

# Two Kinds of Wisdom (Part 1)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do you consider yourself to be a wise person? That's how I began the message last week. And it's important that we consider that again today.

Because that's the question that James begins this section of Scripture, chapter 3, verse 13. He's asking the question, Who is wise and understanding among you?

But he's not looking for an answer in words. He is looking for us to respond by pointing to our life, pointing to our works.

Look at it. James chapter 3, verse 13. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

Look on the screen and notice that in the NIV translation. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

[ 1 : 17 ] You hear what James is saying. The truly wise person, as God would consider wise, is the person whose life is characterized by good works done in humility.

Now I think it's always important in a setting like this, in a Sunday school class, in a sermon, when you talk about good works, to explain, because so many people think the way you're right with God, the way that you go to heaven when you die, is by doing certain things, doing good works.

And if you do enough good works to outweigh the bad works, then you'll be right with God now and forevermore. Well, that's not true. That is our just faulty human logic and wisdom thinking that way.

We have already studied in the book of James how he strongly stresses that real Christian faith, real saving faith, is not just something we profess, but it's something that we live out.

Here's how he said it in chapter 1, verse 22. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. See, if you think exposing yourself to the word of God in a place like this, in a service like this, or even in your own Bible reading, just knowing it, hearing it, but not with God's help obeying it because you want to obey it, you're deceiving yourself.

[ 3 : 08 ] He goes on in chapter 2 to talk about the importance of real faith will be seen in our works, and he completes that section in chapter 2, verse 26.

He says, For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. So I want you just to be clear about that.

As now James is pointing out, that Christians who have a God-given wisdom will show it by the humble way they go about doing things that serve other people, that please God.

True Christian good works. Now, he goes on in verses 14 through 18 to point out there's actually two kinds of wisdom at work in people's lives.

He's contrasting what we're going to call earthly wisdom versus heavenly wisdom, or you can refer to it as human wisdom versus God-given wisdom.

[ 4 : 19 ] Look at how he describes this. Verse 14. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile or evil practice.

But 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. after reading that, which kind of wisdom do you demonstrate most of the time?

Now sometimes we just operate according to this human wisdom, just our own best thinking, and it comes out in some selfishness.

[ 5 : 42 ] It comes out in causing problems with people maybe in our home or at work. But just overall, as you live your life, in light of what James says, do you live according to just earthly human wisdom?

Or do you demonstrate that God has given you His wisdom and you really seek to be obedient to Him in the way you deal with people and situations most of the time?

Well, to help us really be able to answer that, let's look closely at what James says. Let's look first today at earthly wisdom. We're going to come back next week and look at the heavenly wisdom. First, earthly wisdom, we're going to define it this way, is man's ability to discern and judge correctly as to what he thinks is true or right.

Now I'm taking that from the dictionary definition I gave you last week of wisdom. Wisdom, last week we saw, is the power of discerning and judging correctly as to what is true or right.

[ 7 : 04 ] Now think about it. The world, in general, as seen in a dictionary, thinks of wisdom as being able to judge, being able to discern about what's true or right.

But in the world's way of looking at things, God's not a part of that equation. And so that's why we can define earthly wisdom as our ability, human ability, man's ability to discern and judge correctly as to what he thinks is true or right.

Now we looked last week at earthly wisdom or human wisdom, you can call it either one, in great detail. I want to quickly review.

We saw that human wisdom is possible in a positive sense because we are created in the image of God. It's a part of our God-given abilities, being like him, to have a certain degree of wisdom.

It's also a part of God's common grace. God's common grace is the undeserved favor that he shows to everybody. He just chooses to do that.

[ 8 : 23 ] Jesus described it like this. God chooses to send rain on the good as well as the evil. The good farmers, the faithful, God-fearing farmers, as well as the atheist farmers, they benefit from God's good weather.

It's part of his common grace, Jesus said. Human wisdom is possible, but human wisdom is limited because we do not know nor can we fully understand all the facts in a given situation, but God can. God has perfect knowledge and understanding of all things and we lack that knowledge because we're not God. So human wisdom is possible, but it's limited.

But there's more bad news about it. Human wisdom is defective because of the fall. Adam and Eve's sin, it resulted in the corruption of every aspect of creation.

Our God-given abilities as a result of being created in his image, they were not abolished by the fall, they were certainly corrupted. We, we, we, we, our wisdom today, we're using this as our, our, our point.

[ 9 : 46 ] Our wisdom today is defective because of the fall. I want you to think about it like this. Since Adam and Eve sinned, every person comes into this world, born into this world with a sinful nature that makes us naturally focus on doing our will instead of God's will.

