

I Believe... So Now What?
(Week 7)
James 3:13-18
“Have You Ever Been Broken?”

Introduction

“Who among you is wise and understanding? By his good conduct he should show that his works are done in the gentleness that comes from wisdom.” James 3:13

When I was younger (and less fragile), I used to work with horses. In order to train a horse to be ridden, it must first be “broken”. This is a very painstaking process, and I learned pretty early on that there are two ways to go about it. The first is the tried and true “cowboy way”, where the rider corrals the horse in a pen, ties on a saddle, and jumps on the frightened animals back. As anyone who has ever tried this method will tell you, the process can best be described as “just hang on and hope for the best!” The thought behind this “wild west style” of horse breaking is to wear down the animal’s resistance by simply staying in the saddle until the poor creature tires of struggling. While this method can be effective, in my humble opinion, it is not the best option.

The second way to break a horse takes a lot more time, but is far less dangerous to both the horse and rider. It has sometimes been called the “trust method”, and just as the name implies, it is a systematic approach to build up a trust relationship with the animal until it is no longer afraid and will submit to your leading. While the trust method takes significantly more time to break a horse than the “cowboy way”, most “horse people” find the approach far more humane, and much more likely to produce a harmonious relationship between the horse and rider. In short, when your horse trusts you, as opposed to being simply afraid of you, you make a better team.

In a similar way, in order for a person to live in such a way that brings glory to God, they too must at some time be “broken”, so they will respond as God desires. James alludes to this horse and rider analogy when he speaks of controlling the tongue (**James 3:3**). There can be no such thing as an untamed Christian, for in order to be used of God one must be controlled by The Spirit of God. James calls this being led by “wisdom from above” (**vs. 13, 17**).

According to James, there are two kinds of wisdom. First, there is the wisdom of this world, and then, there is the wisdom from above, and the two are as different as day and night. In these few verses (**vs. 13-18**), he contrasts the difference, so his readers can easily distinguish just which source is truly guiding their thought and actions. The truth is simply this: if we live a life guided by the principles (wisdom) of this world, it proves that we have never been truly “broken” by God’s Spirit. But, if we live as those led by the wisdom from above, it is proof positive that our faith is genuine. So, I ask you this question today, “Have you ever been broken?”

James says that by our good conduct we show that our works are done in the “gentleness” that comes from God’s wisdom (**vs. 13**). The Greek word that is here rendered “*gentleness*” (*praytes*, pronounced prah-oo-tace) is used many times throughout *The New Testament*. *Praytes* is often translated “*meekness*” and is a word best used to describe a “*broken*” horse, who has yielded over its strength to its master. The horse is no less strong, but he has allowed his strength to be controlled by another. It is a perfect example of what happens when someone yields the control of their lives over to Christ. We place our “strength” under His control. This is “*praytes*”, and it is the only way in which faith can be proved genuine. God doesn’t need us to “fight” for Him. He simply wants us to stop fighting against Him. We can never bring about the righteousness of God by getting angry and forcing our beliefs upon others (**James 1:20**). No, it is only by being broken and yielding up our strength to his control that The Spirit can lead us, and we will be effective witnesses for Christ.

Again, there are two sources of wisdom by which all men will be controlled. The one is natural, but the other is supernatural. Let us compare the two sources of wisdom today side by side, and as we do, let each of us ask ourselves this question: “Which source of wisdom is controlling me; the wisdom from above, or the wisdom from below?”

Wisdom From Below (vs. 14-16)

“But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don’t boast and deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every evil practice.”
James 3:14-16

In James’ day, the society around Jerusalem was very divided. There were traditional Jews, Jewish converts to Christianity, and Hellenistic Jews who had embraced Greek culture. The Greeks were enamored with wisdom. They believed that the more knowledge a man possessed, the greater not only was his station in life, but his level of contentment. The Jews, however, believed that wisdom was only beneficial if it was “lived out”, as it were. In other words, Jewish people felt that it did not matter how much wisdom you possessed, unless you were able to “live by it”. James was definitely Jewish in his reasoning. He believed that faith without works is dead, and he also believed that the way that a person lived was proof of the wisdom that he possessed.

