

Wisdom – Needed

James follows his comparison of the right and wrong use of the tongue originating from the heart with comparing wisdom and understanding that comes from above or below. The living out of wisdom in ones life is evidence of ones faith and spiritual maturity. Both God’s Word, the most validated of all ancient writings and ancient philosophers considered acquiring wisdom one of the primary goals of life.

However, as we will see shortly there is a vast difference between spiritual wisdom from above and worldly wisdom from below. Wisdom is not just knowledge but the understanding of how to effectively apply the truth of wisdom to ones everyday life.

Solomon understood this need when he penned God’s inspired words, “**The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding.**” (Proverbs 4:7 NASB) The ancient Roman philosopher Cicero wrote 900 years later in the 1st century B.C., wisdom is “**...the best gift of the gods and is the mother of all good things.**” Wisdom seems to be more available with age because as one matures they see their lack of wisdom and are willing to take the time to study and seek wisdom. Doug Larson, American journalist who is now 91 years old wrote in his column awhile back, “**Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you would have preferred to talk.**” These men, Solomon, Cicero and Larson understood wisdom comes from maturity and listening to others. As Christians there is no one we should more carefully listen to, learn from and adapt our lives to than God. We do this through His Word and by the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. The Hebrews understood from the Old Testament that true wisdom was not just intellectual, but behavioral. The biggest fool may have intellectual knowledge and fail to apply it. Wisdom takes knowledge and

righteously applies it to ones life.

Solomon sought wisdom, but along the journey he moved from seeking God's wisdom to man's wisdom. He wrote, "I said in my heart, 'I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.' ¹⁷ And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. ¹⁸ For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18 ESV) Solomon is saying he came to realize human wisdom is totally bankrupt resulting in striving after the wind and ultimately increases ones sorrow.

Even the Hebrews of the 40-year exodus kept turning from God to the wisdom of man and getting into trouble. God said of these stiff-necked people, "Would that they were wise, that they understood this - that they would discern their future!" (Deuteronomy 32:29 NASB) God was concerned with their spiritual wisdom, for it was only by God's wisdom, the spiritual wisdom from above that would turn the Hebrews from apostasy to living by faith, becoming obedient to God and thus knowing spiritual wisdom.

The New Testament sharpens the lessons of the Old concerning wisdom. The Apostle Paul declared that Christ is "... the power of God and the wisdom of God. ... and it is Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption..." (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30 ESV) Saul the Pharisee, a man of great learning and intellectual knowledge, by the power of Christ became Paul and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit true wisdom, that is filled with righteousness, is found through the study of God's Word, listening and modeling ones life after the Living Word, Jesus the Christ and seeking wisdom from God in prayer, it is these that bring sanctification. Writing to the church in Colossae Paul

wanted the brethren to understand that true wisdom comes from Christ and that in Christ, “... are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3 ESV) The first lesson of wisdom is to be able to discern what is false and the second is to know that which is true and how it is lived out in ones life. Pastor Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher and author of the 19th century, a man of God that I greatly admire, wrote, “Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.” Again, we find that men seeking God with an open heart and mind and willing to be obedient gain spiritual wisdom for their lives and are able to help others to begin the path of gaining spiritual wisdom.

Wisdom - Test Of Faith

James in the 3rd chapter of his letter now takes up wisdom as still another test of living faith. The type of wisdom, either from above or below, a person has is revealed by the life he lives. Men who live by wisdom below, whether they call themselves Christian or not, demonstrate by their lives they have no relationship with Christ and have not submitted to the Holy Spirit. They may espouse much Christian sounding language but their life reveals they do not worship, serve and obey Christ above the world. However those, no matter what their station in this world, who possess true faith will manifest the wisdom of God and this is the only wisdom from above.

James has been speaking to the congregation about the use of the tongue, in verse 10 we read, “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.” Now James brings forth the relationship of wisdom, for out of the heart comes the command to bless and curse with the tongue and wisdom tells the heart the difference. James asks everyone within the church in verse 13,

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” The problem James is continuing to address is that in the Jerusalem church there are both true believers and those merely professing to believe. Through the tests he is writing of he hopes to reveal those who are true believers and those who are not. James is asking in what way are you wise and in what way are you understanding? Think before you answer, James is warning, because how you answer will reveal your inner character and the spiritual condition of both your heart and soul.

