

WISE LEADERSHIP

James 3:13-18

In the previous section (3:1-12), James dealt with the issue of teachers. The teaching of God's Word is absolutely essential to the sanctification process. Therefore, it is critically important those who teach be qualified. To that end, James encouraged his people to listen to a brother's *words*, in order to identify spiritually mature men qualified to teach the Word of God.

Here, in James 3:13-18, James deals with leaders. Wise leadership is absolutely necessary for healthy churches. Therefore, it is critically important those who lead be qualified. To that end, James encourages his people to observe a brother's *works* in order to identify those who are wise and understanding and thereby qualified to lead the church family.

A WISE PERSON IS ONE WHO SKILLFULLY APPLIES GOD'S TRUTH TO EVERYDAY LIFE.

Those who lead the church must be men of wisdom who know how to skillfully apply God's Word to life. The term *understanding* refers to a person who has expert knowledge in a particular subject. Those who lead the church must be men who have expert knowledge in the Scriptures.

How are they to determine if a potential leader is wise and understanding? By observing his conduct and general course of life. The character of a wise man reveals itself in his works.

The wise and understanding among them are those who remain steadfast under trial (1:2-4). The wise and understanding are those who ask God for wisdom and in faith do that which He reveals (1:5-8). The wise and understanding are those who are quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (1:19-21). The wise and understanding are those who hear and do the Word (1:22-25). The wise and understanding are those who visit orphans and widows in their affliction (1:27). The wise and understanding are those who show no favoritism but treat each person with dignity (2:1-13). The wise and understanding are those who possess functional faith, their faith expressing itself in works. The wise and understanding are those whose tongues are under control (3:1-12).

It is common those who are business leaders or community leaders assume they are qualified to be leaders in the Church. It is a monumental mistake for a church to make this assumption. Philosophies and practices acceptable in secular leadership are not acceptable in spiritual leadership in the church (James 3:14-16).

Bitter jealousy is better translated *harsh zeal*. *Harsh zeal* describes a person who becomes so intense over an issue they become dogmatic and obstinate. *Harsh zeal* readily leads to *selfish ambition*. *Selfish ambition* describes a person running for political office by unfair means. In the NT, *selfish ambition* describes a leader who forms a group which eventually withdraws from the rest of the church.

A person claiming to follow God's wisdom, but dividing the church is "boasting and lying against the truth". They are not wise and understanding. A person who operates in such a manner is unfit for leadership in the Body of Christ. Whatever decisions result from a process characterized by these sinful qualities is not God's wisdom. In God's economy the process is as important as the outcome.

THE PROCESS IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE OUTCOME.

An ungodly process will not produce a godly outcome. A spiritually mature leader understands the process is as important as the outcome (James 3:17).

A spiritually mature leader understands the process is as important as the outcome. A wise leader, working with his fellow leaders in the church will be pure. He is committed to doing what is right and good in the eyes of the Lord no matter the issue or intensity of his feelings. He does not manipulate, intimidate, or politic. He rejects the idea that the ends justify the means.

He is peaceable; it is not "win at all costs". He is gentle; non-combative. He keeps his cool even when others are unkind. He is open to reason. He is very willing to listen and to be persuaded by facts. It doesn't mean he's wishy-washy, but he is always willing to learn and reconsider based on new information. He is full of mercy and good

fruits. He is impartial. He will not join one party over the other. His loyalty is to the Lord and not a personality within the church. He is genuine. What he says to one group he says to the other. He treats everyone the same – gently, thoughtfully and with love.

When leaders function together in the manner described in verse 17 the church can be confident their decisions are *wise and understanding*. They can be confident they are walking in God's wisdom.

That's the conclusion of verse 18; the harvest, the end result, of a process characterized by peace is God's righteousness.

IF THE PROCESS IS CHARACTERIZED BY PEACE THE OUTCOME WILL BE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

If the process has the qualities of verse 17 we can be confident we are walking in God's wisdom.

James 3:13-18 also applies to decision making and the wisdom of God. When facing a major life decision we need to realize that the process is all important. The "how" is more important than the "what". If the decision making process is characterized by "disorder and every vile practice" as verse 16 says, then it tells us that either we or someone else in the decision making process is functioning in an ungodly way. The outcome of a disorderly, contentious process will not be God's wisdom no matter how we spin it.

But if the decision-making process is characterized by purity, peace, gentleness, openness to reason etc., then we can be fully confident that the decision reached is God's wisdom. This is why I counsel that if you and your spouse are facing a major decision and you are not in agreement, then if possible, delay your decision until you are fully unified and at peace.

Finally, we are not talking about the will of God, but the wisdom of God. God's will is primarily moral - think the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) - and general (pray, make disciples, serve, give, rejoice etc.). It is not the case in most our lives that God has a specific vocation He wants you to do nor a specific person He wants you to marry nor a specific place He wants you to live. All these things are a matter of wisdom. His will for a husband and father is to provide for his family, but how he provides is a matter of wisdom. Regarding marriage God instructs us to marry a fellow Christian. Whom you marry is a matter of wisdom. If we live according to God's moral and general, we need not worry we are missing His "plan A". If our decision-making process has the qualities of James 3:17-18, informed by biblical principles, we can be confident we are walking in God's wisdom.

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