The way we're born with this sinful nature, we're more concerned about doing what I want to do really than what anybody else wants us to do. And you see it in little children all the way up. We see it in our own lives. Left alone, we will use our God-given qualities like wisdom in basically selfish, worldly, and even ungodly ways.

We're going to come to that in a little bit. That's because earthly human wisdom seeks its knowledge and understanding from every source you can find in this world except God and His Word.

That's what James wants us to understand. Earthly wisdom, that which is not from above. Human wisdom. There's a certain amount of it that's, a certain way to look at it that's good, that's positive.

[ 11 : 11 ] But the problem with human wisdom is that we take what we can learn, we take our experience, and we just figure things out based on that, and we don't even consider what God's Word says.

We don't seek His help in trying to understand something. Let me give you an example. Before we look at all the negative things James has to say about earthly wisdom, remember last week that because of God's common grace, there are benefits to human wisdom.

We all benefit from natural human wisdom that God has given to people. That's how cars got invented that we drove here today.

That's why we're in a climate-controlled building. Somebody was able to figure all this out. So we are all beneficiaries of God's common grace and God's common wisdom.

I want to give you an example of the problem. Many non-Christians are wise financial managers.

[12:32] I mean, they know how to live within their means. They know that it's good to avoid debt and save money. There are many unbelievers, atheists even, who can provide wise counsel for how you can manage your money in the best possible way.

But someone like this who only has earthly wisdom, human wisdom, they're not going to lead us or teach us to acknowledge all that we have comes from God.

God gives us the ability to work and make money. God gives us the opportunity to do that. And they certainly won't teach us to give tithes and offerings to God or to seek to honor God in what we do with all of our resources.

People with only earthly wisdom, they'll tell you, you just take care of your stuff, manage your resources well, take care of yourself, take care of your immediate family, and just do what you want to do with your money.

earthly wisdom. It can be very helpful at times. But here's the whole point of what James is trying to get us to understand.

[13:53] Earthly wisdom is not sufficient to show us how to live in a way that honors God, that will serve His purpose.

Earthly wisdom is not even going to tell us how to live and help and serve people around us that God wants us to help and serve. Now, if we're Christians, we are more concerned about things than just what works best for me.

Aren't we? I mean, if we really are Christians, that God has put His Spirit in us, we have a desire to really and truly know what pleases Him and do what pleases Him.

See, Paul talks about it in the second chapter of Philippians that God works in all of His people, all of His children to cause us to will and to work for His good pleasure.

And the only way we're going to know how to work and will and work to His good pleasure is if we have His God-given wisdom. So, now, let's look at what James says, how he explains the problems with just earthly wisdom.

[15:18] Number one, the self-centeredness of earthly wisdom. That's in verse 14. Look back at it again. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false and be false to the truth.

One way to spot someone who lives by earthly wisdom is by something like bitter jealousy in them, selfish ambition.

Bitter jealousy describes someone who cannot see someone else in a place of influence or in a better place than them.

A person with bitter jealousy resents when another person has something they think they should have.

Selfish ambition describes someone who is determined to get what they want no matter what or who gets hurt. Now in this context, James is most likely describing church members who are jealous of teachers and leaders in the church and what they're thinking is, I should have been that teacher.

[16:38] I should have been that leader. They resent who's there. Now the reason we get that idea is what James says in chapter 3 verses 1 through 12.

The verses above where we're reading now. James has addressed the issue not many of you should become teachers. Teachers are going to incur a stricter judgment and you better watch what you say.

You better guard your tongue. There's problems in the church that come out throughout this letter and there's people in churches that he's writing to that they're just they're bitter, they're jealous.

All they're concerned about is themselves. getting what they want, what they think they deserve and they totally resent those who have somehow or another got what they want or been put in a place that they think should be theirs.

Now evidently some of these people that James is addressing thought they were right in their attitude, in their actions and so that's why James says what he did in the rest of verse 14.

[17:46] He says, do not boast and be false to the truth. Some people were proudly opposing the teachers and leaders. Well James wants them to know that their very actions are a denial about what the Bible teaches about godly wisdom and Christian character.

By their selfish and jealous behavior they're demonstrating God's not guiding them. Their so-called wisdom doesn't come from him.

Now, let's think about this personally. Do you ever have a problem with jealousy or selfish ambition?

One way to test yourself is to think about how you respond to somebody at work or somebody at school or somebody on your team or in some organization. How do you respond to someone who is recognized or promoted or honored and you aren't?

