



Ed Miller  
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## JAMES 3:13-18

I'm going to actually give a little more of a plug for my Take Jesus Home small group. Remember two weeks ago we were in Romans 12 and we got this little handout? Wonderful thing. This is the kind of small group I've wanted to have for a long time. We take the message that we hear on Sunday, and Monday we unpack it. So what we looked at in this little handout...I hope you still have it. I think this is a great little discipleship tool. We're going to be going through all these points in the weeks ahead. We talked about two points – loving without hypocrisy, hating evil and clinging to what is good. Can you imagine the discussion that we had?

One of the things that happens when you know you're going to be talking about the sermon on Monday night is you listen carefully to the sermon. You're much more tuned in. It forces us in a lot of ways to really zone in on what we're hearing because we know we're going to be talking about what it means for us to live that out, take Jesus home, apply it day to day to our real life situation.

That's been a marvelous accountability thing for me in my life personally as I've had to be accountable with my brothers and sisters in that group about what I'm hearing. Am I doing something about it? Where am I struggling to live that out?

Hate what is evil. We had quite the discussion about that. What does that mean in our daily lives to hate what is evil? Great discussion. So I just simply invite you to join with us tomorrow night if you can.

How many of you have not ever heard me preach? Quite a number of you. Quite a number of you. Okay good. Hopefully it will be beneficial and edifying for you.

I think because some of you haven't and we haven't done this for a while, I've been teaching through the book of James. We're in chapter 3 in the book of James. If you want to turn there you can certainly do so. We're going to be in James 3:13-18.

Let me give you a little more background. Let's go back and talk about the book of James and the purpose of the book of James, the context so that we can better understand what's happening.

In James 1 the author tells us that he's writing to the scattered Jewish believers. He makes a very strong point of writing to those who are scattered. Why are they scattered? Well in Acts 8 we learn a little bit more about that.

Listen to this. *And Saul approved of their killing him.* Speaking of the stoning of Stephen. This is the passage where that happened. *On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church.* Strong word. *Saul began systematically to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

So the followers of Jesus literally were in fear of their lives. They were in fear of their lives. They fled Jerusalem to avoid ruin, death, left their homes, work, lost loved ones. A very difficult time for the early church.

Many Christians around the world today are facing similar persecution. You don't see as much of it or understand as much of it here, but we're starting to hear more and more, aren't we. We're starting to see a greater and greater animosity toward the Christian faith and toward Christianity. I'll talk about that a little bit more.

But around the world it's a little bit greater already. There's a watchdog group of Christian persecution called the Open Doors and they reported that 7,000 Christians have been killed worldwide simply because of their faith, nothing else that they did. Simply because they identified themselves as Christians. That's a period November 1, 2014 to October 31, 2015. It's a significant increase over years past.

I want to mention that because I want to pray again. I'd like to pray for persecuted Christians around the world and in this country. There are Christians in this country who are starting to have to stand for their faith and decide if they're going to stand for Jesus or not and got to suffer some kind of penalty for not doing that. I encourage you to pray for persecuted Christians around the world. Let's pray now.

[PRAYER] Lord, we're looking at a passage in scripture from a book written by James where he talks about the scattered believers. They've been scattered, they're in fear for their lives. Lord, there are believers, those who identify with us as Christians, those who have believed that you are the way, the truth, and the life, the only way to the Father. Because of that they are being killed, they're being scattered, they're in fear for their lives. Lord, we lift them up to you all around the world and in this country. We lift them up and ask that you would strengthen them, that you would fill them with your Holy Spirit. Fill them with the joy of the Lord. Fill them with the peace of the Spirit. Fill them with the strength that they need filled with grace and truth. Give them the courage to stand no matter what the consequence, stand for you. We lift them up to you and ask for your hand of protection, your Spirit to send angels upon them. In Jesus' name, amen.

Okay you'll have a little context now. James is writing to the scattered believers. There is persecution going on. Let's take a look at James 3:13-18.