Although James uses the two terms of “wise” and “understanding” synonymously here in verse 13 there is a difference in their meaning. To the Greeks the word used here and translated as “wise” means theoretical knowledge, theory or philosophy. To the Jews “wise” means a careful application of knowledge in living one's life and wisdom is related to the understanding of God. The word James uses that is translated as “understanding” appears only this once in the entire Bible. To the Greek it means specialized knowledge as might be needed by a skilled tradesman. It holds this meaning for the Jews as well and thus deepens the impact of the word “wise” that precedes the word “understanding.” James is then saying to the brethren of the Jerusalem church that if you claim wisdom and understanding, prove it or show it by your good behavior. As the 19th century German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote, “**Behavior is the mirror in which everyone shows their image.**”

James continues to move forward with the concept that if one lays claim to wisdom and understanding it is not only seen in their good behavior but also in their “deeds.” This causes one to reflect as to what activities they are involved in and how it serves others. My beloved, what do you do to help others? You, by the very fact you call yourself Christian, represent Christ your Lord. How are you representing Christ as his ambassador here on earth?

As we move through verse 13 we now see James has added another qualifier – deeds are to be done in “gentleness.” Gentleness is character trait given by God to his children. Why do I say this? Because from the Scripture we know gentleness is part of the singular fruit of the Spirit. Turn in your Bible to Galatians chapter 5. Reading beginning at verse 22, “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ **gentleness**, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Gentleness is wedged right between faithfulness and self-control. Now drop down a couple of verses to chapter 6 and verse 1, “**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.**” If you knew my sins you might not want to be here this morning to hear me preach and if I knew all your sins I am not sure I would want to be here preaching to you. You need to understand sin is sin; all sin separates us from God. It is humans that develop a hierarchy to sin and most assuredly the consequences of sin can be quite different, but if I am harsh in dealing with your sin the scriptures say I will be judged accordingly. Paul in his letter to the believers in Rome wanted them to understand it is only God who judges righteously, not man, “**Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?**” (Romans 2:3 ESV) You see Jesus said, “**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**” (Matthew 5:5 ESV) Meekness is NOT weakness but serving others with love and wisdom and understanding. Jesus said of himself, “**Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and when you trust me YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.**” (Matthew 11:29 NASB) We are to model our lives after Jesus who gave his life that we might have salvation. John Newton, the former slave trader and author of Amazing Grace said, “**The chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are the Holy Spirit, and prayer.**” Great advice and when followed the result cannot help but increase one’s spiritual wisdom.

Wisdom - From Below

James continues countering “meekness of wisdom” from above with man’s wisdom. Reading at verse 14, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” Wisdom of the world is so unlike God’s imparted wisdom. The world’s wisdom may contain some good and honorable things but is also contains jealousy, ambition and the false enticements of the world. False wisdom does not recognize God’s sovereignty or His will or His truth. This is not to say Satan the prince of this world does not put in just enough of God’s truth to convince people that his lies are of God and not from him. It is God’s Word that tells us the difference between the truth and a lie.

Motivation for why we do and say and live the way we do is always a matter of the condition of one’s heart. The prophet Ezekiel wrote the words of God, “I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” (Ezekiel 11:19-20 ESV) The result of giving our lives to God and letting the Holy Spirit direct our lives is we receive a spiritual “heart of flesh” and it is not of human flesh but the flesh of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and we are forever changed.

When I sought the wisdom of the world, I was not that different from others. As a husband and father my priorities was career first, because the world said the more money I made the more successful I was and the more important I was. The result - I was a bad husband and father and almost lost my family by my ambition. The world tells women that they can have it all – career, husband, children and home.

However this is humanly impossible to have it all and wisdom understand this. Putting career first will result in their husband and children being short-changed. How many of us observe families where both the husband and wife are working 50 hours a week at their 40-hour a week job. They drop the kids off at daycare or school, after work they pick the kids up from daycare or after-school program and drive through the fast food lane, and getting home slam a burger down. They fight over getting the kids to do their homework for an hour or 2. Once the kids are in bed they plop down in front of the TV for a couple of hours because they are exhausted. There is little time for romance or quality time with each other. On the other hand if the husband is working 50 hours a week and comes home tired, but upon arriving the kids have finished their homework, dinner is ready to be served and after dinner the family spends quality time that includes talking of godly things instead of computer games and TV and the environment of the home is so very different. However, I don't want to let stay-at-home moms and their husbands off the hook. Too often moms put their children before their husband and this is not right. Too often the husband allows the wife to become the spiritual leader of the family and oversee discipline of the children and this is not right either. If both parents need to work then they must also work hard for the proper balance in their lives and the lives of their children. If the wife stays home the same is true – they must seek balance that comes with wisdom from above.

