Grace to You :: Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

## Earthly and Heavenly Wisdom, Part 2

Scripture: James 3:13

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Well, let's open our Bibles tonight to James chapter 3. And I am not really going to preach a sermon to you, that is something with a formal introduction, formal conclusion and a whole lot of points in the middle. What I really want to do is just have a little bit of a Bible study as we sort of approach this passage. Now we did this also last time, but there are so many preliminary considerations to really understanding the text here that we're taking a little time, particularly to look at the Old Testament in regard to what wisdom really is. After all, James refers to wisdom here and doesn't really define it. He assumes that the reader knows a little about wisdom and knows the definition of the wisdom that he's referring to. And since we can't assume that of all of us, because we don't have that Jewish background, we needed to fill in a little bit of the background.

But let me read for you verses 13 through 18 of James chapter 3.

"Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, or sensual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure. Then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Now basically just by way of an overall sense of the passage, James speaks of two kinds of wisdom...earthly, sensual, demonic wisdom. It belongs to those people not of God. And then there is pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, merciful, good, impartial and sincere wisdom that comes down from heaven and belongs to those who know God. This, too, then is a test of living faith. The reader of this portion must ask himself or herself basically the same question that James is asking in verse 13: who is really wise and understanding.

To put it another way, what kind of wisdom do you have? You claim the wisdom of God but in fact do you have it? We've been learning through James' epistle about the tests of living faith. The first test was how you endure trials. The second test was who you blame in temptation. The third test was how you respond to the Word of God. And then we moved into chapter 2 and we saw the test of how you

treat people who are in need. And then we saw at the end of chapter 2 the test of your works. And then in chapter 3 the first twelve verses, the test of your tongue. Trials and temptations and the Word of God and people in need and the tongue are all indicators of the presence of living faith or the absence of living faith. It's simply a matter of your behavior affirming or denying your claim to know God. And here is another of those same kinds of tests.

And all of these tests are given so that it may be clear as to who is truly converted and who really gives the evidence of that conversion and who is not. James has in mind making sure that no one errs in thinking he is saved when he's not.

He sums up the purpose of the whole epistle, if you'll look for just a moment at the last two verses of chapter 5. And in these verses he says, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." That really is the wrap up on this whole epistle. These verses sum up the intent of James. They picture the one who professes saving faith, the one who is in the church thus in a general sense identified as "my brethren." And yet this person errs from the truth, or strays from the truth and it says when you convert him, or turn him to salvation, you save a soul from death--that is eternal death--and you cover a multitude of sins for Christ's death in salvation provides the covering for all sins. So when you find someone who though making a claim strays from the truth and you convert that person, you deliver that person from death and through Christ his sin is covered.

So the epistle is really filled with tests to uncover the false faith so that we can convert men and women to the true faith. It also is a good reminder of how those of us who are believers ought to live. For even true believers can revert back and behave in a way that's inconsistent with who we really are. But James, like John in 1 John, is pretty black and white here in all of his tests. And one of the tests, and let's go back to chapter 3, is this matter of wisdom. The kind of wisdom a person manifests is the indicator of their life. And so you have to ask the question that James asks, who among you is wise and understanding?

In other words, who is it that really possesses true divine wisdom from God, let him show...let it be revealed. Let it be revealed in his general conduct, good behavior, in his specific conduct, deeds, and in his attitude, the meekness of wisdom. If he really has the wisdom of God, let it be seen in his general life style, in his specific deeds and in his attitude. A very basic question.

Now James then goes on in verse 14 to 18 to contrast two kinds of wisdom. False wisdom, the wisdom of the world in verses 14 to 16 and true wisdom, the wisdom of God in verses 17 and 18. When we look at our life and compare our life with this passage, we should be able to determine whether we have the wisdom of God or false wisdom. We should be able to determine whether we're truly redeemed and truly saved and truly know God or whether we are just claiming something that

isn't true. And it may well be that those of us who are true Christians may get a look at a kind of wisdom that we even as believers are dabbling in.

