

Studies in James

Lesson 13

True Wisdom

(Part 1)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. If you had to define WISDOM – TRUE WISDOM, what definition would you give? What IS true wisdom?
 - A. Fortunately, we're not left on our own when it comes to understanding true wisdom.
 1. James provides us with some of the most insightful teaching on wisdom found anywhere in Scripture.
 2. It's found in James chapter 3, verses 13 through 18.
 - B. Perhaps in defining wisdom we need to start by understanding what wisdom is NOT. For example, wisdom is NOT KNOWLEDGE or the ACQUIRING of knowledge.
 1. Wisdom is different from intelligence and academic achievement.
 - a. Sometimes a highly trained and educated individual has serious problems exercising WISDOM.

b. For example, some intelligent and academically advanced persons have difficulty in getting along with people – they lack the WISDOM associated with people-skills.

(1). They can be:

(a). Abrasive.

(b). Insensitive to the needs of others.

(c). Quick to jump to conclusions based on superficial findings.

(2). These are certainly NOT the sign of a wise person.

B. So, what IS wisdom? From THIS lesson, and from the NEXT, we're going to discover that WISDOM can actually be characterized by THREE ATTRIBUTES – Wisdom is PRACTICAL, PERCEPTIVE, and PROJECTED. What do we mean by this?

1. First, wisdom is often defined as - "The ability to put knowledge to use."

a. This is the ability to have a PRACTICAL use of knowledge.

(1). It doesn't do you any good to KNOW a lot of FACTS, if you can't USE that knowledge in a PRACTICAL way?

2. Second, wisdom is ALSO defined as – "The ability to see things from heaven's perspective."

a. So, it's safe to say, there's a certain amount of PERCEPTION in the wise person.

b. They possess certain INSIGHTS – they have the ability to SEE things slightly different than most.

(1). For one thing, they look for the hand of God in certain circumstances and situations.

(a). They understand that God may have a PURPOSE that is FAR beyond mere HUMAN understanding.

3. And finally, wisdom is sometimes defined, from a purely THEOLOGICAL point of view, as – "The ability to DEMONSTRATE the character of Christ in difficult situations."

a. This has to do with a person's INVOLVEMENT with other people – with the way this person COMMUNICATES with others.

(1). For example, earlier in James chapter three, James told us that TEACHERS communicate with their tongues. (**cf. James 3:1-12**)

(2). But in the verses that follow (**James 3:13-18**), the brother of the Lord will show us that teachers ALSO communicate with their VERY LIVES.

II. In THIS section of his epistle, James is still PRIMARILY addressing the teacher, but his remarks are not EXCLUSIVELY to those who teach. They are ALSO addressed to you and me – to EVERY Christian.

- A. But, at the outset, the PRIMARY focus is toward those who have been entrusted with the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Christ.
1. This would include:
 - a. Preachers.
 - b. Teachers.
 - c. Elders.
 - d. Deacons.
 - e. As WELL as, EVERY Christian who shares their faith with others.
- B. But, in ANOTHER sense, James' comments are really to EVERY CHRISTIAN – whether or NOT you're sharing your faith with others.
1. His comments involve the SAME PRINCIPLE we discovered as the general THEME of the book: "If you SAY you're a believer, then why don't you ACT like a believer?"
 - a. As we said at the very beginning of this study, the ENTIRE EPISTLE of James focuses on this ONE OVER-RIDING PRINCIPLE.
 - (1). Our lives MUST be in harmony with the FAITH we claim to have!
 - (2). In other words, we can't CLAIM to be a Christian and without also DEMONSTRATING that claim by the way we LIVE our lives.

- (a). Although NONE of us are PERFECT, and certainly NONE of us are SINLESS, James INSISTS that we strive to the best of our ability to be CONSISTENT.
 - (b). In essence, James says there needs to be CONSISTENCY between the faith we CLAIM to have, and the lives we LIVE.
- C. And so, let's begin taking a brief look at the characteristics of the WISE man, and THEN turn our attention to the man who LACKS wisdom.

BODY:

- I. James begins by describing the WISE person:
 - A. **James 3:13** – *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.* From this, James tells us there are TWO prominent marks of the wise person's life:
 - 1. The first prominent mark of a wise person is described as "*good conduct*" (good behavior).
 - a. The particular Greek word used HERE is found 13 times in the New Testament.
 - (1). The word carries the idea, "to return or turn back to something."
 - b. At the ROOT of this word is the thought of "CHANGE."