Can you honestly, sincerely congratulate them? Can you be happy when somebody gets a promotion that you think I should have got it?

[ 19 : 17 ] Can you be happy with somebody who gets more playing time on your team but you think you should be playing ahead of them? You see, James is not talking about what's right or wrong here in terms of what you ought to get or shouldn't get.

He's talking about how you respond to what is. Are you able to congratulate? Are you able to be happy with people, for people, sincerely?

who have what you wished you had? Or are you jealous? Are you envious? Are you so mad and bitter because you got passed over, you got overlooked, but you just can't treat those other people the right way?

worldly wisdom thinking that kind of way. It'll make us self-centered. That's understandable when you look next at the nature of earthly wisdom.

Let's look at the ungodly nature of earthly wisdom in verse 15. He says, this is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

[ 20 : 37 ] Let's think about what he's talking about. Earthly wisdom, human wisdom. It is earthly. He's talking about a mindset that refuses to consider anything heavenly.

In other words, it ignores God. He's talking about someone operates from a wisdom that just considers the ways of the world and leaves God out of it.

He says it's also unspiritual. He's talking about natural wisdom without any of the supernatural wisdom that God gives us through His Spirit. James is describing someone whose wisdom comes from just how he thinks, just how she feels based on what they read, based on what they're told, based on what they're experienced.

It's unspiritual. It's all about how I think and feel with no regard to what God might be doing. And then third and worst, it's demonic.

Earthly wisdom comes from demons whose leader is Satan. Now, I want you to think with me. We can trace that all the way back to the fall in the Garden of Eden.

[ 21 : 57 ] when all of God's attributes that He has given to human beings, when all of the God-given human qualities were corrupted and became defective.

That's where human wisdom became defective, back in the Garden. That's the kind of wisdom we inherit naturally from our parents. Now, in thinking about this worldly wisdom, it's earthly, it's unspiritual, it's demonic, what would that actually look like in a person?

It may be surprising. It can be found in our lives as Christians just like it is found in the leader of the disciples, Peter.

I want you to look with me, think with me. In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus asked His disciples, who do people say that I am? And they said several things and finally, Peter, speaking on behalf of all the 12, he said, you are the Christ, you are the Son of God and Jesus commended him.

God has shown you this. You hadn't figured it out. God's revealed this to you. It was an affirming time and Jesus, on that occasion, the Scripture says, began to teach those disciples about why He really came into the world which was going to be to die on the cross.

[ 23 : 28 ] Now when Peter heard that, he just said, you are the Son of God, you are the Christ. And Jesus said, you are right, that is true, but I am going to die.

I am going to be crucified. In Peter's mind, that just couldn't be. So here is how he responded. Peter took him, that is Jesus, aside, and began to rebuke him.

Never, Lord, he said, this shall never happen to you. Now, before you think, how could Peter rebuke, correct, reprimand Jesus, and say, you don't know what you are talking about.

He can't be this way. In Peter's mind, what Jesus said just did not make sense. How could the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, be crucified?

Peter just thought, this must be a long day. Jesus is confused, and so he is going to correct Jesus. This shall never happen to you, he said. But Jesus took this very hard.

[ 24 : 45 ] Look how he responded to Peter. He said, get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Peter was so strongly rebuked by Jesus because Peter was just thinking naturally.

He was just thinking and said just what came naturally. He wanted to protect Jesus and protect himself. He was thinking about surviving. That's earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom in action.

See, Peter was only thinking about what's going to affect me and my Lord and my future. Peter was not thinking about what is God's plan in all this.

Peter really wasn't thinking what is the Son of God up to. He just naturally thought Jesus is wrong.

[ 26 : 05 ] Earthly wisdom, it is ungodly in nature. And then thirdly, why don't you look at the harmful effects of earthly wisdom in verse 16.

He says, for where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. The world's wisdom, if that's all there is, people are just doing the best they can do.

according to the way they think and feel and their own personal experiences. The world's wisdom will lead to chaos and opens the door to all kinds of evil.

The jealousy and selfish ambition of some church members that James is writing to is causing all kinds of church conflict that James describes in chapter 4 verses 1 through 5 and strongly condemns them for.

Here's what I want you to think. We see evidence of such earthly wisdom just about everywhere you turn today. Look at Congress, the leaders of our country.

[ 27 : 19 ] Congress is a picture of disorder, of conflict, and ineffectiveness. can you argue against that? Look at the Supreme Court.

It is legalizing every kind of evil practice today, especially sexual perversion. Look at racial problems in this country.

