

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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A REAL WISE MAN

(JAS. 3:13)

Chase Green

Think about a scenario for a moment. If a teacher were to ask a Bible study class, “Who is the wisest and most understanding person in this room?” what would you think of someone who immediately raised his hand and waved it proudly in the air for all to see? This person may think he is the wisest, but in actuality, he may be one of the most foolish ones in the room. The reason for this is that true wisdom is characterized by meekness and humility.

The Proverbs are full of passages emphasizing both wisdom and humility. Here are a few examples: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate” (Pro. 8:13). “When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom” (Pro. 11:2). “By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom” (Pro. 13:10). “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Pro. 16:18-19).

True wisdom goes hand in hand with the virtues of meekness and humility. Earlier in James, he wrote that those who lack wisdom should “ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (Jas. 1:5). It takes humility to ask for something one needs, that which can only be supplied by Another. This Another, in the case of supplying wisdom, is God, and He gives wisdom through our fearing Him and studying His Word (Pro. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33).

This will be addressed more fully in other articles in this

publication, but it is important to note here that there is a tremendous difference between true wisdom from God, and false wisdom that comes from other sources. James 3:15-18, as well as 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, show this very clearly.

With all of this in mind, the remainder of this article will focus on the fact that a truly wise person will not only be humble and meek, but he will also put his wisdom into practice. Again, James 3:13 says: “Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of

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FROM THE EDITOR:

A CASE IN POINT: NABOTH'S VINEYARD

Cody Westbrook

Solomon counseled, “Get wisdom!” (Pro. 4:5), and how we ought to heed that admonition. James would have us know, however, that not just any wisdom will do. There is a kind of wisdom that “does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic” (Jas. 3:15). Literally, it is “earth bound,” “spiritually dead,” and “from hell.” This kind of thinking manifests itself in fruit like envy, selfishness, pride, deceit, confusion, and every kind of evil thing (Jas. 3:14, 16). It is the kind of wisdom that will bring about ruin in the lives of those who possess it and those who are victimized by it. God’s Word provides an excellent example in the story of Ahab, Jezebel, and Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21).

First Kings 21 begins with an unreasonable request (1 Kings 21:1-3). Ahab saw a vineyard next to the palace in Jezreel and thought it would make the perfect vegetable garden. The problem was that it belonged to a man named Naboth, and though Ahab offered to pay market value or trade him for a better vineyard, Naboth refused. To part from the property would be to give away his inheritance—land that belonged to his forefathers—and, beside the dishonor, the Law of Moses stipulated against such a thing (Lev. 25:23-28; Num. 36:7-9).

One would hope that the king of Israel would understand Naboth’s position, but sadly, such was not the case. First Kings 21:4-8 records Ahab’s childish response. The text says that “Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased.” Literally, he “turned his face to the wall.” Ahab sulked and pouted like a little child who didn’t get his way. In spite of his childishness, Ahab seemed to accept the situation, but not so with his wicked wife Jezebel. The Sidonian princess was not accustomed to the king being told “no.” And so she crafted a wicked plot to appease the desire of her husband.

First Kings 21:7-14 relates the story. Jezebel penned letters on Ahab’s official stationary, instructing the elders and nobles to proclaim a fast, place Naboth in the seat of honor, summon false witnesses to accuse him, and stone him to death. The deed was done. Both

Naboth and his sons (2 Kings 9:26) were murdered, and Ahab “got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (1 Kings 21:16).

The first words of James 3:14 immediately come to mind—“If you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts...” Like jealousy, envy is the desire to have something that belongs to another. But unlike jealousy, envy seeks to do something about it. It’s a sinful desire that pushes one to get whatever it is they lust after, even if that means hurting someone to get it. That is exactly what we see in Ahab. He was an envious man who selfishly desired what was not his. And thus he sat quietly by while his wicked wife destroyed another man’s life in order to satiate his selfishness.