- (1). There is a willingness to CHANGE, to go BACK to the truth, and CHANGE in conformity with God's Word.
- c. In other words – a WISE person is OBEDIENT, and CHANGE is a regular part of his life.
 - (1). When he sees there is something WRONG in his life, he CHANGES his conduct to bring it into obedience with God's divine principles.
 - (2). He changes his BAD behavior into GOOD behavior.
2. The other prominent mark in the life of a wise person is "*meekness*" (Gentleness).
 - a. Unfortunately, many mistake this quality as a sign of WEAKNESS!
 - (1). There's a tendency to think of a GENTLE or MEEK person as being SPINELESS, WEAK, without spirit or discipline.
 - b. But this word is used HERE to refer to the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT. (**cf. Galatians 5:23**)
 - (1). This word carries the idea of the process used in taming or controlling a horse, without breaking its spirit.
 - (2). In Plato's era, the term "gentle" was used to describe a brilliant teacher who could dialogue with his students without getting angry.

(a). It is a word meaning "to be under control."

II. Now that we understand the prominent marks in the life of the WISE person, James moves on to describe the UNWISE:

A. **James 3:14-16** – *But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.*

1. In verse 14, James reveals two hidden DRIVES – two hidden MOTIVES in the life of the unwise person – two hidden Motives.

a. The first is BITTER ENVY (bitter jealousy) – jealousy is actually a more accurate translation of the original word.

(1). The arrangement of these two words in the original text suggest a jealousy that causes bitterness.

(2). Although ENVY and JEALOUSY seem similar, they're really quite different.

(a). ENVY is felt when we "mourn EMPTY hands." When we don't have something someone ELSE has.

(b). JEALOUSY is felt when "our hands are FULL," and we feel threatened that someone will take AWAY what we have.

- (c). Envy begins with nothing. Jealousy begins with much.
- (3). James portrays the unwise person as being JEALOUS and afraid of losing something.
 - (a). It is this kind of person who becomes UNCOOPERATIVE and COMPETITIVE, given to RIVALRY.
- (4). In the case of the teacher as well as for the rest of us, the JEALOUSY may be for many reasons:
 - (a). Fear of losing prestige.
 - (b). Fear of losing power.
 - (c). Fear of being exposed as NOT being KNOWLEDGEABLE.
 - (d). Fear of losing credibility.
 - (e). Fear of losing job.
- 2. The second hidden DRIVE or hidden MOTIVE in the life of the UNWISE is SELFISH AMBITION (being self-seeking).
 - a. This hidden motive drives a person to push his way to the top.
 - b. Both teachers AND leaders need to understand this must NEVER be found among God's people.
 - (1). Carving out prominent positions among ourselves is NOT fitting with WISDOM.

c. The wise will allow GOD to create opportunities for them.

(1). They will allow GOD to open doors.

B. James moves on in verses 14 through 15 to show FIVE

CHARACTERISTICS of the so-called "wisdom" of the UNWISE.

1. First, James says the "wisdom" of the UNWISE is ARROGANT – it BOASTS.

a. Arrogance is common among those who try to JUSTIFY their sins.

(1). The Greek word used HERE means, "to boast over WRONG; to be proud in SPITE of wrong."

b. Have you ever noticed how you can NEVER change the opinions of the FOOLISH – the UNWISE?

(1). Their mind is "set in concrete!"

2. Second, James says the "wisdom" of the UNWISE is self-deceptive – it LIES AGAINST THE TRUTH.

a. James says when jealousy and ambition prevail in our hearts, we lie to ourselves.

b. This characteristic leads us to alter our standards in conformity with our deteriorating lifestyle.

(1). That's like changing the length of a yard stick to accommodate an improper measurement.

3. Third, James says the "wisdom" of the UNWISE is EARTHLY.

- a. It looks to earthly, human standards to determine what is right or wrong.
 - b. It looks to earthly measure of success, earthly counsel, earthly motives, earthly methods.
4. Fourth, James says the "wisdom" of the UNWISE is SENSUAL.
- a. Literally translated from the Greek, this word means, "Soulish."
 - (1). It indicates thinking that is completely of one's own soul.
 - (2). It means being guided by natural instincts – animal-like behavior.
 - (a). Bowing into our natural bent toward sin, and giving into our sinful nature.
 - b. The Spirit of God is shoved aside to where this person no longer THINKS or ACTS according to godliness.
5. And finally, James says the "wisdom" of the UNWISE is DEMONIC.
- a. James says the unwise person's thoughts resemble someone who is demonically influenced.
 - (1). From a human standpoint – this person might appear to be shrewd, astute, brilliant.
 - (2). But, from Heavens point of view -- this person appears to be guided and influenced by demonic forces and tendencies.
 - (a). He is misguided and DANGEROUS!

