

## Two Forms Of Wisdom

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. <sup>16</sup>For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup>Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:13-18)

Here, as we read these words that tell us about two forms “wisdom”, “wisdom” that comes out from the hearts of men, and the “wisdom” that comes from above, from God Himself, I'd like for us to take the first few moments and observe some of the people God has chosen to be the ones who would give His precious “wisdom” to us through the words of these scriptures.

Within this small Book, our bible, are all of the “Jewels of Wisdom and Understanding” that mankind will ever need to enable each of us to navigate our way through all the many obstacles and opportunities of these present days, and then also, Praise be to God, on further into the eternities of heaven.

And to say that God is the cleverest of all teachers is certainly the greatest of understatements. For that reason, we should stop often and gaze at God's amazing abilities to convey thoughts and meanings to our creaturely minds, and to marvel at all that He does to bring our small minds into at least some measure of knowledge of Him and of His inscrutable and mysterious ways.

One of God's ways of helping our small minds to grasp an understanding of Him and of His nature is through the unique personalities of these many writers of scripture. And make no mistake, God didn't just look around the world and select the most learned minds of men to convey His messages to the us.

Not at all! Folks, God has a “plan” that He and the other members of the Trinity put into place before the foundations of the world and He is now working it out! Recall the words of Psalm 139 where God tells us plainly that He personally wove the fibers of each of our beings together within our mother's wombs. And as He did that, He wove into each of us special and varied intellects and personality types, each especially equipped to be able to do the work He would later call each of us to do.

And so it was with the writers of these scriptures, and so it was with this Apostle James. From our study of Ephesians 1, we know that God uniquely chose James before the foundations of the earth. And as He wove James together in his mother's womb, He was planning what and how James would later write these precious words of scripture that we are reading here today.

And why is knowing all of this so important to you and me? It's because God wanted a unique intellect and personality type to say these words to your and my unique intellect and personality type so that we could, at this moment, comprehend His message for us today. Isn't that amazing! Folks, God is that sovereign, that providential and that comprehensive in His omniscient abilities.

So then, these words, given to us here in the Book of James were written uniquely for you and for me, an yes, for others like us who have read them over the centuries, so that we could properly receive these truths and then go out and use them for God's purposes within His kingdom. What an amazing God and what an amazing plan!

And I would like to face you and me with the question, “Do you, do I, believe that these words I'm saying are true? Do you believe that God is that intentional and that purposeful with His words of truth? You should! I should!

So then, this man, James, is understood to be the half-brother of the Lord Jesus. We don't know how or by what means he became the leader of the Jerusalem Church, but these scriptures give us the understanding that at the time he penned these words, he was. And we have no evidence within these scriptures that James had any special training and education to prepare him for that role

as the leader and to enable him to write the words that he has written here. Like Jesus, James had grown up in Nazareth as the son of a lowly carpenter. But again, from these words, it is obvious that He had all the abilities he would need. Praise be to God, that is how the Holy Spirit works!

By contrast, another writer of these scriptures, the Apostle Paul, was highly educated in the best of rabbinical schools, and well trained in his oratory skills, able to debate the Old Testament scriptures with the best of the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. And even able to cleverly navigate his way through conversations with the best of the gentile intellectual groups. And yes, all that was part of the plan of God to facilitate His message to those special people that Paul would minister too.

But again, here with James, his approach to the teaching of the truths of God is very different from that of the Apostle Paul. James' manner of wording was much more on the level of common folk. We see that clearly in the first half of this chapter as James used ordinary examples and analogies to convey his points, the word-pictures of horse's bits and ship's rudders guiding the thoughts and words and behaviors of men and women. Most anyone with ordinary intellect would be able to understand his reasoning.

But may I also be quick to keep reminding us here that these words, while being filtered through the mind and personality of James, were also mysteriously the "exact" words that the Holy Spirit enabled and guided James to say. The exact words!

How that takes place, I'm not fully sure. The bible scholars call such things "concurrency", "concurrency", the phenomena by which a person's mind and thoughts come into line with the mind and thoughts of God.

One bible teacher compares it to the way that two separate rivers can meet at a fork and then begin to flow into one, creating a whole new and different river. That is how the Ohio River was formed.

That seems to me to be a reasonable, though unfathomable explanation of the way that the mind and thought processes of the Apostle James met and converged with the mind and thoughts of God, producing words that were thought up by James, but were, all along, the words of God. "Concurrence"!

And so, may I say again, these words that we read here in this Book of James, while being thought of through the mind and personality of James, were also mysteriously the "exact" words that the Holy Spirit enabled and guided James to think and to say. The exact words! Amazing!

And that is the way that this entire bible was given to us. God's Holy Spirit spoke every word into and through the minds of every one of its writers, and then out onto the pages of this bible, leaving not even one syllable to come solely from the thoughts of the writers. We know that to be absolutely true from scriptures such as in 2 Timothy 3. There we are told that

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.  
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And also, from 2 Peter 1:20-21

20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Folks, please do understand and accept the words of this bible to be truth. These words are the very "Breath of God" and are precious beyond measure, providing light and life to anyone who accepts them. Praise be to God!

And again, here with James, God has given this Apostle a very special ministry to people like you and me. Where the writings of the Apostle Paul are filled with deep theological teachings, God has chosen His Apostle James to give us instructions from a far more practical perspective, truths that we can use for the daily occurrences of life, but still "rich" in pure theological truth.

