

James 3:13 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. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Dear Friends in Christ,

PLANTING AND HARVESTING PEACE

“Who among you is wise?” That’s how our reading begins. Let’s change that just a bit. Who do you think of as a wise person? I’m going to give you five seconds to think of a wise person you know..... Whom did you think of? Did anyone think of Yosemite Sam? Who’s Yosemite Sam? He’s that loud-mouthed cartoon character toting twin six-shooters whose favorite line is, “Say your prayers, rabbit!” No, I didn’t think any of you thought of Yosemite Sam. In fact, the wise person you were thinking of is probably the exact opposite. We almost never think of loud-mouthed people with a tendency toward violence as wise. At least on a personal level, we tend to think of wise people as peaceful, and peaceful people as wise.

That is God’s message to us: **“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility [of] wisdom... Wisdom that comes from heaven is... peace-loving”** (13,17). Wisdom is at home among the humble and peaceful.

I. Two Kinds of Wisdom

The Christian Church, likewise, has long been a place where peace and wisdom should be at home. In a time of distress and war, people commonly gather at churches. A few minutes ago you heard these words, “In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.” Nearly every sermon begins by a proclamation of God’s peace. The very last word of our liturgy is “peace”. (You can open your bulletin and check it out.) From beginning to end, our faith is a declaration of peace between God and people, and that God wants us to live at peace with other people.

The problem is, there is a worldly kind of wisdom that does not lead to peace.

We have a family board game called Life. Ever played it? In that game, you have to draw a card to determine your profession for the game. There is one of each card: mechanic, lawyer, teacher, doctor, police man, and some other jobs. Everyone wants to be the doctor. Do you know why? Because it’s the highest paying job in the game, and the object of the game is to have the most money at the end. I know it’s only a game, and a fun one at that, but how many things in our lives do we measure that way? We usually think that the wisest choice is the one that gets us the most.

But God’s word says, **“If you harbor selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly”** (14-15). When we think that wisdom involves getting the most we can, we are chasing worldly wisdom, not God’s wisdom.

Remember our Gospel reading. Jesus told his disciples that he would suffer and die. His disciples respectfully looked at Jesus, acted like they were listening, and as soon as Jesus was done talking, they started arguing about who of them was the greatest. You can just hear them quarreling like a flock of

hens in the chicken yard. When they get to the night's lodging, Jesus sat them down and asked, "What were you guys arguing about?" and they shut up, their eyes down, picking the lint off their clothes cause they know they were acting like fools. Their quarrels weren't heavenly wisdom.

II. The Fruit of Heavenly Wisdom

No. God's wisdom leads to peace, not arguments. *"Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"* (17).

There is something common to all of those words. All of those words are about other people. "Peace-loving" means that you are at peace *with others*. "Considerate" means that you take *other people's* needs seriously, maybe even more seriously than your own! "Submissive" means that you are willing to let *others* have their way. "Full of mercy" means that you treat *others* better than they deserve. They all have to do with how we relate to other people. If you live with someone who is considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere, how can you not have peace?

Now, if those are such good things, why don't we do them? For the same reason I don't like to apologize or admit that I am wrong:

- Because then I must restrain myself and my ambition
- Because I have to let other people shout while I am silent
- Because then I don't have the last word
- Because my gentleness will make me look wimpy
- Because I will look like I lost when I don't respond force for force

When we are peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, etc. we don't get to shout those adrenalin-pumping words, "I'm number one." We don't get to look down our nose at the second-place finishers. Every one of those virtues requires us to get off the pedestal and get down on the same level—actually on a lower level—than the people around us. That's what bearing good fruit means: doing things so that others may enjoy. That's what submissive means: letting others have their way. That's what considerate means: "Closing the window that you like to have open for fresh air because your co-worker has allergies." Etc. Each of those peace-planting virtues is difficult.

Now there are extenuating circumstances. For example the police officer does have the right to use force to keep greater evil from being done. And people can debate about what a nation's duty is when we see people in other nations brutally oppressed. And we can go into all those sorts of questions and never come out the other side. But I am talking about our personal relationships with 99% of the people we rub shoulders with 99% of the time.

Instead of self-promotion, we do Christ-imitation. We imitate that one who became our servant, who became less than a servant, who became a slave to pay for our sins.

III. Which Wisdom Are You Planting?

So we have two types of wisdom, heavenly and earthly. Which wisdom are you planting?

If you really have no idea what seed that is you are planting, there is one way you can tell and be sure – wait for the fruit. Broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage seeds look almost identical. If you don't have a nicely labelled seed packets, how could you tell which is which? The surest way is to wait. You will eventually find out when harvest is near.

Similarly, you can find out which wisdom you are planting by what you harvest. God's Word tells us, *"Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."* On the other hand, *"Peacemakers who [plant] in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."* So what does your life look like?

You can look out there at news stories of riots and murders. When you see that going on, you can be

pretty sure that someone is not planting peace. ***“Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you have disorder and every evil practice.”*** But I am not asking about “out there”.

What do you find in *your* life? You are probably harvesting what you have planted. Is there someone who is not on good terms with you? Do you find arguments between you and fellow students? What about between you and your spouse? I would guess that the last time there was marital discord, someone was not being ***“considerate, submissive, full of mercy.”***

I could go down a laundry list of the different relations we have with children or parents, teachers or classmates, co-workers and bosses, and we find this principal at work that ***“where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is discord.”*** When people are not ***“peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere,”*** you will find lots of argument and strife.

And just about always, we – yes, we who are Christians – find out that we have been to blame; if not in full, then at least in part. Most of the time, we must admit that even if we didn’t start it, we have kept the discord going by our actions, words and attitudes. ***“Such ‘wisdom’ does not come from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.”*** Did the Word of God really say that? Did it really say, “of the devil”? Yes.

IV. What to Do with Worldly Wisdom

Figuring out that we are part of the reason for the discord swirling around us, that is a humbling experience. And you know what? There is nothing that really can make it right. Sure, you can try better in the future, but when you have been antagonistic, or under-handed, or thoughtless, you have already accomplished Satan’s work. Your words and deeds have let loose things which cannot be bound back up. Trying harder isn’t going to cure it. Hurtful, uneraseable memories have been created. For the damage to ourselves and others, we justly deserve God’s judgment upon us, that fiery condemnation.

The only thing that we can do is go to God and ask his forgiveness.

Have you ever asked a person for forgiveness? It’s a lot harder than saying you were wrong—which is hard enough. Saying you were wrong is kind of saying, “I made a mistake. I’ll try harder next time.” But to ask forgiveness, that is something else. Asking forgiveness is admitting you have wronged someone and that there really is no way you can ever make it up. Asking forgiveness is placing my neck on the chopping block, saying I deserve whatever I receive, placing myself entirely at the mercy of my fellow person because of the wrong I have done. We ask God’s forgiveness in every worship service, because every sin is against God. But we also need to do that with the people who have been our victims, victims of our selfishness and pride. We need to ask their forgiveness.

Examine your life. Right now, what do your relationships look like? How are you with your spouse, siblings, parents, children. Is there friction? Is there something you need to ask forgiveness for?

The Bible says, ***“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”*** (Matthew 5:23-24). Plant peace, you will harvest even more.

We can be confident that that is the right way, because that is what God tells us to do again and again. And God assures us that when we approach him in repentance, that when we voice those words, “I’m sorry; forgive me” he is ever willing to grant forgiveness. He grants that forgiveness to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin, because he is a God of peace.

Worldly wisdom, heavenly wisdom... dear child of God, remember those words, ***“Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”*** May that inspire you to plant the seeds of peace. Amen.