So, true wisdom is the essence of and the evidence of salvation. How you handle temptation, how you handle trials, how you handle people in need, how you handle the Word of God, how you handle your tongue, all of those are tests of living faith. And here's another one, what kind of wisdom characterizes you? You see, when the wisdom of God comes into a life, it dominates the soul and transforms that life so that the life style, the specific deeds and the attitudes are changed. And James says if you have the true wisdom, show it in your life style, your deeds and your attitude of humility.

Now I tried to point out last time, and this is what I want to do with you tonight, just have a Bible study together, so get your Bible ready, I pointed out in the last study that James is really building on Old Testament revelation about true and false wisdom. Particular he's building on the wisdom literature. And by the way, also through this epistle he seems to intersect in his thinking quite often with the Sermon on the Mount, as we shall see further when we go through this text. But James is really building on an Old Testament understanding of true and false wisdom.

Now the Old Testament wisdom literature has one particular book that really outlines human wisdom, and that's the book of what? Ecclesiastes...Ecclesiastes...Proverbs is the true wisdom of God, Psalms is the true wisdom of God, Job is the true wisdom of God and even Song of Solomon is the true wisdom of God if on a rather human level. But Ecclesiastes is the folly, the uselessness, the frustration of false human wisdom which is empty vain nothing useless unfulfilling and cursed by God. And last time we took our time and dug a little deeply into the book of Ecclesiastes in order to understand the futility of human wisdom. It never touches the true wisdom of God. It is true that I counted five times in Ecclesiastes, chapter 3 verses 11 and 14, chapter 5 verse 7, 8 verse 12 and 12 verse 13, that the writer accedes to the reality of the wisdom of God but in the writing of Ecclesiastes never is able to apply it himself. He says almost pensively that the true wisdom is with God but it seems as though in his own life it never applies.

And so, Ecclesiastes is a look at the frustrations of human wisdom. Man by this effort cannot know the true wisdom of God. It is the best he can do, it is earthly, it is natural, it is demonic. He cannot by his own means with his own human resources know the wisdom of God. To point that out, go back to the wisdom literature and namely the twenty-eighth chapter of Job, a familiar and really beautiful chapter in terms of its prosaic style and contribution but in terms of its content, a chapter of great futility. But I want you to notice this, it compares man's search for wisdom in his own environment with the process of mining. And in verse 1, and you may be familiar with the chapter, it's a very, very familiar chapter to anyone who studies the pursuit of wisdom, "Surely there is a mine for silver, a place where they refine gold, iron is taken from the dust and from rock, copper is smelted." Now men will go to tremendous efforts to do this and you're familiar with this. They put an end to darkness, that is they go down into the dark parts of the earth which have always been dark and end the darkness

by bringing light as they penetrate and search out the farthest limits. They go into the rock, into gloom and deep shadow. They sink a shaft from habitation forgotten by the foot. They hang and swing to and fro far from men lowered by ropes, way down this shaft looking around, endeavoring to find a vein of ore.

"The earth from it comes food and underneath it is turned up as fire. Its rocks are the source of sapphires. Its dust contains gold. The path no bird of prey knows, nor has the falcon's eye caught sight of. The proud beasts have not trodden it, nor has the fierce lion passed over it." In other words, man descends to a place where no creature has ever been. "He puts his hand on the flint, he overturns the mountains at the base,." Could it be that even in the time of Job they had a way of overturning the mountains? They had some kind explosive capability connected with the flint and with fire?

Verse 10, "He hues out channels through the rocks. His eye sees anything precious. Keep in mind that if in antiquity men could build such monuments to human ingenuity as the pyramids and so forth, there's little reason to assume they couldn't do things like this. "They damn up streams from flowing. What is hidden they bring to light."

Verse 12, "But where can...what?...wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its value, nor is it found in the land of the living, the futility of a human pursuit after wisdom. The deep says it's not in me. The sea says it's not with me. Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, nor can silver be weighed as its price. It can't be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx, or sapphire, gold or glass cannot equal it. Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold. Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned in the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it nor can it be valued in pure gold. Where then does wisdom come from and where is the place of understanding? Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the sky. Abaddon and Death say," that is destruction and death say, "With our ears we have heard a report of it." Then verse 23, "God understands its way and He knows its place, for He looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When He imparted weight to the wind and meted out the waters by measure, when He set a limit for the rain and a course for the thunderbolt, then He saw wisdom and declared it. He established it and searched it out and said to man, Behold...what?...the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom and to depart from evil is understanding."

