

## Godly Wisdom and Earthly Knowledge # 14

James 3: 13-18

In our previous studies, James dealt much with the tongue and our use of such a small and yet strong member. In our text this evening we find a definite shift in his focus. He continues to deal with the personality of the believer, but his focus has shifted from the mouth to our thoughts and the way we handle what we receive. This passage focuses on wisdom and knowledge.

As we begin to consider the two, I am aware that many people tend to place wisdom and knowledge in the same category. While they may be similar, they are certainly not synonymous. One could possess all the knowledge in the world and yet lack wisdom. Knowledge tells you that the stove is hot; wisdom teaches you not to touch it.

While each of these is clearly beneficial, we ought to strive to possess both. Each of us ought to continually strive to learn. We never get to old to acquire more knowledge. As we gain knowledge, we certainly need the necessary wisdom to rightly use the knowledge we possess. Knowledge without wisdom will not generate the desired result.

James deals specifically with the wisdom of God and the contrast it has with knowledge obtained through the world. Let's take a few moments to consider the [differences](#) he reveals as we think on: [Godly Wisdom and Earthly Knowledge](#).

**I. The Counsel in Wisdom** (13) – [Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.](#) Here James offers sound counsel regarding wisdom. He reveals that:

**A. Wisdom is Appreciated** – He challenges the believer to consider those who are wise and endued with knowledge among them. It is interesting that he refers to the man endued with knowledge as a wise man. Clearly wisdom is more admirable than knowledge, but their knowledge was beneficial as well. The phrase [endued with knowledge](#) has the idea of *“knowing how to do, as well as the ability and capability to do.”* These men were to be noticed and appreciated. They possessed a godly trait that is to be sought after.

- As I considered these words I was reminded of the admiration I have for those who possess wisdom and are willing to share it. I shudder to think where I would be physically and spiritually had it not been for wise counsel I have received over the years. I am grateful for those who have made a tremendous impact on my life through their wisdom. Fellowship is blessed with many who possess wisdom. We ought to appreciate them and seek to learn from them. [Prov.11:14](#) – [Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.](#)

**B. Wisdom is Apparent (13b)** – *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.* As they were challenged to consider those who possessed godly wisdom, James reminds them that wisdom will be apparent. It will show forth in the life they live. There will be no question as to whether wisdom is acquired, it will be revealed by their words and actions.

- When one possesses wisdom they will clearly be recognized for their wisdom. The phrase *let him shew* means “*to bring to light; to display; to exhibit for others to see.*” Godly wisdom will reveal more than earthly knowledge. It will be easily distinguished.
- We also see the challenge portrayed. Those who have been blessed with wisdom are expected to share their wisdom with others. It should show forth in a way that others can benefit from it. Wisdom would be in vain if it were not shared or learned from by others.

**C. Wisdom is Appropriate (13b)** – *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.* Here we discover an interesting truth. Godly wisdom is not displayed through vanity or arrogance. Those who possess godly wisdom with a desire to serve the Lord and benefit the body of Christ will be humble in his wisdom. He is not an empty braggart. His words and works will be measured with meekness.

➤ This relates to our previous studies. A wise man doesn't just talk the talk, he walks the walk. The meekness of wisdom James speaks of is more than outward behavior or in relation to one's fellow man. This meekness deals with the grace within the soul, and it is an expression of gratitude toward the Lord. Many today possess a measure of wisdom, but all do not possess godly wisdom. The believer has an advantage, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in all truth. I think we would all agree that the works of wisdom are appropriate!

## **I. The Counsel in Wisdom (13)**

**II. The Contrast to Wisdom (14-16)** – Now James deals with the contrast to wisdom: earthly knowledge that doesn't produce godly wisdom. Consider:

**A. The Presence of the Contrast (14a)** – *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.* James speaks of those who have bitter envying and strife in their hearts. This is a clear contrast to godly wisdom, and yet it is present in many cases. Bitter envying has to do with “*jealous rivalry; contention.*” It carries the idea of “*boiling or bubbling up.*” Strife speaks of “*rivalry motivated by self-interest; scheming to obtain a desired end.*”

➤ Godly wisdom is bound and directed by meekness, where envy and strife are motivated by jealousy and self-serving desires. Sadly many operate in this attitude. It is even present among the church. Envy and strife are present among us, but they are never pleasing to the Lord.

**B. The Perplexity in the Contrast (14b)** – *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.* James had encountered those who possessed envy and strife and they seemed to boast in it. They took pride in their deception and selfishness. They may have known the truth, but were unwilling to acknowledge it because it did not serve their desires. They took pleasure in their slander of others, resulting in personal gain.

