

## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

### Sermon # 7

#### “HOW WISE ARE YOU?”

James 3:13-18

We have at our disposal today more knowledge than at any time in history. More information has been produced in the last thirty years than in the previous five thousand. Today information doubles every four years. Since the advent of the Internet we have more knowledge at our fingertips than we can possibly process.

Our world has plenty of knowledge and education, but it didn't necessarily bring along much wisdom. In fact, wisdom can often be learned from the fairly uneducated. Take children for instance.

- Patrick, age 10, says, *“Never trust a dog to watch your food.”*
- Michael, age 14, says, *“When your dad is mad and asks you, ‘Do I look stupid?’ don’t answer him.”* Wise man that Michael is, he also said, *“Never tell your mom her diet’s not working.”*
- Randy, 9 years of age said, *“Stay away from prunes.”* One has to wonder how poor Randy discovered that bit of wisdom.
- Lauren, age 9 says, *“Felt markers are not good to use as lipstick.”* Naomi can tell you from experience with her son that finger nail polish does not make good lip stick either.
- Joel, 10 years old, says, *“Don’t pick on your sister when she’s holding a baseball bat.”* and
- Eileen, age 8 says, *“Never try to baptize a cat.”*

Although there is much wisdom in what these children said there is more to wisdom than this. In fact James' whole letter is an explanation about the purpose of trials in the life of a believer. And in order for the purpose of God to be worked out in the believer's life one thing is required, wisdom. So James' advice is merely to ask for it. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”* (James 1:5).

James begins to deal with how to live our lives in verse thirteen by asking the question, "Who is wise and understanding among you?" No one wants to be seen as foolish or unwise. We all want to be perceived as intelligent and "in the know," "as people of Wisdom" – and that is a good goal to set – a Scriptural goal. The book of Proverbs reminds us in 2:4 to seek for wisdom "as for hidden treasure."

As we begin to examine what James says about this subject we need to be careful not to confuse knowledge and wisdom. During his retirement years, General Omar Bradley once remarked *“the world has achieved brilliance without wisdom.”* General Bradley realized that there is a vast difference between wisdom and knowledge.

Knowledge alone isn't enough. For example, let me share some things you may not have known.

Did you know?

-that there are only two people in Saudi Arabia who subscribe to “Surfer” magazine.

-that from space, the brightest man-made place is Las Vegas, Nevada.

- that the most stolen items in a drug store are batteries, cosmetics, film, sunglasses and get this Preparation H.

- that Weird Al Yankovic was valedictorian of his High School class and holds a Bachelor's degree in Architecture.

Now you have advanced your store of knowledge but wisdom is more than knowing a lot of useless information. Unfortunately, that distinction is still often lacking in our modern world

There is still a tendency to equate wisdom with intelligence, titles and degrees. Little if any attention is given to the lifestyle of the quoted "expert" or the long-range effect of his supposed wisdom. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts. But wisdom is moral insight with understanding about practical application. Wisdom is measured not by degrees acquired, but by deeds accomplished. According to verse thirteen, our lifestyle will be the leading indicator of the level and source of our wisdom. "Who *is* wise and knowing among you? Let him show his works by *his* good conduct with meekness of wisdom." Depending on the kind of lifestyle a person has, you can make an accurate judgment concerning the kind of wisdom they have -- whether it is the wisdom that comes from God or their wisdom is merely an earthly imitation.

James has already told us how we can get this true wisdom, which is from God. In James 1:5 we read, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*" The place to begin is to ask. But the real question is how can you put true wisdom into practice in your daily life? In order to answer this question, let's look at the nature of true wisdom and at several actions you can take to put it into practice.

James, tells us that there are two kinds of wisdom. Wisdom that comes from God and wisdom that comes from the world. How can you tell the difference? By the fruit that is evidenced.

First, there is worldly wisdom which James says in verse fifteen, "This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic." This type of wisdom is earthly, as opposed to heavenly, its standards and sources are earthly, it measures success in worldly terms and its aims are worldly aims. According to James this type of wisdom is characteristic of an unsaved individual. In the Greek, James is equating this wisdom with an animal. He is saying that this wrong type of wisdom is not more than an animal sort of thing, it is the wisdom that makes the animal snap, snarl and only care about survival. The human being also uses this animal wisdom for survival by using it and not caring who gets hurt. This type of wisdom is from Satan.

According to verse sixteen this kind of wisdom produces trouble, "For where envying and strife *are*, there *is* confusion and every foul deed." The result is "confusion and evil works" - works that are worthless or of no account.

There is an earthly wisdom but ....

Secondly, but there is also a heavenly wisdom, in verse seventeen he tells us, "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."

Do you live your life with certainty or with confusion? Are you sure of what is right and what is wrong? Is there anything today that does not change? Instead of black and white, does everything seem gray and is the line of distinction blurred? For some, maybe you today, this describes your life. There is a constant question of how to live your life because nothing is consistent or "feels right." Life is constantly changing, with no absolutes to guide you.

Are there really absolutes? Do you hold to Truths that never change? Are there markers in your life that are firm, solid and stable? The answer is "yes." There are absolutes that are reliable and never change. Is there Truth that you can count on? Where do you find such truth that stands the test of time, technology and tumultuous life? In a book that has never, and will never be proven false or flawed, for the author is God. Within His Word, the Bible, all we need to know of God, life and eternity is disclosed.

*Real Wisdom is...*

James tells us what a life of real wisdom looks like in verses seventeen and eighteen.

