

BIBLICAL VIEW OF WISDOM

TEXT: JAMES 3:13-18

INTRODUCTION:

1. James refers to both wisdom and knowledge in verse 13. Though they are closely connected, there is a difference between them.
2. *Webster's Dictionary* says that knowledge refers to the possession of facts; whereas wisdom refers to the ability "to judge soundly and deal sagaciously with facts, especially as they relate to life and conduct."
3. *Webster's 1913 Dictionary* has this quote from William Cowper, the English poet and hymnwriter: "Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one, Have oftentimes no connection. Knowledge dwells In heads replete with thoughts of other men; Wisdom, in minds attentive to their own. Knowledge, a rude, unprofitable mass, The mere materials with which wisdom builds, Till smoothed, and squared, and fitted to its place, Does but encumber whom it seems to enrich. Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much; Wisdom is humble that he knows no more."
4. Many people are knowledgeable. They may be highly educated, well-read, and hold several advanced degrees, but they lack wisdom.
5. For example, consider a man that is often in the news. Newt Gingrich certainly is very knowledgeable. Gingrich received a BA in history from Emory University, and an MA and a PhD in modern European history from Tulane University in 1971.
6. He is an educated man, but he is certainly not a wise man. He is very proud. He is a liar and an adulterer who has been married three times. His third wife (who he was cheating with while married to his second wife) persuaded him to convert from being a Baptist to a Roman Catholic.
7. He is educated, but he is also very foolish.
8. Romans 1:22 says, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."
9. Tonight, I would like to speak on the subject of wisdom, from God's point of view. According to the Bible, it is not the possession of knowledge but the proper application of it that is important.
10. Wisdom is not learning a lot of facts. I knew a man who spent many hours reading the encyclopedia, but he was a drunkard. You can gain knowledge from reading the encyclopedia, but you gain wisdom from reading the Bible.
11. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).
12. Drunkards, no matter how well-read or educated or knowledgeable, are "not wise." They are fools.

13. We have noted the close connection between the epistle of James and the book of Proverbs (cf. Pro. 1:1-7).
14. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding" (Pro. 3:13).
15. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Pro. 4:7).
16. "For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it" (8:11).
17. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (9:10).
18. I think you will agree that, in God's estimation, getting wisdom is very important.
19. The Lord Jesus Christ is the personification of wisdom. Referring to Him, Colossians 2:3 says, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
20. Therefore, the first step toward true wisdom is receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour.

I. TRUE WISDOM COMES FROM GOD.

1. Earlier James said that we show our faith by our works (2:17-20). Now he says, we show our wisdom and knowledge by "a good conversation (lifestyle, behaviour)...with meekness of wisdom" (3:13).
2. Warren Weirsbe said, "The phrase, 'meekness of wisdom,' is an interesting one. Meekness is the right use of power, and wisdom is the right use of knowledge. They go together."
3. Meekness is not weakness. The Lord Jesus Christ was meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29).
4. Moses was meek, but not weak. "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3).
5. In contrast to true wisdom which comes from God, worldly wisdom is "earthly, sensual, devilish" (3:15).
6. First Corinthians 1:20 says, "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"
7. Man's wisdom comes from reason; but God's wisdom comes from revelation. This is the big difference between fundamental Christianity and liberalism and the religious cults, etc.
8. Isaiah 29:14 says, "For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."