Now there is one of the most monumental statements ever given in the Old Testament, write that somewhere in your memory, underline it in your Bible, Job 28:28. Wisdom belongs to God. Man in futility endeavors to find it in his own environment, in his own mind. So we find the futility of man in pursuing wisdom from a human perspective. He never is able to touch the true wisdom of God. The true wisdom, God knows, and God reveals it and it begins with the fear of the Lord and a departing from iniquity. Now hold that in your mind because we're going to come back to that great truth.

On the other hand, the wisdom literature we also saw in our last study, Job, Psalms, Proverbs and even Song of Solomon features the true wisdom of God. We don't have time to do that tonight, but if you want a good exercise, go through Psalm 119 and just note how frequently the psalmist longs to know the Word of God, the wisdom of God, the revelation of God, the commandments of God, the statutes of God. He seeks them out. He desires to know them. He affirms that God is the source of wisdom.

And for our time, let's look at Proverbs, just a couple of stops on the way through, verse 6 of chapter 2. "For the Lord gives wisdom from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." That's pretty clear. The Lord gives wisdom. Notice chapter 3 verse 13, "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding, for its profit is better than the profit of silver, its gain than fine gold, she is more precious than jewels and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her hand, in her left hand are riches and honor, her ways are pleasant ways, all her paths are peace, she is a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all who hold her fast. The Lord...a very key verse, another one to underline...the Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens, by His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew."

Now listen carefully. If God used wisdom to create the universe, then wisdom is outside that created universe. Therefore God who created must be the source of the wisdom that predates creation. God then is the source of wisdom. That's basic. God is the source of wisdom.

Chapter 4 verse 5, "Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding, do not forget nor turn away from the words of My mouth, do not forsake her, she will guard you, love her she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is, acquire wisdom. With all your acquiring, get understanding. Prize her, she will exalt you, she will honor you if you embrace her, she will place on your head a garland of grace, she will present you with a crown of beauty." God is the source of wisdom, says the Proverbs and you need to acquire it. Therefore men are called to go to the only one who is the source of wisdom. That's the basic intent of Proverbs, is to affirm that God is the source of wisdom and call men to Him to receive that wisdom.

And in Proverbs 9:6 it says, "Forsake your folly and live and proceed in the way of understanding." In other words, turn your back on human wisdom and follow divine wisdom. And there are other portions of the Proverbs that we could look at that basically make the same affirmation.

The point I want you to understand is this, James when he talks about wisdom not from above is talking about the human kind of wisdom expressed in Ecclesiastes that man invents in his own environment that never touches the truth of God. And when James talks about the wisdom from above, he's talking about that wisdom which comes from God predating creation and which is to be acquired by men.

The most powerful call to true wisdom, and I do want to take a moment with this, is in Proverbs chapter 8. Would you look at that for just a moment? This is, I think, the most powerful Old Testament call to true wisdom. And all of this is building to go somewhere, so hang in there. I can't go through the whole chapter, it's 36 verses, I think...yes, 36. But let me just tell you, you need to study Proverbs chapter 8. The first 21 verses deal with wisdom's excellence...with wisdom's excellence. And the writer says it is excellent in its appeal, the first three verses, it is excellent in its truth, down through verse 12, it is excellent in its loves and hates, that is what it loves and what it hates down through verse 16. And then the last little section from verse 17 to 21, it is excellent in its gifts, or what it bestows. Wisdom's excellence.

Then from verse 22 through 31, wisdom's origin. In verses 22 to 26, he talks about the preexistence of wisdom. It was around before anything was made. Verse 22 says the Lord possessed me, referring to wisdom, wisdom is personified here, "The Lords possessed me at the beginning of His way before His works of old, from everlasting I was established." In other words, the wisdom we want is the wisdom that is as eternal as God is eternal.

"Wisdom which existed with God from all eternity, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth, when there were no depths, I was brought forth. When there were no springs abounding with water, before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth. While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, nor the first dust of the world, when He established the heavens, I was there. When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, when He made firm the skies above, when the springs of the deep became fixed, when He set for the sea its boundary so that the water should not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I--that is wisdom--was beside Him as a master workman and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the world, His earth and having my delight in the sons of men."

