

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22nd, 2024
WISDOM FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?

Prayer

Abba, you said in your word that if anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask, and we ask now that you grant us the wisdom from above in order to resist the wisdom of the world.

AMEN

Knowledge vs Wisdom

In this information age, we have much more information, much more data, much more knowledge than our ancestors, but I'm not sure we have any more wisdom - the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment – than they did.

Whose Approval?

To help us understand the specifics of wisdom, we need to step back a moment and ask ourselves this question:

Whose approval are you seeking?

If the answer is that we want to be known, loved, and appreciated by our wife, kids, coworker, and friends above all else, we will be drawn to the wisdom of the world, just as the Pharisees were (John 12:43)

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22nd, 2024
WISDOM FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?

*. . . for they loved the glory that comes from man more than
the glory that comes from God.*

On the other hand, if we follow Jesus' teaching on where to focus, seeking first the approval of our creator, then we can claim the promise of that teaching (Matt 6:33)

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and
all these things will be added to you.*

Wisdom from Below

I'm going to use the terms wisdom from below and wisdom of the world interchangeably, since we know from John's first letter (1 John 5:19b):

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

And in truly satanic fashion, much of the wisdom of the world takes what God created as good and twists it to evil purposes.

Let's look at several of the sinful attitudes and actions that James decries and ask ourselves if we are guilty of any of them.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22nd, 2024 ***WISDOM FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?***

Ambition: This can be defined as a desire and determination to achieve success. So how can this be bad? Don't the scriptures say in Joshua (1:8)

*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, **and then you will have good success.***

But, in chapter 3, verse 13, James tells us to avoid **selfish** ambition – ambition that focuses, not on what we can accomplish with and for others. but only on what we get for ourselves – twisted from a Godly focus on our neighbor to a worldly focus on self. This will be a recurring theme.

Quarrels and Fights: As we can read in Galatians, the apostles Peter and Paul fought – for the Godly purpose of preserving the purity of the Gospel – that our performance and actions add nothing to God's work of salvation. In contrast, in chapter 4, James tells us to avoid quarrels.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22nd, 2024 ***WISDOM FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?***

Why? Because the fights were not about eternal truth, about right and wrong, but about **what you have that I want** – be it kids in pre-school fighting over a toy, nations fighting over control of a region or people, or something in-between. Again, by making us focus on our wants instead of the good of our neighbor is how Satan has twisted good into evil.

Jealousy: God created this good as well – in fact, scripture tells us that God himself is jealous (Exodus 20:5)

*You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am **a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me . . .*

Here is the proper use of jealousy – to be fiercely protective or vigilant of one's rights or possessions. God is God and there is no other to whom we owe honor and obedience. He is rightfully jealous when He knows that we have been unfaithful to Him and have not kept his commandments. Where it gets twisted is when jealousy is the **envy** of someone or their achievements and advantages or a **mere suspicion**

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22nd, 2024
WISDOM FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?

of unfaithfulness. This unfounded and self-centered jealousy can lead to bitterness, which in turn will poison a relationship that should be caring and protective.

Wisdom from Above

But is all not bad news, in today's reading, James also describes the wisdom from above (James 3:17)

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And we know from Paul (1 Cor 1:30) that

*And because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who **became to us wisdom from God**, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

So this wisdom from above comes to us because of and through our relationship with Jesus. And the wisdom is manifested through the working of the Holy Spirit, who marked us with the sign of the cross and

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22nd, 2024 ***WISDOM FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?***

now dwells in all who are baptized. Let's look at some of the examples of such wisdom that James cites.

Peace Loving: This does not mean that we roll over and become conflict avoiders, but that we have made **peace with God**, that He has restored us to wholeness and that we know and obey the Lord's will.

Gentleness: Again, this isn't speaking about handling things with 'kid gloves.' The Greek word here is *epieikēs* (ἐπιεικής) (ep-ee-i-kace') properly, equitable; "gentle" in the sense of **truly fair** by relaxing overly strict standards – to keep the "spirit of the law."

Mercy: This is compassion, or properly, "mercy" as it is defined by loyalty to God's covenant. God is merciful to us because He has promised or covenanted to be so.

If this list is beginning to sound familiar, it is. Paul's list of adjectives to describe the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) includes them all:

*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness**, self-control;*

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22nd, 2024
WISDOM FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?

And this fruit - singular - isn't hard to grow. Trees and other plants, so long as they are rooted and nourished, will produce fruit and we, being rooted in God's love and nourished through Word and Sacrament, will certainly produce this spiritual fruit. And the fruit that you see in yourself may be different than that which you see in a neighbor, as God is working with each of us individually, at our own pace and route, to conform us to the likeness of Jesus.

Like a faithful gardener, God sows the seeds, waters, and nourishes our faith through means – the read and preached word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren – so that it may grow and produce much fruit.

And even though we are His enemies because of sin, we are also His adopted children, whose sins have been forgiven because of the person and work of Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. And because we are His children, we have the knowledge that this earthly life is transient, and we have a sure hope of an eternal life with our Lord in Heaven.

Let us continue to thank and praise Him for His faithfulness to us and for this hope that we have in Him. AMEN