

Two Kinds of Wisdom

10.25.09

13Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

In a Nutshell: James is contrasting the two kinds of wisdom and the particular kinds of fruit they produce—wisdom ‘from above’, ‘from below.’

“Who is wise and understanding among you?” A rhetorical question to introduce James’ main idea. Common Greek word for speculative knowledge and philosophy, but the Hebrews infused with the much richer meaning of skillfully applying knowledge to practical living. Some debate about whether or not he is speaking specifically to teachers (mentioned previously), in light of the tongue (v. 1-12), or to all of his readers in general. Seems most likely to be the latter.

“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” Biblical (vs. Greek) wisdom emphasizes the real test for wisdom is in how we live—our actions. Biblical ‘meekness’ is not weakness but rather strength under control. To walk in wisdom is to walk in strength under control.

P: True wisdom is a ‘show and tell.’

“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.”

‘bitter’ – undrinkable water + ‘jealousy’ = harsh, resentful attitude toward others. ‘selfish ambition’ stirs up antagonism and factionalism. Often used for politicians. ‘hearts’ – where all behavior begins. Must be addressed if we want real change.

Where are bitter jealousy and selfish ambition at work in your heart?

Both of these sins are a denial of the truth and reveal a failure to believe the Gospel and trust the sovereignty of God. Wisdom from below is 1. Earthbound. 2. From an unredeemed heart. 3. Ultimately from Satan. (World, Flesh, Devil).

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

Wisdom from below yields fruit from below. Chaos and uselessness.

P: Bad wisdom from a bad source leads to bad fruit.

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ‘pure’ – spiritual integrity and moral sincerity, ‘peaceable’ –peace-loving, promoting, ‘gentle’- sweet reasonableness, willingness to endure mistreatment, ‘open to reason’ – teachable,

follows God’s Word, ‘full of mercy...’ – ability to forgive quickly, ‘impartial and sincere’ – doesn’t make unfair distinctions.

P: Good wisdom from a good source leads to good fruit.

“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”
Sums up his paragraph with what seems like a proverb. Those who walk in wisdom will see peace and that peace will lead to a harvest of righteousness.

There are two kinds of wisdom. Followers of Jesus are to walk in the wisdom from above.

Which wisdom are you walking in today?

Putting Feet on It:

1. Look at the fruit in your life.
 - a. Wisdom from Below: Bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, Disorder, every vile practice. *Is this what I see in my life?*
 - b. Wisdom from Above: Purity, peace, reasonableness, mercy, ‘good fruits,’ impartiality, sincerity. *Is this what I see in my life?*
 - c. All of us have a mixture of both. Confess. Repent. All of life is repentance.
2. Examine why things are the way they are.
 - a. *Have I not been told there is another way? Not choosing it?*
 - b. *What is going on in my heart that is driving that behavior?*
 - c. *Are there things in my life that is encouraging this good/bad behavior? Things to eliminate/encourage?*
3. Get to know the Source of ‘wisdom from above’: Jesus.
 - a. *“the power of God and the wisdom of God...who became to us wisdom from God, and a righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:24, 30)*
 - b. Turn from your sin and trust in Christ.
 - c. Immerse yourself in the Bible and begin talking to God (prayer).
4. Surround yourself with wise people.
 - a. *Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. Prov. 13:20*

Works Consulted: *Expositor’s Commentary, MacArthur Study Bible, ESV Study Bible, MacArthur Commentary on James, The Bible Exposition Commentary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments, New Bible Commentary, The Outline Bible, Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary, Wilmington’s Bible Handbook, Word Pictures of the New Testament*