Some might want to even personify that into the Messiah. But the initial implication of this is that he is referring to wisdom. Now therefore in the very end of the chapter, he comes from wisdom's excellence through wisdom's origin to wisdom's blessings. And he says, "If you find me," in verse 35, "you find life and you obtain favor from the Lord. And if you sin against me, you injure yourself. And if you hate me, you must love death."

So, this wonderful chapter is an extensive call to wisdom. James then is building on this Old Testament understanding. Remember chapter 1 verse 1, he's writing to Jews that are scattered? They understand the wisdom literature of their heritage. And they understand the difference between the futile wisdom of man, man at his best trying to devise a system of morals and values and standards and understandings that are completely locked in a godless box. And the true wisdom of God which predates man which comes by revelation from God. The truth that James wants you to understand is this, those that possess the true wisdom also possess salvation. Divine wisdom is the

mark of genuine salvation.

The Old Testament words that are translated wisdom and wise, the words chakam and chokmah are used about 300 times, in Proverbs approximately 100 times. And there are many synonyms as well...a very common Old Testament concept. And the root idea of wisdom is not the speculation of the Greeks when they talked about wisdom, but the actual expression of a person's approach to life. Wisdom had not to do with conceiving, wisdom had to do with behaving, with acting.

Now, remember when I read you in Job 28:28, we're going to make a transition now, follow this thought, God knows wisdom, it said in Job 28. Man looks everywhere, comparing it to mining. He can't find it. God knows it. And in the last verse it says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of...what?...of wisdom." Now catch this very carefully. This is the most basic idea related to wisdom and it unlocks the whole thing.

Now go back again to Proverbs and I want to show you this concept of the fear of the Lord tied to wisdom. And this is a very helpful understanding. In Proverbs, for example, chapter 1 verse 7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction and knowledge." Wisdom and instruction are all used as synonyms quite often in Proverbs. The fear of the Lord is connected again to wisdom. Verse 29, "Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord," again, the fear of the Lord is related to the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Chapter 2 verse 5, "Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and...along with that...discover the knowledge of God, for the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Again, knowledge, understanding, wisdom connected to the fear of the Lord.

Chapter 8 and verse 12, "I, wisdom," again wisdom personified throughout this eighth chapter, "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence and I find knowledge and discretion, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil." Now again, the fear of the Lord and wisdom are connected.

Now go to chapter 9 and a very familiar text, verse 10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Now if we can parallel those two, we're going to get closer to a very important thought. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The knowledge of the Holy is understanding. If wisdom and understanding are parallels, then the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of the Holy One are parallels. Did you note that? To know God and to fear God are one and the same. For to truly know God is to fear God and to truly fear God is because you know God.

Chapter 15 verse 33, I'll say more about that, chapter 15 verse 33, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom." Now just set your Bible aside for a minute and think with me, okay? Wisdom is inseparably linked to fearing God. You cannot escape that. It is inseparably linked to fearing God.

Now what does it mean to fear God? It's a reverential trust, it's a reverential trust. It is, very simply stated, folks, it is simply a way to describe saving faith. Did you grab that? Wisdom is begun by putting our reverential trust in the true God. You see that? When an Old Testament saint wanted to evangelize, he might just say, "Fear God." Right? Fear God.

Even in the New Testament this is affirmed in Acts chapter 10 and verse 22, a man named Cornelius, a Centurion, a righteous and...do you remember the next phrase? A God-fearing man...what does that mean? It means he was a converted Gentile. It means he was a converted Gentile. He had saving faith. In Acts 17, verse 17, Paul was reasoning in the synagogue in Athens with the Jews and the God-fearing ones. Who were the God-fearing ones? Believing Gentiles. They were called "God-fearers." Why? Because fearing God in the truest sense was equal to saving faith. It was a reverential trust, a reverential respect, a faith placed in the living and true God.

