

Confronting the Enemies of Unity – In Our Attitudes
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James 3:13-18
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I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of James. We're doing an extended topical series on unity. Normally we preach expositionally through a book and take each passage as it comes. We feel like that's the best way to lead the church and feed the church, and so that's our normal diet on Sunday mornings. We've been expositing the Gospel of John. We'll resume that, Lord-willing, in August. But we're continuing a series of messages that we felt like were important for us to deal with, and that is the issue of unity in the Body of Christ.

This morning we're continuing a series from the Book of James. We've been looking at different passages. John 13, John 17, and this morning we're going to again be in James 3. James 3 and 4 deal with this issue of unity and particularly, dealing with conflict, and dealing with the enemies of unity in the body of Christ. We've seen in John 17 particularly that the Lord has given us the riches of Christ, meaning that we have a oneness that we've entered into. The oneness of the triune God has come to take residence in the heart of every true believer. When you come to be in Christ, you are in God. Christ is in God. You are in Christ. So if that's the case, there ought to be a oneness manifested in our lives. We are told to preserve, not to create, to preserve the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace, Ephesians 4. That is to guard it. Why do you have to guard it? Because there are enemies: The world, the flesh, and the devil.

James is dealing with very practical instruction on how we, as the people of God, need to confront the enemies of unity. In fact, the title of our message is from James. This series has been 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity'. We see there are really three battlefields that James deals with in Chapter 3 and 4. We spent a couple of weeks looking at the first battlefield, confronting the enemies of unity in our words. We looked at the last two Sundays. This morning we move into a second battlefield, and that is in our attitudes. So the title of the message this morning is: 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity – In Our Attitudes', James 3:13-18. Let's read God's Word together:

James 3:13-18 ~ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down

from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Let's pray together:

Our Father, we ask that as we come to Your Word this morning that You might grant us, without measure, Your Spirit. To quicken Your Word, to make it alive in our minds and in our hearts. That it might have its powerful effect in us. That it might confront our sin, expose our great need of grace, and point us to the sufficiency of our Savior. We pray this in His Name, Amen.

Confronting the enemies of unity in our attitudes, particularly, we see in James, there is one specific attitude and that is our attitude toward wisdom. Wisdom is a key word in these six verses. We see 'wise' and 'wisdom' four times in the passage. James is contrasting two types of wisdom. Twice he describes the wisdom that we ought to esteem, that we ought to value, as the wisdom from above. In contrast is the wisdom that is earthly, natural, and demonic. James is writing to the Christian Jews basically, Jews who have realized that Jesus is the Messiah, and who are following Him in churches throughout the Mediterranean world. James is writing to Jewish background people, the people who have claimed now to walk with God, and walk with God through faith in Christ. These churches are having the same struggles that other churches are having. They are having struggles with false teachers. They are having struggles that come along with that, of listening to the wrong people, of giving themselves to the wrong kinds of instruction. What he's basically saying is, "Look, you have to learn that there are two types of wisdom that will be always present in the church. There will be the wisdom from above and the wisdom from below."

Now it seems like that's just obvious. "Hey, what do you want? Don't you want the wisdom from above? Of course. Yeah, we know that. We've got that James. Let's move on to Chapter 4. Wisdom from above is obvious." No, he said, "It's not that obvious." The reality is that there are people who are able to speak what appears to be the wisdom from above, but which is not. That is they may excel in theological orthodoxy, yet their wisdom is not that which God has blessed. So he says we have to learn to test our teachers, test our leaders.

His real focus is when he asked that question in Verse 13, ***Who among you is wise in understanding?*** This question is really kind of a challenge. “Who among you claims to be wise in understanding?” In fact, the words translated here, ‘wise’ is the word ‘wise’ in Greek. The word for wisdom is ‘sophos’ like in Sophia. But the adjective has the idea, and the idea of wisdom means ‘to be enlightened, to have knowledge in things human and divine’, but it’s practical knowledge, not theoretical knowledge. Wisdom is practical knowledge, it’s skill in applying knowledge to life. Then the word translated ‘understanding’ here, in the NASB, New American Standard, understanding is an interesting word. It’s only used a couple of times in the scripture, here in the Book of James. It means ‘one who is intelligent, experienced, who possesses great expertise’, someone who literally stands over something until they have a thorough knowledge. It’s the idea of a scientist who studies something and knows for himself the facts.

