

James - Saving Faith Changes My Thinking

Sign Title: Saving Faith Changes My Thinking

August 14, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! If you are one of our summer visitors, we are glad to have you. This summer, we are studying the book of James. This morning we continue working our way through this practical book.

This morning, we pick up the theme of saving faith producing life change. In this third section in James, James moves from faith producing works on the outside of our life, to how faith changes the way we think and reason in life.

Before we get into the text, we need some background on the Greco-Roman world and the art of rhetoric. Public speaking skills were highly valued. The Roman empire began as a republic when public debate determined public policy. In a quest for leadership and power, many studied and honed their public speaking skills. Those who were good speakers and leaders would naturally garner the attention of many in the church. The problem was that while these people were good communicators and leaders, and the church was a platform for them to exercise their skills, they were not necessarily the spiritual men and women everyone should have as heroes.

The qualities Jews looked for in good leaders was not public finesse but wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to connect faith to life. The biggest fool was somebody who knew the truth, but couldn't live it.

Wisdom - skill in righteous living.

The Bible talks about this skill of righteous living as something that can be developed. The Bible repeatedly says the way to gain this kind of wisdom is from God's Word.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)

that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2-3 (ESV)

God's word explains the truth about life. It tells us about sin. It tells us of the devil's working against us. It tells us about God's love for us. It tells us about faith, the Holy Spirit and God's providential care for us. It tells us there will be a final judgment and the reality of heaven and hell. These are the truths we need to live wisely.

The greatest piece of wisdom we need to live is knowledge of and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Apart from knowing Christ, we can not live wisely in this life.

Now what happened in the first-century churches James wrote to, and it happens in many churches today, was they lost a biblical understanding of wisdom. They became enamored by the witty speakers, the charismatic leaders and those who became the center of attention. Their heroes weren't people who did the hard spade work of following Christ in real life. James wrote to straighten out their thinking.

James 3:13-16

Last week, James began by addressing the leaders in the group. This week, he again begins with the leaders. He says, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” Have them take a step forward. I want to talk to these people who think you have this *living for Christ* thing figured out. Let’s put a measuring stick on the wall and see how you measure up.

Godly wisdom produces good conduct.

In chapter 2 of James, we learned faith is more than what we believe, it will always come out in how we live. Here we begin with the same thing. Faith is not just what we know, it changes the way we treat people. It changes how we act in the family room, at the dinner table and in the den. Real faith, saving faith, changes the way we think about life.

James says, you think you are so wise and smart? Show it by your good conduct. Then James tells us, if we are truly wise about life, our good works will be done in meekness.

Godly wisdom produces meekness.

This phrase, *the meekness of wisdom*, is interesting. Meekness does not mean weakness.

Meekness - Power under control.

Sometimes it is translated as gentleness, but that doesn’t convey the full meaning. James tells us that if real faith changes our life, it will change the way we treat people. The wiser we become, the gentler you will be with people.

Meekness is having the ability to humiliate those who deserve it but being gentle as we deal with them. It is not indecisiveness or a lack of leadership. It is having authority and power but using it gently and under control. This word is sometimes used to describe domesticated animals, like lions and tigers, in the circus. There is great power, that thankfully for those of us in the stands, it is brought under control.

I've always liked the story of Chuck Norris, who before he was an actor, was a six-time karate world champion. The story goes that during a break in filming for a show or movie, he was at a bar where one of the local boys didn't recognize him. He warned Norris that he was sitting in his seat and if he didn't move, something bad was going to happen. Norris got up and quietly walked away. A friend went up to Chuck and said, "Why did you walk away? You could have taken him apart!" Norris said, "Now what would that prove?"

Meekness is strength under control.

An Old Testament example of this is Moses.

Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. Numbers 12:3 (ESV)

In Numbers 16, his leadership was challenged by Korah and followers. Instead of retaliating, he humbly said nothing, not even defending himself. In the end, God stepped in and defended him. He restrained his power and entrusted himself to God.