And so, when you read in the Old Testament that men are told to fear God, or even in the New Testament when they're told to fear God, or when the fear of the Lord is equated to wisdom, what that means is you cannot even begin to be wise until you are first converted, saved. The fear of the Lord was the initiation of a life of faith and trust. And as long as a man existed with an Ecclesiastes kind of wisdom, as long as—to put it in James' term—a man is content with wisdom that is earthly, that is sensual or limited to the natural, that is from demon sources rather than God, he cannot know God and he cannot know wisdom. A proper fear of God was the equivalent of a proper reverential trust of one's life in God.

And that's such a basic thought. Wisdom begins with a knowledge of God. And that's what makes sense out of life. I wish we had the time to just study the whole of Proverbs. In fact, for many years I have used Proverbs as a discipling tool. When I take groups of men in small discipling groups and take them into a sort of spiritual growth pattern of the years, we very often have gone right through Proverbs examining wisdom and the fear of the Lord. And it says so much about it. It really begins a life style of trust, a life style of faith, a life style of submission, a life style of obedience, a life style of acquiescence to the word and the will and the wisdom of God. But it starts with a saving faith. A person puts his faith in God, that is tantamount to fearing Him. And then, according to--for example--Proverbs 3:18, a tree of life opens up. In other words, all of life is controlled by wisdom. Wisdom, it says, is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. And so when you put your reverential trust in God, literally wisdom becomes the very source of your life and you live for the wisdom of God.

To put it in simple terms, when you put your trust in God, you then also took a step toward obeying His revealed wisdom, right? That's what Christian living is all about. The fullness of life, it even says in Proverbs 10, I think it's verse 27, that the fear of the Lord prolongs life, allows us a full and rich and meaningful life that is not cut short because of some evil. In verse 27 of Proverbs 14, the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life that one may avoid the snares of death. You see, the fear of the Lord is the same as salvation, it becomes our life, the fountain of our life, the extension of our life. It causes us to

avoid death.

In the eighteenth chapter of Proverbs, verse 23...no, that's not the one I wanted, let's see...nineteenth chapter, yes, verse 23, "The fear of the Lord leads to life," see. Spiritual life, the life of God, fulfilling life...wonderful thought, wonderful truth. Chapter 22 verse 4, "The fear of the Lord are the riches...literally...humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life."

Now do you get the picture? Look, the fear of the Lord is the entrance to wisdom. The fear of the Lord takes us into wisdom which becomes our very life. It prolongs our life, it fulfills our life, it enriches our life, it is our life. That is to say the fear of the Lord then is tantamount to saving faith which opens to us the continual flow of the wisdom of God in which we walk and obey. It's a marvelous and rich truth. Wholeness of life, patterns of meaning in life, proper values in life, the significance of everything is tied to the wisdom of God and only the wisdom of God can give us proper values, proper guidance, proper instruction, proper perspective and it comes to those who fear Him, that is who come to Him in reverential trust and faith and believe in Him and give Him their lives. When we hold Him in love, when we trust Him in faith, we are ushered into a life of wisdom. Life then lived in the fear of the Lord is life lived in wisdom. And life lived in wisdom is life lived in salvation. These things are inseparable.

So wisdom begins then with a relationship to God. And James, I believe, is assuming that. And I think his contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God must then be a contrast between the unsaved and the saved primarily, although it must be said that Christians can certainly operate with a whole lot of human wisdom..unfortunately. Now, the wisdom of God and the fear of the Lord, I believe, leads to obedience. The whole idea here is that having feared the Lord you commit yourself to Him then you submit to His wisdom. We aren't as obedient as we ought to be, but certainly the pattern of our life turns from utter and total and complete disobedience to God's wisdom to a submissive heart of obedience which, of course, because of our humanness is often broken by disobedience.

Listen to Psalm 111 verse 10, "The fear of the Lord--same statement exactly as in Proverbs 9:10--the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." But listen to this, "A good understanding have all those who do His commandments." Now the point is here that having come to God in reverential trust and faith and established that I fear Him in a proper sense, I hold Him in reverential awe, I then commit myself to keep His commandments. Jesus said the same thing. If you love Me, you'll what? Keep My commandments. Nothing different. John in 1 John says the same thing. What does your claim mean if you're not obedient? Saving faith then was and is obedient faith. So keep following me, now.