➤ Have we not met those who were unashamed of their sinful ways? They knew their actions were not pleasing to God, and yet they seemed to glory in their behavior. We have known those who embraced and promoted a lie rather than standing for truth. These are in distinct contrast to godly wisdom. We need godly wisdom to lead and guide our lives. *A United States President asked a certain general a question about another officer. Overhearing his reply (which praised the other), a friend approached him afterwards and said, "General, do you know that the man of whom you spoke is one of your bitterest enemies and misses no opportunity to malign you?" "Yes," replied the officer, "but the President asked my opinion of him; he did not ask for his opinion of me."*<sup>i</sup>

**C. The Pollution in the Contrast (15)** – *This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.* James reveals this is not godly wisdom. It may be perceived wisdom by the world's standard, but it is not consistent with the standard of God. Consider:

**1. Its Source** – We find that this wisdom doesn't originate from the Lord above; it is obtained through the thoughts and ways of man. There is no doubt that this is prevalent in our day as well. Much of modern philosophy and public policy is generated through earthly wisdom, human reasoning. *1 Cor.3:19 – For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.* *Jam.1:5 – If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

**2. Its Substance** – *The wisdom of this world is sensual and devilish.* Would you not agree that there is much sensual thinking today? Many base their decisions and actions upon the desires of the flesh, pleasing the natural man, rather than seeking the ways of God. The flesh operates contrary to the spirit, and much of this world is governed by the fleshly, sensual appetites.

➤ James also reveals this type of wisdom is **devilish**. Quite literally he speaks of this wisdom being demonic in nature. It is presented and motivated by Satan himself. Really that should come as no surprise. Anything that is contrary to the will and ways of God is motivated of Satan. People refuse to acknowledge this truth, and it upsets some, but we are either servants of the Lord or servants of Satan. Our thought processes and wisdom are no exception.

**D. The Persuasion of the Contrast** (16) – *For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.* Here we discover a simple and yet profound truth. Earthly wisdom is born of envy and strife which generates confusion and evil works. In essence, nothing genuinely profitable is obtained through worldly wisdom. This wisdom seeks to cover the truth with lies, but in the end it generates evil. Clearly confusion and evil are contrary to the nature of God. **1 Cor.14:33** – *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*

**I. The Counsel in Wisdom** (13)

**II. The Contrast to Wisdom** (14-16)

**III. The Character of Wisdom** (17-18) – In our closing verses, James returns his focus to godly wisdom and speaks of its character. Notice:

**A. The Essence of Wisdom** (17) – *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.* We are reminded that true wisdom is from above, given of God, unlike worldly wisdom. Godly wisdom possesses pure attributes that distinguish it from earthly wisdom. It is:

➤ **Pure** – Pure, perfect and holy, given of God. Purity is often spoken of in regard to moral purity. Notice that wisdom is first pure. Without godly purity, godly wisdom is not obtained.

➤ **Peaceable** – Peaceful, healthful, and wholesome. Godly wisdom desires and promotes peace.

➤ **Gentle** – Fitting, appropriate, proper, suitable, yielding, and unassertive. This doesn't imply weakness, but rather loving consideration that is always acceptable.

- **Easy to be Entreated** – Easily persuaded, compliant. Again this doesn't reveal one who abandons conviction, but one who yields to authority. The subordinate being submissive to his Master. It is the opposite of being rebellious.
- **Full of Mercy** – Filled with compassion and pity; being kind and thoughtful.
- **Full of Good Fruits** – Consistently being charitable to others, willing to help in time of need.
- **Without Partiality** – Being fair and just; impartial.
- **Without Hypocrisy** – Being honest, trustworthy, genuine, and sincere; not hypocritical.

**B. The Expectation of Wisdom** (18) – [And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.](#) We find that true, godly wisdom generates righteousness in the hearts and lives of those who possess it. Those who possess wisdom will be at peace with God and at peace with their fellow man. Wisdom, once possessed, will be revealed throughout life for the world to see.

- Wisdom is not limited to the words we speak or the advice we give. Wisdom has a positive impact on the lives of those who possess it and those with whom it is shared.
- Have you ever wondered why our world is in a constant state of turmoil? Here is the answer: we are lead by those who lack godly wisdom and thus they do not possess or seek real peace. If you desire real pray, seek the Lord for wisdom.

**Conclusion:** We have looked at the differences in godly wisdom and earthly knowledge. We have discovered that while some think they are similar, they are not synonymous. Surely you would agree that we all could use more wisdom. True wisdom comes from above. It is only given of God. It is possible to obtain wisdom, but it requires a right relationship with Christ. Those who are part of the family of God and lack wisdom are likely following at a distance. If you have never been saved, you will never obtain true wisdom unless you come to Christ in salvation. He is the source of wisdom. If you have never been saved, I urge you to seek the Lord.

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<sup>i</sup> Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James.