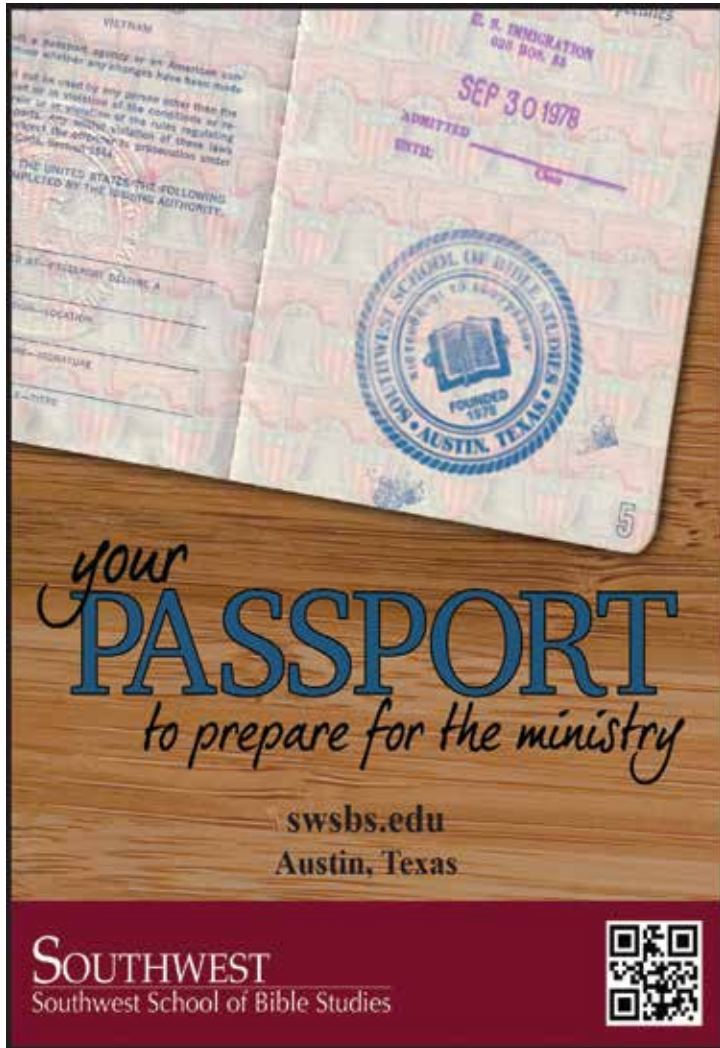
Ahab cannot be considered apart from Jezebel. One could argue, in fact, that Jezebel is the main character of the narrative. First Kings 16:31 points out that Ahab’s calf worship paled in comparison to the sinfulness of his marriage to Jezebel. She was a wicked, godless gentile who had no regard for Jehovah, His law, or the lives of His people. While Ahab sat on the throne, one gets the sense that Jezebel was the one who directed it. In fact the Lord said, “But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up” (1 Kings 21:25, emp. CW). Jezebel provoked Ahab because Ahab allowed her to do it. Both she and Ahab were guided by wisdom that is “earthly, sensual, and demonic,” and look at the carnage that it brought in their lives and throughout the nation of Israel.

It would be great to say that the church is in no danger of repeating the same kinds of sin found in Ahab and Jezebel but if that were true, the Holy Spirit would not have inspired James to write James 3:13-18. As long as the world stands the Devil will do his best to influence the hearts of God’s people with His wisdom. And if we listen and allow him to influence our thinking, ruin will be the result. Strife, conflict, division, jealousy, selfishness, and all manner of evil is injected into the

church by those who exercise worldly wisdom. Preachers must guard carefully against this—they are the primary audience of James 3. But so too must elders, deacons, Bible class teachers, and every member of the church.

We must “Get wisdom!” but let it be the wisdom that is from above, that produces the harvest of righteousness!

CW



WORLDLY WISDOM (JAS. 3:14-16)

Cody Kilgore

A careful reading of James' epistle reveals a shuddering concern for the inward man. Through this epistle, no less than thirty terms which are indicative of the

inward man are employed. The prevailing caution toward the inward man might be eye-catching, but it should not be earth-shattering. Have we not been warned by the pen (Pro. 4:23) and the person of inspiration (Matt. 6:21-23) concerning the inward man? Has it not been impressed upon our minds that the inward man affects the outward?

It is with concern toward the inward man that, at the heart of the epistle, we find James addressing the issue of wisdom. A contrast is drawn: wisdom from below (worldly) and wisdom from above (heavenly). Regarding worldly wisdom, James will direct our minds in opposition to such. The text, James 3:14-16, will expose the contrary and damaging nature of such wisdom.