*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. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven*

*but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. Strong words. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. Again, strong words.*

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

*Who is wise and understanding among you?* Or who presumes to be able to teach others? Well first of all, that's a very challenging passage for someone like myself. It causes me pause, as I'm sure it would you as well. It causes me to examine my life. Is my life such that I can stand and teach others? That's a good thing. We need to examine our lives. I'm not perfect and I don't think this passage is saying we need to be perfect. But does the fruit of our life reflect godliness, godly truth, godly wisdom?

It's interesting that James starts, isn't it? He doesn't define wisdom. He doesn't say what wisdom is. He doesn't try to define a set of values. He doesn't define a set of maxims about truth. He says first and foremost look at the life behind the person who is claiming to be wise. He talks about the good life and the deeds of a wise person. He notes that wisdom comes from a person like this because they're characterized by humility. Looks at the life of a person.

We're in a political season right now. There is a lot of people standing up and saying what they believe and spouting a lot of wisdom, or so-called wisdom. I don't see a lot of humility. I see a lot of arrogance and our whole system kind of lends itself to that. You have a few bites that you get a chance to say what you believe and you try to tout what you believe and tout yourself. But there's an awful lot of arrogance, isn't there?

Look at the entertainment world. There are a lot of people who are "famous" because they perform wonderful music, or they're good athletically, or they're a good actor or actress. But what's their life like? We tend to listen to those people because they're famous. They get in the newspaper, they are written about, they're interviewed on TV. We tend to listen to them because they're famous. I'd suggest that we might want to be really careful about that.

I think of someone like Charlie Sheen. I'm just going to pick out one example. A great actor. A great actor. Maybe some of you have appreciated some of the things that he's done, but his life is all messed up. He is one messed up dude because of drugs and, I would suggest, because he has selfishly filled himself with himself. He's very arrogant, lost, filled with the evil one.

There are a lot of people like that. It's not hard to think of examples of people that are arrogant and their life does not stand for biblical qualities. But yet our world listens to them. They speak and the world listens. Someone gets up on stage there, they win an Oscar; everyone listens to what they have to say because they're famous.

I think James is warning us against that. That is not a good thing. Often say in the political world that we want to debate issues and not look at character. I think James is saying we need to look at character. Character matters a lot. He's presenting a different view of wisdom. He's talking about the wisdom that is elevated based on the quality of the life of the one who's speaking. Not

mostly just about the strength of the argument. It's about what's underlying that, what's underneath that.

I found it interesting that there's a difference between knowledge and wisdom. I used to think those words were somewhat synonymous. Knowledge is understanding truth, information. Scott talked about that a bit a few weeks ago. Truth is more how we handle knowledge, what we do with knowledge, how we apply it in practical ways. Do we take the things that we know to be true and handle them well? Wisdom is applying knowledge in real situations.

James is saying that the character of the person thus affects how we handle that truth. How we handle what we know in practical realities. Wisdom is how we apply it. So in evaluating someone's argument, be sure to look at the life and the deeds of the person speaking.

James is going to get into this more very soon, but now we're going to look at one particular type of wisdom and that is the wisdom that he describes as earthly wisdom. Again, strong words. He calls this kind of wisdom, earthly wisdom, *demonic*. A strong description. He tells us that this wisdom *does not come down from heaven but is rather from the earth*. It's evil. It's evil.

Here are the descriptions. The character qualities – remember we're talking about the character qualities underlying the one who claims to be wise. *Bitter envy, selfish ambition, boastful*. It's what we've been talking about. Right?

I like that word *selfish ambition*. I think is very descriptive because there are a lot of people today who get on a forum, they have an opportunity to speak, but they have an agenda. They have an agenda. It's a selfish agenda. It's an agenda. I would suggest it's often an evil agenda, even though they may not even know it. They may not even know it's an agenda, but it's an agenda that is going against God's truth. An agenda that's demonic because it's standing against God and His truth. The wisdom that comes from people like this James suggests it's *earthly, unspiritual, demonic, and full of every evil practice*.

