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HCC Sermon
James 3:13-18

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Vic taught me everything I needed to know at work.
2. Need: We're often looking for advice what to do.
3. Sub: Who do we learn from? [Since there are so many sources of advice]
4. Text: James 3:13-18
5. Preview: James begins with who we should learn from. Then he shares who we should avoid learn to. He concludes with more specifics about who we should learn from.

BODY

- A. Understanding refers to knowing what to do in situation (3:13b).
- B. Wise refers to knowing when to apply such an understanding (3:13a).
- I. Learn from those who act humbly (3:13)
 - C. A wise person acts
 - D. A wise person not only acts, but he acts humbly.
 1. Humility is not false modesty
 2. Humility is characterized by thankfulness.
 3. The humble person operates according to God's wisdom.

(James now shares who we should avoid learning from.)
- II. Avoid learning from those who act selfishly (3:14-16)
 - A. The selfish exhibit jealousy (3:14a).
 - B. The selfish desires fame (3:14b).
 - C. The selfish live according to wisdom not from God (3:15)
 1. The wisdom from the world says that life is a competition.
 2. The wisdom that is unspiritual encourages you to do what is right in your eyes.
 3. The wisdom that is demonic refers to forces at work to deter you from God.
 - D. The selfish create chaos (3:16)
 1. The create chaos in their relationships (3:16a)
 2. The create chaos in their lives (3:16b)
- III. Learn from those who exhibit godly character (3:17-18)
 - A. Godly character begins with wisdom from above (3:17).
 1. God designed the world to function in a certain way.
 2. God designed humans to interact in a certain way.
 3. Human beings need help.
 4. Jesus is wisdom (1 Cor 1:24)
 5. A relationship with God results in purity.
 - B. Godly character results in peace with others (3:18).

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Learn from those who act humbly. Avoid learning from those who act selfishly. Learn from those who exhibit godly character.
2. Closing Image: A few years ago, my brother-in-law took Josephine and me bouldering

MANUSCRIPT

Vic taught me everything I needed to know at work. After graduating from university, I worked at Lockheed Martin as a quality engineer. Our Lockheed facility in Fort Worth manufactured military fighter aircraft such as the F-16, F-22, and F-35. While I had a degree in Aeronautics and Mechanical Engineering, I didn't know anything about quality engineering. Vic took it upon himself to teach me.

Vic had worked at Lockheed Martin for over twenty years. He began work as a quality inspector on the manufacturing line. Then he received a promotion to work as a quality Engineer. Prior to Lockheed Martin, he served in the U.S. Air Force as a crew chief on B-52 bombers. He knew more about aircraft than I did.

He summed up our job as quality engineers in one word: purge. Our work identified incorrectly manufactured parts to purge them from the facility so that no one would install on aircraft. It sounded simple enough. But in a facility that spanned football fields, it sometimes proved difficult to find the part you were looking for

Vic taught me how to navigate the database to track down parts. He knew the people that I needed to talk to if I had issues with a tube or an electronic component. He helped me develop competency to read blueprints. He modeled diplomatic finesse in difficult conversations with customers. Whenever I needed help, Vic would teach me.

Why did Vic spend so much time teaching me? I knew other engineers who refused to divulge their work practices because they feared losing their jobs. I asked Vic once. He told me that training me benefited the team. If the team succeeded, then he succeeded. Vic looked out for the interests of the team.

Some of you have people like Vic in your life. Others of you are looking for people like Vic. Why? **We're often looking for someone to teach us how to do things.**

If we're going to be first-time parents, then who do we talk to for advice on what to do when our child is born? If we're auditioning for All-state band, then who do we learn from to prepare? If we're buying a house for the first time, then who should we go to for advice on apply for a mortgage? When we're trying to figure out how to choose a major in college, who should we look to for advice? When our marriage goes through some turbulence, who do we turn to for counsel? **Who do we learn from?**

James warns the early church not to learn from those who would quickly stands in their gatherings to offer a special word. For he writes: "Not many of you should become teachers my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (3:1). This person who is eager to provide a reply probably have not learned to control their tongues. They fail to realize how their words like pillow feathers released into the wind cannot be retrieved.

To whom should we listen? Who should advise us? Who will provide instruction? Who should we seek for counsel? Who has the wisdom of God that could provide us spiritual direction?

James answers this question in the last section of James, chapter 3, verse 13 through 18. Please turn there with me if you haven't turned there already. James, chapter 3, verse 13.

James has organized this section from verse 13 to 18 like a sandwich. Verse 13 corresponds with verse 17 thru 18. The middle verses, verses 14-16 correspond with each other. It can be described as an A, B, B, A format.

James begins with an answer to the question who we should learn from in verse 13. Then he warns us who we should avoid learning from in verses 14 thru 16. He concludes with more details on who we should learn from verses 17 thru 18.