We live in a day in which we often look, you know when you read an article or you’re watching TV news, they call in the experts. This is saying, “Who among you is wise and expert in the things of God?” That’s what James is asking. “Who among you has the skill to lead? Who among you, in the Body of Christ, are those who everyone else looks to as experts in the things of God?” James asked this question because he is aware of the fact that the wrong people often are the ones to whom people are looking. He’s giving his readers the tools they need to discern who those they should follow are. The question really is: Whom should you follow? It can also be applied this way, because it’s not just about the teachers. I think it’s primarily that focus but it’s also, what kind of person do you want to be? What kind of person do I want to be? Do we want to be people who are characterized by heavenly wisdom, or earthly wisdom? Again, we would automatically say, “Of course, heavenly wisdom.”

Well what does that look like? How do you know if your leaders possess God’s wisdom? So that the leaders in the church, the formal leaders—the elders, the deacons, these are the kinds of men that we should look for, that possess heavenly wisdom. But not just that, mentors in your life, those that you look to to help you along in the Christian life. What are they to look like? This passage speaks to that. They’re the ones that should have heavenly wisdom, not earthly wisdom. If we want to make influence in peoples’ lives, what do we need to have? Heavenly wisdom. This application for the way that I live as a dad and a husband, if I have heavenly wisdom, if you have heavenly wisdom, it makes it much easier for people to follow you, and it’s much more healthy. If you don’t have heavenly wisdom, if I don’t have heavenly wisdom, then we are damaging people greatly. That’s what James is concerned about.

Now, basically he's giving us the test for how we can recognize who is really speaking from God. Again, the idea is that it's not just theological orthodoxy, that is essential, but not merely theological orthodoxy. More importantly, spiritual maturity. This is really how the whole New Testament shapes up, isn't it? Who are those who are to lead? When you look at 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, to look at what the elder is supposed to be, you find some things that relate to skill and expertise. You find one attribute mentioned in Titus and 1 Timothy 3, and that is you must be apt to teach. But then you find a dozen or so character qualities. In Titus 1, you find one skill: You must be able to refute those who contradict. You find again about a dozen character qualities: Temperate, prudent, pure. So it's character that matters. Deacons in 1 Timothy 3, Acts 6, what do you find? Character qualities. Too often we think in terms of skill, God looks at the heart.

We're tempted to be like Samuel when he anointed King Saul and he presents Saul to the nations. Saul is taller than anybody else and Samuel is excited about what God is doing here. He doesn't see the whole plan. He says, "Who is like him among the people? Look at this wonderful king." Shortly Saul would fall because he failed to love and obey God. Remember when Samuel says, "Go to Jesse's house, you're going to anoint one of his sons." He goes in and he sees the oldest son and he says, "That must be him. Look at that fine young man. That's the one." The Lord says, "No, that's not him." He goes through each of the six sons, looking at them, and the Lord says, "He's not the one. He's not the one. He's not the one. He's not the one. He's not the one." He runs out of people. He says, "Are these all your sons?" The Lord says, "No, there's one more. The youngest is out watching the sheep. We had to send him out there because we knew you were coming and we had to have the other guys ready. We'll send for him. I'm not going to rest until he comes." He comes and the Lord says, "That's the one." Why? Because man looks at outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. This is exactly what we see here.

We are to esteem heavenly wisdom in our congregation, in our lives. That means that we want it, we want to possess it, and we are to elevate in our esteem people who possess heavenly wisdom. What James is saying, in the broader context, and what we're going to see as we see the effects of this, because what he basically does is he says, "What do you need in leadership? You need heavenly wisdom, not earthly wisdom." Then he's going to help you see what it looks like. How do you recognize it? He's going to show us negatively and positively. "It's not this. Positively, it's this." Then he's going to say, "If you get earthly wisdom, this is what happens. You have discord, every vile practice. You have disharmony, disunity if you're looking to people to lead who don't have heavenly wisdom. It

has tremendous repercussions. If you look to people who do have heavenly wisdom, if they're the ones who the church sees as wise and discerning, if they're the ones we look to in our lives, what happens is it brings unity, it brings righteousness, and peace by those who sow peace." It's just a matter of great practical importance. Do we possess God's wisdom? Do we possess heavenly wisdom? Who are those who should lead? We are to esteem the wisdom from above.