Let me give you an example. There's a prevailing philosophy in our culture today that is called relativism. It might be called other things as well. It's called relativism and it is the politically correct philosophy today that's championed by many people. Those of you who are young folks you know that you're hearing this in your school. Very much a philosophy of everything is equal. Every belief system is really the same. There's really no difference between Christianity, Islam, Judaism, secular humanism, atheism. They're all equally valid. That is a philosophy that's predominant today.

I would suggest that the primary value of that philosophy is a value of tolerance. Not the kind of tolerance the way we think of it. Tolerance means I'm going to let you believe something; I'm not going to kill you. I'm not going to go against you. You can believe that.

But we have a different definition of that today in our politically correct world. The definition is now I actually have to accept that. I have to accept. To be tolerant is to accept and, maybe even go one step further, to champion it. I have to cheer for your view because it's equally valid, so I celebrate it.

I'd suggest this comes out of an ambitious agenda to change the way the world operates, to change the way we think, to deceive. That's why James called it demonic, something like this. It's coming out of an ambition to change the way we look at the world, change the way we look at everything. It's unspiritual. It's designed to deceive.

What's hard is it sounds so good. Doesn't it? Doesn't it sound so good that we should all just get along, we should all just accept each other, we're all brothers and sisters. It sounds really great. In many ways when we look at things like culture and ethnic diversity, we can affirm that. Can't we? We are all different. We're different. But we're all one in that sense as human beings. We can affirm that. But when we start talking about other things being of equal value, it doesn't work.

First of all, it doesn't work because it's internally inconsistent. It's internally inconsistent to say that we should tolerate everything. Because we don't. If you just probe a little bit into that and someone who's saying we just need to be tolerant and coexist, well, do we coexist with pedophilia? Is that what we're supposed to do? Do we coexist with murderers? In the West at least we would say no. No, we don't do that. It's inconsistent internally. We do not tolerate everything. In fact intolerance is not tolerated. Isn't that interesting? Intolerance is not tolerated. If you're intolerant, we're not going to tolerate you. It's internally inconsistent. But nobody sees this. It's because there's a blindness, unfortunately.

Secondly, we know that all belief systems are not equal. They're not. Jesus claimed that He is *the way, the truth, and the life*. That's in John 4. *No one comes to the Father but through him*. That is a profound statement coming from Jesus Himself, reported by the apostles, written down for us to see. Jesus says, "I am the only way to God." He took the form of a human being, God Himself coming to earth to dwell among us, limiting Himself so that we could have new life, so that we could be saved.

That's the God that we believe in the Bible. That is not the God of every other religion. In fact for some religions, that is anathema that God would actually limit Himself to a human being in Islam. It's a sticking point between Christianity and Islam. That's not the kind of god that they believe in. Allah is not that way. Allah did not come down to earth and become a man. That idea is anathema.

So we have this idea in our culture today of kind of a one-world religion. Everything is equal. The God of the Bible is the same as the god of Islam. And if you don't believe in a god at all, that's okay. Whatever you believe is fine.

I'm going to use an illustration from current events that I think will help us see this dichotomy here. You may remember that there was an attempted assassination of a police officer last month in Philadelphia. His name was Jesse Hartnett. He survived.

But at the news conference it was striking. The new mayor of Philadelphia, Jim Kenney, stated right at the front that Islam had absolutely nothing to do with this incident.

Now I would suggest (I'm not trying to pick on Jim Kenney because there's a lot of people we could pick on) he represents a politically correct philosophy, this philosophy that I'm talking about of relativism that says that Islam and every other religion are all the same. All peace-loving, equal, valid. He's saying he doesn't want Islam disparaged at all, so he's saying Islam had nothing to do with it.

Then we have following that, coming right up, the police commissioner and other police officers who say very, very clearly Islam did cause this man to act. They interviewed him. He said very specifically, made it very clear, that the man, Edward Archer, attended a local mosque, confessed to being a Muslim, that his actions were motivated by his commitment to ISIS and to jihad.