One of the methods of teaching that God employs with His writers of scripture is to draw very obvious and sometimes extreme contrasts between points of understanding that He desires us to grasp. Here, in the first half of this chapter, God gives stern instructions regarding the pitfalls that lie in the path of those who “teach”. And while yes, these instructions are excellent practical advice for all teachers, He would have those who are called to be teachers of His Word, His scriptures, to be especially careful, because good and well-intended efforts can easily go off-course.

And here also, God focuses on our “tongue”. And He points out how we can take one of the most useful and needful and practical instruments of our body, our “tongue”, and misuse it for sinful purposes. And here, God is purposeful in pointing out the “utter foolishness” of our behavior, often bringing about great harm, even when we might intend “good”.

And then, as we begin to read the second half of this chapter, we see the great contrast that is being drawn between “foolishness” and “wisdom”, the foolishness that can be brought about by the misuse of our tongue, and the simple “wisdom” that can be gained by being faithful to the teachings of these blessed scriptures. Listen again to these words!

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. <sup>16</sup>For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup>Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:13-18)

As we recall the words in the first half of the chapter, we can easily see that such misuse of our tongue is almost always involved in matters of dispute and not in matters of agreement. Yes, foolish words can come simply from the mouth of a

person filled with pompous pride, eager to display their own personal intellect. And yes, we do learn many foolish facts and directions from them.

But there is also a clear implication from the words in these earlier verses that the uncontrolled tongue spoken about is also intent on establishing a person's argument. In verse 2,

2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. (James 3:2)

And in verse 9,

9 With it (our tongue) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 from the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:9-10)

And then in our text for today. Verse 13

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? 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. (James 3:13-14)

Here, God is instructing us that there are two forms of "wisdom" in play all throughout our day, in our conversations and behaviors, a form of wisdom that may "seem" to be right and good, and may seem even practical for some of the circumstances we are involved in, but it is not at all the "best" wisdom. Listen again!

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. <sup>16</sup>For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and

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The word "wisdom", when used in the ordinary conversation of our culture, has so many different faces and meanings, its definition changing with each use. Even you and I use it differently depending upon our thoughts at the moment. I have often used the expression, "conventional wisdom", when speaking about a common way of considering a matter. And sometime "conventional wisdom" is just another way of saying "common sense". And so often, "common sense" does seem so "right"! But often, our "common sense" is not right!

Thankfully, God's knowledge and insights are timeless, and they are eternal. And so, for us today, as we consider God's meaning for this word "wisdom", we'll use only His perspective and His meaning as our guide.

As we focus on these scriptures today, God tells us here that there are two, very contrasting, meanings being given for this word "wisdom". First, there is a form of "wisdom that comes down from above" and the secondly, there is a form of "wisdom that is earthly, sensual and demonic".

As I have considered these two forms of wisdom, though they are obviously very different, when the rush of our daily pressures comes to bear on us, I do see that we can often, very easily, confuse one with the other.

As some of those pressing circumstances of our day surround and overwhelm us, our minds often quickly search for answers that will work for us. And under pressure, we might find ourselves choosing a form of wisdom that solves our problem, and perhaps we'll even call it "common sense". But the choices we make really might not at all be "wisdom from above", but instead, our choices might be "the "wisdom of the world".

But again, it is not always easy to know the difference when both forms of wisdom take on the same appearance, worldly wisdom counterfeiting itself to look like Godly wisdom. And folks, worldly wisdom can be so very enticing to us,

reaching out for us, drawing us into its ideas and into its ways of thinking, and convincing us to choose its ways.

And after a while, without our even realizing it, the world's wisdom can even become our normal manner of thought, and we begin to "own" its ideas as our own. And sadly, the more we "own" the world's ideas, the more the world begins to "own" us. And yes, as our "owner", the world will begin to make demands on our behaviors, insisting that we join with it in its ways or else we'll be denied the benefits that it offers.

For some, choosing "worldly wisdom" might involve making choices about the basic necessities of life, food and clothing, where we work or don't work, sacrifices we might be asked to make for a "better job", or "higher pay". And the problems that can follow along with the "worldly wisdom" that we choose can take us down paths that we really should not follow.

And over and over throughout these scriptures, God gives us clear instructions to help us to discern the choices that we have in front of us each day, so that we are able to make truly "wise" decisions. And I would like for us to study some of those in detail the next time we meet.

But before we close today, may I call back to mind the essential message that is being given within this text. Here, God speaks about how most all the occurrences of daily life are complicated yes, but then again, not so complicated. And He concludes His instruction by saying to us that such matters should be far simpler than we make them out to be. That all of the difficulties of daily life, most often, come down to the simple matter of the "choices" we make. And yes, no matter what excuse we might decide to make, we will always be held accountable for the choices we make.

You might recall from the words of Deuteronomy 30, that at every moment God is placing those "choices" before us, "Life and good, death and evil". And He says to us, "Choose life"!



Here in this passage, God is telling us that He has set before us the “wisdom of the world” which is earthly, unspiritual and of the devil. And He has also set before us “wisdom that comes from heaven”, which is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. And He tell us again to “Choose life”!

Listen as we close!

<sup>17</sup> . . . the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup>Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17-18)