Now I want you to consider this question of: What is heavenly wisdom? How do we know, under several different questions. We're going to start today and we'll continue probably, Lord-willing, two weeks from today. As Ted mentioned, Dr. Mack is going to be here next Sunday. I'm looking forward to having him in town ministering God's Word to us. But I want to ask a few questions. This is how we're going to organize our thoughts around this passage. The first question is, if we're going to decide how you know who to follow, James basically encourages us to ask a series of questions, and I have four questions. We're going to look at the first two, and possible two and a half this morning.

1) Where Do You Look?

The first is, where do you look? To see if someone has heavenly wisdom, where do you look?

2) What Are You Looking For?

Secondly, when you know where to look, what are you looking for?

3) How Do You Recognize It?

4) What Difference Does It Make?

We're going to look at the first two and possibly begin into the third this morning. Where do you look? What are you looking for? How do you recognize it? First, where do you look? Verse 13 tells us where to look. James says:

James 3:13 ~ Who among you is wise in understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

Essentially, where do you look to see if someone possesses heavenly wisdom? Now, listen, everybody is in process. There is no one that is perfect. No one ever

arrives in this life. The idea in the church is that we are to look for those who are further along the line than us. They're still going to be imperfect, and the closer you get to somebody, you're always going to see their flaws. That's just the way it is in this fallen world. The only one person in the history of the world that familiarity did not breed contempt was Jesus Christ. His disciples lived with Him day in and day out for over 3 years and they said, "Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. Behold, the spotless Lamb. He is God." Everybody else though, when you get to know them, you are going to see that there are flaws, the flesh is still here.

Still there is growth in grace and growth in character, and what's the distinguishing mark? That's what this passage says that first of all, before you know what you're looking for, you need to know where to look. You're not to look primarily at someone's words. You are to look at their life. That's what this passage says. Look at Verse 13. ...***Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. Let him show...*** that verb, translated in Verse 13, ***Let him show...*** means 'to expose to view, to point out, to exhibit, to display, to make visible to the eyes'. So the idea is that someone possessing heavenly wisdom, if you look for it you will see it with your eyes.

What will you see? Continuing the verse, ...***Let him show by his good behavior...*** The ESV translates that 'good conduct'. The NIV says 'good life'. The word here is the verb form that turns into this noun means 'to turn about, to turn up, to turn over'. But noun form here came to mean sort of the course of your life. Look at how he turns here, look at how he turns there. It came to mean 'the course of one's life'. The idea is motion. You are not looking just at what someone says about themselves, you're looking at what they do. Do you see that? It's to let them show by what they do. When you look at how life comes at someone and you look at how they take the turns that come upon them, this is how you are to recognize heavenly wisdom. That is where you look. You look at the character. You look at the motion.

Then he adds to that, ***Let him show by his good behavior his deeds...*** The NAS says 'deeds'. I wish they'd translated it 'works' because 'works' is such an important word and it's the same word in Greek. Remember James 2, the whole section from Verse 14-26 deals with faith and works. James adds to our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He doesn't argue with Paul, he agrees with Paul. The way that you're saved is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We are justified by faith alone, by faith apart from works. You're declared righteous because you believe in God, and what Jesus Christ has done on

the cross on your behalf, and you place your trust in that and that alone. What James is saying is, “If you have that kind of faith, faith in Christ alone, faith alone won’t remain alone for long.” True faith won’t remain alone, it will exhibit itself in works. Once you’re born again, once you have a new nature and you’re believing in Christ, you’re going to start being zealous for good works, like Titus 2 says. You’re going to start doing deeds of righteousness. That’s the fruit! Jesus says, “A bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree bears good fruit. You’ll know them by their fruit.” Do you see how it fits together?

In James, look at Chapter 2, Verse 14.

James 2:14 ~ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

He has faith apart from works. Wait a minute, that’s not going to work, not ultimately.

