

*This week we welcomed our Vicar back from 3 months sabbatical and headed straight into the question: 'What is Wisdom and Who are the wise?' James teaches that there are two types of wisdom: worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom and we need to know the hallmarks that distinguish one from the other. We need wisdom for relating to our friends, relations or work colleagues, the PCC needs wisdom. What are those hallmarks? **James 3: 13 – 18.***

1. The First Hallmark – DEEDS not DEGREES. Verses 13 and 17- 18.

- Godly wisdom is not shown by how many degrees a person has, but by the good deeds he chooses to do. Our culture prizes cleverness over character and confuses it with wisdom. Our education system rates cleverness by exam results, degrees and volumes of learned journals. Wisdom is all about relationships.
- The information revolution gives us access to vast amounts of knowledge but not the understanding as to how best it is used or how to avoid its abuse. Knowledge abounds but wisdom is lacking.
- **Verses 17-18.** James challenges us to demonstrate Godly wisdom which writes itself onto the pages of our life's actions and in the way we relate to people. Counterfeit wisdom erodes healthy relationships.
- This would have been hard to hear for James' readers. Wisdom was almost idolised in Graeco-Roman culture and there was a long tradition of venerating the sophists: philosophical thinkers and speakers who enjoyed debating with each other publically on matters of truth, reality, ethics and morality.
 - Perhaps it's hard for us too: it seems in the UK we value eloquence highly. We are impressed with people who can entertain and bemuse with witty repartee and make rousing speeches in debate.
 - God is not impressed. He chose tongue-tied Moses to be a great teacher for the Israelites and Paul with his lack of skill as an orator to embark on preaching tours in fear and trembling. **1 Cor. 2: 1-5.**
- There IS a spiritual gift of teaching, there is nothing wrong with God's people being good communicators and the pursuit of knowledge is not a bad thing but none of these on their own lead to Biblical Wisdom. The hallmark of Godly wisdom is whether our lives display purity, peace, submission, mercy and sincerity

2. The Second Hallmark – HUMILITY not HUBRIS. Verses 14 – 16.

- James equates wisdom with humility in **verse 13** but his Christian readers were living in a culture which despised humility or meekness as weak and servile: Stoics named it as No. 1 in a list of 'moral faults'! It is similarly hard to live humbly in today's society because humility is seen as weakness.
- People who can never admit to being wrong are afraid of looking foolish, but actually the opposite is true – it is wise, under God, to be willing to yield to others: if we can, we concede a point.
- People who listen to others the most are the ones with the most wisdom.
- Hubris is counterfeit wisdom (**verse 14**). Someone might sound wise or clever, but really they are full of envious selfish ambition (Gk. *eritheia*) which leads to boasting and lies and stems from bitter jealousy:
 - Competitive envy is found everywhere: at home, school or work and even in church. In Politics *eritheia* refers to manipulating and co-opting others to achieve what 'I want'.
 - There will be disorder, turbulence and plotting. James is clear that this kind of conduct is demonic and in direct contrast to **verse 18**: righteousness, or justice, is the seed and crop of the peacemakers

3. Who is Wise and Understanding among us? Verses 13, 17 &18.

- None of us! But there is One who is among us by His Spirit – Jesus IS the wisdom of God. **1 Cor. 1: 22-23.**
- Wisdom is a Person in the Person of Jesus, in whom there was no hint of selfish ambition. He was full of mercy and peace, with no trace of hypocrisy nor of hubris. He lived with true humility.
- Wisdom comes to rescue us from our darkness and lays His life down in order to set us free. Wisdom is a Person to follow and grow into. When we turn in faith to Him, He will lift us up. **James 4: 10**

Questions for Discussion.

1. Do we agree that cleverness is prized too highly in our culture? Is the word mis-used?
2. Are there more differences between knowledge and wisdom? Do you have to be a Christian to be wise?
3. Worldly wisdom says you can draw a line between professional achievement and private conduct, between year-end results and the means by which they have been achieved. What would James, or indeed Jesus, say?
4. In the age of social media, with endless forums on which to debate, are we learning to wisely yield to others?
5. Read **James 3 verse 17 – 18** together and meditate.