

Prayer of the Week:

O God, you know that we are set in the midst of many grave dangers, and because of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant that your strength and protection may support us in all dangers and carry us through every temptation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
(Source: Book of Common Prayer 2019, Collects of the Christian Year, The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany)

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.



Wisdom vs. Fake Wisdom

James 3:13-18

January 31st

Intro

The rise of “fake news” has made it difficult to discern what news is legitimate and what news is just trying to confirm biases and stoke fear of the other side.

It turns out, though, this kind of confusion isn't new. Early Christians faced a similar problem regarding wisdom.

James' letter was written to a wide audience of Christians, so he was addressing widespread problems among Christians. One of the problems was this: some Christians claimed to have wisdom, but did not; while other had wisdom, but were discredited. So, James wrote to clarify the difference between wisdom and fake wisdom.

Fake Wisdom

According to James, fake wisdom has two key markers; bitter envy and selfish ambition (vs. 14). At first, the connection between these symptoms (envy and selfishness) and the diagnosis (fake wisdom) isn't exactly clear. But, let's follow James' logic.

Envy believes that a person's worth, importance, and value comes from what they have. When you believe that worth comes from ownership, you'll inevitably become selfish and try to get all you can. Here is the verdict: Any insight shared with the underlying belief that worth comes from having, isn't really wisdom at all.

But, we don't just live in a materialistic culture. We also live in a culture where knowledge is seen as power. There seems to be a competition of who can know the most and be most aware. There is a growing tendency to criticize individuals or groups of people for not being aware enough; unwilling to accept any point being made and instead point out what information or awareness that group doesn't have.

James reminds us that while this posturing may appear, at first, as wisdom; it is actually fake wisdom.

"We are faced, then, with two kinds of wisdom. This may well be a word for our day, when so many people across the world are fed up with the way their country is run, with the way their police force behaves, with the way the global economy functions, and so on. Often these criticisms are fully justified, as they certainly would have been in James' own day. But the challenge then for God's people is to be able to tell the truth about the way the world is, and about the way wicked people are behaving, without turning into a perpetual grumble, and in particular without becoming someone whose appearance of 'wisdom' consists in being able to find a cutting word to say about everyone and everything."

-N.T. Wright

In short, being "woke" is not the same as having wisdom.

Wisdom

Compare that to authentic wisdom. For this, James provides a full list: pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, unbiased, and without hypocrisy.

Notice that this list does not connect wisdom to knowing a large number of facts or possessing knowledge. Wisdom is a set of characteristics given by the Spirit of God. Knowledge and skill and are important to wisdom, but wisdom is made complete by our posture toward the world and others that embodies James' list.

The passage closes with an interesting statement: "a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace."

This is the outcome of godly wisdom!

In Greek, the words righteousness and justice share the same root. They are derivative of one another, and in many circumstances are interchangeable. James wants us to see that fake wisdom, animated by the unholy spirit, leads to disorder and wickedness while true wisdom, animated by the Holy Spirit, leads to justice that is sown in peace!

Practicing true wisdom will help lead our world to justice and if you want to lead our world to justice, you are going to need wisdom!