

Wisdom From Above

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

When we were last together and we began to examine this word “wisdom”, we saw how easily we can get caught up believing in and taking part in the “wisdom of the world”. And without even realizing that we are doing it, we not only subscribe to world’s beliefs, philosophies and ways of life, we help to promote them.

And in particular, we find that we have joined with the world in its insistence that the only path to achieve greater wisdom comes through institutions of higher education and learning, not accepting and not trusting people unless they have all those special credentials and have “letter designations” after their name, such as, CPA or MD or PHD, or perhaps have a job title like “Vice President”.

And yes, we really do need for “experts” to truly be “experts” in their fields, especially our doctors and other medical specialists, and the like. But I do fear that we have learned to be too trusting, and in many ways have “bought into” a system of ideas that, in itself, is not truly trustworthy.

It doesn’t require much close examination of the outcome of the “wisdom of the world” to be able to see that its ways really do not always work out very well, that the world’s systems are often in disarray and regularly collapsing under the weight of their own delusions, especially in our political and governmental ideologies, and in our business and financial systems, and in untold other

ventures that are built on ideas and philosophies that center their attention on power and profit, but leave the average working man hurting and wanting. Verse 16,

¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (James 3:16)

The words of this verse are so obviously true. As the “wisdom of the world” promotes and produces envy and selfish ambition, it also produces disorder and evil practice. And its wisdom seems always to ultimately fail.

And folks, for all these things, the envy and selfish ambition and disorder and disarray, to be taking place in business offices and in political circles, and the like, they must first be taking place within the hearts of men and women on an individual and very personal level.

Such sinful desires and behaviors have been common within the male gender throughout the generations since Adam, but over the past recent decades, here in America, those same sinful behaviors have also become commonplace for women, taking them away from some of God's ordained roles of motherhood and marriage and placing them instead in positions of importance in many of our workplaces and political roles. And yes, women are very capable of carrying out all those business and political responsibilities, sometimes far better than men. But there is always a price to be paid for such successes. And that price can clearly be seen in all the many hurting and broken homelives and family lives.

And similar hurting and similar struggles can be seen in the racial divides that have become so prominent in today's culture, our black brothers and sisters crying out for their recognition within our society.

And yes, many of the desires and hopes of women and of the various ethnic groups are valid. But again, there is always a price to be paid. And unfortunately, these words of warning do also include them. The words in verse 16 are a driving force behind most all of our desires regardless of gender or race.

¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (James 3:16)

And may I say again, the words of this verse are so very, very true. As the “wisdom of the world” promotes and produces envy and selfish ambition, it also produces disorder and evil practice. And its wisdom seems always to ultimately fail.

But why would that be so? Why have the world’s systems failed and why will they always fail? The world’s systems, whether they be personal and individual, or business or political fail because their wisdom is limited to only the self-centered and imperfect abilities of mankind, and consequently, the world can see no further than itself and the immediate moment.

Yes, people and businesses do try to make long term plans and projections. But folks, only the all-knowing, eternal mind of God can know all of the dynamics that are taking place beneath the surface of each person’s mind, their personal plans and their intents. And only the omniscient mind of God knows all the future events that lie ahead that will impact the decisions people make, especially in businesses and in politics.

Also, may we never forget the ever-present three great enemies of our souls, the “world, the flesh and the devil”, and especially the “devil”. Folks, too often, our brethren within our more conservative churches tend to “write off” the involvement of the devil, saying such things as, “Oh, my own sin is enough to be concerned with,” and besides that, I don’t want to ascribe too much credit to satan and give him glory.”

But listen, to ignore an obvious enemy in time of battle is utter foolishness. Satan is real and he is ever on the attack. And for us to think that if we simply ignore him, he will not bother us, will guarantee our failure. The devil and his minions never rest in their efforts to win and to keep their converts.

And folks, one of the favorite temptations of the devil is that of “immediate gain”, “immediate gain”. He knows our ways, and he knows that we are easily swayed by the possibility of “having it all and having it now”, that most of us will quickly trade away the unknown future for just a few moments of pleasure today.

So, the demonic “wisdom of the world” cries out to us to “seize the day”, to go ahead and have that immediate success, to have that boyfriend or that girlfriend that you always wanted, to have that other job that pays really well, to have that beautiful home, and that car that proudly declares to everyone how successful you are. And yes, even to have that other man’s wife or that other woman’s husband. Grab happiness while you can, it is a fleeting thing!

And too often, we do exactly that, we reach out and take hold of the moment. But unfortunately, as we can clearly see taking place all around us every day, those pleasures are short-lived. Things gained through the “wisdom of the world” never seem to last very long.

And these words must serve as a warning to even those of us who think ourselves to be strongly, believing Christians, the same can happen with us. We mustn’t think that we are exempt from satan’s ploys and temptations. We too can quickly fail! We cannot serve both the mammon of this world and keep a humble heart for Christ. It simply does not work that way. Jesus told us clearly in Luke 16:13, that

13“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Luke 16:13)

Here, the word “mammon” envisions money and the “highlife” that “wealth” and “position” can bring. And note also, that the exact dollar amount of wealth is not described for us in these scriptures. So, for most of us, a little can be the same as a lot, and we can be severely tempted by it, regardless of its amount.