You want true wisdom? True wisdom comes only from God. You want true wisdom from God? It comes only to those who fear Him. You want to fear Him? You place your life in His hands and the result is going to be you are then under His authority and His wisdom comes to you and you respond in obedience.

Furthermore, to define a little more of the nature of salvation along the line of the Old Testament discussion of wisdom, Job 28 which I read to you, verse 28, listen to this again, "Behold, the fear of the Lord that is wisdom," listen to the corollary, "and to depart from evil is understanding." Equal to wisdom is understanding, equal to fearing the Lord is to depart from evil.

Now just pull it all together. Fearing the Lord involves doing His commandments, involves turning from evil. You see it? Fearing the Lord involves reverential trust and awe, submission and obedience and a turning from evil. Proverbs again, chapter 8 and verse 13, this is so straightforward it cannot be missed. We have already established that the fear of the Lord is tantamount to saving faith. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth." Now we're going a step further. To fear the Lord is to put reverential trust in Him. Concomitant with fearing the Lord is to do His commandments, to turn from evil and then to what? Hate evil. It seems to me that these are the dynamics that work in the soul of one who truly fears God. This is the stuff of salvation. Wisdom came from fearing God. And fearing God included reverential God-honoring faith and trust, a willingness to obey His Word, a turning from evil and a hatred of evil.

And I believe, and there's so much more that we could look into, but I believe we have here the essence of saving faith in the Old Testament connected to wisdom and the fear of the Lord. This is really little different than the New Testament. Believe, believe, repent...right?...turning from sin, confess Jesus as Lord and obey His Word and with a new heart we hate evil. Paul says even when I sin I hate it, right? I do what I don't want to do, I don't do what I want to do. So, this is behind what James is saying.

Let me personalize it, if I can. Take a person like Abraham. Abraham put reverential trust in God, he feared the Lord. He feared the Lord with such a strong and trusting faith that he willingly obeyed Him even in the offering of his own son. Certainly the fear which Abraham exercised was an obedient fear. And he knew also that his son was being offered as a sacrifice and the only purpose for a sacrifice was as a symbol of atonement for what? Sin. So in a very real sense, Abraham in being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac is demonstrating to us a true fear of God, a trust that God would not violate His covenant even if He had to raise his son from the dead, as it says in Hebrews, a willingness to obey at any cost and a recognition that sin needed to be atoned for and that his own hatred of sin was serious enough for him to offer his son as a sacrifice if in some strange and bizarre way unknown to him there might be some sense in which that son could be an offering for sin.

Fearing the Lord becomes even more prominent by the time you get into the Mosaic period. And I was reading in Exodus about the midwives. I don't know if you remember, it says in Exodus 1:17 "The midwives feared the Lord." And as a result, the people multiplied and grew very strong. It says in verse 20, "And the families of the midwives prospered because they feared the Lord." Further on you find in chapter 14 that the people feared God at the exodus and that fear if it remained in them,

according to Exodus 20:20, would have restrained them from sin. As long as the fear of the Lord remains before you, you'll restrain from sin. People who truly feared God obeyed God, hated sin.

So the high point of...to use a theological term...salvific terminology in the Old Testament seems to be bound up in this thought of fearing the Lord. To just crystallize that, go back with me to Deuteronomy chapter 4. Now remember, we're just kind of doing a little Bible study here and we're going to pull it all together and then I really believe when we open up James chapter 3, which will probably be next week, it will just fall open because of what we understand in the background. But in Deuteronomy, which of course is really the pinnacle of laying down God's law at a moral level, we find very interesting emphasis. Verse 10 of chapter 4, "Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horab when the Lord said to me, Assemble the people to me that I may let them hear My words so that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth and that they may teach their children." You fear Me and you teach your children to fear Me. What is that? That's saving faith, that's reverential trust.

He's not saying, "What I want is you to be in a constant state of panic. I want you to live every moment in sheer terror that I'm liable to blast you out of existence." No, and teach your children to live in the same fear. No. This is the kind of fear that is saving faith, reverential trust.

Chapter 5 verse 26, "For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire as we have and lived?" That's a healthy fear. "Go near and hear all the Lord our God says, then speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you and we will hear and do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me," and so forth. In other words, the people had a healthy fear of God, a reverential awe of God, certainly they knew He was a God who hated sin.