We should remember that the context points us to the cautionary words of James 3:1, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” Those who take up the responsibility of teaching are under greater scrutiny. It is not merely our words that are weighed, but our minds: that is, our attitudes and intentions. Thus, James speaks plainly, “For we all stumble in many ways...” (3:2). The warning that James provides is given for this reason: human frailty. As people, we are fallible and vulnerable, and that does not change when one undertakes the work of teaching God's people. Therefore, we turn to the discussion of wisdom; after all, who we are in our minds will determine who we are as teachers.

Be wary of worldly wisdom

We are reminded in this section of the progression of the mind to the deeds of the body. The Scriptures emphatically state concerning worldly wisdom: “This is not the wisdom that comes down from above...” A student of God's word might note the similitude of this statement to that of Ephesians 4:19, “This is not how you learned Christ,” wherein Paul was contrasting the sinful lifestyle exhibited by those outside of Christ with that which is expected of those who belong to Christ. Similarly, James points to the wisdom of the world as entirely different from that which ought to guide the mind of a teacher of God's people. He employs a trifold of synonyms to convey his point: earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. The question then becomes, what is worldly wisdom?

Worldly wisdom, the kind which James is referring to, is self-promotion. James is not suggesting that we cannot learn from the world. Instead, James is declaring that the self-promotion of the world must not be present in the disciple. Remember, the context serves as a warning to those who teach, highlighting a weakness inherent to man. This is why

James qualifies worldly wisdom with these terms: jealousy and selfish ambition.

What does worldly wisdom teach me?

Worldly wisdom, as James describes, is rooted in selfishness. James is warning teachers of the danger of making their teaching platform a personal one. In our time, we have seen teachers of the gospel desert the truth for a host of reasons. One might preach and adulterate their preaching for riches; certainly, they did in the first century (2 Cor. 2:17). One might abuse the honor of teaching for the promotion of hostility or rivalry; Paul seemed to know some who did such (Phil 1:15). Others, unfortunately, might preach to build up themselves, not the brethren, and inflate their egos - we know the Pharisees struggled with such (Matt 6:1; John 12:43). Additionally, we might be tempted to the position of teacher because of a compulsion for authority, like that of Diotrophes (3 John 9). We might also find ourselves tempted to use the preaching of the cross as a measuring stick for one another (2 Cor. 10:12). In all, an abuse of teaching surrounds a yearning for inappropriate gain, whether financial or social (Tit. 1:11). Those who teach will be tempted to make their work about self, worldly wisdom charms us into thinking it is.

What is the danger of worldly wisdom?

The danger of worldly wisdom is not suggested; it is declared: “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there WILL (emp. added) be disorder and every vile practice.” (3:16). While worldly wisdom promises us personal security, it leads to spiritual fatality. Paul warned Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:20 of those who made shipwreck their faith: Hymenaeus and Alexander. Their wound was not born merely of cowardice but of corruption - they corrupted the position of teacher. Worldly wisdom would have us persuaded of a hope of salvation despite personal and promoted corruption. Scripture would emphatically cast the stone: “It would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Pet. 2:21).

Circling back to the inward man

Worldly wisdom entices us to use our platform for self, a truly damning error. Recognizing the self-imposed damage that comes from following worldly wisdom, we receive caution to guard our hearts. James reminds us of where the issue lies, “...in your hearts...” (3:14). To live for Christ, our hearts must be secure within the walls of His word (Ps. 119:11), our affection must be above (Col 3:2), and He must be our sustenance (Job 23:12; John 6:53-54). The

inward man must be protected, and introspective purity must become a priority. Play second fiddle (John 3:30). Exercise the wisdom that leads to pleasing God. “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Gal. 1:10)

CW



HEAVENLY WISDOM (JAS. 3:17-18)

Kevin Cauley

Boys are naturally competitive. I have four of them. They are grown now, but when they were younger, they had daily conflicts. One was the battle for the front seat. “It’s my turn;” “No, it’s my turn;” was so routinely debated, you’d think it was congressional legislation. When one didn’t get his way, he would inevitably appeal to the supreme court with the cry: “Daaaad!” I never knew whose turn it was (Who’s got time to keep up with that?), but I finally got wise and the supreme court ruled: Days that ended in odd numbers went to the older child; the ones ending in even numbers to the younger. This (more or less) ended the “It’s my turn” arguments about sitting in the front seat—ah, sweet peace!

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (Jas. 4:1). This is the root of the issue. Eliminate fleshly desires and conflicts go away, but how to get there? “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (Jas. 3:17-18).

