

Wisdom That Is From Above – James 3:17,18

I. Introduction

- A. Action + Attitude are two constant demands that drive a true child of God.
1. James 3:13: *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.*
 2. Meekness is the proper attitude towards power and wisdom is the proper attitude towards knowledge. The truly wise Christian will exemplify both these characteristics as they go about their daily lives.
- B. Wisdom from above is in direct contrast with wisdom that proceeds from an envious and self-seeking heart (James 3:14,15).
1. The wrong kind of wisdom is earthly, sensual, and devilish.
 - a. earthly in that it measures its successes in worldly terms and its aims are worldly aims.
 - b. sensual in that its source is our animal instincts not our spiritual man.
 - c. devilish in that its source is Satan and is designed to produce results that he would delight in.
 2. The wrong kind of wisdom is arrogant and designed to create factions and produce jealousy (James 3:16)
 - a. Instead of bringing people together it drives them apart.
 - b. Instead of producing peace it produces strife.
 - c. It is particularly designed to disturb personal relationships.
 3. Examples of the wrong kind of wisdom at play:
 - a. The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).
 - b. Abraham's decision to go to Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20).
 - c. King Saul's decision to put his armor on the young David (1 Sam. 17:38ff).
 - d. The disciples thought the crowd should be dismissed to find their own food (Mt. 14:15).
 - e. The centurion (under the helmsman's advice) determining to leave port against Paul's warning (Acts 27:9-11).

- C. Wisdom from above has its origins with God, not man. Its character is heavenly and not earthly.
1. Its God's gift and must be received from Him (James 1:17: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*) Solomon on wisdom from above: Read Prov. 2:1-6.
 2. "Above" is where Christians are always looking.
 - a. His citizenship is there (Phil 3:20).
 - b. His Father is there (Mt. 6:9).
 - c. His treasures are laid up there (Mt. 6:19ff).
 - d. He is reborn to gain entrance there (Jn. 3:1-7).
 - e. His home and hope are there (Jn. 14:1-6)
 - f. His affections and attention are aimed there (Col. 3:1-4).
 - g. There is no real surprise then that true Christians seek their wisdom from above and not from man.
 3. What is the Christian's wisdom then?
 - a. Jesus Christ is our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24, 30) ... *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ... Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God... In Him "are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* (Col. 2:3)
 - b. The Word of God is our wisdom (Read: Duet. 4:4-6) It is only from the scriptures that we can become "wise unto salvation." (2 Tim. 3:15)
 - c. This wisdom can be accentuated through believing prayer (James 1:5: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*)

II. Lesson – James use eight words to describe the characteristics of wisdom "from above."

- A. Pure – from a Greek word meaning: pure enough to approach the gods. Originally meaning ritually pure, it came to mean morally pure. This can be seen from an inscription from a Temple at Epidaurus (that pre-dates James): *"He who would enter the divine temple must be pure; and purity is to have a mind that thinks holy thoughts."* This is the purity that Paul feared the Corinthians would lose: *"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your*

minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ.” (2 Cor. 11:3ASV) And James feared lack of this purity would lead his readers to spiritual adultery (James 4:4: “*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*”) While much worldly wisdom would obviously not want to be scrutinized by God, true wisdom has had its ulterior motives removed and is prepared to be seen by God.