Chapter 6 verse 2...well, verse 1, "This is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you that you might do them in the land where you're going to possess it so--Moses talking--so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God with a result that you will keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you all the days of your life and that your days may be prolonged." Very much like some of the statements in Proverbs.

Verse 13, "You shall fear the Lord your God and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you for the Lord your God is in the midst of you and is a jealous God." Verse 24, "So the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always and for our survival." You see blessing, long life, all attached to fearing the Lord, to a proper faith in Him.

Chapter 8 verse 6, "Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God to walk in His ways and to fear Him, to trust Him, to believe in Him, to commit your life to Him." Chapter 10 verse 12, "And now, Israel, what is the Lord your God require from you?" Here is the summation of the whole thing. What does God require? "But to fear the Lord your God," that's putting your faith in Him, "to walk in all His ways," that's obedience, "to love Him," that's a heart attitude, "to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I command...I'm commanding you today for your good."

There it is. Fearing the Lord...fearing the Lord is putting faith in God that is saving faith, trusting faith that results in a life of obedience. Verse 4 of chapter 13, "You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him and cling to Him." It just goes on like this. Chapter 14, I don't want to beg the issue but I want you to see the comprehensiveness of it. Verse 23 of 14, "You shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil and the firstborn of your herd and your flock in order that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always."

Now may I suggest to you here that there is an initial fearing of God when you put your trust in Him. And then there is an ever increasing and on-going learning to continue to fear Him as well. It's not just once, it's a way of life.

Chapter 17 verse 19, "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes." Anyone in leadership in any responsibility as king is to be read in the Word of God and to fear God.

And then there's just a couple more. One is in chapter 28 over in verse 58, this is a beautiful statement, "If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in the book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the Lord your God." If you don't, then the Lord will come and bring you plagues, it says in the next verse.

And then one final one, verses 12 and 13 of chapter 31, "Assemble the people, the men, the women, the children, the alien in your town in order they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God and be careful to observe all the words of this law." So you get the picture.

And I wanted it to be comprehensive because I want you to understand this. When we talk about the fear of the Lord, beloved, we're not talking about some autogenic feeling, we're talking about the result of hearing and believing in the true God and placing faith in Him which results in a life of obedience, a life which turns from sin, hates evil and serves God and loves God. In fact, you can go through passages that I've gone through in Deuteronomy, other passages in the Proverbs, and you can kind of put together a composite. The fear of the Lord goes hand in hand with keeping His Word, with obeying His commands, with walking after Him, with serving Him, with loving Him, with clinging

to Him, it's all the same thing. To receive Him is to fear Him...that's the beginning of wisdom. That's where it begins.

The other day on television, Phil Donahue program which is a terrible program, probably done more to corrupt the morals of American women than any other program in history because he gives a platform to every aberration there is. But he said on that program and he purports to be truly wise and probably articulates human wisdom with more verbosity than any other human being, he made the statement that Christians...he does not like fundamentalist Christians, in fact, he specifically noted fundamentalist Christians...and he said of fundamentalist Christians that they basically think they are right...l'm just reading what he said...they think they are right and I hate their arrogance...or something to that effect. It bothers him that we think we're right.

I would like to suggest to you that we know we're right because it is based upon the Word of God. And he went on to say that it bothers him that we think we're the only ones who are going to go to heaven because we're the only ones who have the true gospel. You see, human wisdom can't stand that. Human wisdom is futile and true wisdom only comes to those who put their reverential trust in the living God, of course now, through faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And apart from Christ, there is no way that anyone can be ushered into the true wisdom of God. But as I pointed out, that's just the beginning. When you come in to the relationship with God through the fear of the Lord, that's just the beginning of wisdom. And then the rest of your life what happens? Well, 1 John says that from then on we have as Jesus promised in John's gospel a teacher from God who will teach us and John in his epistle says He teaches us all things so that we need not that any man should teach us. We don't even need human wisdom. We're taught of God through teachers, through the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God. And so we enter into a life of wisdom.

