

Text: James 3:17-18

Theme: Practicing Christian Wisdom

September 23, 2018

What do the following have in common? Basketball, football, track, playing the piano and singing professionally? They all require practice. You may be outstanding in one area or another, but without practice, even outstanding will take you nowhere. As James talks about wisdom in our text, he makes it clear that wisdom, like so many other things, requires practice. No one is born wise. They acquire wisdom by studying and practice. Today, we take a few moments to consider how we practice Christian wisdom.

I. By our very calling as Christians, we are expected to practice wisdom. 1. As we practice wisdom, we practice being pure in heart. When we think “purity,” we think undiluted, untainted, not watered down. When we think Christian wisdom and purity, our focus turns to statements like, “No selfish motives, not seeking personal gain, no “what can I get out of it?” As we practice Christian wisdom, we look at our motives, our intentions as we ask ourselves, “What’s my motivation? Am I doing this for the good of all or for my own personal gain?” Pure in heart searches the heart, sifts through our motives as it asks, “Is my motivation proper and pure.”

2. As we practice wisdom, we practice being peace-focused. How focused is an avid whitetail hunter as a deer approaches? Will a squirrel in the distance or a mouse running beneath the leaves distract him? As the trophy buck comes near, his eyes are riveted on his target. Wisdom says, “Make peace your focus, your goal, your target. Keep peace in the foreground, on the tip of your tongue, and in the front of your mind. Make peace your goal and God will bless your endeavors!” In a world where we are so easily distracted, wisdom cries out to our hearts, “Focus. Rivet your eyes on peace because Jesus says, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’.”

3. As we practice wisdom, we practice compromise. Suppose someone gave you a list of ten topics. With some thought, how many of those topics would likely benefit from compromise? Christian wisdom says, “Set aside your personal goals, your ‘I’m right and you’re wrong’ thoughts and look for a way to compromise, to reach an agreement that best suits the whole.” Because every church contains diverse thoughts and ideas, we need to pour all those ideas into a big bowl, stir them together, and then determine the best end result. One side note, however. Matters of doctrine are the exception because God’s Word is not open to compromise.

4. As we practice wisdom, we practice being gentle. What’s the difference between a gentle dog and a vicious dog? Sounds like a simple question, doesn’t it? With very little thought, we can easily describe the difference. As we practice wisdom, God calls us to do so with gentleness, to be like the gentle dog, to be gentle in our words and gentle in our actions. Practicing wisdom keeps taking us back to the Sermon on the Mount where we find so many similarities, as Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek.” As we practice gentleness, others see the benefit of being gentle, and the more gentle hearts we have in any location, the more productive we are.

5. As we practice wisdom, we practice compassion. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, we find the familiar words, “And He had compassion on them.” But, if we want an example apart from Jesus, there’s the Good Samaritan. Practicing

Christian wisdom is choosing to function with compassion, choosing to practice Christian love, choosing to go the extra mile, even when you have nothing to gain. Compassion reaches deep into our hearts as it says, “Be like Jesus. Follow His example. Put caring for others at the top of your list because those who care first, will also be those who practice all the other aspects of Christian wisdom.”

6. As we practice wisdom, we practice good works. Before we can practice good works, we first need to understand good works. Good works are always a result of faith, never a means of earning faith. Just because you do nice things for others doesn't mean you have done a good work. As James adds good works to his list, he implies, he assumes faith already exists. So, as we practice Christian wisdom, faith comes first and faith becomes our motivation. With a sincere, genuine faith set into our hearts, we practice wisdom by doing things for others that build them up and give honor and glory to God.

7. As we practice wisdom, we practice impartiality. What if God played favorites? What if God created some seven billion people in our world, but decided that only 575 would be saved and all the rest would spend eternity in hell? Thankfully, God shows no partiality and, as His people, He expects the same from us. As He waits for us to practice impartiality, He says, “Listen, listen carefully before you speak. Engage the brain before you open the mouth. Think about the matter; think about what is best for the whole. Look at all sides of the issue, and then, respond in a way that builds up the whole, that gives evidence that wisdom is at work.”

8. As we practice wisdom, we practice sincerity. Paul says in Romans, “Love must be sincere.” Sincerity reminds us, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” As we practice Christian wisdom, we look into our hearts and we toss out everything self-seeking, everything manipulative. Once we have all those things cleaned out, we fill our hearts with the 99.9% pure motives, thoughts, and actions. As we focus our energy on discarding and refilling our hearts, our motives will be sincere, genuine, and for the good of the whole. When the good of the whole becomes our focus, we will know that wisdom is alive and well in our hearts.

9. As we practice wisdom, the result will be unity, harmony, and, most of all, peace. Those three are the building blocks of God's Church, the motivation for church growth, for creating a house of God that we and others are delighted to call “home.” Christian wisdom isn't the frosting on the cake. It is the cake. It's a necessity. Imagine what would happen if those three, unity, harmony, and peace, were practiced by everyone in Taylor county for the next week. We can dream about what it would be like or we can do something far more useful. We can practice Christian wisdom here, out there, and everywhere.

10. As we do, I assure you that the benefits will far surpass all the hours we may have already spent practicing football, basketball, volleyball, or the piano. Amen.