James 2:18 ~ But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

You have to possess faith, and then works follow. True saving faith is evidenced by good works. This means that what James is saying in Chapter 3, Verse 13, is that the wisdom which comes from above is evidenced not merely by just talking a good game, it’s evidenced in the way we live. It’s not merely theological expertise, but it’s real spiritual growth and maturity.

So where do you look? You look at someone’s life. Now when you look at their life, what are you looking for? How do you recognize? What does spiritual maturity look like? How do you distinguish those who have heavenly wisdom? One word is chosen by James to really serve as kind of a rubric for everything else he says about this, and the one word is the word ‘gentleness’ in Verse 13. ***Let him show by his good behavior his deeds...*** You’re looking at what’s visible, you’re looking at his actions, you’re looking at the way that he handles himself, but what you see when you look at that is at the root of it, gentleness. Or really better, meekness. The ESV and King James translate it ‘meekness’ and I like that word better. It does mean gentleness, and it means humility, but it is a very important word biblically. The word ‘meekness’ is that which consists both in outward action and inward disposition. Gentleness focuses on the outward action, do you see that?

“He’s gentle. Do you see how he’s handling something?” Or, “She’s gentle. Do you see how she handles that person?”

Meekness expresses that and goes deeper. It expresses itself in gentleness on the outside but it comes from an inward attitude of the heart. Meekness flows from this transformation that’s happening in the depth of someone’s soul. Essentially, the essence of that inward disposition is this attitude: The meek person accepts all of God’s dealings with them as right and just. That is the root of meekness. “That whatever God does with me is right and just. If I have that inward disposition it will affect every outward action.” Let’s think about that because things happen all the time that we don’t want to happen, right? That we don’t like? That’s the reality of living in a fallen world. We have circumstances come upon us that we think, “This is terrible!” Not only is it terrible, we’re tempted to think it’s unfair. “Why did God let this happen to me?” The meek person captures that thought and says, “Wait a minute. This is right. God is doing what He’s doing, and He’s right.” The meek person interprets everything in light of the cross. And if you interpret everything in light of the cross, it’s one thing to say it, and it’s another to do it. If you really interpret everything in light of the cross, it means “I have died to who I am, when I became a Christian.”

In fact, James has used the word that the other apostles loved to use in his first opening sentence of this letter. He identifies himself. He says, “I want you to know who I am. I’m James, a slave of Jesus Christ.” The English word ‘bondservant’ is a prettied up version of it. The word literally in Greek is ‘slave’. A slave has no rights at all. He is the property of another. He has no will of his own. He belongs to another. And when you and I come to Christ, what do we have to do? We have to deny ourself, take up our cross, and follow Him. It’s no longer about me or you. It’s about Jesus. When we see it rightly, we understand that that is only the bare minimum of what it ought to be. I mean, if I see my own sin the way it is, how wicked I am, how I deserve wrath, and how I deserve hell, but that Jesus Christ died for me, He bought me from sin and hell, I was a slave, I’ve never been free, and I was a slave of sin when I came into this world, then that’s what Jesus is saying in John 8:32.

John 8:32 ~ And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

And the Jews said, “We’ve never been slaves. What are you talking about?” That’s the most ridiculous thing they could say. They, at that time, were enslaved to Rome. They had been enslaved before that to the Greeks. Before that, they were enslaved to the Persians, and before that, they were enslaved to the Babylonians.

They had a history of continual slavery. There was a little bit of a break during the Hasmonean Period during the Maccabean Revolt, but basically they were slaves. They said, “We’ve never been slaves to anyone.” Jesus says, “Everyone who sins is a slave of sin.” So you and I are the slaves of sin, but if you have come to know Jesus Christ, you’re now the slave of Jesus Christ. You’ve exchanged that slavery for a more glorious slavery, for slavery in Christ is true freedom indeed. But you are not your own. That’s what Paul says when he’s talking about why you shouldn’t engage in sexual immorality.

1 Corinthians 6:19 ~ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

How can you possibly do that? Your body does not belong to you, Paul says. If we understand that, that I belong to Christ, then when bad things happen to me, when I perceive things to be bad or not what I want, then, “Wait a minute, God’s sovereign. This is good.” When disease comes, nobody wants that, but if we believe what we say, the Lord is on His throne. He’s numbered our days before there’s yet one of them. He has laid out a path for us, and we have to turn from our desire to be frustrated, and praise and worship Him instead. The meek person is the person who, when they go through challenges like that, you see them quickly getting back on board. Yeah, there are moments of doubt. There are moments of frustration, because we’re sinners, but you see them getting back on track. “The Lord is good.”

