

# James

## I. Introduction

- A. **James 3:13-18** . . . Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. [14] But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. [15] This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. [17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. [18] And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
- B. Last Sunday, we looked at worldly wisdom, and today I want us to look at God's wisdom, that is, the wisdom that comes from above rather than from below.
1. If you need help in discerning which wisdom you are living by in any particular situation, consider this: our words, our behavior, the way we treat others, and what or who is most important to us exposes which wisdom we are following.
  2. The wisdom from below is first and foremost selfish, and then it produces discord, dissension, open conflict, hostility, hatred, and ultimately, broken relationships.
  3. As we will begin to see today, the wisdom from above is completely opposite from the wisdom of the world.

## C. Prayer

## II. A look at God's wisdom – what it is like and what it produces

- A. God's wisdom is **first pure** – in other words, before God's wisdom is anything else, it is free of every thing that might in any way lower its quality, and in so doing, prevent it from accomplishing its purpose.
1. Equally important to God's wisdom being pure is its purifying affect on all who live according to it. But why is this purity important?
  2. The answer to why purity is important must begin with Jesus' words: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (**Matthew 5:8**).
    - a. Certainly, seeing God means more than looking at Him. It means knowing Him personally, enjoying intimate fellowship with Him, and living with Him eternally. However, no one begins the

Christian life with a pure heart. So how do we get a pure heart? To get a pure heart, we must begin with purifying our flesh of its impure cravings and our mind of its ungodly thoughts.

- b. **Romans 12:1-2** puts it this way: “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. [2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
3. My point here is that purifying our body and mind is a prerequisite for purifying our heart. But that doesn't answer why purity is important. To help us see why purity is important, I want to begin with an illustration from the world of alcoholism and drug addiction.
  - a. While the alcoholic or drug addict is using their drug of choice to satisfy their addiction, they are essentially in a stupor. Because their mind is in a fog and their body is either savoring the last hit or crying out for the next one, this stupor engulfs them in selfishness and blinds them to the damage they are doing to themselves and every relationship they are part of.
  - b. Now if they are going to come to their senses, they must first get the drug out of their body. In other words, they have to purify their flesh – and they do this by putting a complete stop to ingesting any more alcohol or drugs. We call this drying out, and it is the only way they can cleanse their bodies, and in so doing, defeat the hold the alcohol or drugs has over them physically.
  - c. But they cannot stop there, because they have turned to alcohol or drugs for some reason – and though that reason is found in their heart, it is justified and given hope of gratification by their mind. Therefore, they have to purify their mind of all that opens the door to or keeps them interested in the alcohol or drugs. Plus, they have to drive out the selfishness and foolish thinking that they have used to justify their addiction.
  - d. But once again, they cannot stop there. They have to look into the depths of their heart in order to discover and put to death whatever longings they hoped to satisfy or fears they hoped to relieve or soothe by their self-destructive behavior.
  - e. Now if they have made it this far, and some do, they have gained a pure heart regarding their addiction. However, to keep their heart pure, they must remain vigilant so as to run from any and

all temptations which would make it easy for them to return to their old way of life.

4. With this illustration in mind, let's look at why purity is so important to God, to us, and to wisdom. Simply stated, selfishness and sin, foolishness and treasuring things of this world, ungodly fears and fleshly cravings become the impurities that affect our body, mind, and heart. Though we probably do not consider ourselves stupefied by these things, the reality is, we are – to some degree or another. However, by God's grace, and through His divinely empowered process of purification we are able to make good progress toward a pure heart, which enables us to treasure what is truly valuable, think sensibly, love selflessly, live godly, and see God more nearly as He is.
  5. Remember my saying we do not begin with a pure heart? Well, to encourage you on your way, here is a picture of what happens as you progress from impure to pure. The purer you are in your flesh and your mind, the purer your heart can be. The purer your heart, the more of God you see. The more of God you see, the more He becomes the treasure you would give up all else to have. The more He is your precious treasure, the more you want to please Him in every thing. The more you want to please Him, the more you realize you love Him. And though you may not yet love Him as you ought, the more you want to love Him as you ought, the more you will do whatever it takes to love Him with all that you are and have. The more you love God, the more you hate what is not of God. The more you hate what is not of God, the more you live according to the word and wisdom of God. The more you live according to the word and wisdom of God, the more peaceable, gentle, reasonable, merciful, godly, faithful, and pure you will be.
  6. Now there is no question that we will need all the grace and strength of God to make this journey toward purity. But the important truth is, because of God's gracious help, this purity is possible. God has given us everything necessary for a godly life. Therefore, let us stop wondering if purity of heart is possible, and start asking how we can get there.
- B. **Then**, God's wisdom is **peaceable** – this means that those who live according to heavenly wisdom are themselves peace-loving – which means they seek to be at peace with others, they promote peace between people or groups of people, and they work at resolving differences where there is discord and bringing reconciliation where there is division.