First, **heavenly wisdom** is, well, heavenly. Its origins are from God’s eternal nature, not the ever-changing whims of man. It springs from the eternal font of stability, faithfulness, and relationship. It is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), a clear sea of crystalline glass (Rev. 4:6), stable, trustworthy, and dependable. It is the one true way that leads to life (John 14:6).

By contrast, **man’s wisdom** does not come from above. It is earthly (*epigeios*), sensual (*psychikos*), and demonic (*daimoniodes*). It has concourse with what is worldly, fleshly, and satanic. Its goal is to divide and conquer by any means, to titillate, gratify, and surfeit those self-seeking desires. It bubbles up from one’s concupiscence, the root of which means to be in active motion, always changing, never the same. It feverishly pursues whatever its momentary whim dictates without thought of consequence. It is unbridled, passionate, and without thought. It is envious, constantly comparing one’s lack with others’ perceived abundance and never being content.

Second, **heavenly wisdom** is informed by God’s character. It is pure (*hagnos*). The word shares the root for holy (*hagios*). Heavenly wisdom is not motivated by the carnal. It is spiritual, sanctified, and devoted. It is also peaceable (*eirenike*). It builds relationships instead of tearing them down. It is gentle (*epieikes*), moderate, and patient. It is easy to be entreated (*eupeithes*), compliant, helpful, and ready to give. It is full of mercy (*eleous*), kind, gracious. It is full of good fruits (*karpos*), healthy and nutritious. It is without partiality (*adiakritos*), does not pre-judge people or situations, but waits to hear the whole matter. It is without hypocrisy (*anupokritos*), singular in motive and goodwill toward others. These are all attributes of God, so it should not surprise us that heavenly wisdom is godly. This wisdom counts “all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8), is “content with such things as [it] has” (Heb. 13:4), and looks out for the interest of others (Phil. 2:4).

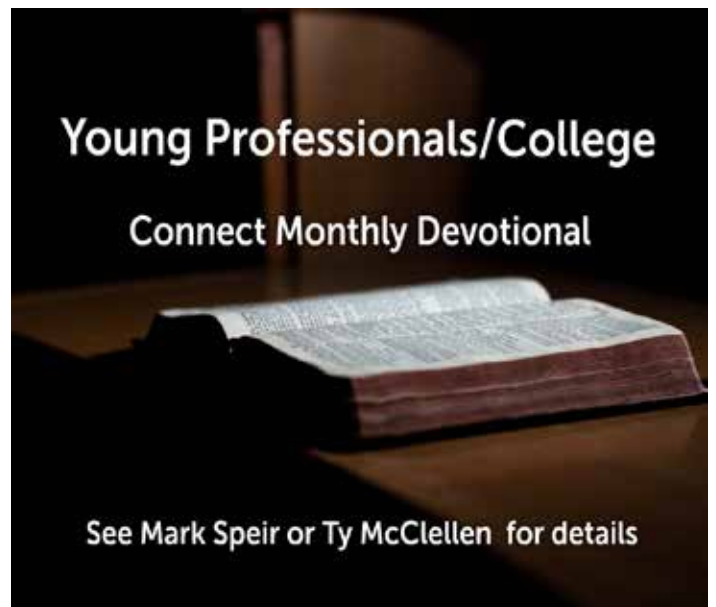
Third, **heavenly wisdom** creates peace, which is a lot like sunshine; we appreciate it more after we’ve seen some rainy