The contrast in these statements is striking. Did you see it? Did anybody watch the interview? Some watched it. I thought about showing it, but I decided not to show it. I think it's striking because what we see on one hand is a deception, an actual wisdom that says we're not going to deal with the truth, and then police officers whose job is to get the facts, to get the right information, and a kind of a pure wisdom that says we're going to present the facts.

The facts are that this man was motivated by Islamic teachings. I'm not necessarily saying that all Muslims are out to kill everybody, but this gentleman was motivated in such a way. There's a stark contrast between the two types of wisdom that's represented there. Very striking.

That may lead you to think more about Islam. I'm going to talk just a little bit about Islam this morning. Because it's very much in the news and it's very much something that I'm sure is on your mind. And we don't talk about it very much in the church.

It probably raises the question, what is Islam? What do I believe? We have folks around the world who are believing certain teachings of Muhammad and the Quran and they are killing people. They are murdering people. They are the ones that are causing a lot of this persecution among Christians. And we have it happening in this country. And then we have other people standing and saying no, that's not Islam. That's not Islam.

I cannot completely define Islam, but let me give you an example. There actually is what we call a smoking gun and it doesn't get any press hardly at all.

There was a trial in 2007 and 2008 of the Holy Land Foundation. The Holy Land Foundation was a nonprofit organization donating money to the Middle East, supposedly for humanitarian reasons. But in fact it was found very clearly that much of that funding was going to fund terrorism.

The Muslim Brotherhood was the one that was indicted in that trial, but there were many other non-indicted co-conspirators, including many other Muslim organizations, including CAIR. Out of this came this thing called the explanatory memorandum and other things, other documents that were found through their investigation, not intended to be found, by the Muslim Brotherhood.

It clearly revealed a secret plan for what they called civilization jihad, aimed at taking down our country through a stealthy approach to jihad. Not the direct killing of people, but in kind of infiltrating our government, our media, our educational system. Infiltrating this. This document was written by Muslim Brotherhood folks and listed a whole bunch of other Muslim organizations that were also friends of this organization, CAIR being one of them.

CAIR is an organization that is identified as a terrorist group by the United Arab Emirates. I would suggest that CAIR poses as a moderate and peaceful organization. They deceive us. They deceive us. But in reality they have another agenda.

That's one example. I share this because we need to understand that there is deception out there. The evil one wants to deceive us with this kind of wisdom that's motivated by another agenda.

Let's look at the other type of wisdom, shall we? Let's continue on. Let's look at the wisdom that comes from heaven, verses 17-18. *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. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

This is godly wisdom. Godly wisdom. First of all, it's pure.

There's an awful lot in this passage and I could keep you for an awful long time to talk about each of these words, so we're not going to do that as much as I'd like to. But let's talk about this idea of pure wisdom. Purity. In other words sincere is another word. Sincere. Pure and sincere. What do you think of when you think of something that's pure? You think of something that's untainted. I think of something that's without any blemish, without fault. Pure.

Now for us who are speaking wisdom, purity doesn't mean that we are perfectly pure. Because this wisdom that comes down is something that comes from God. Wisdom comes from God and it is pure. That doesn't mean that the person necessarily is pure. But we are untainted. There's an implication that if someone seeks these qualities, purity becoming the first, then they can speak God's wisdom and truth. Purity is important because it has to do with, again, with motives. It has to do with the heart.

I spoke at New Jersey Christian Academy this week and I talked about the importance of the heart. God cares about what's in our heart. So I think about purity and I think about the heart. Pastor Scott talks about the importance of us being right with God in our heart and tending to our heart. Untainted. Pure.

I don't know the police commissioner in Philadelphia, I don't know what his motives were, I don't know whether he was a believer. I know that when he spoke the contrast from what was said by the mayor and by what was said by this man was just so striking. It seemed to be pure to me because it was like just the facts. Just the facts. I'm going to tell you what this guy said; I'm going to reveal the facts, the truth.

I think that's what we're called to do. We're called to be people wise that present pure wisdom, wisdom that comes from above that's pure. We're humble. It's humble. It's considerate, it's

peaceful, it's submissive. We're not arrogant. That police chief was not arrogant at all. It wasn't anything arrogant about him. He spoke humbly, but he gave the truth and the facts.