The greatest example of meekness is Jesus Christ. Think about Jesus on the cross. Here is the one who carried out his father's creative decrees and fashioned the universe. He fashioned not just everything material but he

fashioned the immaterial spirit world of angels, some of whom rebelled against him and became Satan and his demons. Jesus humbled himself. While still retaining all of his divine attributes, he gave up the independent exercise of them to his father's discretion.

He fused himself completely and permanently with a human body. He lived a perfect life. He was tempted as we are, then he died in our place for our sins. Picture him hanging on the cross with our sin upon his life as he pays the debt for you and me. Any moment he could have gotten off the cross. He had the power to say, "Heck with this; it is too humiliating." He could have destroyed creation even faster than he made it.

In fact, Revelation tells us that when he returns to fight against Satan and his demons, all he will need to do to wipe them out is use the sword that comes from his mouth. That means, he just has to say the words, "Game over" and the battle is over for Satan, the demons and all who have not trusted in Christ. He has that power, but he didn't use it. In love for his father and in love for us, he kept this incredible power under control and humbled himself to the point of death. Let's read Philippians 2 where we see Paul making this same argument.

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:3–8 (ESV)

Let's recap. There are two kinds of wisdom. One is godly wisdom. It comes from saving faith. It is cultivated through God's Word. It is ultimately

rooted in and based on Jesus Christ. The result of this wisdom is a life characterized by humility and meekness.

Not everyone in the church has saving faith changing the way they think about life. Some in the church have a fake faith. Those with fake faith don't have godly thinking patterns. They reason with earthly wisdom. What does earthly wisdom look like?

Those living by earthly wisdom destroy others.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and 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. James 3:14–16 (ESV)

Bitter Jealousy

Envy wishes we had what someone else possesses. Jealousy doesn't just wish we had what someone else possesses, but means we wish they didn't have it. Why are we so bent out of shape when someone else has something desirable? Because in our heart of hearts, we think we deserve it more. In our heart of hearts, we think we are number one. When number one doesn't get what number one wants, envy and jealousy pop up as fast as a weed in the summer garden. It was jealousy that drove Cain to murder Abel. It was jealousy that caused Joseph's brother to sell him into slavery. It was jealousy of Jesus' popularity that drove the Pharisees to murder Him.

While jealousy is the way those with fake faith think about others in life, even as Christians, that emotion can crop up on occasions. Sometimes I fight jealousy in the sport of wrestling. There are times when either because of an injury, schedule conflict or even because somebody beat my sons in a wrestle-

off, I sit on the sidelines and watch another boy wrestle in my sons' places. I will admit, sometimes the feeling wells up inside of me that says, "If my boy can't wrestle in that position, I don't want to see someone else from his team win." When I feel that emotion coming on, I have to remember, this feeling is not coming from godly wisdom. It is not the way God wants me to think about life. It is worldly wisdom that says, if I can't have it, nobody else should. As we will see, it has pretty ungodly origins.

Selfish Ambition

Selfish ambition - The desire to use divisive means to promote your own interests.

Number one will look out for number one and will use any and all means to magnify to the world the glory of number one. In the first century, this word became associated with anyone who sought political office. It sounds like a presidential campaign. One of the classic examples selfish ambition comes from 3 John.

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. 3 John 9–10 (ESV)

Have you met Diotrephes? He always has to be first. He has to be the center of attention. I have met some modern incarnations of him. They are people who use their influence to cause church splits. They posture themselves as someone who will help save the church, from the pastor and leadership. They usually do their work in secret behind the scenes though gossiping and sowing distrust among the people.

These kinds of people cause serious pain in a pastor's life. Many do not recognize the seriousness of this sin. Those with selfish ambition think the church is there to promote and recognize them. People like this need to be dealt with decisively. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. They posture themselves as those who can bring spiritual life, but they have hearts set on bloodletting and throat slitting. They love to be the center of attention.

These people think they are godly, but the wisdom they follow, the thinking patterns they live by, are not from God. God's wisdom produces humility and meekness. Earthly wisdom produces selfish ambition. Where do these ungodly thinking patterns come from? They are from the devil. These people think they are spiritually wise, but the reality is they are false to the truth. The church is not here to stroke our egos. Life is about God and his glory. The only big shot in the church is Jesus.