It's amazing, you know, really is how well and how capably and frankly how rather easy it is for any believer to analyze the world. Have you found that to be true? Do you ever listen to these people talking and trying to resolve issues and you're sitting there saying, "I know the answer to that...I know the answer to that...I know the answer to that?" And they're talking capital punishment...huge massive debates about capital punishment. If they'll just ask me, I'll tell them...take a life, you die. That's what it says in Genesis. And then you have these great debates about abortion. I know the answer to that. And then you have the great debate about whether a homosexuality is simply an alternate life style and people are discussing and debating that. I know the answer to that. It's a damning sin...just like adultery or fornication or any other sexual sin, bestiality or whatever. And here we are, not many noble, not many mighty and we are sort of, as Paul called himself, the off scouring of the world but we've got all the answers. It's because we have been ushered into the wisdom of God through fear of the Lord, through our reverential trust in God by His grace He effected that, it's not an act of man on his own, it's the work of God to do that, the sovereign work of God. He turned our hearts from sin to Himself, we trusted in Him and now we have been ushered into the dimension in which divine wisdom exists and we now open the Word of God and it speaks truth to us.

Laurence(?) Toombs(?) in his book "Old Testament Theology and the Wisdom Literature," that's really not a book, that's a portion of The Journal of Bible and Religion, said this, "Wisdom is to be found with God and no where else, and unless the quest for wisdom brings a man to his knees in awe and reverence, knowing his own helplessness to make himself wise, wisdom remains for him a closed book." It's so wonderful to have the book opened, isn't it? To have the wisdom of God.

By the way, the Word in Luke 11:49 is called the "wisdom of God," did you know that? And the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2 is called the "Spirit of wisdom." So we have the Spirit of wisdom and the wisdom of the Word and therefore we are the wise. Once we fear God, receive His wisdom, it just continually flows to us and the Apostle Paul says, get this, "Christ is made unto us wisdom." Isn't that a beautiful statement? Christ is made unto us wisdom. He becomes wisdom to us...tremendous truth.

And so, we because we possess Christ, Paul says to the Colossians, in whom dwells all the treasures of what? Wisdom and knowledge...possess the very wisdom of God.

Let me just wrap up our thoughts tonight. The Bible puts no premium on wisdom that is creedal or cerebral, okay? Nothing is known, truly known, nothing is understood, truly understood until it reshapes life. For this reason the way of wisdom is the way of obedience and knowledge at its deepest level is living out a personal relationship with God. Wisdom then is manifesting the truth of God in every dimension of life. Boy, what a marvelous reality. We have entered into the dimension of wisdom and are taught of God.

Well, now we're ready to study James. Some time we'll do that...but not tonight. And I have condensed so much, but isn't it wonderful when you stop and think about it that God has given His wisdom to us? A tremendous gift. And here is the Word of wisdom, here is the Spirit of wisdom and when the believer brings together the Word of wisdom with the Spirit of wisdom, though he may not be wise in the world, he is wise beyond the world's wisdom. For we understand what the natural man could never understand, right? For the natural man understandeth not what? The things of God, 1 Corinthians 2:14. To him they are foolishness, to us the wisdom of God...how marvelous. And how foolish for a believer who possesses the wisdom of God to pervert himself and live according to the wisdom of the world. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You for taking those of us who are not wise and not noble and not mighty and who are the baser things, taking us who were babes and not the wise and the prudent in the worldly ways and making us wise in eternal things. O blessed God, what a happy privilege to know Thee and to know Thy truth and Thy Word and Thy will. May we manifest that true wisdom that marks the one who has a relationship with Thee, the living God, through Christ. May the world see in us that wisdom which changes our life, that wisdom which is first pure, pure and which is then peaceable and which is then reasonable which is then gentle, full of mercy and good fruits which never wavers and knows

no hypocrisy but is always sincere. May we, Lord, demonstrate a wisdom of behavior that the world may know that the controlling force in our life is from above, even Thee, the Father's Son and Holy Spirit.

And, God, we would ask tonight that if there are some in our midst who are still living at the level of earthly wisdom, the level of natural understanding that flows not down from Thee but up from demon sources, O God, may they be translated from the wisdom of the world to the wisdom of God by fearing Thee and putting their faith in Jesus Christ who died and rose again. We bless you, Father, for the richness of all we possess in Him in whose name we pray. Amen.

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