



## International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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### Lesson 7

## James 3:13-18 Commentary New Revised Standard Version

### Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

**(James 3:13) Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.**

Those with true wisdom will rightly apply the knowledge they gain from learning the will of God as revealed in the Bible and their conscience. Those with understanding will know the consequences of right and wrong thoughts, choices, and behavior without needing to learn these consequences from good and bad personal experiences. Bible study gives people wisdom and understanding partly because they learn what to do and what not to do from God's commandments and the experiences of those who

made good and bad choices in the Bible. In many cases they see the consequences of obedience and disobedience from the examples of those they learn about in the Bible. As they read the Bible, Christians should choose to live a good life and produce good fruits in words and actions, and they can do so with the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit. They can also pray for the grace of God to empower them and others to do what is right. Wisdom inspires believers to speak gently instead of cursing. Instead of becoming arrogant, they become humble from knowing how much they depend entirely upon God to give them the power they need to know and do the will of God in a variety of difficult situations in this life.

**(James 3:14) But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.**

Christians should be filled with the love of God and the Holy Spirit, so they can love God and others rightly and without envy and selfish ambition. It is one thing to be ambitious and work hard to achieve goals consistent with the will of God as revealed in the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit in fairness to others. It is quite another thing to be selfish and ruthless and take unjust advantage of others to achieve your personal goals. As Christians, we must read the Scriptures daily so we can assuredly know the truth about God, reality, others, and ourselves. Our Bible study can help us recognize if we are motivated by any bitter envy or selfish ambition in how we treat or

relate to others. Christians need to pray with an earnest desire to know and do the will of God. They need to earnestly desire that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, so they pray for God to help them do His will on earth as it is in heaven. Christians must have an ambition to pray and live with submission to Jesus Christ. They must maintain an open mind and heart to receive the Spirit's leading and avoid self-centeredness and other sins. If a Christian is filled with the Spirit, there is no room for bitter envy or selfish ambition in their hearts. Those who call themselves "Christian" while maintaining bitter envy and pursuing selfish ambition are false to the truth—the truth about what kind of a person they really are, the kind of person God wants them to be as a follower of Jesus Christ, and the kind of person the Bible describes as a follower of Jesus.

**(James 3:15) Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish.**

"Bitter envy, selfish ambition, and boasting" is a manifestation of the "worldly wisdom" that Christians see demonstrated almost every day in this world. Heavenly wisdom comes from the divine revelation and wisdom in the Bible and the example of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit lives within Christians; therefore, they recognize worldly wisdom for what it is and seek to avoid thinking and living as this world does. Worldly wisdom is earth-focused or creation-focused or self-focused instead of God-focused. Earthly wisdom does not think of heaven or

God's work in the world, in human history, and in Jesus Christ. Worldly wisdom is not truly spiritual in the Biblical sense, but often pretends to be religious. Those with a "worldly wisdom religion" only speak of God or use the name of God when they want to selfishly manipulate religious people to achieve a self-centered or earth-centered ambition. Finally, James warns us that "worldly wisdom religion" is the religion of the devil. The devils who fill this world seek to devour Christians, as Peter described in 1 Peter 5:8, "Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." Those who reject the divine wisdom in the Bible often boast and think they are wiser than Christians. They boast that their thinking is based on what can be learned from experience, from observation, from their own thinking abilities, and from others who think like them. But they are often unknowingly misled by devils who influence their thinking and choices. Christians should not be surprised when those who have turned from divine wisdom begin acting earthly, unspiritual, and devilish. Therefore, as Peter wrote, Christians need to discipline themselves and keep alert—being ambitious to know and do the will of God according to the Bible—so they do not fall for the schemes of those who are earthly, unspiritual, and devilish.

**(James 3:16) For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.**

Unhappily, “worldly-wisdom” people can sometimes be found living among Christians in a church. They bring their envy, selfish ambition, pride, and devilish beliefs into the church and they can mislead some to begin thinking and acting as they do. Therefore, Christians must stay alert, for those who think and speak with “worldly wisdom” will bring “disorder and wickedness of every kind into a church.” James was not afraid to “tell it like it is” to his readers. One can look at the way many governments function around the world and see the consequences of envy and selfish ambition, for these governments are disorderly and their rulings bring disorder and endorse wickedness of every kind that supposedly will benefit those who are earthly or worldly. Disorder and wickedness in a church can sometimes be traced to the envy and selfish ambition that motivates some in a church. Sometimes church leaders with selfish ambition will lead a church in ways that favor them and meet their selfish needs instead of the way God approves in the service of His people.

**(James 3:17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.**

Contrast those who manifest a “worldly wisdom religion” with true Christians in the church. The true spirituality described in the Bible encourages people to live by faith in Jesus Christ. True faith in Jesus Christ as Savior frees

sinners from cursing, envy, selfishness, showing partiality, hypocrisy, and wickedness. Following Jesus Christ as Lord of your life will free you to act on the divine wisdom you learn from the Bible and enable you to bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit works within you. Paul listed the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” A person can use the list of traits in James 3:17 and Galatians 5:22-23 to test themselves and discover where they need to grow spiritually with the help of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Being “willing to yield” does not mean willing to yield so wickedness can do whatever it wants; rather, James meant believers should be willing to yield and do what God wants or be willing to yield and do what someone else wants (if it is not wrong) rather than insist everything always be done their own way. Being full of mercy will inspire you to pray for someone to make the changes they need rather than cursing them. Praying for others and blessing others are good fruits to bear. Having a pure motive and being peaceable and gentle toward those who need correction will produce better results than cursing them.

**(James 3:18) And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.**

The wicked behavior of others may influence a Christian to curse the wicked and retaliate against them; however, a

harvest of righteousness may come from blessing those who practice wickedness, and from praying that they will repent of their sins and come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Christians must pray because, as Paul reminded us in Ephesians 6:12, “Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Only Jesus Christ can save the wicked from their wicked practices so they can be blessed by God. If a person practicing wickedness claims to be a Christian but refuses to repent and follow Jesus, believers can pray for God to discipline them in ways that will lead them to repent and follow Jesus. Then, they can receive the blessing of God’s forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Those who make peace will not compromise with wickedness; instead, they will sow the Word of God in peace. While sowing the Word of God, they will pray and do as Paul commanded in Ephesians 6:10-11: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Those who peacefully sow the Word of God enjoy a harvest of righteousness within themselves and among the followers of Jesus Christ. They will live at peace with God and within themselves because they live right with God and others according to the teachings of Jesus. They will do as Paul wrote in Romans 12:18, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” In Matthew 5:9, Jesus promised, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for

they will be called children of God.”

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. How should those who are wise and understanding think and live?
2. What does it mean to be “false to the truth.”
3. How would you describe a “worldly wise religion” or person; one that is “earthly, unspiritual, devilish”?
4. How did James describe the religion from above?
5. What can Christians do to make peace and what are some of the consequences of their efforts?

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