I’ve shared with you at the funeral that Charlie Winsell was hurting so much in the latter days of his life. He was in a lot of pain. I got to where I realized I needed to ask him how he was doing, because he wouldn’t tell me. I had to say, “How are you feeling today?” and then he would tell me, “I’m hurting, but the Lord has been good to me.” If you see it rightly, that’s always the message. Everything in my life can fall down around me today, but in light of the cross, God has been good to me. I have no complaints. That is the essence of meekness. I have no rights and this world isn’t my home.

2) What Are You Looking For?

Psalm 37:11 says that the meek inherit that land. Jesus uses that in Matthew 5 to describe what a true Christian is, and the essence of what happens in a Christian’s life. Remember the beatitudes. The first sermon of Jesus in the New Testament

that's given in any length is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. As you make your way into the New Testament, the first big sermon is the Sermon on the Mount, and He begins with:

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who know they are nothing, that they are absolute paupers before God, and that they have no claim.

Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

There's a progression going on. They see themselves. They see their wickedness. They see there's nothing to commend them before God, like the publican who beat his breast, and would not look into heaven, but said, "Have mercy on me, Lord, the sinner." Jesus said that's where salvation starts - poverty of spirit. Then it becomes mourning. ***Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*** There's mourning over sin. "Look how wretched I am. Oh wretched man that I am." And when someone is seeing that correctly, Jesus says the third attribute is:

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

When you've seen your poverty of spirit, and you've mourned over your sin, you understand I have no claim to anything, and you let go. Meekness is pictured in an open hand. The opposite of meekness is clinging for stuff. "No, I want that. You stepped on that. You took that away from me. Give that back to me." Meekness is this: "Lord, whatever I have is Yours. If it glorifies Christ, take it away." That's the essence of meekness. When we've seen ourselves poor in spirit, when we've mourned over our sin, then we become meek, and the irony is that when you give everything away for God's sake and you realize you don't own anything, what did He say? "Blessed are the meek." The meek are those who let go of everything. They let go of their reputation. They're not easily offended. It's hard to offend a meek person. The person who is easily offended is the person who is not meek. The meek person has no rights. "Well, you stepped on that, but it doesn't belong to me anyway. You slandered me, but what's my name? I'm nothing." It's Christ. When you're meek, it's hard to be offended. And when someone's easily offended, they're not being meek. They're not exhibiting meekness. We need to understand that and rethink our understanding.

Too often, we say things like, “Well, I’m just sensitive.” There’s not a Biblical category for that. Or at least not in that way. There’s a Biblical category for it, but it’s not, “I’m sensitive.” It’s, “I’m selfish. The reason I’m sensitive is I’m thinking about myself.” A meek person is thinking about Christ and others. That is the quintessential characteristic of one who possesses heavenly wisdom, is that they are becoming meek. This is what was true of the great leaders in the Bible. One of the wonderful passages in Moses’ life is Numbers 12:3, where it says that Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth. In the context, it helps you understand what meekness is if you know what was going on in that passage.

In Numbers 12:1, his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron challenge Moses’ authority. They said basically, “Is God only speaking through Moses? Hey, we want our place up here on the platform.” They were attacking Moses’ unique position as the leader of Israel. The text tells us right after that, that Moses was more meek than any man on the face of the earth, and what happens is he doesn’t do anything about it. The Lord does. The Lord comes down and says, “Okay, let’s talk about who’s really in charge here.” He starts talking about how he’s going to minister through prophets. He says, “Look, when I come to talk to a prophet, when I set apart a man to be a prophet, I’m going to speak to him through visions and dreams, but I want to tell you something about Moses. With him, I don’t mediate My message through dreams or visions. I speak to him mouth to mouth, face to face. That’s my man.” The Lord did that. Moses didn’t defend himself.