*First, Real Wisdom begins with a pure life.* (v. 17) "But the wisdom that is from above is first truly pure..."

James says that true wisdom is 'pure' which means free from defilement. In the Greek it means "without a flaw, pure enough to approach God." This wisdom is so cleansed of all concealed motives and of self that it has become pure enough to stand before God. Wisdom of this world may wish to escape the sight of God because it is simply not pure - true wisdom is able to bear his sight.

Everyone knows how to be on his or her best behavior when the situation requires it. So behavior can be altered to suit a particular situation and not be a reflection of how we truly desire to live. The real question is how we behave when we are alone, or among our close friends. God does not want us to merely act holy, he wants us to be holy. This requires true repentance -- a change of mind.

Real wisdom is being so cleansed of all ulterior motives and of self that it has become pure enough to see God. Worldly wisdom might well wish to escape God's sight; the true wisdom is able to bear his very scrutiny.

*Secondly, Real Wisdom is characterized by the desire to get along with others.*

(v. 17) "... peaceable,..."

You may feel like the Peanuts cartoon in which Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate the whole wide world!" Charlie says, "But I thought you had inner peace." Lucy replies, "I do have inner peace. But I still have outer obnoxiousness"

If we are going to have peace we must realize that true peace is not possible until first we have experienced *"peace with God."* "Therefore having being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

Having established peace with God we need to pursue peace with our fellow man. If we are going to experience peace, we are going to have to pursue it. Peace will not come on its own. We have to be proactive. We must intentionally avoid arguments by refusing to participate. It is very difficult to have an argument when one party refuses to argue. Make peace your goal. Listen to what James says in verse eighteen: "Now *the* fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Peacemaking does not suggest, as some may hear it, an attitude of peace by abdication -- like the couple who had just celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Someone asked the husband the secret of their marital bliss. *"Well," the old man drawled, "the wife and I had this agreement when we first got married. It went like this: When she was bothered about something, she'd just tell me and get it off her chest. And if I was mad at her about something, I was able to take a long walk. I suppose you could attribute our happy marriage to the fact that I have largely led an outdoor life."*

If you find yourself always fighting with people, that should tell you that something is not right inside you. If you are angry and hostile you need to find out why. You can be sure that the anger and hostility is not inspired by God.

*Real Wisdom is characterized by the desire to get along with others and...*

*Third, Real Wisdom is living with tender consideration for others. (v. 17) "gentle"*

It is impossible to find an English word to translate this quality. Matthew Arnold called it "sweet reasonableness" and it is the ability to extend to others the kindly consideration we would wish to receive ourselves.

Selfishness makes us inconsiderate of others. But James says that this heavenly wisdom is "considerate." When we consider others, we are looking outward instead of inward. It is hard to think of others when we are only thinking about ourselves. That is why it is so important that we relinquish selfishness. And surprisingly, one of the most effective ways to do this is to focus on other people -- on their needs and how we can help them. As Christians, we are called to love and care for one another.

*Real Wisdom is living with tender consideration for others and...*

*Fourth, Real Wisdom is always teachable. (v. 17) "willing to yield"*

The way this word is used in this context has to do with our own openness and teachability. Proverbs 12:15 (GN) says, *"Stupid people always think they are right. Wise people listen to advice."*

On one occasion Abraham Lincoln, to please a certain politician, issued a command to transfer certain regiments. When Sec. of War Edwin Stanton received the order, he refused to carry it out, saying the President was a fool. When Lincoln was told of this, he replied, *"If Stanton said I'm a fool,*

*then I must be, for he is nearly always right. I'll see for myself.*" As the two men talked, the President quickly realized that his decision was a serious mistake, and without hesitation he withdrew it. A teachable, submissive spirit is often a major key in defusing conflict.

*Real Wisdom is always teachable and..*

*Fifth, Real Wisdom is a life controlled by mercy. (v. 17) "full of mercy and good fruits,"*

James says that we are to be "full of" or "controlled by" mercy. "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:36) The kind of mercy that is being described here is not just for the man who is in trouble, but it means to be merciful to the one who is in trouble even if the trouble is his own fault! Mercy is not dependant on guilt or innocent. Somehow it is easier to be merciful to the one we believe is suffering unjustly, but God is merciful even though you were guilty.

James by his use of the word "fruit" reminds us that righteousness is not produced by the believer, but rather it is produced in the believer.

*Real Wisdom is a life controlled by Mercy and...*

*Sixth, Real Wisdom is characterized by sincerity. (v. 17) "... without partiality and without hypocrisy."*

We are not just told to act as if we are not prejudiced but we are to be sincere. True wisdom is (*anupokritos, an-hupo-kritios*), without hypocrisy. That is to say, it is not a pose and does not deal in deception. It is honest; it never pretends to be what it is not; and it never acts to gain its own ends.

## Conclusion

In the Bible we are told the story of how God came to Solomon and told him that he would give him anything he desired. He could have riches, power, prestige, anything he desire (2 Chron. 1:6-7). Solomon's request was the he be given wisdom (2 Chron. 1:8,10) Solomon at the height of his spiritual power wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7). Yet in later life the life that had stood so tall and straight had rotted from within. In his sunset years he ceased to fear God and began to simply depended on his own human wisdom. He was no longer the world's wisest man, he became the world's most knowledgeable fool.

Are you wise? Are you wise according to the world or according to God? Do you employ the world's wisdom or do you follow Godly wisdom? Let's take a few moments right now and ask God to help us inspect our fruit.