

Two Kinds of Wisdom (Part 2)

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Date: 25 September 2016

[0 : 00] I want you to think about some of the changes that you have experienced in your lifetime. How many of you grew up in the home where there was one telephone that sat on a shelf in a hallway like that you see on the screen or on a table?

It was attached to the wall by a wire. How many of you remember that pretty well? A lot of people do. Well, now we have a phone that we put in our pocket or on our side.

We carry it everywhere we go. Quite a change, isn't it? Who grew up in a home with one TV? Something like that. You got three channels. You had to get up and go and turn the knob to change the channel.

Well, now we've got all forms of TV. Satellite, cable, U-verse. More channels we could even imagine. You can change them, record, pause, do all kinds of things from a remote or even your smartphone.

Who had a computer with dial-up internet connection that sounded like this? Seems like an eternity, didn't it?

[1 : 20] Now we've got instant, silent connections. All these advances in technology that we have experienced reveal how God has created human beings with highly developed intellectual capacities.

Tremendous intelligence human beings have. And we're just compelled, aren't we, to constantly try to discover and develop new things, new technologies.

You know, if you just look at the history of the world, the human race has continuously gotten smarter all the way through.

Even to today. Even to today. But smarter doesn't always mean wiser, does it? In fact, the smartest people know that just that intellectual ability is not enough.

They need to know how to do something, do the right thing with that knowledge. And so smart people understand the need for wisdom. But when you start talking about wisdom, that brings up its own problem.

[2 : 44] Because there's more than one kind of wisdom that we, even as Christians, possess and use. We've been looking at it now for the last two weeks in James chapter 3.

He has pointed out the basic two kinds of wisdom that we all use. Look at it. Earthly human wisdom in James chapter 3, verses 14 through 16.

He contrasts that with heavenly or God-given wisdom in verse 13 and then in verses 17 through 18. Last week, we looked at earthly wisdom and defined it like this. Man's ability to discern and judge correctly as to what he thinks is true or right.

Earthly wisdom, earthly wisdom, human wisdom, whatever you want to call it, is a wisdom that we have as a result of being created in the image of God. Now, we're fallen creatures.

[3 : 55] Our God-given abilities have been corrupted by the entrance of sin into the world. But we still have this basic common wisdom that can be very helpful at times.

But human wisdom or earthly wisdom will always be limited. Always limited. It will often create or lead to problems.

And it will sometimes result in evil things being done. James describes that. James chapter 3, in verse 15 in particular, this earthly kind of wisdom, this human wisdom that just comes to us naturally.

He says, for where jealousy, let me back up in verse 15. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. It's not God-given wisdom. It's not heavenly wisdom.

But it's earthly, unspiritual, demonic. Now, we see evidence all around us today of how human intelligence and earthly wisdom combined do not automatically make life better.

[5 : 15] You think about the advances in technology. You think about what we have available to us today. But don't most families have less personal interaction at home than at any time in history?

I mean, isn't it true there are more times than you care to admit that one person is in one room doing one thing, or maybe everybody can see one another, but you've got your head down in that tablet or phone or TV.

Most communities today are more divided than they've ever been. There's not this sense of neighborliness, of people coming together, knowing one another, helping one another.

And then most of the world, most of the world feels less safe today. And we're always on alert for possible terrorist activity.

If you think about it in these terms, earthly human wisdom alone has not made our lives better, nor will it in the future.

[6 : 30] We need, we desperately need God's presence in our lives, in our homes, in this community, in this world.

We need God-given wisdom to be able to look at life and figure things out from God's perspective, how He intends things to work, how He intends life to work, in the way that will bring true glory to Himself and will be meaningful and purposeful for us.

I want us today to look back at James chapter 3 and move forward now in verses 17 and 18 and see what will happen, see what our lives will look like when we seek and apply God-given wisdom. Now I want you to understand as we go through this, and next week we're going to go in and start our study of Proverbs, the Bible's big book of wisdom. The Bible does not try to actually define wisdom.

It'll say a lot of things about wisdom, but what you really find is that the Bible describes wisdom. The Bible describes what it looks like in our lives.

[8 : 01] That's what James talked about how earthly wisdom, what it looks like in our lives. He said in one of those verses, verse 14, in verse 14 about it, you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts.

He goes on to talk about there'll be disorder in every vile or evil practice because of that. Earthly human wisdom can be seen. That's all there is in our lives in those kinds of ways.

Well now let's look at verse 17, the kinds of things that will be true about our life when we are seeking and using God's wisdom. Verse 17, With the wisdom from above, heavenly wisdom, God-given wisdom, the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. The first characteristic of God-given wisdom is also the first priority that James gives here.

It's purity, or he uses the word just pure here in the ESV. But the wisdom from above is first pure. It means it's undefiled, it's clean.

