

Studies in James

Lesson 14

True Wisdom

(Part 2)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our last lesson, we began taking a quick look at the subject of WISDOM, from the teaching of none other than James, the Lord's own brother.
 - A. From what we learned last time, wisdom can be defined in THREE WAYS – wisdom is PRACTICAL, PERCEPTIVE, and PROJECTED.
 1. We said wisdom is often defined as – "The ability to put knowledge to use."
 - a. This is the ability to have a PRACTICAL use of knowledge.
 - (1). Because, what good is it to KNOW a lot of facts, if we can't use that KNOWLEDGE in some PRACTICAL way?
 2. We also said wisdom is sometimes defined as – "The ability to see things from a divine perspective."
 - a. This means there seems to always be a certain amount of PERCEPTION in the wise person.

b. They possess certain insights – the ability to SEE INTO things a little better than most.

(1). For one thing, they seem to always be looking for the hand of God in certain circumstances and situations.

(a). They understand that God may actually have a purpose for all that is happening – a purpose that may be BEYOND mere HUMAN understanding.

3. And we said wisdom is also defined as – "The ability to DEMONSTRATE the character of Christ in difficult situations."

a. In other words, we see the wisdom of God PROJECTED through the life of the one who possess this wisdom.

II. But for the most part of our time, we focused on James' description of the UNWISE.

A. James began by telling us the UNWISE are generally driven by two hidden motives. James says we demonstrate the wisdom of the UNWISE, *...if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts...*

(James 3:14a)

1. The first hidden motive is bitter envy (bitter jealousy).

a. The arrangement of these two words in the original text suggest a jealousy that causes, or leads toward, bitterness.

2. The second hidden motive is Self-Seeking (selfish ambition).

- a. This hidden motive drives the UNWISE person to push his way to the top – generally at all costs.

B. James also told us there are FIVE common characteristics of the wisdom of the UNWISE. (vs. 14-15)

1. It Is Arrogant – it boasts against the truth. (vs. 14)
 - a. The UNWISE are arrogant because they never admit wrong – it's never their fault. Therefore, they are always trying to justify their own sin by blaming it on someone else.
2. It Is Self-Deceptive. (vs. 14)
 - a. James describes the UNWISE as lying against the truth.
 - (1). They refuse to see themselves for what they REALLY are – they lie to themselves.
3. It Is Earthly. (vs. 14)
 - a. James says the wisdom of the UNWISE looks to earthly, human standards to determine what is right or wrong.
4. It Is Sensual. (vs. 15)
 - a. The UNWISE are guided by natural instincts – by their own animal-like behavior.
5. And finally, it is Demonic. (vs. 15)
 - a. The UNWISE person sometimes actually resembles someone who is demonically influenced.

- C. And finally, James told us the consequences of refusing TRUE wisdom.
(vs. 16)
 - 1. He said, where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is:
 - a. Confusion – Disorder, disharmony, chaos, antagonism.
 - b. Every evil thing – A full variety of vile, corrupt, petty, worthless, good-for-nothing things.
- D. Then we actually saw this kind of wisdom displayed in the life of Solomon – a man to whom God had given wisdom and understanding, but who, in the end, turned to the wisdom of the world.

BODY:

- I. So, for the remainder of our time, let's now focus on what James has to say about those who are truly WISE.
 - A. We've already noted that there are TWO PROMINENT CHARACTERISTICS of the wise person: *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. (James 3:13)*
 - 1. James describes FIRST characteristic of a wise person as "Good Conduct" (Good behavior).

- a. This word suggests there is a willingness in the life of the WISE person to CHANGE, to go back to the truth, and change in conformity with God's Word.
 - b. A wise person is obedient, and change is a regular part of their life.
2. The SECOND characteristic in the life of the WISE person is "Meekness" (Gentleness).
- a. This word carries the idea of the process a trainer goes through to tame or control a wild horse WITHOUT breaking its spirit.
 - b. The word literally means, "to be under control."
- B. But now, let's notice how James describes the wisdom of the WISE person. In fact, what James presents here for us is a list of SEVEN CHARACTERISTIC MARKS OF TRUE WISDOM – a wisdom from ABOVE. **James 3:17** – *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*
1. The FIRST characteristic mark of TRUE wisdom is the fact that it is PURE.
 - a. In other words, this kind of wisdom always produces purity in the lives of the WISE person, because the wisdom ITSELF is pure.

- (1). The word PURE, as used in this verse, simply means freedom from defilement; absence from pollution; cleanliness.
- b. James says, there is a sense of moral purity prompted by pure motives.
 - (1). There are no "hidden agendas," no "ulterior motives," no "secret ambitions."
 - (2). The one who possesses this kind of wisdom is always operating from a heart that is completely GOVERNED by purity – by MORAL CLEANNESS.
2. Second, the wisdom of the wise is PEACEABLE.
 - a. This wisdom will always guard us against either DOING or SAYING things that cause hurt feelings, or that cause ill will and alienation.
 - (1). Unfortunately, THIS characteristic is FOREIGN to our human nature.
 - (a). By NATURE, we want to stand up for "our rights."
 - (b). By NATURE, we want to keep people from "walking all over us."
 - b. But when PEACE is woven into our lives:
 - (1). Our HUMAN nature is replaced with His DIVINE nature.

