

“TWO KINDS OF WISDOM.”

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January 25, 2015, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: James 3:13-18

Introduction.

It would be a safe bet to say that all people desire to be happy. They would disagree on what would make them happy, but they all desire to be happy. The list of things that would make them happy is very long. I won't even take time to start, you can fill in your own blanks

Imagine being told you could ask for one thing and it would be given to you? Like having a genie out of a bottle saying he will grant you one request. What one thing would you ask for that would make you most happy?

Something like that actually happened once. There was a man who was told he could ask for anything he wanted and it would be given to him. The answer he gave seemed to surprise the person granting the wish.

God offered Solomon a blank check, “ask me for anything and I will grant it.” That is a true test of a person's character. What Solomon asked for said something about him.

II Chronicles 1:11-12 God answered Solomon, “Because ... you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king, 12 wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor.”

Wisdom is such a good thing it's a package deal. He who gains wisdom gains many good things as well.

Let's briefly define wisdom as the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, good judgment and insight.

And this leads to a question, who is wise and understanding among you? Who do you look to for wisdom? Whose life is characterized by wisdom, prudence, discernment, spiritual maturity?

By asking the question the implication is that it's something you can notice, you know it when you see it.

James 3:13-18

James tells us that we don't just need wisdom, but we need a certain kind of wisdom. It turns out there are two very difference and opposing kinds of wisdom, a wisdom that is earthly and a wisdom that is from above.

James helps us get a grasp of these two kinds of wisdom by contrasting their origins, their operations and their outcomes.

Contrast in Origins, James 3:15, 17a.

Proverbs 4:7 urges us all to get wisdom, whatever it costs, whatever it takes. Well, where does wisdom come from? Where can we go to get it? James being the matter of fact, rather blunt kind of person he is, boils it down to two places.

Man's Wisdom comes from the world, the flesh, or the Devil.

James 3:15, 17 This is ... earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

James 3:15 (KJV) This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

Man's wisdom comes from experts, from the media, from text books and computers, man centered psychology or philosophy. It's about what feels good, or seems good to us. Counterfeit guidance comes, for example, through Ouija boards, séances, fortunetelling, and astrology (Lev. 20:6; 19:26; II Kings 21:6).

Worldly wisdom is anything that doesn't acknowledge God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the Bible. This wisdom though seemingly wise, leads you farther from truth and farther away from the source and origin of true wisdom and deeper into bondage.

Romans speaks of these people as those who claimed to be wise but denied God and

Romans 1:21-23 ... became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.

Wisdom from above comes from God.

Scripture teaches Godly wisdom begins with the *fear* of the Lord.

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

To fear God is the threshold of great wisdom. Those who fear God above all else almost always know and do what is right and best.

What does that mean, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?

We have been told many times that this kind of fear isn't fright or being scarred. This is a filial fear, the fear of a son to a father, a kind of reverence or honor or deference. To put it in other words, this is a humble, teachable kind of spirit or attitude.

A person who fears the Lord is a person who is willing to distrust his own thoughts, willing to submit his ideas and will to God's. Proud people, conceited people, self-important people don't gain wisdom because they don't bend well, they don't bow before the wisdom and will of God. A proud person will not admit he needs help or that he needs to change.

All wisdom is either worldly or other worldly in origin. As God is all wise, so God is the only true source of true wisdom.

Contrast in Operations, James 3:13-14, 17.

Since these two kinds of wisdom come from two entirely different places, as you would expect, they operate in entirely different ways.

James describes the character or nature of false/true wisdom, worldly/godly wisdom.

James 3:13-14, 17 By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ... 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Fleshly wisdom operates from a sinful heart with sinful desires.

Worldly wisdom is ultimately from the devil and so devilish or demonic in its manifestations.

Fleshly wisdom is envious, jealous, full of boasting, strife, malice and deceit. It is chaotic, divisive, disorderly, selfish and self-centered and self-serving. Pride is the original sin of Satan. Envy is the mother of much if not most strife.

Worldly wisdom is destructive to faith, contrary to God.

Worldly wisdom is what killed Jesus and calls the cross foolishness.

Worldly wisdom leads us away from Christ and the cross and away from acknowledging sin.

You know this wisdom by what it doesn't talk about, what it leaves out or covers over.

The wisdom of God has nine characteristics.

Meek, humble. This wisdom comes at a cost, a cost to our pride, to self-exaltation and self-sufficiency. One of the chief characteristics of a wise person is humility, never a know-it-all kind of attitude.

Pure – True to God, Godly. Not double-minded or compromising.

Peaceable – without strife. In so far as it depends on you (Rom 12:18).

Gentle – without severity. Considerate. Making allowances for another. Not harsh even when right.

Open to reason – reasonable, approachable, teachable, without arrogance or stubbornness.
Yielding in matters of opinion but not in matters of truth.

Full of mercy – gracious, kind, forgiving. Compassion in action. Gives what we all need.

