

"Earthly Wisdom"

James 3:1-12, Part Two

August 9, 2009

"Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." (Jas 3:11-16 AV)

James is wisdom literature of the New Testament. Just as the Wisdom literature of the OT gives us applications of the Law of Moses and the wisdom of creation, so the wisdom literature of the New Testament gives uniquely New Testament applications. This morning I will speak of the wisdom that is according to the world: that is sensual, devilish.

James' theme is that the faith that saves is a living faith. There is justification before God in heaven, and that is accomplished when Christ through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God and therefore is able to purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God? We are purged from our dead works to serve the living God because of the offering up of the blood of Christ, once for all.

The figure of a living body is apt. We see a dead body and we say "The man is dead." The evidences of life are not life itself. They are not the source of life. Ecclesiastes, one of the books of wisdom in the OT, says at death, "The body returns to the earth, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. The source of life is the decree of God, for man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So, living faith is not the cause of justification, which is the blood of Christ, but the evidence of justification.

Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc., are not faith. All of these things may be imitated, more or less successfully. No amount of effort to produce these things will bring forth faith; but their absence indicates death. James, always imminently practical, continues with down-to-earth application of his doctrine.

The tongue is the chief culprit of sin among our members. There is often very great sin connected with the desire to instruct others, and we are forbidden to be masters. Scripture

warns about those who run and have not been sent. Hence great condemnation is often the lot of the instructive. Censuring others is an act of authority, often done in usurpation and ignorance. The spirit of Antichrist is in this censuring for antichrist has his books, his experience, his religious affections, his system of righteousness, his religious orders, his ministers of light, his code of laws which are at odds with the law of God, although they may quote the law of God as Satan did to our Lord at His temptation. He sets himself against the knowledge of God everywhere that knowledge of God appears.

The tongue is a great power: for good or for evil. The tongue is the thermometer of the soul. To be able to control the tongue is the mark of spiritual growth. If you cannot control what you say, then you cannot control the rest of your body. The tongue must be controlled, for those who cannot control their tongues cannot control anything else: it is compared to the bit in horses mouths: turns the whole horse. The rudder of a ship. The fire kindled by a small match. The tongue is a "world" of iniquity. A universe of sin. We break every one of the Ten Commandments with the tongue. That is why unbridled freedom of speech is a license to commit every sin. The unsanctified tongue is an open sepulcher. Defiles everything around it. Only God can tame the tongue. Easier to tame the lion and the bear. James is not saying that it is wrong to speak; no, the tongue is called the glory of the man in Ps 30:12 "To the end that [my] glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever." In fact, there is a godly admonishing of one another and all the body cares for all the body. This is not James' subject here.

This brings us to the verses we read a few moments ago: vs. 11-16

I. Far more important than what you do, is what you are. This is what is meant by the heart.

A. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. The heart in scripture is not the organ that pumps blood, but the very essence and core of the man. It is the spiritual core of the man.

B. As the physical heart pumps the blood to all parts of the body, and the life of the flesh is in the blood, so the spiritual core of a man or woman affects the spirit and the nature of the man.

C. Out of the heart are the issues of life. If the spirit of Christ dwells in us, the life of Christ will be revealed in us and his character will be formed in us.

D. But if all we have is the curse of God and Satan rules our hearts and lives and we do the works of our father, as Jesus said. Satan was a liar and murder from the beginning and our lives will be characterized by hatred, which we hide, for deceit and lies will also be of our very essence.

II. Everything must be true to its own essence.

A. A fountain cannot yield two kinds of water, but will yield according to its nature. A tree yields fruit according to its nature.

B. But here's the rub; if you are a Christian you have two natures or principles operating in you: the flesh and the spirit; Adam and Christ. That is why we have mixed fruit as Galatians five tells us. Adam, the flesh, has his fruit; Christ, the Spirit, has his fruit.

C. But if we walk in the Spirit we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

D. Jesus said a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; and bad tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. The nature of the tree is revealed by its fruit.

III. In order to bear the fruit of the Spirit you must trust Christ and renounce your own strength. You must do this every day that you live.

A. Your new life in Christ began when you believed the Gospel and confessed your sin. This is the new birth, a work of the Spirit, for the new life is the work of the Spirit from beginning to end.

B. Repentance is an acknowledgement of sin and guilt and is a kind of death. The new life begins in joy in Christ, as the catechism says. You must be born again, in order to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit is the result of the word and Spirit of God, not the works of the flesh. Left to yourself, or trusting in your own strength and will, you will always do the works of the flesh.

C. The conversation of the fool, the natural man who has not the spirit of God, is twofold: Evil desire and its resulting strife. [there is much more that could be said, for this is a most brief summary]:

1. Desires against God: "Lusts" The heart of the natural man is a nest of evil desires and lusts, as Jesus said. It is not that which enters into a man that defiles, but that which comes out:

2. Mark 7:20-23 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

3. The natural man is a fool, for he does not understand the things of God; he walks in a foolish conversation, or way of life. This is described by Paul in Ephesians 2 as a kind of deadness:

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and

sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." (Eph 2:1-3 AV)

4. Not only evil desire, but the strife that goes along with them: somebody always gets in the way of you having your perfect life. Very often it is your husband or wife. Maybe it is a child. Maybe it is a mother or father. The test of your wisdom is not when you get what you want, but when somebody gets in the way of what you want. Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard and the result was perjury and murder.

5. Earthly wisdom lies against the truth: fabricates, twists, everything described in the 9th commandment, as our catechism says:

A112: That I bear false witness against no one,[1] twist no one's words,[2] be no backbiter or slanderer,[3] join in condemning no one unheard and rashly;[4] but that on pain of God's heavy wrath I avoid all lying and deceit [5] as the very works of the devil;[6] and that in matters of judgment and justice and in all other affairs I love, speak honestly and confess the truth;[7] also, insofar as I can, defend and promote my neighbor's good name.[8]

6. Earthly wisdom is characterized by confusion and every evil work. People are set against each other because they do not have the truth and act in terms of either the deceit of their own heart or upon the deceit they have heard from others. No one is immune from this.

7. The flesh always produces the same fruit, and cannot bring forth any other kind of fruit. The natural heart produces that which Mark described above and can produce no other. Imitation fruit can be squeezed out for advantage and pretense, but it does not come from the well springing up to everlasting life, as Jesus described it, but these things are dead and painted images of the real thing.

8. Earthly [natural]; sensual [no more than animal]; devilish. [evil spirit]

9. But eventually the true nature of the tree will be revealed for Jesus said that there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed.

10. He boasts great things--things he does not have. The tongue boasts great things. He is like clouds and wind without rain; He is like the leaven that puffs up the bread, but is nothing but empty air. Like cotton candy--the greatest disappointment of my young life was my first taste of cotton

candy. I knew the meaning of the words of the prophet who described those who dream that they eat, but awaken and their soul is hungry. Great promise, but no substance.

11. Satan is the master of illusion, of making things appear different than they are: Propagandist; He appears as an angel of light and his ministers appear as ministers of righteousness. But it is the wisdom from below, not from above. 12. The wisdom from above is a gift from God. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God...."

13. This passage develops the theme of James 1:14-21

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. 18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. 19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. 21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Amen and Amen.

God bless you.