The term James uses here of “selfish ambition” in verse 14 means strife, contentiousness, self-focused selfishness. We can observe throughout history what the results have been. The term “selfish ambition” originally was applied to doing work for selfish gain and from this other implications resulted and grew until it came to be closely associated with those seeking political offices for often their desire was for power and influence and personal gain. I know that is hard to believe when we look at the politicians in our own country. But, we must remember when a

person's motives are based on the world's wisdom it inevitably leads to arrogance and selfish ambition.

A Christian whose life demonstrates the wisdom of the world is in truth a fraud. James in chapter 1 wrote, ¹⁷“Every (*How many is every?*) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” *Every perfect gift is from God and there is NO variation – his gifts are not from the world below, but from above.* ¹⁸“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, (*Who is the word of truth? It is Jesus!*) that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1:17-18 ESV) We are the firstfruits of our Lord and Savior for we have been restored and reconciled to God the Father and no longer belong to the world.

It is clear from verse 15 and 16 that the wisdom of the world below is false and is demonic. The source of fallen human wisdom is Satan. If it were not so we would not experience, as Jesus said we would. Please turn to the Gospel According to Matthew chapter 24. Jesus said before he returned we would experience “... wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.” Have we not seen these things increase over history and even accelerate in our lifetimes?

Jesus continues, ⁹“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.” *More Christians have been martyred in the last 100 years than the 1900 prior. In our nation one cannot condemn the behavior of any group without it being a hate crime – with one exception that of Christians.* Jesus continues, ¹⁰“And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and

lead many astray. What does it mean to be Christian in today's world? Is there unity found in the only eternal truth – the Bible? Continuing in verse 12, **“And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.”** But then Jesus adds the hope of all true Christians saying, ¹³**“But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”**

(Matthew 24:6-14 ESV) My beloved we are called to endure and we are called to proclaim the saving gospel of Christ to everyone we meet. Will you live by the wisdom from above that is eternal or the wisdom from below that is demonic? As Martin Luther said, **“If thou art wise thou knowest thine own ignorance; and thou are ignorant if thou knowest not thyself.”** My beloved, seek wisdom from above.

Wisdom - From Above

Praise be to God, that James ends with the truth from above and its blessing. James writes, ¹⁷**“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”** (ESV) Wisdom from above refers to God's divine wisdom that he so graciously bestows on those who trust in Christ. The more we trust and submit to God the Holy Spirit the greater God's wisdom impacts who we are. Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5 with the Beatitudes, then follows with: his comparison of salt and light, that He came to fulfill the Law, the sermon continues with how we are to deal with anger, lust, divorce, the giving and taking oaths, we are to give our desire to retaliate over to him and turn our cheek, leading us to love our enemies, that we are to give to the needy, in chapter 6 he teaches us the Lord's Prayer, the purpose of fasting, we are not to seek the treasures of this world over the treasures of heaven, as his children we know that for a period of time the world belongs to Satan and we are not to be anxious, we are to be careful about judging others, if we live by faith we

can ask and we will receive, we are to treat others as we want to be treated. He then gives the parable of the Tree and its Fruit – good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit. Jesus continues with the fact that we will encounter people who say they are of the Lord and serve people in his name, but the truth is they know Jesus not and he will deny them before his Father, and then, and then as he ends his sermon in chapter 7 where he says, this is important, take Jesus’ words into your heart and hear his wisdom and let it change who you are, Jesus said, **“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”** (Matthew 7:24 ESV) The wisdom from above is first pure and therefore its fruit is peace, gentleness, and thinking and acting reasonably. When we let the wisdom from above invade our hearts we grow in mercy and good fruits. We are able to stand firm in God’s Word in the face of all sorts of attacks with unwavering hearts and without hypocrisy because we hear the words of God and do them and this makes us **“like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”**

When we hold firm to God’s wisdom from above and live life with mercy and good fruits the natural result is living in God’s peace. First peace with God and secondly peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ for everything is based on the Word of God and third, with those unbelievers in our life because even though they disagree with who we have become they experience our love for them. The prophet Isaiah said, **“... the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.”** (Isaiah 32:17 NASB)

I desire to live by God’s wisdom from above. It is my prayer for myself and for each of you that as individuals and as a community we can fulfill this great and wonderful calling of wisdom and understanding God has given us from above.
Amen!