It’s a good thing Moses was meek, because if he had not been meek, he would have destroyed that nation probably 30 times in those 40 years. Can you imagine? Remember how they were just constantly complaining against him? “Moses, why did you bring us out? Hey look, the Egyptian army is behind us.” God delivers them. He raises his staff. The waters part. They walk through. The Egyptian army is buried by the Red Sea. You would think that would have done it. “Moses, why did you bring us out here and deliver us through the Red Sea? Now we’ve got no bread.” So God gives bread from heaven. “Moses, why did you bring us out? We’ve got no water.” So God gives them water. Again, and again, and again. But he was meek. He knew it was about God and what the Lord is doing. So what would happen is when they would start grumbling against him, rather than get angry that they were attacking him, Moses would fall on his face and begin praying for them, and would realize that they were attacking God. That’s meekness.

And of course, the ultimate example of meekness is our Lord Jesus Christ. Zechariah 9:9 told us that we needed a King to come and rescue us, a King who was meek. “Behold, your King will come to you in righteousness and bring

salvation. Behold Him, humble and mounted on a donkey.” He comes as a meek King. Not to trample us down, but He comes in gentleness. That was the echo of Zechariah 9:9 with the passage we read earlier, where Jesus, in Matthew 11, says, “Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest, for I am gentle and meek and you’ll find rest.” Meekness, no rights, slave of Jesus Christ.

3) How do you recognize it?

He had said “Where do you look? What are you looking for? You look at their life. What are you looking for? You’re looking for meekness.” Now he’s saying, “How do you recognize it?” So what he does from Verse 14 onward, is he gives you kind of a negative and a positive checklist. “Meekness does not look like this.” That’s where he starts. “But meekness looks like this.” Look at Verse 14-16 which tell us what it doesn’t look like:

James 3:14 ~ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

The opposite of meekness is bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Those words are so important in the passage that he repeats them:

James 3:16 ~ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

Those are exactly the same two Greek words. Jealousy and selfish ambition are the opposite of meekness. What are jealousy and selfish ambition? The word ‘jealousy’ here is the idea of an eager, fervent desire for something. It can be a positive word meaning zeal, but here it has a negative connotation, and most often in Scripture, it’s got a negative connotation. When we have zeal like this, it easily crosses the line into jealousy. The word comes from a word which means to be hot or boil, and so it pictures intensity. The adjective bitter is added to the noun jealousy. Bitter means acrid, harsh, cruel. When someone has cruel jealousy, what does that mean? It means that they want their position. “You stepped on my position. That’s my place. Get out of it. And if you get in my place, I will be cruel to you. I’ll speak badly about you. I will try to displace you. I will harbor anger and resentment in my heart.” That’s what the jealous person does.

‘Selfish ambition’ is spoken of a person who is lobbying for political office. They want to be out front. The jealous person and the person of selfish ambition want to lift themselves up. They want to be in the place of prominence.

Now, how do you know if you have that wrong attitude? Because God does call some to be teachers, and they have to be up front sometimes. So how do you know if you have the wrong attitude? One of the ways that the Lord has used to test me through the years is: How much do I rejoice when someone else is used by the Lord instead of me? As a minister, I have lots of minister friends that I love and really think a lot of, and when God gives them bigger ministries, or when God lets them speak over here, or whatever, is there any hint of wanting what they have? Is there any envy? If there is, and we don’t immediately die to that, then we’re cultivating a heart of bitterness, jealousy, and selfish ambition. If it’s really all about Jesus, we ought to rejoice that He’s using the person that He’s using. “Praise God, He’s using that brother. That is so wonderful.” But see how it can begin to destroy a church if that’s the spirit within the congregation? If we allow this jealousy and selfish ambition to be in our hearts, then we don’t rejoice in other people’s giftedness, and so we hinder the gift of the Spirit. But when we can rejoice that God is raising up someone else, and say, “Look how they’re growing in grace, Lord. I was wanting to do that, but You have a better plan, and I know I don’t have any claim on that. Praise Your Name,” then we can speak with real joy and encouragement. “Thank you for ministering like you did.”

It can be in any place, no matter what our ministry is. Our ministry may be giving or serving. Maybe someone comes along and they serve, and I wanted to have that opportunity, and maybe we’re thinking about whether or not my service or ministry was acknowledged. “Hey, they publicly thanked them, but they didn’t publicly thank me.” That happens, doesn’t it? One of the reasons it happens is because the Lord loves us, and He’s like tapping on our shoulder, saying, “Why did you do that, Ty? Were you wanting the acclaim of men? I love you enough to let them not mention you, so you would have a reminder to do it for Me.” Meekness is that kind of attitude. And when that attitude is there, it creates unity. The Lord says this is what we’re supposed to be like, and in this, He’s just saying to be like Jesus.

