¹ "It is interesting to note that James never uses the noun σοφία [*sophia*] to refer to the false 'wisdom'; rather, it is only implied within the text. . . . Hartin (*A Spirituality of Perfection*, 73) . . . labels this 'anti-wisdom'" (Blomberg & Kamell, 174).

1. The phrase, “bitter jealousy” exposes the heart of this self-centeredness.
 - a) “Jealousy” (ζήλον, *zēlos*) refers to “enthusiasm” and “ardent concern” (and is sometimes used positively; John 2:17; 2 Cor. 11:2; Num. 25:11-13).
 - b) “Bitter” (πικρόν, *pikron*) shows that James means the negative idea.
 - c) “This kind of envy seeks the best for oneself, regardless of what might be good for another person [or the church, DA], . . .” (Blomberg & Kamell, 172). It’s about promoting one’s own opinion above all.
 2. “Selfish ambition” (ἐριθείαν, *eritheian*) was “used in settings of sectarian rivalry or partisan politics, [an] image . . . of people in angry competition, undermining one another and each fighting for their own rights, a far cry from ‘the humility of wisdom’” (Blomberg & Kamell, 172).
 - a) The proximity to the warning to teachers (3:1) suggests to some that they could be particular offenders, and certainly the danger exists.
 - b) But, the politicking here is not limited to up-front leaders; great harm comes from others with influence stirring things up behind the scenes.
 3. James is firm: such behavior is arrogant and an affront to the truth of real wisdom that is characterized by humility.
- B. Described: an unholy triad (3:15) (Blomberg & Kamell, 173-174).
1. Earth-bound (“earthly” - ἐπίγειος, *epigeios*): consistently used in the NT of that which is inferior (Davids, 152), this “wisdom” “shuts out God and limits its scope to things on this earth” (Blomberg & Kamell, 173).
 2. Spiritually dead (“unspiritual” - ψυχική, *psychikē*): often contrasted with “spiritual” in Scripture, this involves “lack[ing] the life of the Spirit” (Blomberg & Kamell, 174), a life that is not really submitting to and following God’s way.
 3. Demon-instigated (“demonic” - δαιμονιώδης, *daimoniōdēs*): this word, the strongest of the three, goes to the heart of the wrong trust in anti-wisdom.
- C. Disastrous: seeking self-glory (3:16).
1. James’s words are strong.
 - a) “Disorder” (ἀκαταστασία, *akatastasia*) (cf. 1:8, “unstable,” and 3:8, “uncontrollable”) ranges from “turbulent” to “seditious”; it’s close to anarchy, the “breakdown of order bordering on unruliness” (Martin, 126).
 - b) “Vile practice” (φάυλον πρᾶγμα, *phaulon pragma*) is a strong phrase to describe that which is evil, wrong, bad and vile.
 2. Even if things do not reach violent extremes, the credibility of people claiming total allegiance to God suffers: “When we fight for power in Christian circles, evil establishes a foothold. . . . Our actions no longer demonstrate our faith (as throughout ch. 2), but rather show our commitment to the world and its standards of behavior (setting up ch. 4)” (Blomberg & Kamell, 175).

III. A Heart Check-Up.

- A. Because he mentions it in passing, we may miss the necessary corrective: we must check our hearts (3:14), not the physical organ, of course, but the center of our beings.
1. Before the Jews used Greek, the Greeks (e.g., Homer) “brought together the heart and reason without clearly separating thought and feeling” (Sorg, 180).

2. The Jews used it differently and more intensely as they tried to communicate about their understanding of the heart (לֵב, *lēb*).
 - a) The LXX most often translates it with “heart” (καρδία, *kardia*), but also at times with “mind” (διάνοια, *dianoia*) and “soul” (ψυχή, *psychē*).
 - b) Emotions may not be excluded (they used the kidneys, often mentioned in close connection with the heart, to refer to feelings), but the *lēb* was “the seat of man’s spiritual and intellectual life,” his inner nature (Sorg, 181).
 - c) In the OT, the heart “is also the seat of man’s feeling, thinking and willing,” i.e., “the person in its totality” (Sorg, 181).
 - d) The “heart” includes the idea of responsibility.
 3. “The NT use of *kardia* coincides with the OT understanding of the term, just as much as it differs from the Gk.” (Sorg, 182).
 - a) It’s the seat of intellectual and spiritual life, the inner life.
 - b) It is to respond in *obedience* (cf. Rom. 6:12-18).
 - c) Emotions are part of my life, but following God with all my heart means I conclude things, decide things, and do things whether or not I feel like it.
- B. Which brings us back to James.
1. Few professing Christians are so callous and insincere as to consciously set out to please ourselves and let “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition” carry the day.
 2. Yet those traits keep showing themselves.
 3. So, we must do regular check-ups on our “hearts,” our conclusions, our decisions, and our motives. Whose will do we *really* seek?
 4. Our answer shows whether or not we seek wisdom or anti-wisdom.

Conclusion

1. A quotation I ran across not long ago cuts to the chase: “Wisdom is what’s left after we’ve run out of personal opinions” (Cullen Hightower).
2. That’s not a bad paraphrase of James. Do we seek our way or submit to God’s? To have wisdom, we must always ask that question. God will help us in the quest as we surrender.

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