[9 : 31] The person who lives according to God's wisdom, they'll demonstrate it by the morally pure life that they live, that they demonstrate in their character just who they are, and in the things that they do.

Such purity, such purity, as James is describing here, will free us from the bitter jealousy and selfish ambition that will come, that often comes, when we just do our best to figure things out with our earthly wisdom.

Now, the purity that James is talking about can only be experienced in the life of a person who has a right relationship with God. If you're not a Christian, you're not going to be able to have this God-given wisdom that enables you to live this clean and morally pure life until you acknowledge that you're not right with God, turn from your sin, and put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation.

But when you do that, God will forgive you, He will cleanse you, He will make you His child, and He will give you His wisdom if you'll ask for it, if you'll seek it, and be willing to use it.

But James is writing to Christians, and that's what the majority of us are in here this morning. So what we need to think about is this. As a Christian, there's a lot of times when I don't live the pure life that Jesus expects me to live, calls me to live as His follower.

[11 : 12] We all know we have impure desires at times. We have temptations to say things and do things that are just the opposite of this moral purity.

And we give in to those desires more often than we want, don't we? Than we would like to admit.

We give in to those temptations. And we need to acknowledge that. And we also need to understand that when there is such moral impurity in us, about us, it hinders our fellowship with

God.

The Spirit of God is grieved by such in our lives, by such thoughts that we dwell on and then act on. And the Spirit of God, who indwells every Christian, when this is true about us, He'll make us uneasy about ourselves. He'll convict us of that sin. He'll cause us to not be able to rest easy with it, to be comfortable, to be happy in it.

Because it's His job to call us to the point of being miserable, being guilty, so that we will confess that sin, turn from it, be forgiven, and experience a new cleansing.

[12 : 35] The book of 1 John, chapter 1, verse 9, talks about this. This is a verse of Scripture that all of us need to know, need to utilize a lot.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. You know, if you came in here this morning, and there is in your life things that you know don't please God, it may even fall under the category of moral filth.

Maybe things that you're just, just the attitude that you have, the fantasies you entertain, or it could just be the language that you're using.

If you came in this way, and the Spirit of God is really convicting you of it now. I mean, you know it's wrong, and you're tired of doing this, being this way, dishonoring God, and probably some people in your life.

If you will honestly confess your sin, agree with God about it, ask Him to help you to stop it, to turn from it. He will forgive you.

[13 : 58] He'll cleanse that filth. He will give you a fresh start this morning. You. No matter what it is, God will forgive you, cleanse you, and restore you to fellowship with Him if you will come to Him this way.

Once we have been purified by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will work in us to give us desires to maintain a pure heart, a pure mind, so that we can live in right fellowship with God and in right relationships with other people.

So just think, am I demonstrating that I have and use God-given wisdom by the not morally perfect, but by the purity that I desire and the purity that I seek to maintain just on a daily basis?

Look at the next characteristic of someone who lives according to God's wisdom. Peaceable. Some translations say peace-loving, but it's describing someone who does more than just loves peace.

It's describing someone who wants to be, seeks to be a peacemaker. That means they try to preserve peace where it already exists, and it also means they work for peace.

[15 : 34] For it does not. They try to bring it about. James is not describing someone who has this attitude, well, I'm just sort of going to close my eyes.

I'm not going to notice things. I'm not going to say anything. I'm just going to sort of go along to get along so there will be peace. That's not what he has in mind at all.

The goal of peacemaking, or being peaceable, is not to live like the old man who celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary, and when asked what was the key to his success, he explained it like this.

He said, when we got married, my wife and I made this agreement. When she was bothered about anything, she could just speak up, tell me about it, say what was on her mind, not hold anything in. And then, when I was upset about something, I would take a long walk. And as the man talked, he paused, and he said, I suppose you contribute our happy marriage to the fact that I have largely led an outdoor life.

[16 : 52] Now, I just read that little story, but I honestly know a couple. That was the way they made it 50-something years.

She vented, she ranted and raved about everything that was on her mind and heart. And he hunted and fished and played golf and did a lot of things to keep him outside and away from her.

That was not the ideal marriage. That was not truly him being a peacemaker. He was a conflict avoider.

Now, there are times when we all need to take a walk. Close your mouth, take a walk. It's not good, it's not healthy for us to seek fights.

And if you enjoy a conflict, something's wrong with you. I mean, you're not normal if you just like a good fight with people. Our goal should always be to do what Paul told the Roman Christians.

[18 : 06] Two different statements. Look at it in Romans 12. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Notice the first two words there, if possible.

It's not always possible. Some people won't let you live peaceably with them. But if possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all people.

Maintain peace. Work for peace where it's not there. And then the second thing he says is in Romans 14, so then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Paul is saying there, you be proactive. You be a peacemaker. You do the kind of things that will actually bring about peace. and mutually benefit, build up one another.

