

James – Life after Faith
James 3:13-18
“Being Smart about Wisdom”

1. WISDOM ORIGINATING FROM TWO DIFFERENT REALMS

- A. Human wisdom
- B. Heavenly wisdom

2. WISDOM OPERATING FOR TWO DIFFERENT REASONS

- A. One is selfish
- B. One is spiritual

3. WISDOM OFFERED WITH TWO DIFFERENT RESULTS

- A. How harmful human wisdom can be
- B. How helpful heavenly wisdom can be

1. Socrates, who lived during the 5th century B.C., refused to be called by the title “sophos”, which is the Greek word for wise; because he felt it would be blasphemous.

2. Instead, he preferred to be called “philosophos”, which means “lover of wisdom”, and gives us our modern term, philosopher.

3. While not many people would consider themselves to be philosophers, everybody has a philosophy, whether they realize it or not.

4. Your philosophy is the beliefs, views, and motives that drive you to live the way you live, and do whatever it is you do with your life.

5. In other words, your philosophy is the thinking that produces your living. It is the wisdom, right or wrong, from which you make decisions and perform actions.

6. In James 3:13, we find a rhetorical question. Bro. James asks, “*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?*”

7. While most people would try to be humble about it, almost no one would say, “Well, I don’t have any good sense. I don’t know what I’m doing.”

8. Most people believe that they *do* have a measure of wisdom and knowledge. Most of us feel like, at least to some degree, we know what were doing.

9. James says that if we think we have wisdom and knowledge, we should demonstrate it (as one translation renders verse 13) by our “good conduct”, showing the evidence of real wisdom with meekness.

10. This closing section of James chapter 3 is really a contrast of two kinds of wisdom. One is the authentic, godly wisdom of which the Bible speaks; and the other is an arrogant, empty wisdom that really isn’t wise at all.

11. We need to be smart about the philosophy and wisdom with which we conduct our lives. Let's look at these two wisdoms, and learn from the Spirit of God about which one we should seek.

12. In this passage, James points us first of all to:

I. WISDOM ORIGINATING FROM TWO DIFFERENT REALMS

1. In verse 15, James is talking about a wisdom that is *"not from above"*. Then in verse 17, we find James talking about *"wisdom that is from above"*.

2. The first thing we note about the two philosophies, or wisdoms, that James discusses in this text is their source - where they originate.

3. Just as you should care about the source of the water you drink, you should likewise care about the source of the thinking that is driving your life.

4. Note first of all that, in this text, we are told about:

A. Human wisdom

1. Look at verse 15. It says, *"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish."*

2. James says that there is a wisdom that is made on earth. It is a product of this world and of the people who live in it.

3. The two other adjectives, "sensual" and "devilish", are merely the trademarks of the kind of wisdom this world produces.

4. The word "sensual" speaks of that which pertains to the natural world. It is the opposite of spiritual. It is that which we can taste and touch, see and smell.

5. The word "devilish" literally means that which is full of demons. When you understand that Satan is the "god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4)", then you understand why this world's wisdom is devilish in its nature.

6. In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, not long after the main character, Christian, sets out on his journey toward the Celestial City, he is encountered by a character named Mr. Worldly Wiseman.

7. Everything that Christian had been told by the Evangelist was disputed by Mr. Worldly Wiseman. His advice was totally different from what Christian had read in his Bible.

8. The truth is; much of what this world considers “conventional wisdom” runs completely counter to the Word of God.
9. There is a human wisdom. It is produced and propagated in this world, and carries with it the values and priorities of this world.
10. Contrary to the human wisdom of verse 15, James also tells us about wisdom from a different realm, that is:

B. Heavenly wisdom

1. Look now at verse 17. There we read, *“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.”*
2. We will look at that verse more closely in a moment, but just note the fact that there is a wisdom that runs contrary to the wisdom of the world, primarily because it originates from a different place.
3. Do you recognize that phrase, *“from above”*? In the opening chapter of James, verse 17 says, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is **from above**, and cometh down from the Father of lights...”*
4. The heavenly wisdom of verse 17 is God’s wisdom. It is the mind of God sent down for the lives of men. It is the divine philosophy, as opposed to the human philosophy.
5. Just as high as the heavens are above the earth, so also is God’s wisdom above man’s wisdom. I Corinthians 1:25 says, *“...the foolishness of God is wiser than men...”*
6. In this passage, James reminds us that there is the collective wisdom of mankind, and there is the complete wisdom of God.
7. With that being said, where does the wisdom with which you run your life come from? Is it human wisdom, or heavenly wisdom?
8. Almost everything we buy has a label on it somewhere with the words, “Made in” followed by the country where the product was manufactured.
9. It used to be that people paid more attention to those labels, because they wanted to know the quality of what they were buying.
10. James reminds us that we ought to know where our wisdom comes from, because there are two different realms from which wisdom originates.

11. Notice a second truth we draw from this text. James teaches us not only about *wisdom originating from two different realms*, but also he points us to:

II. WISDOM OPERATING FOR TWO DIFFERENT REASONS

1. Again, in this section, James is contrasting two different kinds of wisdom. One is true wisdom; the kind the wisest man who ever lived said is “better than rubies (Prov. 8:11)”, and can only come from God (Prov. 2:6).
2. The other is a synthetic, man-made wisdom that in the end will prove not to be wise at all. These two philosophies of life are completely opposite of one another.
3. You can see their difference, not only by looking at their source, but also by looking at the fuel that motivates them.
4. People who live by God’s wisdom are driven and directed by something very different than those who live by this world’s wisdom.
5. Notice how different the reasons for their operation. First of all:

A. One is selfish

1. Look at what James says in verse 14. *“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.”*
2. The next verse refers to this kind of attitude as the wisdom of this world. Look at verse 14, and notice that phrase “bitter envying”.
3. It is translated from two words that literally mean, “zealous jealousy”. The idea is of someone who always wants the better for themselves than others.
4. The word “strife” is a political term, and it describes the work of a politician who will do just about anything to get elected.
5. The overall picture in verse 14 is of a person whose wisdom and philosophy of life is to do whatever they have to do, and step on who ever they have to step on, in order to advance themselves and their cause.
6. The wisdom of the world is motivated by the mantra “Looking out for number one.” It is a selfish philosophy.
7. Someone has well said, “Americans used to say ‘Give me liberty.’ Today they just say, ‘Give me.’”ⁱⁱⁱ

8. James reminds us in verse 14, that this kind of selfish, ambitious, “give me” philosophy of life is not something we should ever be proud of, or boast about, because it is a sure sign of worldly wisdom.

9. Selfishness is the motive behind the world’s wisdom. But notice the opposite wisdom in this chapter. One is selfish, but notice also that:

B. One is spiritual

1. Look back at verse 17. James says, *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure...”* By “first”, James means the first and foremost; the principle and primary thing.

2. James says that the number one quality of the wisdom that comes from God is that it is pure. The word translated “pure” comes from the same root that gives us the word for “holy”

3. The world’s wisdom operates for selfish reasons. God’s wisdom, and the philosophy that is to drive the lives of His people, operates because of spiritual reasons.

4. Because it is pure, it is then also, *“...peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”*

5. The wisdom that God gives is not competitive, combative, or confrontational. It is not harmful, hurtful, or hypocritical.

6. The difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from above is the difference between the millionaire who dies with the first dollar he ever made, and the missionary who gives all he has to a foreign field.

7. It is the difference between a husband who leaves his wife when she’s no longer young and beautiful, and the husband who loves his wife when she’s old and feeble.

8. It is the difference between loving this world, and looking for another that is to come. It is the difference between the experiencing the American Dream and expanding the Kingdom of Christ.

9. One is selfish and one is spiritual. I ask you again. Which wisdom is guiding the path of your life? Which philosophy do you follow?