As we think through these words, we know that there is nothing especially wrong with wealth, or with higher education, or with lofty positions in life. The problem seems to lie instead within the controlling “sensation of pride” that goes along with that “mammon” that makes that lifestyle turn out wrong. And in these words, God is calling us to turn away from the “wisdom of the world”, and instead, to join with Him in His wisdom, and by doing that, enjoy a far better lifestyle.

Listen, to the description given here of the far better life enjoyed by those who choose God’s “wisdom from above” . . . beginning in verse 17 of our text,

¹⁷But 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. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17-18)

Are not each one of these ingredients that make up "Godly Wisdom" simply wonderful and desirable? Consider them with me for a moment, first beginning in verse 17, "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure." The Greek word here for "pure" means, sacred, holy and morally blameless. Did not Jesus come to earth for this expressed purpose, to cleanse us from our sins and to make us pure and holy? Folks, it is important beyond measure that we not only "be holy, even as God is holy", but that we also behave in that same manner. And then as an added bonus, our Godly behavior enables us to influence others toward holiness.

Next, we see here that God's wisdom is "peace loving", "peaceable", giving us a quiet heart that has no strife or conflict to drive its emotions.

And God's wisdom is "gentle", "considerate", giving us a quiet heart that is patient and kind.

And God's wisdom is "submissive", "humble", "willing to yield". Above all other forms of sin, "pride" seems to have the deepest of desires to exert self and its ideas, its ways and philosophies over everyone and everything around us. But here, we are told that "wisdom from God" is "submissive", "humble", "willing to yield".

Note also that these words are describing the very heart of Jesus, describing who He is. He is meek and lowly of heart, gentle and humble, the Prince of Peace. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said

²⁸"Come unto me, all you who are weary and (heavy laden) burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus is gentle, loving and kind, willing to give whatever it takes to make you and me holy. He is "humble in heart" willing to be submissive, even unto death

on the cross. And He will give you and me “peace”, a peace that surpasses all understanding, a peace that the world cannot give.

And Godly wisdom is said here to be “full of mercy”. Many of the moments of our day are filled with opportunities to judge and to condemn other people for their actions and behaviors. But “Godly wisdom” speaks out that we have no claim on the authority to judge others. Yes, those people may be wrong and deserve punishment and condemnation, but that must be left to those who have that authority and position, the legal authorities and especially God Himself.

You and I must not busy ourselves with judging and condemning others, but instead, we should be their advocate. As “born again” believers, we are “a Royal Priesthood”, ever standing before the mercy seat of God, begging for forgiveness for those who commit wrongs.

Then next, we read here that Godly wisdom will always produce “good fruit”. We’re told in another place in the scriptures that, “No good fruit can come from a bad tree and no bad fruit can come from a good tree”. And Jesus said in John 15,

¹⁶ . . . I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. (John 15:16)

Folks, as our hearts are set upon Christ and on his righteousness, our “Godly wisdom” will produce “good fruit”, in our conversation, in our behavior and in our outward treatment of others.

And we are told here that Godly wisdom is also “without partiality”. Godly wisdom pays no attention to a person’s wealth or their lack of wealth, their education or their lack of education, their position in life, their color, their nationality.

Jesus chose a tax collector, not because of the tax collector’s wealth and abilities, but so that He might make that tax collector “Holy”. And Jesus chose a prostitute, not to condemn her, but to save her from her sins. And Jesus chose the common people, the least among us, so that they could become great in His kingdom. Jesus was “impartial”.

And Godly wisdom is said here to also be “sincere”, “without hypocrisy”, without pretenses. Godly wisdom does not try to present itself as something it is not.

And as verse 18 tells us, Godly wisdom gives “peace”, both to the peacemaker and to those the peacemaker walks among. Verse 18, “Peacemakers who sow in peace produce a harvest of righteousness”. Godly wisdom will bring a troubled heart under control and give it peace, comfort and rest.

Let me conclude our thoughts here today with what I know to be God’s way of our gaining and using His wisdom, while staying clear of the corrupt “wisdom of the world”. The answer is contained in one simple word that is given to us in verse 13. Listen!

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. (James 3:13)

The one simple word is “humility”, a humble heart that is yielded to Christ.

In Philippians 2, we are told to, “let this mind be in you which is in Christ Jesus” who “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Folks, humility is the key that unlocks the door to “Godly wisdom” and to Godly behavior. You and I must deny our own desires for anything this world tempts us with, and we must willingly choose Christ and His provision. We must not be found guilty of trying to serve two masters. We cannot do it. We will fail.

Humility is the desire for nothing for ourselves, but everything for Christ and for our brethren in the faith. And a humble heart will produce a harvest of righteousness in us. Isn’t that a far better thing?

As we leave here today and as we see the turmoil of the world up-swirling all around us, it is my prayer that we will walk in the humility and wisdom of Christ. And as we do that, we will find peace beyond anything we have ever known before.

Verse 17, as we close . . .

¹⁷ . . . 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. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17)