Now, let's think another way that James is not talking about. He's not writing about a peace that depends on walking away from every conflict.

[19 : 19] Christian peacemakers. We're supposed to know the truth and stand for it. We're supposed to know what's right and defend that which is right.

We ought to be people who are concerned about justice prevailing. peace prevailing. But just as importantly now, we need to pursue the truth, speak the truth in love.

We need to do what we can to bring about peace in the right kind of way, the most positive kind of way. So let's just look now, think about our own lives.

In situations that exist where there's conflict, let's say, in your home. Sometimes there's conflict at home. Sometimes there's conflict at work.

Sometimes there may be conflict at church. Sometimes there's conflict among your friends at school. When you step into a situation where there is conflict, conflict, what do you bring to the table?

[20 : 31] What do you do by your presence, by your words? Do you make things worse? Do you add fuel to the flames of hostility by the things you say, the way you act?

Or does your arrival just bring a sense of calm? Do your words soothe?

Do your words tear down walls instead of reinforcing them? Do you have a calming influence?

Do you try to have a calming influence that seeks a peaceful resolution based on what's right now, based on what will be just fair, if you want to use the word, for everybody involved?

Now, the answer, whatever answer you give, reveals the kind of wisdom that you operate under in those kind of circumstances. You're not really that wise if you're just always making things worse.

[21 : 51] You're operating according to just earthly human wisdom, unspiritual, maybe even demonic at times. But if you are someone that you think and you speak and you act in a way trying to bring about peace and calm and unity, then you know you're a Christian with the Spirit of God helping you to exercise true godly wisdom.

You need to thank God for that and keep on that. Another characteristic of a person who lives according to God's wisdom is according to the ESV in this verse is gentle or considerate.

It's describing a person who knows when and how to make allowances for others when you could be just and just do the right thing but sometimes there's a need to show mercy.

I'm not saying to approve what's wrong but to show mercy, to show grace. Aren't you glad that God didn't always give you what you deserve?

That God's not always just making us reap what we sow. God shows me and I'm sure you'd have to say He shows you a lot a whole lot of grace and mercy on a regular basis.

[23 : 40] And we need to be like God in that, be godly like that and do the same thing. Here's an example of what James is talking about this kind of gentleness.

Dr. William Trumbull was an English statesman. One day he was riding on a train, traveling a distance. He had his own little compartment.

His seat was here and there was a seat across from him facing him. And a rough looking character that was obviously under the influence came in his little compartment and sat out in that seat right in front of him face to face.

And the man when he sat down he pulled out a bottle and he offered Trumbull a drink. Well Trumbull just responded calmly, no thank you, I don't drink.

Well the man took a drink himself, put the bottle up, but over the next hour he pulled that bottle out several times and each time he offered Trumbull a drink and each time Trumbull just calmly, matter of factly gave that same response, no thank you, I don't drink.

[25 : 01] Well finally it made the man mad and he just looked at Trumbull and he said I guess you think I'm just a nothing but just a drunk and you think you're a whole lot better than me.

And Trumbull again just so calm and cool Trumbull replied on the contrary, I think you're a very generous man.

And the person who observed this said that that old man, it just melted him. His hostility went away. He quit drinking.

He started talking to Trumbull, talking about himself and his life and why he was in the situation he was in and Trumbull listened and took him seriously.

And as they traveled together Trumbull who was a Christian actually shared the gospel with this man who did put his faith in Jesus by the end of the trip.

[26 : 11] Now, a smart person or a worldly wise person would have figured out a way to get that obnoxious drunk out of their compartment.

And let's just be honest. If you were there, if I was there, first thought through my mind is how can I get rid of him without having a fight? How can I get him out of here?

I didn't pay this money. I don't want to be on this trip. Well, the drunk in front of me wanting me to drink with him. How do we, I'm going to find somebody to get him out.

That's the normal thing. That's the smart thing. That's the earthly only wisdom way to do it.

God. But this man, Trumbull, he was a godly man with godly wisdom who didn't treat that man like the man deserved, but treated him as someone like himself created in the image of God, treated him with respect, treated him with gentleness, gentleness, and it had the best outcome.

[27 : 33] We need to look at our lives and just see if there's godly wisdom coming out in not always giving somebody what they deserve, not always standing upon our own rights, but showing grace and being gentle because we are God's children and we want to love like he loves.

The next one talks about being open to reason. This is the opposite of being stubborn. The NIV translates it as submissive. It describes a person who is open to reason and willing to be persuaded differently than what he or she originally thought.

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln issued a command to transfer a certain army regiment from one place to another. Well, when his secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, received the order, he refused to carry it out and he said that Lincoln was a fool.

Well, when Lincoln was told this, he replied, if Stanton said I was a fool, then I must be, for he is nearly always right.