- (a). We no longer act abrasive, contentious, or seek to pay back an "eye for an eye and tooth for tooth."
 - (b). Instead, we seek to soothe, to comfort, to heal, to restore broken relationships.
- 3. And third, closely coupled with this wisdom being peaceable, James says it is also GENTLE.
 - a. This same word occurs in both verse 13 and 17 – but the meanings are different.
 - (1). In verse 13 – where James says, *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom* – the word means "to be in control."
 - (2). However, here in verse 17 – where James says, *the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle,* – the word is a little more difficult to translate.
 - b. Some have translated the word GENTLE as "tolerant, equitable, or moderate."
 - (1). But all these definitions fall short of the true essence of this word in the original language.
 - c. Actually this word in the Greek suggests much the same as the word "Peaceable."

(1). In other words, James is saying that the WISE person is "GENTLE" and does not feel the need to fight for every last legal right that may be theirs.

(a). This person known how to be flexible.

(b). He knows when it's wiser to forfeit his right and submit.

(2). And so, the idea James is trying to get across here is that the wisdom of the WISE – a wisdom that comes from ABOVE – is a wisdom that is characterized by TOLERANCE, but without COMPROMISING truth or conviction.

(a). This is just another way of saying this person is lenient, merciful, forbearing, long-suffering, willing to give in.

4. Fourth, in addition to being GENTLE, James says the wisdom of the wise is WILLING TO YIELD (Reasonable).

a. This is the ONLY place in the entire New Testament where this term appears.

(1). The word actually comes from TWO Greek words that are combined to mean "one who is easily persuaded."

- b. James says that a person who possessed the wisdom of the WISE – a wisdom from ABOVE – is accommodative, harmonious, a peacemaker, agreeable.
 - (1). This person is always ready and eager to move toward workable solutions when disagreements arise.
- c. This all actually fits together in this way: Because the person possessing God's wisdom is motivated by PURE thoughts:
 - (1). He is "PEACEABLE" – always trying to maintain peace between himself and others.
 - (2). Because of this, he is "GENTLE" – flexible, knowing that it is sometimes wiser to concede.
 - (3). This makes him "WILLING TO YIELD" – reasonable, accommodative, agreeable, always seeking to maintain peace.
- 5. The fifth characteristic of the wisdom of the wise is that their wisdom is FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS.
 - a. In the original language, the word "mercy" pertains to the feelings one person has for another who has fallen into a bad situation.
 - (1). But in the New Testament, the word "mercy" has a much BROADER meaning. It pertains to showing MERCY toward those who are experiencing bad situations as a

result of their OWN foolish choices, and rightly DESERVE the consequences.

- b. Anyone can feel pity for someone who suffers INNOCENTLY – someone who is going through trying times that they DON'T actually deserve.
- c. But the REAL test comes when we show mercy to the one who IS responsible for the circumstances they find themselves in.
- d. James says, the wisdom which is from ABOVE shows itself in the form of mercy that produces "GOOD FRUITS" toward others – a mercy that demonstrates itself with the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT toward those who got THEMSELVES in a fix.
 - (1). **Galatians 5:22-23** – The fruit of: *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*
 - (2). Mercy is the "ATTITUDE" we demonstrate toward those who got THEMSELVES in a mess they can't get themselves OUT of.
 - (3). Good Fruits, on the other hand, are the "CORRESPONDING ACTIONS" we demonstrate toward those who got themselves into trouble.

- e. In other words, we demonstrate the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control) toward those who got themselves in a fix because we have the ATTITUDE of MERCY.
 - f. And WHY do we do this? Simply because, everytime we got OURSELVES in a fix as the result of our OWN foolish lusts and desires, God has been merciful to US OVER and OVER and OVER again.
6. The sixth characteristic of the wisdom of the wise is that it is WITHOUT PARTIALITY. Other translations (NASB) render this as UNWAVERING.
- a. James is using a word that describes "faithfulness to principles" REGARDLESS of our environment.
 - (1). In other words, it doesn't matter whether we're dealing with the GODLY or the UNGODLY – we will ALWAYS operate by the SAME STANDARDS of conduct.
 - (2). The person who possesses God's wisdom always operates in the realm of FIXED SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES – regardless of the situation.
 - b. This person does not operate on the basis of TWO STANDARDS – one when dealing with the GODLY, PURE

and RIGHTEOUS (fellow Christians), and then an entirely DIFFERENT standard when we are dealing with people in the WORLD.

(1). There is no sense of DUPLICITY here – the WISE person does NOT show FAVORITISM to one group over the other.

(2). The WISE person – the one who operates with a wisdom that is from ABOVE -- understands God's word, and is capable of making sound, biblical decisions, and then STANDING BY THEM regardless of the circumstances in which he finds himself!

