

The Book of James

The Humility of Heavenly Wisdom

Lesson #8 for November 22, 2014

Scriptures: James 3:13-4:10; Deuteronomy 4:6; Galatians 5:17; Jeremiah 3:6-10,20; Acts 19:13-16; Psalm 24:3-6.

1. There is a lot of evidence in our world today that Christians are not much different in their behavior from people of the world. For example, the divorce rate is almost equal. Are there any ways in which Christians are notably and distinctly different from worldlings?
2. Are Christians less likely to exhibit selfish rivalry at work? Is there any fierce competition between pastors for advanced positions in the conference? Is there any competition between Adventist members for positions in the church? Or, should we expect church members to act just like people of the world?
3. Read James 3:13. What is the “meekness of wisdom”? Do Christians act more wisely than others? Do we behave more humbly than people of the world?
4. This lesson is not about intellectual knowledge; it is about human behavior. Notice that James was talking about *good conduct*—the Greek word is *anastrophe*—compare its use in 1 Timothy 4:12; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 1:15; 2:12.
5. Remember the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35. Is it really possible that if church members showed true love for each other, then the whole world would notice? Do church members in your community stand out for their love, caring, compassion, and humility? Apparently, the ancient Jews were supposed to. See Deuteronomy 4:6.
6. But, so many of this world’s citizens—as well as so many Christians—are caught up in the rat race we call “keeping up with the Joneses,” competition for the best positions at work, competition for higher salaries, etc., instead of being meek and humble.
7. Read James 3:11,14 and Acts 15:1-5. Are any Christians that you know motivated by envy and selfish ambition? If the truth could be known, how many of us are in an exclusive pursuit of our own interests? Does that sound like something that Jesus would do? Or, more like Satan’s plan back in the beginning? In the words of several of its authors, the New Testament tells us that we should die to self and surrender our wills to the Lord. If we are not willing to do that and if we continue to pursue a very selfish lifestyle, do you think God will admit us to heaven? Does He want to risk restarting the great controversy?
8. Read James 3:15-16, *GNB*. Would we agree with James’s words: “Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil.” God cannot admit people like that into His kingdom! Is that limiting our freedom?
9. So, let us look at some definitions. The *wisdom of this world* encourages us to fight for the highest place, to keep up with or even try to beats the “Joneses,” and to try to meet the world’s standards in every way we can, often killing ourselves in the process.
10. On the other hand, *heavenly wisdom* means we act like Jesus, not contending for the highest place, or the highest salary, but rather serving the poor and needy and being willing to do the undesirable work. Often, people will recognize our contributions, and we will be happier; we will be honored for what we have done, and God will reward us in heaven. (See Matthew 25:31-46.)
11. So, which type of wisdom dominates in your life? Would we be willing to admit that earthly

wisdom is demonic or even devilish? Even Solomon back in Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 said that there are ways that seem right to people but they end up as ways of death.

12. Heavenly wisdom is described in further detail in James 3:17-18; John 3:3-7; and Colossians 3:1-2. When reading these verses, it is important to recognize that when Jesus was talking about being “born again,” the Greek can also be translated being “born from above.” So, why are there so many people who are killing themselves striving for the top?
13. In our lessons together, we have tried to emphasize the fact that we need to practice living and acting like Jesus. So, how did Jesus act even as a young person?

Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God’s countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 89.4.

Jesus did not contend for His rights. When roughly used, He bore it patiently. Because He was so willing and uncomplaining, His work was often made needlessly hard. Yet He was not discouraged for He knew that God smiled upon Him.—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Jesus* 39.4.

14. Could those words be used to describe any of us? In James 3:17-18, James was quite clear that he was talking about being baptized by the Holy Spirit, that is, being born from above. Heavenly wisdom could cause us to be meek, humble, peaceable, gentle, merciful, forgiving, willing to overlook the faults of others, and not being critical or judgmental. But, it is so easy to fall into the habits of worldlings around us.
15. If we really acted like Jesus, could we even survive in our dog-eat-dog environment?
16. Read James 4:1; compare Galatians 5:17. These two verses suggest that wars and conflicts begin in the selfish desires of human beings. What do you think James was talking about when he mentioned a “desire for pleasure”? Look at your own experience and the experiences of those that you observe in your church or Sabbath school class. Is there any evidence of lust, anger, covetousness, selfishness, envy, even cravings? Notice that several of these words are taken straight out of the Ten Commandments. James actually mentioned murder! He was probably not talking about literal murder but just as Jesus suggested, anger, which in God’s eyes is next to murder. And what is the root cause for all of that terrible unrest?

It is the love of self that brings unrest. When we are born from above, the same mind will be in us that was in Jesus, the mind that led Him to humble Himself that we might be saved. Then we shall not be seeking the highest place. We shall desire to sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of Him.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 330.4-331.0; *LHU* 162.4; *ML* 181.5.

17. Read James 4:2-4 and compare Jeremiah 3:6-10,20; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 2:2; and Luke 16:13. In the Old Testament, we see plenty of evidence that the children of Israel loved to get involved in the worship of pagan, idolatrous, and even fertility cult religions. Are there any equivalents in the Christian world today? If we enjoy watching murder, war, explicit sexual behavior or adultery, drugs, foul language, etc. on television or in movies, is that behavior in any way similar to the behavior of ancient Israel in God’s eyes?
18. Read James 4:5-6. What will be the final result if God “resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”? Will that have anything to do with our final salvation?