- B. Peaceable – in a right relationship with God and man. True wisdom will always bring men closer to one another and to God at the same time. When peace rules (arbitrates) in our lives serenity will prevail and contentment will reign (Col. 3:15). It’s in contrast to:
1. arrogant wisdom which separates man from man by setting up rivalries (James 4:1,2).
 2. cruel wisdom that delights in hurting others with clever or cutting words.
 3. depraved wisdom which seduces men from their loyalty to God.
- C. Gentle – from a word that cannot be directly translated from the original. (It also appears in Phil. 4:5 and 1 Tim. 3:3) It has been defined as “justice and better than justice;” and as “that which steps into correct things when the law becomes unjust.” Matthew Arnold called it “sweet reasonableness.” It’s the ability to apply the Golden Rule. The man who can apply this principle is able to forgive when justice gives him the perfect right to condemn. A spiritually sick friend needs the same consideration given to a physically sick friend. Gentle wisdom teaches a man:
1. how to make allowances,
 2. when not to stand up for his rights,
 3. how to temper justice with mercy,
 4. to remembers that man-made rules are not an end-all in God’s eyes.
 5. However, he will not compromise the truth to keep the peace.
- D. Willing to yield – which could mean either “ever ready to obey” or “easy to persuade.” I can see it either way. A truly wise man is ready to listen and obey whenever God’s word is spoken, and should be easily persuaded (not almost persuaded) by God’s word. He is ready and willing to abandon a course once it shown to be wrong. As James

has already said: “...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath...” (1:19).

[Note: the previous four words point to our attitude of heart; the following four are our call to action.]

- E. Full of mercy and good fruits (taking the next two words together). (Read Lk. 6:36) In Christian thought mercy:
1. indicates mercy for the man even if his troubles are of his own making. Our mercy must reflect God’s mercy in this respect. Godly mercy expects no reward (The Good Samaritan).
 2. indicates that good fruits must be a result of the mercy. Here is an action word – practical help for those in need must be available. There is no true pity without helping the one pitied! What has James already taught in 1:27 and 2:15,16? “*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble...*” and “*If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*”
- F. Undivided – (without partiality). Not wavering or vacillating. Choosing a course and keeping to it. Many who say they are keeping an open mind are just refusing to make up their mind; in the spiritual realm this is fatal! True wisdom is based on the certainties laid down for us from God through Christ. The fundamentals of faith are not obscure and are easily grasped. Our convictions are based on our faith in Christ and in God’s word.
- G. Sincerity – (Without hypocrisy) it is neither an act nor deception. It is pretending to be nothing that it is not and does not have its own ends in sight. Hypocrisy in attitude is just as fatal to our spiritual lives as hypocrisy in deeds. Those without hypocrisy are:
1. sincere
 2. open in their dealings
 3. without deceit

III. Conclusion – The Results

- A. Worldly wisdom produces trouble – envy, strife, disorder that comes from instability and works that are worthless and of no account (James 3:16). Not only must we avoid worldly wisdom as individuals but must also avoid it as a congregation of God’s people as well. Battles among so-called Christians, church splits, operating the church according to business principles instead of God’s word and the absence of purity and peace point out that something is wrong – is that “something” the absence of true wisdom?
- B. God’s wisdom produces blessing (James 3:18) – *“And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* (RSV)
1. Remember this peace includes a right relationship between man and man. The seed can only be sown and flourish when this peace exists between the one sowing the seed and the fertile ground. Nothing good will grow in an atmosphere where men are at variance with one another.
 2. Mt. 5:9 reads: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.”* With our verse under consideration is it any wonder that the peacemakers have such a close relationship with God the Father?
 3. Peace is a fruit of righteousness and it becomes the sphere in which righteousness and all that comes from righteousness flourishes.
 4. Christ is our peace through whom we are reconciled to God (Eph. 2:14). His peace is available through keeping his commandments and includes peace within ourselves, with one another and with God.
- C. We are what we live and what we live is what we sow! Living by man’s wisdom will sow sin and strife and we will reap confusion and worthless works. Living by God’s wisdom will sow righteousness and peace; we will reap God’s blessings.
- D. God hates a troublemaker! (Read Prov. 6:16-19) Lot followed the wisdom of the world and his holdings literally went up in smoke. Abraham based his decision on God’s wisdom and his choice eventually led to blessings upon the whole world!

Prov. 3:13: “Happy is the man who makes discovery of wisdom, and he who gets knowledge.” (BBE)

Resources:

Warren Weirsbe's *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Volume 2, pp. 362-66.

Guy N. Woods' *Commentary on the Epistle of James*, pp. 190-97.

William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible Series* (James and Peter – volume 14), pp. 93-98.