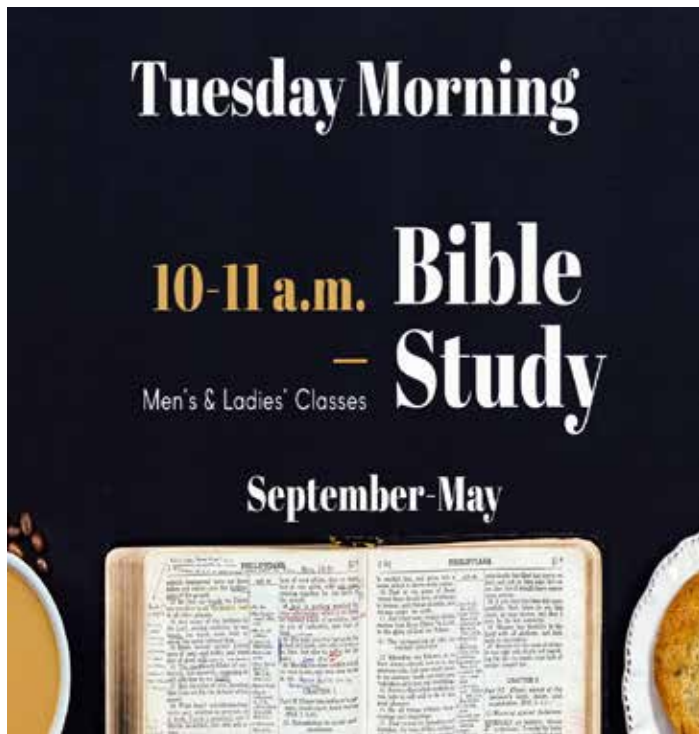
days. It may be fun to jump in mud puddles, but eventually, you will need to clean yourself up lest you rot. When one pursues heavenly wisdom, one works righteousness, and righteousness results in a peaceful relationship with both God and man. This behavior influences others (Matt. 5:16), and peace grows more peace. The whole point of this section is that heavenly wisdom builds relationships in an orderly and meaningful way as opposed to earthly wisdom that tears them down creating panic, fear, and chaos.

James is building an argument in chapters two and three. Chapter 3:13-18 is part of his argument. This culminates in his condemnation of the sin of pride (chapter 4), which is at the root of every sin. All the evil that is in the world, all conflicts, wars and fights, envious passion, anger, lust, and worldly pleasures, they stem from fleshly desires that bend the heart to wickedness. “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23). These attitudes are the very opposite of God’s purposes in Christ Jesus.

Our calling as Christians is to participate in God’s eternal purpose, to unite all peoples together in Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:8-12), to pursue the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2). We can only do that by employing heavenly wisdom “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (Jas. 3:16). May God help us to embrace heavenly wisdom.

CW





GOSPEL PARALLELS: SALVATION AND CONDEMNATION

Dave Rogers

The suggestion that someone will not experience everlasting peace and joy is distasteful and abhorrent to much of the world, but the Bible shows that some will be lost rather than saved. Without the prospect of condemnation, the very idea of salvation becomes absurd and pointless; the word loses all meaning and value if we have no possibility of missing it.

Hebrews 9:27 declares that, "...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment". Though the idea of being judged for their choices offends some people, humanity's ability to recognize injustice remains a fixed, if often ignored, element of our existence. We may not want genuine justice for ourselves (knowing only too well our own failings and hypocrisies), but for many people the only "value" that matters is whether or not their actions produce undesirable consequences in the current world; no consideration is given to their impact beyond this life. How ironic, then, that more people believe in the existence of heaven than hell (73% vs. 62%, according to a 2021 Pew Research survey).

A popular 1977 song proclaimed that "all we are is dust

in the wind," suggesting that human existence and activity are morally neutral (thus, ultimately irrelevant). Though some mock the very idea of "salvation" from sin (even as they deny the possibility of condemnation because of it), salvation and condemnation stand or fall together; these words represent the sum of Heaven's justice and mercy.

According to Ezekiel 18:4, 20, condemnation is the eternal consequence of an individual's sin (in this context, "death" represents the permanent separation of a soul from fellowship with the Creator). In the ancient days of Moses' covenant, it was understood that even the "real-time" consequences of a sin should be proportional to the sin itself: Exodus 21:22-23 expresses this principle in no uncertain terms (note that this context counts a child in the womb as having equal value with a babe in arms!). The concept of "just" (i.e., fair, equitable) consequences is again emphasized in verse 25. Since the beginning of time God has declared that violations of His laws incur consequences in both the so-called "real" world as well as in eternity (cf. Gen. 2:17; 9:5-6).

The apostle Paul explains in Romans 6:15-20 that sin brings consequences because it violates—offends—the righteous character of the Creator. Those who object to the concept of a supreme "Judge" nevertheless desire justice in human society (at least until they find themselves in its spotlight). Condemnation is an essential component of justice because that word becomes a mockery without it. To the Athenian thinkers in Acts 17:31, Paul professed that Jesus is both the "measure" by which justice for all will ultimately be determined, and the appointed judge of all. The fundamental responsibility of any "judge" is to render justice, and Isaiah 56:1-2 pronounces a blessing on those who do so.

Sin exists because God identified and defined it, in giving His laws to the patriarchs of the ancient era (Gen. 4), to the Hebrew people (via the Mosaic law, Gal. 3:19), and ultimately through the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). The function of any law is to distinguish right from wrong (cf. Jas. 2:10), thus defining sin (1 John 3:4): Where there is no law, there is no sin (Rom. 4:15), and thus neither condemnation or salvation could exist.