I'll see for myself. And he got together with Stanton and as they talked about it, he realized that he was totally wrong, that Stanton was right and he withdrew the order.

[29 : 17] Now, if we have a conversation and you tell me I'm a fool, I'll just be honest with you, most days I'm going to bow up.

I'm not going to take it well. I'll call you a fool too for calling me a fool. Well, what James is saying is a person with godly wisdom is going to think, going to consider what they hear.

It could be truthful, it could not be. And we're not going to be so defensive and think that we can never be wrong.

as you just do what you do on a daily, weekly basis, do you see signs of godly wisdom in your life? Because you see this quality of being reasonable, being willing to be corrected, willing to change. the next one.

[30 : 33] Full of mercy and good fruits. A person who lives according to god's wisdom, it'll be seen because they're full of mercy and good fruits. Now, mercy is a compassionate attitude, and good fruits are the actions that flow from it.

living according to god's wisdom in this kind of way means that when you see a situation and you have pity on somebody, your heart goes out to someone.

You do more than just say or think, I feel sorry for them. You do more than even pray for them. You actually do something to help them.

Think about how many times you've run across someone. Maybe you knew them real well, maybe you didn't. And there was, it was a situation where they had a need, there was something that you could have done, and as you saw them, you really did feel sorry for them.

Your heart went out to them. And you meant to do something. But you never did. You never spoke up. You never gave them any money.

[31 : 45] You never offered to help. You just had merciful thoughts. There was no good fruit.

James is telling us when we are operating according to godly wisdom, we'll not just see needs.

We'll not just have a compassionate heart.

We'll be moved to actually do something about it. Final characteristic of God's wisdom is, he says, impartial. Impartial and sincere.

Impartial here refers to being consistent, really. Being steady. A person who is not easily turned aside, chooses a course of action and sticks with it.

Sincere here could be translated without hypocrisy. impartial. It's a reference to being the real deal, to being genuine. The person who is impartial and sincere is the kind of person who does not look around to see who's looking before they act.

[32 : 54] The person who acts with impartiality and sincerity is not concerned with what the majority thinks or what the majority is doing. The person who is truly operating with godly wisdom is going to do what's right before God, what's right for that person, and then just deal with whatever comes as a result.

Deal with the fallout. That's the kind of wisdom that on a regular basis, you operate according to. Impartiality.

Sincerity. James tells us that these are characteristics of a person who's living with god-given wisdom, acting on god-given wisdom.

And then he goes on in the last verse, verse 18, to talk about the results of living this way. Look at it again. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make.

Peace. Most commentators say this is a proverbial saying. Something that was well known to the churches in James' day.

[34 : 14] Godly wisdom results in righteousness as well as peace. The righteousness here refers to right actions, doing the right thing, moral actions, living according to God's will.

You know, if we are serious about living a Christian life and asking God to give us wisdom in our various situations, help us to know what to do, help us to know why to do, we'll be seeking to live our lives in such a way that, to the best of our knowledge, we're doing what's right before God and what's right before people, no matter what the consequences may be.

James describes a person with godly wisdom, basically, as someone who is interested in, committed to living a life that they know will please God.

And a person who lives this way will be trying to live in peace and harmony with everybody else around them, at least as far as it depends on them.

Now, we've gone through this passage, verses 13 through 18, over three weeks now. What have you learned about yourself? If you're here for the first time, read verses 13 through 18, and then think, do I just on a regular basis, do I live according to earthly human wisdom?

[35 : 54] Or do I live according to heavenly God-given wisdom? Which do you prefer? That's a legitimate question because James says in chapter one, if you lack wisdom, all you have to do is ask God.

James is talking about knowing how to live in the midst of life's hardships, difficulties. He says, if you ask wisdom, ask God. Lack wisdom, ask God. Look at it, James 1, verse 5, first part of verse 6. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach. And it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting.

You know, what James is saying here is not a one-time request. We need to make it a habit of asking God to give us wisdom, to be the kind of person we need to be in our home, on our job, at school, in this church, just wherever it is that we go.

We need to ask God to give us wisdom, to be able to see, to be able to understand, to be able to make decisions that would please him, that would bring glory to him, our ultimate goal in life, but also would truly help people, meet people's needs.

[37 : 23] And in the process of doing this, we'll be blessed. I want to ask you this morning, do you want to experience, be able to use God's wisdom?

We'll ask you. Scripture says he'll give it to us and the results will be seen very clearly in our lives. Let's pray together.

Dear God, show us right now what we should do in response to what you've said to us. That's what we desire, Father. We've heard your word. Help us now to obey it.

Show us what that means. And in an attitude of prayer, you listen to the Lord and you respond to him. If I could pray with you, help you, I'll be here at the front for the next few minutes.

Thank you.