7. And finally, James says the wisdom of the wise is WITHOUT HYPOCRACY.

a. As you already know, the word "HYPOCRITE" literally means to speak from BENEATH, or MORE literally to speak from BEHIND.

b. In the ancient Greek theater, actors played various roles by speaking from behind a mask that portrayed the KIND of character they were playing.

(1). Behind the mask bearing a smile, he would speak funny lines to make the audience laugh – portraying the role of a comic.

- (2). Behind the mask bearing a frown, he would speak tragic lines to make the audience feel sadness and sorrow – portraying the role of a person overwhelmed with sadness.
 - (3). Over time, the word HYPOCRITE came to mean ANYONE who masked their REAL character – such as an UNRIGHTEOUS person hiding behind the mask of a RIGHTEOUS and GODLY person.
- b. James says, the wisdom from ABOVE does now "SPEAK FROM BEHIND A MASK."
- (1). This person does NOT claim to be something he's not.
 - (2). He is not "two-faced." Rather they are someone who is recognized for always being OPEN and HONEST – someone who maintains INTEGRITY!
 - (3). Furthermore, there is a sense of CONSISTENCY in this person. They don't pretend to be on ONE side of a dispute, then pretend to be on the OTHER side a minute later.
 - (a). They are OPEN, HONEST, CONSISTENT and one who maintains INTEGRITY.

II. Finally, James tells us the RESULTS of having TRUE WISDOM – a wisdom that comes from ABOVE.

A. **James 3:18** – *Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* The NASB puts it this way: *And the SEED whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

1. The SEED whose fruit is righteousness – What SEED would James be talking about?

a. Well, we need to go back to verse 13. James says when we plant the seed of "GOOD CONDUCT" and "MEEKNESS" it produces the FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. It is a seed that bears the CHARACTERISTICS of, or the FRUIT of:

- (1). Purity
- (2). Peaceableness.
- (3). Gentleness.
- (4). Reasonableness or a willingness to yield.
- (5). Mercy with good fruits.
- (6). Without partiality.
- (7). Without hypocrisy.

b. When THIS seed is planted, it results in PEACE.

2. The PEACE James is referring to here is not peace with GOD, but rather peace with ONE ANOTHER – a kind of "horizontal harmony" – where one person is properly relating to another.

- a. With THIS kind of WISDOM, we're able to maintain peaceful relationships between ourselves and others without violating God's principles.

CONCLUSION:

- I. What kind of wisdom do YOU have?
 - A. Is it a wisdom that descends from ABOVE – GOD'S Wisdom?
 1. One that is characterized by "GENTLENESS" and "GOOD WORKS?"
 - a. One that bears the fruit (characteristics) of:
 - (1). Purity
 - (2). Peaceableness.
 - (3). Gentleness.
 - (4). Reasonableness or a willingness to yield.
 - (5). Mercy with good fruits.
 - (6). Without partiality.
 - (7). Without hypocrisy.
 - b. One that establishes and maintains peace between you and others?
 - B. Or do you have a wisdom that is from BELOW – a wisdom of THIS world?

1. One motivated by "BITTER ENVY" and "SEL-SEEKING AMBITION?"
 - a. A wisdom that demonstrates itself as:
 - (1). Arrogant – boasts against the truth.
 - (2). Self-Deceptive – lies against the truth.
 - (3). Earthly – looks to earthly, human standards of right and wrong.
 - (4). Natural (Sensual) – one guided by natural, animal-like instincts.
 - (5). Demonic – one that appears to be demonically influenced.
 - b. A wisdom that will produce confusion and every evil thing?

II. James gets RIGHT DOWN WHERE WE LIVE!

- A. He addresses REAL problems, faced by REAL people.
 1. Remember – James is talking to Christians.
 - a. People who profess a faith in Jesus Christ.
- B. Christians aren't immune from these problems.
 1. We can live by the standards of the WISDOM OF THIS WORLD, just as much as the people of this world.

III. So, what's the solution?

- A. **James 1:5-8** – *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. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*
1. Do you HONESTLY think God will NOT honor your request for WISDOM – IF you ask in faith?
 - a. Ask knowing that God WILL help you acquire the WISDOM THAT DESCENDS FROM ABOVE.
 2. God wants you to have THAT kind of wisdom.
 3. But remember. James says if we're not SURE we want that kind of wisdom – namely because we don't want to completely give UP our lifestyle – we will be DOUBLE-MINDED and UNSTABLE IN ALL OUR WAYS.
 - a. We can't have the wisdom from ABOVE and still be operating from the standards of the wisdom that is from BELOW.
 - b. We can't have OUR way and the LORD'S way at the same time, UNLESS the LORD'S way IS our way.
- B. So, maybe the question we need to ask is what kind of wisdom do YOU want – REALLY want?

1. The ONLY wisdom that will see us through eternity is the wisdom that is from ABOVE – GOD’S wisdom.
2. It will not only give you peace of mind NOW, but it will also prepare you for an eternity in heaven with God.
3. But remember, it’s a wisdom that is characterized by PURITY, and the only way we CAN become PURE is to have all our sins washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ.