

# The Work of The Wise

## January 31, 2007

I'm always pleased to renew my acquaintance with certain topics. And I'm always encouraged to rediscover the benefits of applied theology, because... "It is the purpose of all doctrine to secure moral action" (A.W. Tozer). James is the poster child for applied theology...the whole "knowing and doing" nature of his writing just keeps hammering home how important it is for people of faith to do something redemptive in the course of daily life and common existence.

The crux of chapter three is establishing standards of excellence for people in leadership roles.

- There's a warning that we shouldn't simply gravitate toward the role of a leader as a way of getting strokes for our ego...
  - It can happen anywhere...
  - Captain of the Football Team, Head Cheerleader, Class President of the Fourth Grade, President of the Pastor's Conference, Director of the Ladies' Auxiliary, Grand Poopa of the Fraternal Order of Water Buffalo...
  - We can let almost anything go to our head...and frequently do.
- There's another warning that we can't reject the leader's role just because we're lazy or don't want the responsibility or accountability—some of us are going to need to step up to the plate and be leaders.
- A third warning takes us to task over our speech; and while it applies to everyone, it seems especially important that leaders absolutely have to know how to control their words...
- The fourth warning has to do with the character of Christ-followers—character that is not to be primarily exposed with words but expressed by works—a character defined by wisdom...

### **James 3:13-18**

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. <sup>16</sup>For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

<sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

<sup>18</sup>Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

### **I. A Question... "Who is wise among you?"**

Don't answer! I can see the hopelessness on your faces as you look around the room. Granted, it's a tough call. It's not that kind of question. It's a rhetorical question. Think about the people you've known, worked with or for, and more than likely some one will sort of rise to the top...but probably not too many.

It gets a little intense when you look at the words James uses to describe the sort of person we're talking about...

1. **The interrogative pronoun, "who is" translates more fully into English as, "who is the exception, among all the unwise people that you know, that is wise?"**
2. **Wise and understanding, *sophia & phronimos*, describes the patient ability that some people have to combine mental prowess with very practical, down-to-earth skills—in other words it's having smarts and common sense.**

### **ILLUSTRATION**

Dan and Debra, not their real names, were probably the smartest people I've ever known, and I knew them quite well. Dan was the elder brother of Debra. Both had incredible memories. I've known only a few people with photographic memories, but both Debra and Dan had it. It was truly phenomenal to watch them recite from memory everything from state capitals to lists of presidents, vice-presidents, current senators and representatives from all 50 states. They could list every country on the globe in alphabetical order. They could read a newspaper article, hand it back to you and recall it almost word for word every time. I could go on and on, but you get the point...

Both were awarded with prestigious scholarship offers out of high school. Dan accepted an appointment to West Point where he still holds a number of academic records. At the time of his graduation no one had ever obtained a higher combination of accumulative test scores than he did. There was not a single blemish on his transcript. Every test score was 100% and every grade was an A. Today, he's a very successful business man, husband and father.

Debra, on the other hand, is a different story. She had every bit as much intelligence as her brother, but she possessed none of his common sense.

Dan could, and did, get along with anyone in any setting, and would contribute admirably whether we were doing research for a report, building a float for homecoming, or getting ready for the big game on Friday night.

Debra excelled only when she had a book on her desk, a pen in her hand, and someone to ask her the answer to a question. She was constantly rude, critical, impatient, insensitive, and dismissive. She never seemed to listen to anyone in order to learn or because she cared about their opinion—she seemed to listen only in order to devise a way to counter whatever they said, refute their position and have the last word.

Debra experienced none of Dan's successes. Although she could have attended any college she chose, she bounced around from place to place and never really

accomplished much distinction anywhere. The last I knew of her she hadn't earned her B.A., and had drifted into a life of professional mediocrity, failed relationships and extreme personal bitterness.

### QUOTE

"Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,  
Have in times no connection. Knowledge dwells  
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;  
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.  
Knowledge, a rude, unprofitable mass,  
The mere materials with which wisdom builds,  
Till smoothed and squared and fitted to its place,  
Does but encumber whom it seems to enrich.  
Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much.  
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more." (William Cowper)

### DISCUSSION

1. How would you define intelligence?
2. How would you define common sense?
3. You probably know a lot of people that are smart—some of them are really smart—and you probably know a lot of people that have a truck load of common sense, but how many do you know that are both?

### II. A Qualifier...

#### 1. Characteristics that should be absent. (vv 14-16)

- a. Bitterness—*pikros*, an intense desire to inflict pain on someone else that is so powerful that a person is willing to endure equally intense pain in order to cause it.
  - i. I think the issue of holding grudges and refusing to forgive other people is the perfect illustration...
  - ii. It always hurts more to hold a grudge than it does to have the grudge held against you...the one holding the grudge will still feel its effects long after the begrudged one has moved on.
- b. Envy—*zelos*, means to boil...
  - i. If you think about all the times you've been overlooked for promotions or shafted by someone else's connections often enough and long enough you'll find yourself *zelos*.
  - ii. Envy will eventually consume your ability to enjoy anything about your life.

- c. Selfish ambition—*eritheia*, earlier versions call it strife; it's the willingness, the gall, the self-centeredness, the to do whatever it takes, to whomever it's required, regardless of the consequences, to have your own way.

### **ILLUSTRATION**

In J. Wallis Hamilton's book, *Ride The Wild Horses*, he records the answer that Benito Mussolini gave when asked the question, "What is your greatest ambition in life?"

"He paced the room and gave this answer: 'I am obsessed by one wild desire. It consumes my whole being. I want to make a mark on my era with my will. A mark like this...' then with his fingernails he scratched the back of a chair from end to end, 'like the claw of a lion.'"

- i. While most of us won't go that far, we're probably not innocent.
- ii. This word also describes the person that is willing to manipulate other people, to play them, to abuse their trust or to set them up by not being forthcoming with your own motives or goals.
- iii. It's not always overtly evil, but it's still wrong...

## **2. Characteristics that need to be present. (vv 17-18)**

- a. Purity—*hagnos*, means innocent or modest, and comes from *hagios*, which means holy or consecrated.
  - i. It speaks of being moral and ethical.
  - ii. It doesn't mean perfect, but it does mean transparent honesty...you have to be the person you present yourself to be.
- b. Peace-loving

### **Proverbs 6:16-19**

There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:

<sup>17</sup> haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, <sup>19</sup> a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

- c. Considerate—*epieikes*, refers to a person's willingness to be patient with other people; one that has a quiet, humble gentle manner with others, as opposed to rash, harsh, demanding or cruel.
- d. Submissive—*eupeithes*, describes a person that is reasonable, rational, capable of being persuaded, fair-minded. It's the person who can say, 'I'm sorry; my mistake; let's do it your way...'

- e. Merciful—*e/eos*, is the word we get compassion from. It's the ability to see life from the perspective of someone else and to be moved to do something about it; not just pray about it or talk about it in a meeting, but get your hands dirty, write the check to pay for something, take from what you have and suffer the loss in order to meet their need... It's a tough, action oriented word.
- f. Fruitful—Sort of connected to merciful as it relates to the doing of what needs to be done being the stated goal of God's blessing on someone's life.
- g. Impartial—*adiakritos*, means you can't be prejudice for any reason whatsoever if you want to be an effective leader as a Christ-follower...
  - i. No prejudice based on race...
  - ii. No prejudice based on social standing...
  - iii. No prejudice based on economic status...
  - iv. Everyone gets the same consideration from a godly leader.
- h. Sincere—*anupokritos*, unmasked, is something of an antonym to hypocrisy. It means unpretentious. It described actors on a stage that played only one part—no need for a mask.

**DISCUSSION**

1. Did any of the “absent” qualifiers strike a particularly strong chord with you as personality traits that you strongly dislike in other people? If so please list it/them as well as state why you feel as you do.

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2. Please do the same with the “present” qualifiers.

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None of this is really all that astounding, is it? But these are the people that make effective leaders for the purposes of doing kingdom work.