

# 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 three truths found in this portion of James:
  - 1. The only way to validate what we claim to be and believe is by our behavior, because our behavior and not our claims is who we are. Jesus said: “By their fruits you shall know them” (**Matthew 7:20**).
  - 2. God has so created us that we can know what is going on inside our heart, mind, desires, intentions, and the like. If we do not know, it is not for lack of god given ability, but rather lack of will to know.
  - 3. The purer our heart and mind, the more we see sin and righteousness as God sees them, and the more God’s seemingly strong words about sin and righteousness sound true to our ears.
- C. Today I want us to look at the wisdom of the world in hopes we will see much more clearly why we want to run from it rather than to it. Next Sunday we will examine the wisdom that comes from God.
- D. Prayer

## II. A Comprehensive look at the world’s wisdom: what it is like and what it produces. As we talk about this, try to picture situations in the world that mirror what God is saying about worldly wisdom.

- A. The world’s wisdom produces **bitter jealousy**.
  - 1. **Bitter** speaks of inward thoughts and feelings of a critical, angry nature. These thoughts and feelings nurture fault-finding, dislike, contempt, and even hatred toward others. And as with everything else that is going on inside of us, they influences what comes out of us – our words and deeds – and especially when dealing with others.

2. **Jealousy** speaks of a strong sense of uneasiness or anxiety over the possibility of being robbed or over having been robbed of the attention, affection, position, possessions, or financial gain we desire.
3. When we combine **bitter** with **jealously**, we get an angry, competitive fear that someone will be given or take away from us what we want. The common effect of bitter jealousy within a group of any size, is conflict, strife, fighting, broken relationships, and division.
4. What I trust we can see from this is that the wisdom of the world has no intention of seeking the overall good or unity of any group or community of people. Rather, the world's wisdom is focused on looking out for oneself. But it doesn't stop there. The world's wisdom promotes the idea that we look out for ourselves best when we overlook or ignore the harm our self-interest does to others. And this is why worldly wisdom feeds bitter jealousy, which in turn feeds dissension – even to the point of damaging or breaking relationships.

B. The world's wisdom produces **selfish ambition**.

1. **Selfishness** speaks of being mostly or only concerned with our own interests, advantage, happiness, privileges, security, and well-being. Interestingly, we all know that selfishness is not a good character trait, and yet we sometimes prefer worldly wisdom even though it exalts selfishness
2. **Ambition** speaks of something that can be used for good or for evil ends.
  - a. Ambition is a strong or even zealous desire and motivating force for such things as acceptance, approval, fame, success, possessions, pleasure, power, and riches.
  - b. This kind of desire and driving energy is good when directed toward serving God and others – for their sake. But when we put selfishness with ambition we get a person who is zealously driven toward a goal for mostly or only self-serving reasons. Such a person is not concerned about the community good, and he will only sacrifice his interests when his personal gain from such a sacrifice is greater than the cost.
3. Thinking back to what we just said about bitter jealousy and what we are now saying about selfish ambition, it should be obvious that they frequently go hand-in-hand. And it should also be obvious that they work against the will and ways of God, and against our spiritual health, and against the unity of the body of Christ.

4. Now let's try and bring perspective to what we are talking about. We may at times be foolish in our thinking. We may even, in moments of carelessness, give way to pride, jealousy, and selfish ambition. And in either case, we may end up being at odds with family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and some of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Now I am not justifying such occasions of sin, but they can and do happen. However, here is my point:
  - a. A foolish or careless moment is bad – for it is sin just as much as any deliberate, planned sin. But we take care of this kind of sin by confessing it, making things right, and returning to doing what we know is right.
  - b. The greater problem arises when sin – such as bitter jealousy and selfish ambition – are allowed to continue in an ongoing, repetitive, un-repented and un-resisted manner. This is an indication we have abandoned the fear of God, the love of God, and the wisdom of God for worldly wisdom and selfish interests.
5. Here is my point: the self-justified or denied practice of sin is exactly where worldly wisdom takes us. In fact, it is the only possible outcome from worldly wisdom. May we see the truth of this – that is, where worldly wisdom will take us – each time we are tempted to set godly wisdom aside and take up worldly wisdom.

C. The world's wisdom produces **arrogance**.

1. **Arrogance** is a form of pride. It is an unrealistic sense of our ability, greatness, and importance, which in turn feeds an attitude of superiority that compels us to look down on those we deem less able or less important. When we are arrogant, our looking down on others results in thinking of them and treating them with condescension and even contempt.
2. Put a bit differently, arrogance is a haughty presumption of superiority coupled with a disparaging view of others that leads to treating them as inferior.
3. Are you beginning to see a pattern here? Worldly wisdom is forged in the fires of hell and crafted specifically to appeal to those whose hearts are set on self and who are eager to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.
4. Sadly, worldly wisdom does not stop here. As we will see in the next description of worldly wisdom, it fosters self-deception and encourages living in denial of reality.