10. Notice a third thing the Word of God teaches us about the importance of true wisdom. Notice not only that Bro. James tells us about *wisdom originating from two different realms*, and *wisdom operating for two different reasons*, but notice also lastly that we see in this text:

III. WISDOM OFFERED WITH TWO DIFFERENT RESULTS

1. I want to remind you of a verse we looked at in James chapter 1. There in verse 5, Bro James said, *“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. The wisdom from above, the philosophy of God, is not limited to a small, elite group of super spiritual people. In fact, it is freely available to anybody who wants it, and will ask for it.
3. Likewise, the wisdom of the world is also offered free of charge. Just turn your TV on, and pay attention to the messages being pitched to you through the media and the culture.
4. Both the wisdom of this world and the wisdom from above are offered to you. However, before you choose a philosophy for your life, you should look at the résumé of both forms of wisdom.
5. James points us to the results of this world’s wisdom, as well as the results of God’s wisdom. Notice in this text:

A. How harmful human wisdom can be

1. Look at verse 16. It says, *“For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.”*
2. We have already seen that “envy and strife” are the motives that drive worldly wisdom. The Word of God teaches here that where you have envy and strife, there will also be the fruits of those bitter traits.
3. Where human wisdom and the philosophy of this world is at work, James says “there is confusion”. Immediately, we are reminded of I Corinthians 14:33, where Paul said, *“For God is not the author of confusion...”*
4. Human wisdom is harmful, first and foremost because it is not of God. He does not create the instability and disorder that envy and strife always cause.
5. Along with confusion, James says that worldly wisdom will also result in “every evil work.” The word “evil” there really means “that which is useless; good-for-nothing.”
6. In other words, worldly wisdom will inevitably result in a confusing life, full of things that have no spiritual and eternal value.

7. In 2004, Donald Trump published a book entitled *How to Get Rich*. Just five months later, Trump's company, Trump Hotels and Casino Resorts, went bankrupt for the second time in a dozen years.ⁱⁱⁱ

8. The wisdom of this world claims to teach you how to be happy, successful, and fulfilled. However, James reminds us that its track record is much different than its claims.

9. Notice not only that we see in this text how harmful human wisdom can be, but notice also:

B. How helpful heaven's wisdom can be

1. Again, in contrast with results of man's wisdom, James tells us in verse 17, that the wisdom from above is *"full of mercy and good fruits."*

2. He goes on in verse 18, and says, *"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."*

3. Basically what that means is that because the wisdom of God begins with a pure and peaceful motive, the fruit it produces will also be pure and peaceful.

4. You see; if you start with God's wisdom, which is all the things described in verse 17, you don't have to worry about the results.

5. The Bible says that, *"...whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap..."* When you operate from a philosophy of purity and peace, grace and giving, genuineness and godliness, those are the kind of results you expect to receive in life.

6. Two wisdoms – philosophies of life – are offered to us today. One is the wisdom of the world; the other is the wisdom of the God who created the world.

7. Their origins and their outcomes are drastically different, and should be considered carefully when it comes time for you to decide which wisdom you will follow.

8. Whenever the newspapers would report that the famous writer, Mark Twain, was suffering from illness, people would send him all sorts of cures and remedies.

9. Twain would send each this same reply: "Dear Sir (or Madam): I try every remedy sent to me. I am now on No. 87. Yours is 2,653. I am looking forward to its beneficial results."^{iv}

10. When we live by God's wisdom, we can look forward to its beneficial results.

1. Some of you may be wondering, so what is God's wisdom? Is it a particular Scripture, or some system of living? What is God's plan for wisdom?
2. The truth is that God's wisdom is not found in a plan; but in a Person. In I Corinthians 1:30, Paul says, "*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom...*"
3. Just a few verses before that, in verse 24, Paul refers to Jesus as, "*...Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*"
4. To know Jesus is to know the wisdom of God. The world largely ignores Jesus, and the so-called wise men of this age reject him completely.
5. However, to believe upon Jesus, and to live your life under His lordship and leadership, is to be smart about wisdom.
6. He is the wisdom from above, and through faith in Him, we can live wisely in a foolish world.

ⁱ *ESV*

ⁱⁱ Pentz, Croft M., *The Complete Book of Zingers*, (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1990), p. 273

ⁱⁱⁱ Donald Trump: How to Get Rich, *anecdote.com*, accessed 1/28/10,
<http://www.anecdote.com/index.php?aid=17308>

^{iv} Perfect Remedy, *anecdote.com*, accessed 1/28/10, <http://www.anecdote.com/index.php?aid=9237>