1. To use Paul's words, living according to heavenly wisdom as it relates to peaceableness means we never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Instead, we respect what is right in the sight of all men. And when possible, so far as it depends on us, we strive to be at peace with all men (**Romans 12:17-18**).
2. Unlike false peace – which is built on things like power, selfishness, and appeasement, true peace is built on love and truth. And because it is pure, true, godly peace never sets aside truth or in any way implies it is approving evil in its pursuit of peace. Only false peace does that. And though false peace may please sinners, pacify the selfish, and make it appear there is no conflict, it can never resolve differences in a way that heals damaged or broken relationships. In other words, false peace cannot achieve true peace.
3. And this raises a truth that many miss. The absence of conflict does not automatically mean that differences are resolved, damaged relationships are healed, and broken relationships are restored. Just because people are living together peaceably does not mean they are living together in peace.
4. For example, when Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq, there was no obvious or open conflict between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims, or between the Muslims and the Christians. They appeared to be living side-by-side in peace. And yet, when the iron fist of Saddam's dictatorship was removed, we quickly discovered how misleading the appearance of peace was. In fact, they have been attacking and killing each other, or fleeing the country, ever since.
5. The point here is that true peace exists only where all parties do the things that make for peace. Without that, there may be calm, but there is no peace.
6. Now the reality is, we cannot be at peace with everyone, because there are some who see us as the enemy – and they don't want to be at peace with us. Then there are those who stubbornly insist on having their own way, yet expect us to live with them as if there is peace between us. However, the un-peaceableness of others does not change the peaceableness of heavenly wisdom. For this reason God says:
  - a. **Hebrews 12:14** . . . Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.
  - b. **Romans 12:18** . . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.
  - c. **Matthew 5:23-24** . . . Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has

something against you, [24] leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

7. The point here is simply this: God's wisdom promotes and protects peace whenever and wherever it is possible to do so. Heavenly wisdom is no less peaceable in the face of selfishness, or where there is resistance to what is right and good, or when facing hostility. A seemingly extreme example of this truth is found in **Romans 12:14** . . . Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. And Jesus said: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (**Matthew 5:44-45**). May we be followers of God's wisdom.
  8. The last thing I want to say about the peaceableness of heavenly wisdom is that it not only promotes and protects peace among people, it evangelizes in an effort to promote peace between God and man.
- C. God's wisdom is **gentle** – which means it is meek, tender, patient, humbly yielding in the face of strong opposition, and willing to sacrifice itself for the greater good. Or, to look at it from the opposite direction, heavenly wisdom it is not rough or harsh or severe.
1. This kind of gentleness can only grow and bloom into maturity where there is true humility and great faith in God's provision and protection.
  2. The reason we need great faith in God to live by the wisdom of gentleness is because of our powerful predisposition toward self-protection – which we too often exercise in a selfish way. It is our selfish self-protection that motivates us to fight selfishness with selfishness, criticism with criticism, put downs with put downs, rejection with rejection, and hostility with hostility.
  3. But consider Jesus. If he had clung to selfish self-protection, He would not have allowed Judas to betray him, Pilate to condemn Him, or the soldiers to beat and crucify Him. Yet we look on His gentleness in the face of such hostility as a marvelous expression of God's great love for us.
    - a. If we value such gentleness in Christ, shouldn't we value it in ourselves? (Note: **I Peter 2:21-24**)
    - b. However, to practice such wisdom, we need genuine faith in God's provision and protection regardless of the circumstances.

4. Now, some believe that the gentleness of passiveness is the product of heavenly wisdom. NOT SO! True gentleness harbors no resentment or bitterness. True gentleness does not act as if it is accepting what it does not want to accept, only to explode in anger when it feels like it can't take any more. True gentleness does not put on the appearance of co-operation while quietly, or in mostly hidden ways, going its own way.
5. We see an example of God's gentleness with us in the words of **Romans 2:4**, where Paul writes that it is the kindness of God, not His fierceness or wrath or power, that brings us to that place where, of our own free will, we want to repent of going our own way and yield to God's way.
6. To conclude this section on the gentleness of heavenly wisdom, I am going to read four statements – two from scripture and two from other sources.
  - a. “Never pay back evil for evil. Never take your own revenge. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (**Romans 12:17, 19, 21**).
  - b. “Be angry and yet do not sin” (**Ephesians 4:26**).
  - c. “Those who wish to act as physicians to heal the vices of others ought not to be executioners” (Calvin).
  - d. “There is no harmony or unity in the sword, only forced peace, for when the threat is removed, differences are revived and division returns” (DSB).

### III. Conclusion

- A. It is impossible to exaggerate the foolishness and evil of worldly wisdom just as it is impossible to overstate the value of purity, peaceableness, and gentleness to God's wisdom.
- B. I urge us all to ask God to show us the clear difference between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom – and to continue asking until we are convinced that all earthly wisdom is to be run from, and heavenly wisdom is to be sought as if it were pure gold.
- C. **Psalm 90:10-12** . . . As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away. [11] Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? [12] **So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.**