As I mentioned earlier, there are two “sources” of wisdom, and they offer us vastly different approaches to living. The first type of wisdom is “worldly”, and it comes as naturally to mankind as breathing. James reveals the source of worldly wisdom in **verse 14**, calling it “earthly, unspiritual, and demonic in its nature.

It is interesting to note that the child of God has three natural enemies that strive against him in this life. They are: 1) The World, which represents the system of human wisdom that prevails all around us; 2) The Flesh, which represents the sin nature that lies within all of us; and 3) The Devil, who is the father of lies who seeks to destroy us. When James speaks of the **“wisdom that does not come from above”**, it is in fact the wisdom that comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil to which he is referring. The “rules” that men play by in this fallen world are in direct opposition to God. The “natural”(unredeemed) man lives only to take care of himself, while the child of God (reborn from above) will live to serve others and bring glory to God.

James provides for us here a bit of insight into how to recognize “worldly wisdom”. It is self-centered at it’s very heart. To use the previous topic of controlling the tongue. Even an ungodly person is able to control what he says to his own ends. For example, the most foul mouthed person on earth, can censure what he says while he is at work in order to keep his job. And why does he do that? Not because he desires to have a clean mouth that proceeds from a clean heart, but rather, because there is benefit in it for him. So, he lives just as “clean” as he needs to, in order to keep what is his. While there is indeed “wisdom” in his thinking, there is nothing spiritual about this kind of wisdom. It is merely self-serving. The man is conducting himself according to the dictates of “worldly wisdom”.

Worldly wisdom, according to The Scriptures shown here, is by definition rooted in **“bitter envy, and selfish ambition” (vs. 14a)**. The Greek phrasing that James uses here is much more descriptive than the English translations can begin to adequately address. The words rendered **“bitter envy”** (*pikros zelos* in the Greek) literally mean piercing jealousy or contentious rivalry. It means that every motive behind the actions of “natural” men are being driven by a desire to “win out” at the expense of others if necessary. The world becomes a field of competition, as it were, where only the strong survive. Is it any wonder that pagans embrace Darwinism, which embraces the survival-of-the-fittest mentality?

This doesn’t necessarily suggest that the pagans of this world never do anything good. Quite the contrary. Pagan people often do some very good things, but their motivation for these good deeds is suspect. Have you ever noticed how the most elite members of society seem to have a camera around every time that they do something considered “noble”? Now, why **is that** do you suppose? Could it possibly be that they want others to see their good deeds, so they may receive the accolades that they so desperately crave? Of course, it does! I mean, here in twenty first century America, what good is doing good, if it’s “off the record”? Believe it or not, it was much the same in Jesus’ time. In fact, he warned His followers against this practice.

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward." **Matthew 6:1-2**

You see, to the worldly person, everything that they do (even some very good things, mind you), are motivated by the "How-does-this-make-me-look?" philosophy. Check your motivation this morning. Why do you do what you do? Do your good deeds come from a heart that has been changed by God? Or, are you just concerned with how you appear to the others who may be watching? God knows. And, so will you, if you take an honest look within. James tells us that if this is our true motivation, then we need not boast about it and deny the truth (**vs. 14**). For our good works have nothing to do with God and everything to do with getting our pat on the back. And, Jesus says that we already have all the reward we will ever receive when we live for the praise of others. Personally, I would rather have the approval of God!

The word that James uses for "selfish ambition" (*eritheia* in the Greek and translated "strife" in some translations) is actually a political word, referring to one who tries to gain favor for himself by winning others over to his/her side. As I am writing this, I cannot help but think of the mid-term elections that are just a few days away. How hard these politicians work to win us over! How many of them do you think even care about us at all? Very few, I would say, and yet, we clamor to the polls year after year as lemmings diving in unison off the cliffs to give them our undying devotion. Do we actually even know what these people stand for? Or, do we just blindly follow the "party line"? There is nothing quite so divisive and sensational as politics. I look forward to the day when there are no more elections, just The King of Kings and His loyal subjects living in that harmonious eternal kingdom. The natural man lives and dies by politics, doing whatever he can to win people over for his own advantage.