James asks the question in verse 13: *Who is wise and understanding among you?*

Understanding refers to knowing what to do in a situation. A person with understanding knows that error should be confronted. He knows what to do. **Wise refers to knowing when to apply such understanding in a way that pleases God.** Although error should be confronted, there are proper times when to correct error. Maybe correcting a person in front of a group would not be beneficial. It would maybe more helpful to wait for a private conversation. This wisdom ultimately comes from God. James encourages those who lack wisdom to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5).

Who has Godly wisdom that we can learn from? **Learn from those who act humbly.** Those who have wisdom act with meekness. They don't draw attention to themselves by what they do. They exhibit a great sense of control. **Learn from those who act humbly.**

James writes this in verse 13: *"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."*

A wise person acts. He or she does something. They just don't talk about loving their neighbors. But they chat with their neighbors to get to know them when opportunities afford themselves. They don't just talk about the importance of honoring their parents. But they actually call their parents to see how they're doing. They don't just talk about the importance of reading God's word. They actually set aside time to do meditate on God's truth.

A wise person not only acts, but he acts humbly. The word meekness here can mean humble and gentle. A person who is meek or humble demonstrates control. Wisdom excises authority over this person's life. When wisdom tells them to speak, they speak. When wisdom tells to be quiet. They remain silent. Such people think little about themselves. The conduct their lives in a way that does not draw attention to themselves.

Now humility is not false modesty. False modesty occurs when someone praises you for job well done in your solo. And you quickly respond: It wasn't really that great. I messed up in these parts. This still draws attention to yourself.

Humility shows itself when you feel thankful that the performance blessed someone. For God gave you the ability to play this solo that it might bring encouragement to those who hear it.

When a person acts humbly, this demonstrates that they are operating according to God's wisdom. We should listen to such people. We should learn from them. They will have God's truth to help you in your situation.

James now shares whom we should avoid learning from. These are people whom we should not listen to. **Avoid learning from those who act selfishly.** They lack humility. They lack meekness. One word describes them: ego. **Avoid learning from those who act selfishly.**

James writes this in verse 14: *"But if you have bitter jealousy or selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast or be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist there will be disorder and every vile practice."*

How do we identify the selfish? **The selfish exhibit jealousy.** They lack satisfaction with what they have. They struggle with discontent. They always complain about their marriages. They criticize their children. They talk about missed opportunities at work. They didn't get certain grades in school because of a certain student ruining the curve. People who are jealous tend to blame others and circumstances for their challenges. They will advise people to do the same.

The selfish desires fame. James uses the phrase: "selfish ambition". They want the spotlight on them. They expect their social media videos to go viral. They promote themselves rather than God. This college admitted me because of my grades and test scores. This job accepted me because of my technical expertise. They express their opinions as right and everyone else is wrong. They do whatever they can to gain a following even at the cost of their souls. People who exhibit selfish ambition in their hearts will advise you to try harder and work harder to achieve your dreams. For your limits are self-imposed. If you just put your mind to it, then you can achieve it.

The selfish live according to wisdom that is not from God. They operate according to principles not from heaven. This wisdom is not God directed. James writes in verse 15: *"This is not wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic."* Another way to describe such wisdom is wisdom characterized by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The wisdom that is from the world says: "Life is a competition." Unless you compete and win, you'll be left behind. To be left behind is to be worthless. You must look out for your own interest." To survive you must fight to have what other people have. If you don't fight to get it, then you'll have nothing. It's the survival of the fittest.

The wisdom of that is unspiritual encourages you to do what is right in your eyes.

For the word unspiritual refers to anything opposed to the spirit. What God wants; you do the opposite. For God doesn't have your good in mind. Only you know what you want. You must pursue your desires. For if you don't pursue your desires then you'll miss out. If you have sexual desires now, then you gratify them now. If you have a desire to date this guy though everyone advises against it, you do so. If you want to go to Hawaii, then you go even if you have to charge it on your credit card. Do what is right in your eyes.

The wisdom that is demonic refers to the forces at work to deter you from God. C.S.

Lewis writes that there two dangers when it comes to devil. The first danger is to disbelieve their existence. Everything can be explained by science and rationale. But then how do explain the distraction that enters your focus when your mind drifts to spiritual questions? How do you explain how the sins of others cloud your attention to your own? The other danger is to have an excessive interest in them. You think everything is a work of the devil from your illness, to your relationship woes, to your frustrations at work. Again, it is opposed to the Spirit. Instead of producing fruit of the Spirit, you produce acts that demons would approve of.

The selfish create chaos. James writes in verse 16: *"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."*

They create chaos in their relationships. It results in factions within a community. People take sides. Cliques emerge. People suspect others of impure motives. They accuse. They gossip. They blame others. Friendships implode. Fellowship disappears.

They create chaos in their own lives. James uses the phrase: "every vile practice". It leads to immoral behavior. People lie in order to get ahead. They disrespect their parents

because parents don't know what they are talking about. They commit all kinds of sexual sin because marriage is passé. They spend time with friends that reinforce their prejudice and hate for others.