What are we called to do as Christians? Let's take this idea of Jesus being the only way. We are called to speak that truth. And it's going to come. It's not long in coming that we're going to be challenged to decide whether we're going to stand on that truth or not. Maybe some of you have already had to do that. Maybe you've been challenged.

That particular viewpoint goes completely against the political philosophy of relativism. Completely against it. It is completely different. And because of the influence of Christianity, the Judeo-Christian worldview in our culture, we've been able to not have to deal with that. But it's changing. Relativism is taking the day. Political correctness is something that's new and real.

Saying that Jesus is the only way is not popular. It's not popular. Right now it may not be something that we're going to be stood up against a wall and shot for, but it's not popular, that's for sure. The Jews hated the followers of Jesus because He claimed to be the only way. He claimed to be the Messiah come from God that they were looking for. Muslims hate Christianity because of that belief that Jesus is the only way.

What does this mean for us? Now we have to decide what to do. What does this mean for us as we consider these two types of wisdom? The wisdom of the world, earthly wisdom that's meant to deceive, to lead us astray; godly wisdom that speaks truth, that's pure. What do we do with this?

Well first of all I speak to you about it this morning because I think we need to be aware. I don't think we're very aware of what is happening. So that means we need to understand what is going on.

We're talking about this Monday night, these kinds of things. Join us if you'd like to learn more.

The passage again that we looked at in Romans the last time we were in Romans – *hate what is evil*. We need to hate what is evil. I'm suggesting to you, brothers and sisters, that this is evil. This relativistic philosophy is evil. It's demonic. We need to hate it.

Do we need to hate the people? No. Again, Pastor Scott made that very clear. We're not called to hate any person. We're called to love people because God wants to save them. Doesn't He? God has great passion and mercy on everyone. So if we have folks that we know in our lives and they differ on the philosophy from what we believe, we're called to love them. We're called to speak truth in a humble, gentle way, balancing grace and truth. We're not called to hate people. Make sure that you hear me. I'm not calling anyone to hate any people. I'm not suggesting that.

Second thing, though, as we think of taking Jesus home – we need to *cling to what is good* and stand firm on the wisdom from above. Are you standing firm on the wisdom from above? Are you standing firm on the fact that Jesus is the only way to God and His Spirit lives within us and empowers us?

Standing firm I think means not being afraid. This kind of stuff makes me afraid and maybe some of you are anxious even as I'm speaking this morning. I would understand that completely. It makes me anxious. It makes me quite anxious. We're not called to be afraid at all. We're called to stand on the reality that God is with us. Whether we're at school, at work, in our neighborhood, we're called to be people that are full of confidence in Jesus. He is with us.

Look at what we've heard in Romans throughout the time that we've been preaching about Romans – *there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus*. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. God is working good in us.

James in chapter 1 talks about *consider it joy when you face trials of many kinds*. Consider it joy. How do we do that? Well it's because we know God is in control of all things. No matter what's happening in the world. Right? God is in control. So, brothers and sisters, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Stand on the truth. Love people. And God will take care of the rest.

I'd like to just be quiet for a moment and have you reflect on this in this quietness of your heart and then I'll pray.

[PRAYER] Thank you, Lord, that we have your truth. Wisdom from above that comes from you, that comes from heaven. We've been given truth through your word. Thank you so much that we have a record of your coming to this earth and all that that means and all that you taught. We have a record of who you are. We know who you are. Lord, we ask that you'd help us to stand on that, have confidence in the reality of what you say, and not be deceived by all the messages out in the world that say that things are different, they're not that way, they're not what the Bible teaches. The wisdom that has, there's an agenda to change our world and to move us away from Judeo-Christian values. Lord, help us to stand and not be deceived. Help us to support one another in that effort. We want to represent you well, we want to be people that stand for you and are powerfully filled with the Holy Spirit. Help us, Lord, to do that. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.