C. Finally, in verse 16 James shows us the RESULTS of refusing true wisdom.

1. Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is:
 - a. Confusion – disorder, disharmony, chaos, antagonism.
 - b. Every evil thing – a FULL ARRAY of vile, corrupt, petty, worthless, good-for-nothing things.

III. If we were to search through the Bible for a good example of the wisdom of the WISE and the wisdom of the UNWISE, we probably couldn't find a better example than that of Solomon.

A. At the beginning of Solomon's reign as King he is in contact with God.

1. He had a bright future – one that was not yet scarred by compromise.
2. God asks him, "*Ask what I shall give you.*" (**2 Chron 1:7**)
 - a. Solomon could have asked for FAME.
 - (1). Especially, since he was having to follow in the steps of his beloved father David.
 - b. Solomon could have asked for FORTUNE.
 - (1). Especially, since he was becoming King at a time when Israel was rapidly growing and expanding.
 - c. Instead, Solomon asked for "WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE" to rule the people of God.

(1). **2 Chron 1:10** – *"Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?"*

(2). God gave him the gifts of WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE in unprecedented measures.

B. But, in the forty years that followed, Solomon changed.

1. Although Solomon launched a massive building program in Israel and greatly expanded his possessions, his program of growth turned to greed and nearly plunged the entire nation into near bankruptcy.
2. Solomon also took foreign wives from the nations from which God forbade the children of Israel to intermarry – seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, to be exact – women who eventually turned his heart away from the God of Israel.
3. Solomon not only began worshiping these foreign gods, but even went so far as to build "high places" for them – alters, temples and places of worship for these idols.
4. **1 Kings 11:9-13** – *So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded. Therefore the LORD said*

to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

5. Solomon IGNORED the wisdom and knowledge God had blessed him with.
 - a. He began making a number of unwise choices – all of which can be demonstrated by his:
 - (1). ARROGANCE.
 - (2). SELF-DECEPTION.
 - (3). EARTHLY standards.
 - (4). Giving into his own SENSUAL instincts.
 - (5). Finally, ending up as one whose actions resemble one who is under DEMONIC control or influence.
- C. Solomon's life demonstrates one HARSH REALITY about wisdom -- "Wisdom GRANTED is different from wisdom APPROPRIATED."
 1. In other words, "It's one thing to RECEIVE wisdom -- it's ANOTHER things to USE it."

CONCLUSION:

- I. We need to be very careful that we don't fall into the same trap.
 - A. The child of God is NOT immune from succumbing to the life-style described in this study.
 1. We need to watch our daily walk as a Christian to keep from falling into the same trap as Solomon.
 - a. We can ALSO made unwise choices – all of which can be demonstrated by:
 - (1). Trying to JUSTIFY our sins rather than CONFRONT them.
 - (2). Changing our standards to conform to our deteriorating lifestyle.
 - (3). Relying on earthly standards of right or wrong.
 - (4). Giving into his own SENSUAL instincts.
 - (5). Finally, ending up resembling one who is under DEMONIC influence or control.
 2. Is your life characterized by DIVINE WISDOM – by GOOD BEHAVIOR (good conduct) and MEEKNESS?
 3. Or, is your life characterized by the WISDOM OF THIS WORLD – wisdom that is motivated by ENVY and SELFISH AMBITION?

4. The answer to that question depends on where your heart is – whether you have a heart set on walking WITH God, or a heart set on walking IN DARKNESS.
 - a. If your heart is set on walking in DARKNESS, you will continue living your life to please ONLY yourself.
 - b. If your heart is set on walking with God, you will live a life that is dedicated to doing the LORD'S will.
- B. So, what kind of WISDOM characterizes your life?
 1. If you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ – never come to Christ in complete faith, repenting of your past sins, confessing your faith in Him before others, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins – you can demonstrate DIVINE wisdom by doing that this very moment.
 2. And if you've DONE that, but are no longer walking in the light, you can ALSO demonstrate DIVINE wisdom by simply come back to the Lord in repentance and confessing your sins to God. He will forgive you from all your sins, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.