Law decrees that sin has consequences, but without punishment, any reward for righteousness becomes meaningless: In the judgement scene presented by Jesus in Matthew 25:40-43, justice for sin is to be eternally separated from righteousness (in the person of God Himself) while salvation from sin results in perpetual unity and fellowship with the One Whose character defines righteousness. Because all fall short in sin (cf. Rom. 3:9-10, 23), only an act

of mercy makes separation avoidable and unity possible—and that mercy is obtainable only in Christ (Rom. 3:24-26; 2 Cor. 5:19; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:10).

If God is the ultimate and faultless measure of righteousness in all things (and He IS—note Abraham’s question in Gen. 18:25), what would motivate Him to offer mercy to those who violate His righteous standard? Paul answers this in Romans 5:8 and 2 Corinthians 5:14, as did Jesus in John 3:16—God is motivated by love for the zenith of His creative energies (Job 7:17; Ps. 8:4; Heb. 2:6)! The grace He offers is activated in the faith-filled obedience of a penitent sinner (John 14:15), which the Creator will then “vindicate” by granting “rest” with all those declared righteous through their belief in His promises (2 Thess. 1:7-12).

Like law with grace and faith with works, the gospel parallels of salvation and condemnation stand or fall together because neither has any meaning without the other.

CW

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wisdom.” James 1:21, recalling that all true wisdom comes from humbly receiving God’s Word, says: “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.”

Unfortunately, most people are not willing to lay aside their filthiness and overflow of wickedness in order to truly hear the Word of God, which would produce faith in their hearts (Rom. 10:17), leading to the salvation of their souls (Heb. 10:31). Hebrews chapter 11 shows that true faith always follows through with obedience (“By faith Abel offered,” “By faith Enoch was taken away,” “By faith Noah ... prepared an ark,” etc.; Heb. 11:4, 5, 7). If someone will not readily hear the Word of God, then he certainly will not have faith, will not obey God, and it will be impossible for him to please God (Heb. 11:6).

True wisdom, then, always leads to best-effort obedience. “Best-effort” needs to be emphasized since we are all imperfect creatures – just like all the people mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 were imperfect. A great study of this idea can be found in the book of 1 John, which emphasizes walking in the light (1 John 1:7), admitting when we slip

back into sin (1 John 1:8-10), and the importance of not continuing in willful sin (1 John 2:1; 3:4-9). When we do slip into occasional sin, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” Who “is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1-2).

Thus, true wisdom includes best-effort abstaining from sin, but it also includes being “doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves” (Jas. 1:22). Many Christians sadly can quote book, chapter, and verse on matters pertaining to evangelism, feeding the poor, worship, or the plan of salvation, but when it comes to actually living these principles out in their daily lives, they do very little with that knowledge, content to just sit on the sidelines. James would say, “to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

By way of conclusion, look at this lengthy but crucial further teaching from James 1:23-27:

For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

If we are going to be truly wise according to the standards set in God’s Word, then we will 1) be humble and meek, avoiding the sin of pride, and 2) be active in the work of the Lord, based on the teachings of the Lord found in His Word. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (Jas. 3:13).

CW



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From the Director's desk



Trent Kennedy
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June is a big month for us. We have completed Camp Hensel, papers have been written, exams have been taken, and sermons have been preached. June 29 is our formal graduation ceremony. Eight students will walk across the stage and move on to new opportunities and challenges in the Kingdom. Five of our graduates have been hired to serve in various ministry roles. Our ladies will take what they have learned and put it into practice right away by teaching other ladies and in children's classes.

These graduates have studied the English Bible, been introduced to the original languages, memorized important places, dates, and people, preached dozens of sermons, read and reported on various books, led Bible studies, visited widows and shut-ins, and much, much more. They will not graduate with all the answers, but we hope they know what questions to ask. They have learned in the classroom and outside of it. And now, they are ready to get to work.

After graduation, we will have the month of July “off” to rest and ready ourselves for the first Sunday in August, when we look forward to welcoming a new crop of incoming students. During that time, our staff will be out preaching and teaching, our returning students will be filling various pulpits, and our incoming students will be out raising funds. Please keep the staff and student body of SWSBS in your prayers as we finish this year and look forward to next year.

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