

### Two Different Kinds of Wisdom

#### James 3:13-18

James 3:13-18 - *"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup> This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."*

#### Background Notes

Question: What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Answer: Knowledge is the apprehension of truth in one's **mind**; wisdom is the application of truth to one's **life**.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs is called "wisdom literature" because it gives us guidance for the application of truth to our everyday lives. The epistle of James is also called "wisdom literature." Certainly the book of James contains doctrine, but it is also filled with practical application -- the application of truth to our everyday lives. That is wisdom, and James 1:5 tells us that if anyone lacks wisdom, he can ask God, and God will provide it.

James 3 describes the wisdom that we can request from God -- the *"wisdom from above."* However, we need to be aware that there is also "wisdom from below," as we've seen from these verses. So we need to be very careful! We must be sure that we are following the right "wisdom," especially when we make everyday decisions. We'll talk more about that in our practical application.

How do we know for sure which wisdom we're following? That is exactly the rhetorical question raised by James in verse 13: *"Who is wise and understanding among you?"* In other words, how do we know for sure we are following the right wisdom - the "wisdom from above"?

The answer is to look at the results, as we see in verses 13 and 14. We can ask ourselves these questions: How is my conduct? Do I tend to be bitter and jealous? Am I self-seeking? Do I always make my decisions on the basis of "what's in it for me?" If we have to answer "yes" to the negative results, then we can be **sure** that we're not following wisdom from above, but rather wisdom from below. We are just kidding ourselves if we think we're following the wisdom from above.

#### Doctrinal Points

## 1. The wisdom from below is earthly, natural and demonic.

Verse 15, speaking of the “wisdom” that results in pride and envy and self-seeking and evil: *“This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.”*

The wisdom from below is first of all **earthly** -- it is of this world. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says, *“The world by wisdom knows not God.”* Wisdom from below does not take God into account. Did the theory of evolution, for example, originate from following the wisdom from above or the wisdom from below? The answer is obvious - the “wisdom from below”! The theory of evolution was not born on the basis of evidence. The evidence does not support evolution, whether it is evidence from the laboratory or evidence from the fossil record. The theory of evolution originated as an alternative to creation so that the God of creation could be removed from the equation.

Secondly, the wisdom from below is **sensual**. It is **natural** “wisdom.” It is the wisdom of the flesh -- the fallen sinful nature that we all possess. For example: if you were to make a job change only on the basis of more money or more power – which wisdom are you following? Once again, the answer is obvious – the wisdom from below. If you’re following the wisdom from above, there obviously are other factors to consider, such how a job change would affect your family and church.

Finally, the wisdom from below is **demonic**. Satan is the ultimate source of the wisdom from below! Satan has designed this world system to appeal to our fallen sinful natures. Which of the two wisdoms tells us that, as Christians, we should not have to suffer for our faith? Was that suffering only for the early Christians? Once again the answer is obvious – that kind of “wisdom” is **not** the wisdom from above, because 2 Timothy 3:12 says that *“All who will live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”*

Remember what our Lord said to Peter when Peter began to rebuke the Lord for talking about his coming suffering? What did the Lord say? “Get thee behind me, Satan.” The wisdom from below is **earthly, natural, and demonic**.

## 2. The wisdom from above is first of all pure.

Verse 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.”* Once again, notice that it is the **results** that prove what wisdom you’re following.

If you’re following the wisdom from above you will want peace, and you will be working for peace in your family and in your fellowship. If you are following the wisdom from above you will be a gentle person, not pushy and power-hungry. If you are following the wisdom from above, you will be willing to give up your own rights for the sake of others. If you’re following the wisdom from above you will be full of mercy, and not seek revenge when someone wrongs you. If you’re

following the wisdom from above you will not show favoritism. You will not be a hypocrite. If you're following the wisdom from above, your life and the fruit of your life will be characterized by righteousness and peace!

Notice that the **very first thing** about the wisdom from above is that it is **pure!** It is not tainted with wrongdoing in any way. Here's an illustration. A number of years ago our family was involved in buying a home in a new location, and we were praying for God's guidance. We found a house that we liked except for one thing: the estimated real estate taxes were way too high, and way out of line with the rest of the neighborhood. The house had just been renovated and the taxes would be reassessed based on the selling price. We told the realtor that we liked the house, and we had a sizeable down payment available, but we were reluctant to buy it because we thought the taxes would be too high. The next day the realtor called back and said that our problem was solved! Oh, really? How? Well, because we had a sizeable down payment, the owner of the house had agreed to lower his listed price, so that on the official record the selling price – and our taxes -- would be much lower. Meanwhile, off the record, we would pay the difference in cash out of our "down payment" money -- and everyone would be happy. "You'll pay the owner the difference 'under the table' and the tax people will never know!" Of course we said, "Praise the Lord! What a wonderful answer to prayer!" Right? **Wrong! No way!** We knew that this was not wisdom from above because wisdom from above is first of all **pure!** There is nothing "under the table" about the wisdom from above! We didn't buy that house, and soon after the Lord led us in a completely different direction, which was clearly his will. The wisdom from above is **first of all pure!**

## Practical Application

### Remember, there are two wisdoms when you make decisions!

We all make decisions every day -- big decisions and small decisions. I just gave you a personal example of a big decision, but you can be sure that no matter what decision you have to make, big or small, Satan will try to trick you into making the wrong decision! Remember the wisdom from below is earthly, and natural, and demonic. The wrong decision will look very appealing and seem so right. Remember the wrong decision that Joshua and the Israelites made when they were tricked by the Gibeonites?

*Joshua 9:3-15: But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us." Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you dwell*

*among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?" But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?"*

*So they said to him: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth. Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us."' This bread of ours we took hot for our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."*

*Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but **they did not ask counsel of the LORD**. So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them."*  
[emphasis added]

Question: What wisdom were the Israelites following when they made their decision to make peace with the Gibeonites -- wisdom from above or wisdom from below? Obviously they were not following the wisdom from above, because *"they did not ask counsel of the Lord."*

Everything **looked** all right! It certainly **appeared** that the Gibeonites were on a peace mission from a far country. But Satan is a master at deception! 2 Corinthians 11:14 says that Satan can disguise or transform himself into an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 2:11 talks about the **schemes** of Satan, and Ephesians 6:11 says that we should put on the whole armor of God so that we may be able to stand against the **wiles** or the schemes of the devil. The bad decision to make a peace treaty with the Gibeonites caused problems for the Israelites for years to come.

So be very sure that you are following the wisdom from above, especially when you make major decisions. Pray for God's guidance and follow the guidelines of James chapter 3. When you make decisions, remember -- there are two kinds of wisdom!