19. Read James 4:1-4. From where do all those evil desires in our minds come? Were Adam and Eve created naturally selfish, covetous, envious, and sinful in other ways? So, if those characteristics came to us through sinning, should we be doing our best to get rid of them? If we recognized how desperate our situation really is, would we espouse these words from Ellen White: "Our great need is our only claim on God's mercy." – *The Desire of Ages*, page 317.0.
20. Are any of our actions actually worthy of salvation? Look in detail at the behavior of Jesus as He faced the cross. If we really contemplated the last 24 hours of Christ's life on this earth, what would it do to us? In what ways would it speak to our need? (See *DA* 83.4.)
21. Read James 4:7. Notice the sequence in this verse. First, we must submit ourselves to God. Then, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can resist the Devil; and he will flee from us. We do not have to contend with people who are obviously demon-possessed as they did in the times of the New Testament. But clearly, God's Spirit is more powerful than any of the demons. Notice also that God has a very interesting sense of humor. Read Acts 19:13-16.
22. So, if the Devil sees us trying our best to cooperate with God, how does he respond? Doesn't it look like it would be wise to submit ourselves to God at the beginning of every day? Then, with God's help, we could do our best to resist all of the Devil's temptations.
23. Read James 4:8-10. James really got wound up in these verses. "Come to God"; "wash your hands"; "purify your hearts, you hypocrites"; "be sorrowful, cry, weep; change your laughter into crying, your joy into gloom"; "Humble yourselves." These things are not easy. But honestly, they probably are a summary of what we have read since the middle of James 3. The first or earliest example that we know about of someone who wanted to exalt himself above his position was the Devil himself. Do we ever behave like him? (See Isaiah 14:12-14.) Would we really want to?
24. Also read also Psalm 24:3-6. James was repeating the ideas from this Old Testament passage and describing to us in detail what we need to do to come back to God. Have we tried humbling ourselves in the sight of the Lord and letting Him lift us up? (James 4:10; Mark 9:35; Luke 14:7-11) What would happen if we practiced doing that at least one day a week?

There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world's standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. . . . He bids them seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His promise is that all things needful to them for this life shall be added. Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. **Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing.** Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.1. [Bold type is added]

25. Read again Deuteronomy 4:6. Did God really think that goal was possible for the children of Israel? Was there ever a time when the nations around them looked at them and thought they were "a wise and understanding people"? What about the days of David? Or, at the time

when Solomon was building and dedicating the temple? Or, never?

26. What should be our ultimate weapon against pride and selfishness? If we cannot defeat these naturally inherent characteristics of human beings, none of us is going to be saved. If we truly look at the last few hours of Jesus's life, what does it say to us about our pride and selfishness? Will there be any proud people in heaven? What does it mean to crucify self? Do you know any Christians who are truly unselfish and loving in all their actions? How do you suppose God would work with a person like that? Could such a person be truly loving, kind, compassionate, and humble without it showing on the outside?
27. The Bible seems to suggest that the smartest, happiest people are those who get pleasure in serving others. Is that even possible for inherently selfish human beings? Don't we believe that everyone in heaven will be continuously acting in loving and helpful ways to all around them?
28. And what about wisdom? Is there a difference between one who is truly wise and one who is merely knowledgeable? We need knowledge. But don't we need wisdom even more?
29. Is the difference between *earthly wisdom* and *heavenly wisdom* clear in your mind after studying this lesson? If you were able to watch someone for a while, would you be able to tell whether s/he is operating based on earthly wisdom or on heavenly wisdom?
30. The Bible often uses the word *meekness* in a similar context. What does *meekness* mean? What does it mean to be "poor in spirit"? One dictionary defines these terms or conditions as "humbly patient or docile, as under provocation from others," and "gentle; kind." Do we tend to be easily provoked? (1 Corinthians 13:4)
31. Read Ephesians 4:2, *GNB*. Could we act as Paul suggested when he said: "Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another." Would that prove that Christ is in us? Look again at James's definition of *true wisdom*: It is (1) "First pure," (2) then "peaceable," (3) "gentle," (4) "willing to yield," (5) "full of mercy" and (6) "good fruits," (7) "without partiality," and (8) "without hypocrisy." (See James 3:17-18.)
32. Let us be painfully honest for a few minutes. We all recognize that there are two contending forces acting on our minds every day. The force that wins will be the force that we listen to most often. Eventually, it will tend to become the only voice we hear. Will that be the worldly voice of selfishness? Or, the heavenly voice of love? We cannot serve two masters. James 4:2,4 tell us that friendship with the world is enmity with God. God wants each and every one of us to be part of His bridal company. What would it mean to be a bride of Christ? Among those who finally are part of that group, will there be selfishness and contention for the first place?
33. Try to imagine how Jesus felt as He saw His disciples entering the upper room on the night before His crucifixion and arguing among themselves about who should be first in His upcoming earthly kingdom! (Luke 22:24)
34. God wants us to learn to practice His kind of love. It is an all-or-nothing love; the peace and quiet and happiness that it brings are out of this world!
35. Are we ready to give these ideas from James a try? What do we have to lose? What do we have to gain?

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