

# The Wisdom from Below and Above

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**James 3:13–18 (NKJV) “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup> This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”**

If there has ever been a time when there has been a void of the wisdom of God in America, it is now. There is much being passed off as wisdom, but is it really? What constitutes the wisdom of God?

In the text above, James brings to account those who make a claim to wisdom: “*Who is wise and understanding among you?...*” James calls the wise to the judgment seat to determine if their claim of wisdom is true or false. Paul did the same in 1 Corinthians 1:20 (NKJV): “*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*” Both James and the apostle Paul distinguish between two sources of wisdom: the wisdom from below and the wisdom from above.

How can we discern true wisdom? Jesus declared that wisdom is justified by her “children”—meaning the fruit of its works: “*But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, <sup>17</sup> and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.’ <sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.*”<sup>1</sup> The prophet Hosea declared: “*Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.*”<sup>2</sup> James tells us that wisdom is known by the fruit of its conduct or lifestyle: “*...Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.*”<sup>3</sup> James calls the fruit of wisdom the “fruit of righteousness”.<sup>4</sup>

A wise man does not have to profess that he is wise. The fruit of his life is all the proof he needs. The evidence of godly wisdom is meekness. The one whose life does not display meekness is not operating in the wisdom of God.

The Greek word translated as “meekness” means “gentleness, humble courtesy”. The opposite of meekness is “mean” and “harsh”. Therefore the wisdom that is from above is kind rather than mean and gentle rather than harsh. Meekness responds in the right way rather than reacts in the wrong way. Meekness is a temperament controlled by the Spirit rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:16-19

<sup>2</sup> Hosea 14:9 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> James 3:13 (NKJV)

<sup>4</sup> James 3:18 (NKJV)

by the flesh. The meek not only strive to *be* right but they also strive to *do* what is right. It is possible to be right and still be wrong! The meekness of wisdom seeks to win the heart and not just the argument. The wise are not only right in what they believe and what they do but they are right in how they do it.

As mentioned, there are two sources of wisdom—the wisdom from below and the wisdom from above. Those who want to know true wisdom must guard their heart from reacting negatively toward those speak the truth: *“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.”*<sup>5</sup> Those who want to be wise must love the truth more than they love defending a lie. Otherwise their stubborn pride will blind them in deception as they travel down the road to destruction: *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,<sup>10</sup> and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.<sup>11</sup> And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.”*<sup>6</sup>

James describes the wisdom from below as “earthly”, “sensual”, and “demonic”. First, the wisdom that is from below is *earthly* meaning, of this world, i.e. worldly. The apostle John says that everything in this fallen world, which would include worldly wisdom, is based upon the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.<sup>7</sup> Worldly wisdom entered when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Worldly wisdom is reflected in our human systems of education, politics, economics, and culture. Worldly wisdom is the fruit of the fallen sin nature that has infected, defiled, and distorted every part of the human being—spirit, soul, and body.

The human pursuit and formulation of wisdom is called “philosophy”, (“love of wisdom”). Christians are warned not to embrace human philosophy because it runs contrary to God’s wisdom: *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”*<sup>8</sup> Those who profess themselves wise in the wisdom of this world make themselves fools in the sight of God.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the wisdom from below is *sensual*. This means that this world’s wisdom is informed and controlled by the five physical senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. The opposite of *sensual* would be *spiritual*. God is Spirit, being invisible, and thus cannot be perceived through the five physical senses.<sup>10</sup> Sensuality is contrary to faith because its reasoning is limited to what it can see, hear, taste, touch and smell. Thus it eliminates God from all consideration or discussion. Sensuality walks according to the flesh rather than by the Spirit. Believers, on the other hand, are to walk by faith and not by sight.<sup>11</sup>

Third, the wisdom from below is *demonic*. It is demonic in its inspiration, evil in its motivation, deceiving in its influence, and violent in its reaction. It hates, rejects, and rebels against God

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<sup>5</sup> James 3:14 (NKJV)

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 (NKJV)

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 2:16-17

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 2:8 (NKJV)

<sup>9</sup> Romans 1:22

<sup>10</sup> John 4:24, Colossians 1:15

<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7

and His Son Jesus Christ. It replaces the truth with a lie. It replaces the real Jesus with a false Jesus. It replaces the true Gospel with a false gospel. It replaces the true Holy Spirit with a false spirit. It substitutes true worship with false worship. It was this demonic element that Paul warned against when he said, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.*”<sup>12</sup>

What is the fruit of the wisdom from below? The first fruit is *envy* which is a fierce, bitter, and spiteful rivalry fueled by resentment over another person’s advantage. The second fruit is *self-seeking* which is a partisan spirit that campaigns for position and influence by unfair means. The third fruit is *confusion* which is a state of confusion caused by disorder, disturbance, tumult, and commotion. The fourth fruit listed is *every evil thing* that includes everything worthless, mean, bad, base, and wicked. In his book *Sparkling Gems from the Greek*, Rick Renner renders verse sixteen this way: “For where there is a fierce desire to promote one’s own ideas and convictions to the exclusion of everyone else’s, it produces divisions so great that people end up taking sides and forming differing parties with conflicting agendas. This is a terrible event, because it creates great unrest among people who should be united. Ultimately, the whole situation becomes a stinking mess!” Obviously the fruit of worldly wisdom has been in operation far too often!

After describing the nature of the wisdom from below, James describes the nature of the wisdom from above. The wisdom from above refers to the wisdom of God. The wisdom from above is *heavenly* rather than *earthly*. It is *spiritual* rather than *sensual*. It is *divine* rather than *demonic*. It is firmly grounded in the truth of God’s Word and of His Son, Jesus Christ.

James lists seven fruits of the wisdom from above. Collectively these seven fruits are called the “fruit of righteousness”.<sup>13</sup> These seven fruits are comparable to the seven pillars mentioned in Proverbs 9:1 (NKJV) “*Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars.*”

The first fruit of the wisdom from above is *pure*. James specifically lists *pure* as “first” among the seven meaning that it is first in rank. “Pure” refers to that which is uncontaminated by impurity and free from any fault. The second fruit of the wisdom from above is *peaceable* meaning that it is free from a quarrelsome attitude, i.e. it has a disposition that is always ready to reconcile if possible. The third fruit listed is *gentle*. It is not mean and harsh but rather speaks the truth in love.<sup>14</sup> The fourth fruit listed is *willing to yield*. It is willing to listen to, consider, and submit to the wisdom of God spoken through another. The fifth fruit listed is *full of mercy and good fruits*. It does not rush to demand the full penalty for sin where the fruits of repentance are genuine. Such acts of mercy are regarded as “good fruits”. The sixth fruit listed is *without partiality*. It is fair and just being free of personal bias or favoritism in judgment. The seventh and final fruit listed is *without hypocrisy*. This refers to the display of personal integrity that is free of a double-standard. The wisdom from above will bear these seven fruits and will be rewarded with the peace of God: “*Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*”

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> James 3:18

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 4:15

Many claim to be wise but they are fools in God's eyes. They possess the wisdom from below. Don't make yourself a fool by giving heed to human philosophy. Turn your eyes toward heaven and seek the wisdom from above so that you will be found truly wise.

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