That’s really the answer, because we do have jealousy in our hearts, because we have an old man, don’t we? But the person He says needs to be in leadership is one who’s overcoming it, conquering it. It’s a daily battle, but they’re winning the battle over time. Three steps forward and two steps back. They’re making progress. But when it wells up within us, and we see this, then we need to ask, “Lord, why

am I feeling this?” Why is it that when something bad happens to someone out in the world, there’s this sense of rejoicing in it? That is ungodly and wicked. When the wicked suffer, we shouldn’t rejoice. We should just glorify God and pray for them. The Lord doesn’t take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:19). He wants the wicked to turn and live.

So when we see that in us, what do we need to do? We need to look at Jesus. He was never that way. He spoke sternly and clearly to the wicked, and sometimes with great force and passion to the Pharisees to wake them up, but He took no pleasure in their sin and unbelief. In that passage that we read earlier, Matthew 11:25, where He says, “I’m gentle and meek,” it’s interesting to look at the context. Jesus was having to work through the same challenges that we have. Now, He never sinned, but if you look at the context there when He talks about being humble and meek, when you look at the broader context, He has just pronounced woe on Chorazin and Bethsaida – two towns that He had ministered in. Why was He doing that? He ministered there. He did great miracles there, and they were not believing. What had happened? They did not acknowledge His rightful place in their lives. They did not honor Him. They did not glorify Him. They did not worship Him. They dishonored His Father. They dishonored Him. And what did He do? He spoke the truth to them. “You need to understand it’s about how you respond to Me. It’s going to be more difficult for you on the Day of Judgment, because you had a fuller revelation.” But then in His own heart, He goes on to say, “All authority has been given to Me by the Father. People don’t see it.”

Do you see how He’s working through it even in His mind? In His human mind, Jesus is living out perfect righteousness. The eternal Son of God has become man. “All authority has been given to Me by the Father.” And then, in the midst of that, dealing with the fact that He’s been rejected, He says, “Come unto Me, you who are weary and heavy laden, and I’ll give you rest. For I am gentle and meek. See, I’m not straining after My place.”

Philippians 2:5-8 ~ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Look at Jesus. When we feel like we’ve been slighted, think how ridiculous that is, when we’ve been slighted compared to what Christ has been. What have we done

to Him? Put whatever slight someone does to you in context of what you've done to Christ. It totally changes the picture, doesn't it? And the wonder of it is that we see that, and we need to hate that, and ask, "Why is that in my heart?" but then we look to Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, how glorious You are. I'm so glad that not only have You paid for this, not only have You paid for my wicked heart that would rejoice in something negative or be envious of something positive, You paid for that, but You also will empower me with Your own meekness." You keep looking at Jesus and you become like Him. That's the glory of salvation. That's the only way we can become the kind of people that anybody should want to follow. Like Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

Let's pray together...

Our Father, we thank You for Your word which confronts us and exposes our need. It is like a two-edged sword which pierces to divide joint and marrow, soul and spirit, the discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart, which shows us, Lord, an x-ray MRI vision of what we are and where we lack. When we look at this truth of what we should be like, we see how far we fall short, Lord, how quick we are to take offense, and how big our toes are. We stand in need of grace. Father, forgive us for lifting ourselves up and obscuring the Gospel. Help us to be people who, because we are so in awe of our Savior, so amazed by His grace, and enthralled by His love, that we start to more and more resemble Him. May people see it with their eyes when they look at us and our behavior. And Lord, let it not be for their sakes, but for Your pleasure.

We pray for those that are here that need to let go of their lives so that they could have Christ. Lord, You said that the Kingdom of God is like a man who went and sold all that he had, so that he could buy the pearl of great price. We have to let go of everything to lay hold of Christ. We pray that You would grant true repentance and true faith to those who need to repent and believe today. Grant them new hearts and help them see that slavery to Jesus Christ is the most wonderful freedom and joy in the world, and that everything else is only death and decay. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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