9. The apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 in I Corinthians 1:19, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."
10. Man's worldly wisdom will come to nothing. God's wisdom will endure forever.
11. James lists seven fruits of heavenly wisdom (3:17). First and foremost is purity. True wisdom is "pure," i.e. holy, free from defilement.
12. True wisdom leads to purity and holiness. "It is impossible to exaggerate the value of a sensitive conscience" (Guy King).
13. Milton called the conscience "the umpire of the soul," but some people need to train their umpire better – by the Word of God.
14. Purity comes before peace (3:17). I referred earlier to Mr. Gingrich. He is impure. He is so obscenely impure that even many worldly people are repulsed by him.
15. Purity cannot be compromised. "Peace at any price" has destroyed many churches and Christian schools.
16. Next James says "then peaceable" (3:17). Martin Luther told a story of two goats that met on a narrow bridge. Neither one would back up and they both knew that if they got into a fight they would wind up in the river. Finally, one of them lay down and let the other one go over him. The wise man is a peacemaker and will do all he can to maintain peace without sacrificing purity.
17. Romans 12:18 says, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."
18. Third, the wisdom that is from above is "gentle" (3:17). A wise man is a gentleman, not a roughneck.
19. Recently an arrogant movie star had to be removed from an airplane because of his rude and disruptive behaviour. This man considers himself a know-it-all, but it is obvious he knows nothing about true wisdom.
20. True wisdom is "easy to be intreated" (3:17), i.e. willing to yield (like Luther's goat on the bridge), conciliatory, agreeable, open to reason, ready to admit when we are wrong.
21. "Full of mercy and good fruits" (3:17) means compassionate, kind, not vindictive. Our Lord said in Luke 6:36, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."
22. People that are merciful are fruitful -- "full of mercy and good fruits."
23. "Without partiality" means no favoritism (cf. 2:1-4).
24. "Without hypocrisy" means sincere, not phony, no pretense.

II. THE WRONG KIND OF WISDOM COMES FROM THE DEVIL

1. Worldly-minded people are characterized by "bitter envying and strife" (3:14). They are only concerned with their own interests and selfish ambitions – their career, their plans, their goals, their possessions, their family (some might object and say, "But isn't it good for us to be concerned with our family?" Yes – but not if the family comes before God).
2. The worldly man is proud of his success and jealous of any competitors. James says "glory not" (3:14), i.e. do not boast. First Corinthians 1:31 says, "That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."
3. Notice the steps downward: bitter envying and strife leads to boasting, which leads to lying and deceit (3:14). This wrong kind of wisdom "descendeth not from above" (3:15). It is from the world ("earthly"), the flesh ("sensual") and the devil ("devilish"), our three great enemies.
4. We do not hear many sermons these days against worldliness because most preachers are themselves pretty worldly, or they are afraid to offend their worldly members.
5. A little girl was watching her mother working in her flower garden one day and she said to her mother: "I know why the flowers grow, Mom. They're so pretty they want to get out of the dirt."
6. I don't know how pretty you are tonight but I know that if you are saved, God wants you to get out of the dirt.
7. Men reject God's wisdom and try to replace it with their own worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom has the wrong motives – "bitter envying and strife" (3:14).
8. Worldly wisdom produces the wrong results – "confusion and every evil work" (3:16). Wrong thinking produces wrong living.

III. TRUE WISDOM BRINGS GOD'S BLESSINGS (3:18).

1. James 3:18 links together chapters 3 and 4.
2. James 3:17 says that true wisdom is peaceable. James 4:1 starts off by mentioning "wars and fightings." (There were no chapter divisions in the original writings.)

3. James is declaring an important Bible principle – you reap what you sow (3:18).
4. The wise man demonstrates "the fruit of righteousness" (3:13, 17), because he sows "in peace" (3:18).
5. The wise man obeys God's Word and sows righteousness, not sin.
6. There is a popular phony "pseudo-Christianity" today a that is as fake as can be. Churches can manufacture conversions, they can stage fake miracles, they can speak in gibber-gabber and call it "tongues," they have their artificial ministers and phony worship services and they are fooling many people. But there is one thing that they cannot fake and that is fruit.
7. They cannot create "the fruit of righteousness." Only the Holy Spirit can do that (3:18).
8. What we sow determines what we reap. If we live in God's wisdom, we will sow righteousness and peace, and we will reap God's blessing.
9. If we live by man's worldly wisdom we will sow sin and reap "confusion and every evil work" (3:16).

CONCLUSION:

1. Let me ask you a few simple questions: Do you serve the Lord without caring who gets the credit? Are you proud?
2. Do you harbor jealousy and envy in your heart?
3. There is an old proverb. Some say it is from the Persians or Chinese or maybe the Arabs, etc.

He that knows not, and knows not that he knows not; he is a fool. Shun him.

He who knows not, and knows that he knows not; he is simple. Teach him.

He who knows, and knows not that he knows; he is asleep. Wake him.

He who knows, and knows that he knows; he is a wise man. Follow him.