So there you have it, the wisdom of this age is inspired by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and you will know it, because those who live according to its tenants will be self serving, jealously striving for personal gain, while trying to advance themselves by winning favor with the majority. And we wonder why there are so many churches today that have gone through serious "church splits"? James tells us that worldly wisdom produces "**disorder and every evil practice**". The word translated "evil" would be better translated as "worthless", meaning simply, that the things built up by man using his own worldly wisdom will bring about nothing but confusion and nothingness. Such things **never** last. If you'd like to see a great example of this, then look no further than the Tower of Babel. It is forever memorialized in *Genesis* as a monument to the hopeless futility of worldly wisdom. Only the wisdom that comes from above will stand the test of time my friends. What is your motivation behind your actions this morning? From whence is the source of your wisdom?

Wisdom From Above (vs. 17-18)

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without pretense. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace." **James 3:17-18**

So what are the characteristics of those whose source of wisdom is from above? As you might have guessed... They are Christlike. I find it interesting to note that James' "list" of spirit-filled attributes are very similar to The Apostle Paul's "fruit of the Spirit" found in **Galatians 5**:

"But the fruit of The Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Law is not against such things." **Galatians 5:22-23**

When a person is controlled by The Spirit of God, then Godly wisdom from above will be their only motivation. The child of God isn't concerned with "scoring points", nor "keeping up appearances". Their mind is set on pleasing Christ. For the true believer, this can only be accomplished by trusting Jesus fully to guide their every action, both in word and in deed. Just as the "trust method" for gently breaking a horse takes time to accomplish, Jesus shows us daily that He cares for us and that His direction is the best possible way for us to go. Each day the believer relinquishes more and more of his or her control to the One Who has demonstrated nothing but a sincere desire for their best interest. Jesus is completely trustworthy! Can I get a witness? As we rely on Christ as the sole source of our wisdom, we are transformed into his very likeness, seeing the world as He sees it and reacting to its circumstances as only He would. We, like Him, will be:

1. Pure (*hag-nos* in the Greek) meaning clean.
2. Peace-loving (*eirenikos*) meaning exactly what it says.
We long to have peace with God and with each other.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." Matthew 5:9

This is the exact opposite of the "selfish ambition" that comes from worldly wisdom.

3. Gentle (*epieikace*) meaning appropriate and patient with those who are weaker (Matt. 12:20)
4. Compliant (*eupeithes*) meaning easily obedient. We long to obey and follow Christ.
5. Full of Mercy (*eleos*) meaning longing to show kindness to those who are rejected by this world.
6. Good Fruits (*agathos carpos*) meaning good works that speak to our genuine faith
(**James 3:1-12**).
7. Unwavering (*adiakritos*) meaning we show no partiality. We love all people the same. We are as Christ is... approachable (**James 2:1-9**).
8. Without Pretense (*anypokritos*) meaning un-hypocritical. We don't have any ulterior motives. We aren't "play-acting" for an audience of men, but rather, we are under the control of The Holy Spirit Who is guiding us in the ways of His wisdom from above. Both our actions, and the motives behind them are equally pure.

These are the characteristics of one who is being guided by wisdom from above. There is a stark difference between the two sources of wisdom is there not? Now each of us should examine ourselves closely and ask, "Which of these two sources of wisdom best describes my life's current course?" We must look intently into The Word of God and see ourselves, so that we can be conformed into the image of Christ. For if we ignore the truth, then our course is hopeless (**James 1:22-25**).

"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace."

James 3:18

Creates a beautiful picture doesn't it? Those who are controlled by The Spirit of God, who live according to His wisdom, rejecting the wisdom of this wicked world, will sow righteousness wherever they go, and they will do it in a way that promotes peace, and not strife. Too many want to argue their talking points these days. The wisdom of this world says; win as many over to your side as we can so we'll crush our enemies. But Christ tells us to love our enemies (**Matthew 5:44**) and to speak the truth in love (**Ephesians 4:15**). The wisdom of this world is nothing like the wisdom of God:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways, are not My ways. This is The LORD'S declaration."

Isaiah 55:8

So whatever you do... seek and be led by the wisdom from above, for only by so doing can we ever hope to bring glory to The One Who died to save us from sin!

And ALL of God's people said... **TRUTH!!!**