Many of those so-called leaders who are in the spotlight, like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, they are men who operate obviously according to earthly wisdom because everywhere they go, they cause more disorder and deeper division than existed before they arrived.

But I want you to don't dwell on Congress and Supreme Court and these other things.

Let's bring it closer. Let's make it personal. What's the environment? What's happening in the places where you are actively involved?

[ 28 : 32 ] Like your home, your school, your team, your workplace? Think with me.

Are good things happening? And when I use the word good here, I'm talking about things that would actually please God, His definition of goodness. Are people demonstrating humility?

Are people who call themselves Christians actually living like it? You see Christian character being displayed in their life. Well, if that's true, then somebody is leading the way by the way they exercise godly wisdom.

And if that's the case, you need to support them. You need to encourage them. They may not be doing everything you wish they would do, but something good is happening and you need to be one who helps that along.

If you're the leader of all that, continue it, there'll be a lot of opposition to that. If you truly exercise godly wisdom, everybody's not going to like it. But God will be faithful to you.

[ 29 : 49 ] You just be faithful to Him. But if in those places I just described, where you are, if they're characterized by disorder and evil practices, people are showing signs of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, you need to understand that those people who are in charge are not exercising godly wisdom.

That's just human wisdom in action. They may be smart people. They may be doing a lot of good things for the company or for themselves, but if the climate, the environment is one of a lack of order, a lack of unity, lack of character, something's wrong.

And James would tell us there may be many things wrong, but one of the problems is people who are actually exerting the most influence, they're not using godly wisdom.

And if that's the case, where you are in that environment, something needs to change. Now, if you're the leader, the place to begin is with you.

What you need to do is confess to God that you've just left Him out of the whole process. You've been exercising your best effort with your human wisdom, you've not been seeking His help.

[ 31 : 25 ] His will. You've not been looking to His word. And you need to confess that, repent of it, and ask God to give you wisdom, which James in chapter 1, verse 5 says God's ready, willing, and

able to give it to all who ask Him in faith.

Now, if you're not the leader in that environment, you need to pray and ask God to work in your situation to somehow raise up people who will exert godly wisdom and pray that somehow or another God will turn things around.

Don't give up. James wants us to understand it's dangerous to live in this world and just try to do the best we can.

just do the best we can in the way that we think, things that we read, things that we feel, go by our gut. James is saying it's not wise.

That's worldly wisdom. That's human wisdom. That's earthly wisdom. Specifically, he says, that will not work in the church.

[ 32 : 44 ] That cannot be the mentality of leaders, teachers, or church members. It'll lead to all kinds of disunity and problems.

God will not bless. But we need to understand it doesn't work anywhere. If you have any doubts, just look around. It is not an exaggeration to say that most homes, communities, governments, and organizations are not characterized by the things James says will happen when there's earthly wisdom, when there's godly wisdom being exercised.

Things like humility, peace, purity, and other qualities. We're going to look at that in detail next week. There's just too much evidence around about us, in our neighborhoods, in our various organizations, of bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, of selfish ambition, disorder, and all kinds of evil practices.

That's why we, not other people, but why we as God's people, we've got to stop trying to just do our best and rely on our own good, worldly, human wisdom.

It won't work because we are leaving out the true source of wisdom, the Lord Jesus Christ. We're leaving out God and His will.

[ 34 : 34 ] No matter what you do, no matter where you live, who you live with, you need God's wisdom. And in the weeks to come, as we finish up here in James and move into the book of Proverbs, we're going to look at how to acquire godly wisdom.

We're going to look at more detail about what it looks like, how it will benefit us and other people. But right now, understand this, godly wisdom comes from living in close fellowship with Him. and learning to look at all of life through the lens of Scripture. That includes the way you live at home with your husband, your wife, your children, your parents.

It means the way you do your job, the attitude you have, the way you do whatever you do. Are you a wise person? Don't tell me.

Don't answer with words. Just look at your life and your influence. That's where you'll see if you mainly function according to earthly wisdom or God's wisdom.

[ 35 : 50 ] Let's pray. Father, Father, you've made it clear the contrast between earthly human wisdom, our best efforts, and your true, life-changing, purifying, peaceful wisdom.

help us, dear God, to see how we should respond to you this morning. Help us to desire and to seek your wisdom, to know how we should fulfill all of our responsibilities in this world.

world. In an attitude of prayer, you listen to the Lord and you respond to him. This is something that will make a difference in your life and the life of people around you, living according to God's wisdom and refusing to just do what comes natural, live by human wisdom.

So listen to the Lord and respond to him. Let's pray together. If I can pray with you, I'll be here at the front.