What does worldly wisdom look like in action?

It is just concerned with earthly results.

Worldly wisdom doesn't consider that each of us will stand before Christ for judgment. Worldly wisdom is about getting results right now. Get this into your head. Doing whatever we must to get results in the church is not the most important thing to do. What is important is the day we stand before Christ. Then all will be revealed and the secrets of our life laid bare. It won't just be about the results we were able to produce but how many body bags we filled to get them.

It doesn't see spiritual value.

This means that no matter how religiously educated a person is, no matter how many people follow them, those who are living by worldly wisdom are not controlled by the Holy Spirit; they will not teach about the spiritual value of things.

Let me give you an example from Joel Osteen's book Become a Better You.

Maybe Alzheimer's disease runs in your family genes, but don't succumb to it. Instead, say every day, 'My mind is alert. I have clarity of thought. I have a good memory. Every cell in my body is increasing and getting healthier.' Start boldly declaring... "God is restoring health unto me. I am getting better every day in every way."¹

Since when is health and happiness always the *best* thing for me? Health may be the best thing for us physically, but it is not necessarily the best thing for us spiritually. God uses pain to grow our faith in Christ and teach us that God can be trusted. Suffering may be the best thing for us spiritually. Would you rather have perfect physical health and no spiritual life; or, would you rather have suffered and God used your suffering to break you away from the self-sufficiency in which you trusted? The greatest steps of spiritual maturity happen in times of pain, not seasons of pleasure.

Worldly wisdom is demonic in origin.

In the church, there will always be people who are quick-witted with great people skills. They have a great following. But if their faith is fake, one way to know it is they reason with earthly wisdom rather than godly wisdom. Know for certain, the devil is behind their logic.

¹ Joel Osteen, *Become a Better You* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 45, 114.

Worldly wisdom brings about Satan's destructive desires.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. James 3:16 (ESV)

Worldly wisdom leads to disorder and every evil practice in the church.

God desires order. When God does something, he does it in an orderly fashion. Look at the world and consider the trillions of atoms and molecules all working in perfect order. There is incredible order to creation. There is God-created order and authority in the church with pastors, elders and deacons. There is God-created order in the home with the husband as head of his wife and responsible for his family.

Satan never creates order. He only destroys it. In fact, Satan's fall was his desire to be out of order. When Satan and evil influence someone, there will be disorder, chaos and anarchy in their life. Their families are torn apart by disorder --- marriages split and churches divide.

God's wisdom promotes unity. Earthly satanic wisdom promotes disunity. God's wisdom promotes peace. Earthly satanic wisdom promotes division, party lines and divisive attitudes.

One of the things I love about Faith Church is the tremendous spirit of unity among the leaders, staff and church body. I am unaware of any disunity and factions. I tell our membership classes that we take unity seriously. If you have the gift of disunity, please go and use that gift in another church.

Not only does worldly wisdom lead to disorder, but it also leads to every vile practice. The word vile literally means *good for nothing*. While those who

follow worldly wisdom think they are doing a world of good as they tear others down and build themselves up, in reality, their work is good for nothing.

Conclusion

Saving faith in Christ will produce godly wisdom. We learn to think about challenges from God's perspective. We learn to think with humility and meekness as we deal with people. Fake faith leaves us reasoning with earthly wisdom. A wisdom that only thinks of this life. A wisdom that only sees earthly comfort, not spiritual value. It is a wisdom that leads to jealousy, self-promotion and division in the church.

As we close, I put a few questions together to help you discern which side of the wisdom equation you are on. Are you characterized by earthly wisdom or Godly wisdom?

- Am I marked by bitter feelings towards others in the church?
- Is there a pattern of unresolved conflict in your life?
- How do you treat those you don't agree with?
- Is it hard for me to rejoice in others' successes?

Let's pray.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.christ2Rculture.com

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.christ2Rculture.com>) on the copied resource.