Full of good fruits – full of well doing; it's a blessing to others.

Impartial – balanced, treating all fairly.

Sincere – without hypocrisy. All of the above is real, and not a show.

Look at those nine words again. Ask yourself do those words characterize your speech, do they characterize your working relationships, your parenting, your attitude at church or school? Is our life characterized by wisdom from above? To the extent you lack these characteristics to that extent you lack wisdom.

Notice all these characteristics imply action, doing something, behaving in a certain way. Wisdom is tied not just to the brain but to the heart and hands. It's practical.

Contrast in Outcomes, James 3:16, 18.

James 3:16, 18 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ... 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Origin determines outcome.

If you want to know what was planted, look at the harvest. You can judge a tree by its fruit. You can know faith by its works. You can judge wisdom by its outcomes. The fruit and quality reveals the source.

Lots of people claim to be wise or to have wisdom, so how can you tell the difference.

Worldly wisdom produces trouble (vs. 16).

It becomes clear very quickly that worldly wisdom is not wisdom at all. The word for it is folly, foolishness. It is chaos and disorder and evil. Its fruit is bad. It's what you would expect from the devil.

For all of his wisdom from above, when Solomon started following wisdom from below in his choice of wives, it led to disastrous results.

When Abraham and Lot got too big to stay together, their herds were too numerous, they decided to separate. Abraham let Lot pick first and Lot look at the fertile Jordan River valley and decided the area of Sodom and Gomorrah looked nice. He followed the wisdom of the world and in the end everything he owned went up in smoke. Nothing good came from his decision.

Abraham's decision pleased God and led to great blessings, blessings that ultimately flow down to us as the children of Abraham through Jesus.

Godly wisdom produces blessings (vs. 18).

We reap what we sow. The outcome or fruit of peace is contrasted here with disorder and every evil thing.

Godly wisdom often seems to put us at a disadvantage in the world, but in the end God's wisdom is supreme and always wins.

We may lose a job or lose a contract or lose a friend or lose a competitive advantage because of following God's wisdom, it may cost you, but in the end God is glorified and He is pleased and blesses us.

If you sow unrighteousness you will get unrighteousness, if you sow righteousness you will get righteousness. Godly wisdom means choosing the best means to get to the best ends.

Applications and conclusions.

Consider the example of Solomon again. Right after he asked for wisdom two prostitutes came to him, one with a dead baby and one with a live baby, each claiming the live baby was theirs. Solomon asked for a sword and said cut the live baby in half and give half to each.

1 Kings 3:26-28 But the woman whose son was alive yearned for her son and said, "No, my lord, give her the child and by no means slay it." And the other said: "It shall be neither mine nor yours, divide it." Then the king said, "Give the living child to the first woman. She is its mother." And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the ***wisdom of God*** was in him, to render justice.

There wasn't a verse in the Bible telling Solomon what to do in this situation, there was no direct commandment of God. Solomon had to exercise mature judgment and great discernment, he took the wisdom from God and applied it in an wise way and the outcome was a great blessing to the people of Israel.

We all know people who are really smart but not very wise. There's lots of knowledge in the world, but very little wisdom in the world.

Wisdom has a moral quality, it's the skillful application of knowledge and intelligence. The point of seeking and obtaining wisdom is to be able to live wisely, to see and do what is right in the right situation.

Being wise doesn't mean we know everything or that we understand everything that is happening to us or around us. We learn to trust God's wisdom even when we are in the dark.

Who is wise and understanding among us? Are you? Do you desire to be? Let me leave you with three ways to gain and apply wisdom from above that leads to true happiness.

Scripture.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom

If you read the newspaper every day or some Internet news source you will be worldly wise. If you read the Bible every day you will become spiritually wise.

If you will not read Scripture, if you will not reflect on what God's Word say, you will not grow in wisdom, and in fact, you will grow in folly. Your future happiness depends on you getting and keeping the wisdom of God from His Word.

Prayer.

Solomon was not born wise, he asked for wisdom.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

If you lack wisdom, if you need wisdom, ask for it. You have not because you ask not.

Paul prayed for wisdom for the churches he wrote:

Ephesians 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Colossian 1:9 we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding

Jesus.

Wisdom from above is not abstract or impersonal, wisdom from above is personal, it has a name and that name is Jesus. Jesus is the wisdom of God in us. To gain it we must be born again.

In Christ is hidden all the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

“Solomon spoke God's wisdom. Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). Others had spoken truth; he is the truth. Others had pointed the way to life; he is the way and the life (John 14:6). Others had given promises, but "all the promises of God find their yes in him" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Others had offered God's forgiveness; Jesus bought it by his death. Therefore, in him are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). To know and love and follow this Jesus is to own the treasure of ultimate and eternal happiness. Therefore, the command, "Get wisdom," means first and foremost "Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus!" in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom” (John Piper).

We will conclude by putting this wisdom from above into song and making it our prayer to God.