Avoid learning from those who act selfishly. For they will lead you toward a life that is characterized by chaos. It will lead to life displeasing to the Lord. Such a lifestyle opposes what God intends for you.

Learn from those who exhibit godly character. Listen to those who exhibit the fruit of the spirit. Pay heed to the one who conducts his or her life that pleases the Lord. Learn from those who exhibit godly character.

James elaborates on the importance of God character. He writes in verse 17: *“But the wisdom from God is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

Godly character begins with wisdom from above. Note that this wisdom is not obtained here on earth, but it is obtained from above where God is. God gave us wisdom in the form of his word. For the Bible teaches us God's wisdom.

God created the world. If God created the world, then he designed it to function in a certain way. God designed human beings to survive by eating food and drinking water. God designed the heavens to give rain to water the earth. The water then provides nutrients for grain fields to grow. The grain matures to produce kernels that can be crushed to form flour. God not only created creation, but he also designed how relations work. Since God designed human beings, he designed them to interact a certain way. He expects us to care for one

another when one has needs. He expects us to speak the truth with one another so that people would grow in character. God's wisdom teaches how we are to flourish in the midst of this creation.

Yet as human beings we recognize that we need help. When our car breaks down, we bring our car to the auto mechanic. If we have trouble breathing, then we go see a doctor. If we need to learn a new language, then we go take a Japanese class.

But we also realize that we need a deeper help. When we lose a loved one, we grieve because there's something within us that says death is not right. This isn't supposed to happen. When we get into an argument with our spouse, we think to ourselves: this isn't supposed to happen. Why do I keep saying things that hurt the one I love? Why is it that no matter how I want to do good, I always find my motivations tainted? This help cannot be fixed by mere words. We are broken people. We need someone greater than ourselves to help us.

That's why Jesus is wisdom. Paul writes in 1 Cor 1:24: Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For Jesus lived the human life as God designed it. He lived it perfectly. When He died on the cross and rose from the dead, he invites to be united with him in faith. When we place our faith in Christ we identify with his death and resurrection but more importantly with the perfect life he lived. This makes us pure.

That's why James writes here in verse 17: the wisdom from above is first pure. If you are live according to the wisdom of God, you must have experienced the purity that comes from a relationship with Christ. Unless you have this purity, then the other attributes will not manifest. James himself knows that all other godly characters has to flow forth from purity.

Such a person will be peaceable. They inject peace into a situation because they accept responsibility for when they do wrong. They will forgive others when they are wronged because they have been forgiven in Christ. They will be gentle. When someone corrects them, they receive that correction with joy. To be a Christian, by definition, is to recognize that one needs help. They will be open to reason. If someone has a better idea on how to lead a Bible study, then they will follow their direction. If someone can mentor someone better than they can, then they will defer to them. Their lives demonstrate mercy and bear good fruit. They spend their resources to help others. For they recognize how much God spent by giving his only Son to save them how could they then do less? Lastly, they share no partiality to people. A person marked by the wisdom of God will love a person regardless of their social status, family background, or race. God embraced them though they were once sinners. A person is sincere meaning that he pursues a deeper knowledge of God with the passing of each day. They know that a knowledge of God when believed will deepen their affections for the Lord.

Godly character results in peace with others. Everything that they do leaves an aroma of peace in the air. It follows a godly person where every they go. James writes in verse 18: *“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”*. Such a person gives counsel that results in peace. Their advice. Their teaching leads to right relationships with others and right relationship with God. James describes it as a harvest of righteousness. He doesn't mean forensic righteousness where God labels you righteous. He refers to a conduct that please God (James 1:20). Anger, strife, and division does not produce such pleasing conduct. This righteousness grows out of an atmosphere of peace.

Learn from the person who reconciles with his brother or sister in Christ when misunderstandings arise. Learn from the one who makes their opinion known and defers to the decision made. Learn from the person who disciplines her child in private rather than public. Learn from the person who confesses sin regularly and asks for help to walk by the Spirit. Learn from the person who leads his family to worship God. When you learn from these people who have a peace with people and peace with God, God will produce a righteousness that please Him.

From whom should we learn God's wisdom? Learn from those who act humbly. Avoid learning from those who act selfishly and only care about themselves. Learn from those who exhibit godly character.

A few years ago, my brother-in-law took Josephine and me bouldering. This involves climbing up a rock face through the use of holds without any type of ropes. If you lose your footing or grip, then you would fall into some soft padding.

When you're looking at the rock face, you can see the path rather clearly to the top. But the perspective changes when you climb the rock face. You don't know where the next hold is because your eyes see only rock face. It helps when you have someone on the ground to provide you advice on where to put your hands and your feet to get to the top.

We find ourselves sometimes with our face in the wall of life. We can't seem to know what to do next. What is thing to do? May we look for those whom God has put in our lives who exhibit wisdom and learn from them what we might possibly do next.