D. The world's wisdom produces lying against the truth, that is, **deceiving ourselves or living in denial to the point of lying to ourselves and others about ourselves.**

1. Generally speaking, we lie about ourselves for one of two reasons:
  - a. We lie about ourselves to avoid having to admit to and therefore submit to the truth concerning ourselves exposed by our behavior.
  - b. Or, we lie about ourselves because we think of ourselves as basically good, that is, as not doing anything really wrong.
    - (1) We support this self-righteous view by telling ourselves that when others are offended or hurt or angry over our behavior it is not because we have done something wrong, but because either they are doing something wrong, or their preferences and desires are different from ours.
    - (2) In other words, when others are offended or hurt by our behavior, we tell ourselves that the problem does not lie with us, but with them. And we tell ourselves that if they would deal with their problem, then they would no longer see us as the cause of their unhappiness or disappointment or hurt or anger.
2. Once again, worldly wisdom shows itself to be oriented toward selfishness, which in turn produces godlessness, dissension, and damaged or broken relationships.

E. The world's wisdom is **earthly**.

1. The world's wisdom is labeled "earthly" because it is based on the thinking and reasoning of the world. And isn't this the point God has been making all along?
2. To say this the other way around: earthly wisdom is **not** based on the thinking and reasoning of God, or love, or righteousness, or goodness, or grace and mercy, or patience, or forgiveness, or long-suffering in the face of opposition, or perseverance and faithfulness, or overcoming evil with good so as not to return evil for evil.
3. The primary aim of worldly wisdom is to please self, first and foremost. And it does this in three primary ways:
  - a. First, worldly wisdom is crafted to appeal to our old nature, the gratification of our flesh, and our self-interest – which makes it very pleasing to self.
  - b. Second, worldly wisdom points out what seems to be the wisest, most reasonable, seemingly defensible ways to gratify the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

- c. Third, worldly wisdom promotes the idea that the improvement or enrichment or happiness of life, **right now**, is more important than God's will; and more important than our spiritual development; and more important than the growth of our relationship with God; and more important than those things that are eternal. And whose selfish interests are not primarily concerned with what we are or are not getting right now?
4. Worldly wisdom may seem wise at the moment, but we are Christians, and our life is not contained in this moment or even in this world. We are going somewhere – both in this life and in the next – and worldly wisdom can never get us there!
5. Listen carefully as I read this scripture from **Galatians 5:7-9** . . . Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. [9] [Therefore] Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

F. The world's wisdom is **natural (unspiritual)**.

1. This is simply another reason why we should run away from worldly wisdom and cling to God's heavenly wisdom.
2. Unspiritual wisdom seems wise to those who are not and do not want to be spiritual. And who are those who do not want to be spiritual? They are the ones who choose to rely on themselves, first and foremost, for their happiness, well-being, success, and security. And the reason they prefer worldly wisdom is because it promotes self-protection, self-pleasure, and self-exaltation. You see, worldly wisdom makes us out to be the god, and everyone else – including God – servants who ought to make our life better according to our wishes.
3. So think about this: how can such wisdom produce love and unity between two people or in the home or in the church? It can't!
4. God speaks to this issue when He says: "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for **they are foolishness to him**; and he **cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised" (**I Corinthians 2:14**).

G. The world's wisdom is **demonic**.

1. Whatever you may think of the world's wisdom, God makes it clear that it is promoted and pushed and presented as true wisdom by the devil and his workers.

- a. In other words, the world's wisdom is not just foolishness or selfishness or worldly as opposed to spiritual. The world's wisdom is not sometimes good and sometimes not so good. The world's wisdom is evil, and it is evil because it comes from the devil, himself.
    - b. So think carefully about this: the source of worldly wisdom exposes its underlying purpose or goal. And what is that?
      - (1) The goal of worldly wisdom is to work against and ultimately defeat God by turning us against God.
      - (2) The goal of worldly wisdom is to destroy all the good God has created and intends for us to enjoy.
      - (3) The goal of worldly wisdom is to stop all the love relationships God longs to enjoy with the people He created.
  2. These two scriptures expose the source of worldly wisdom:
    - a. **II Corinthians 4:3-4** . . . And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, [4] in whose case **the god of this world** has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
    - b. **Ephesians 2:1-3** . . . And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, [2] in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. [3] Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.
  3. Do not be deceived, worldly wisdom, no matter how good it sounds or how appealing it appears, comes from hell and has as its only intention God's defeat and your destruction.
- H. The world's wisdom **produces / leads to disorder and every evil thing**.
1. Worldly wisdom is the enemy of love, unity, and godliness.
  2. I think we all know that there can be no love in selfishness, no unity in selfishness, and no righteousness or godliness in selfishness.
  3. Selfishness opens the door to disorder, dissension, unresolved conflict, and every other imaginable evil known to mankind. You may not allow your use of worldly wisdom to take you that far, but keep in mind that constrained selfishness is no less selfish than unconstrained selfishness.

4. There is one more thing I want to say about the results of worldly wisdom: the more you see the truth of what we have talked about today, the more you will understand the words of James 4:1-10, concerning where conflict comes from and why it lingers in an unresolved state.

### III. Conclusion

- A. You may be wondering why we would spend so much time talking about worldly wisdom? The answer is simple. Worldly wisdom is all around us and constantly pressing us to conform to live according to it. Some of it is obvious – and we quickly reject it. But some of it seems too good to ignore, and we are strongly tempted to follow it. My goal today is to encourage us to clearly see that worldly wisdom is no good, no matter how good it sounds or appears to be. May we, as God's people run from it as we would any life-threatening, highly contagious disease.