



VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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STUDY 28: CHARACTERISTICS OF GODLY WISDOM

James 3:13-18

Having masterly illustrated the potentials of the tongue for good and evil, James goes on to point out the root cause behind these – personal desires to be seen as being wiser than others. In this text James shows the difference between:

1. those who pretend to be wise and those who are truly wise.
 2. the wisdom that is from beneath (i.e. from earth or hell) and that which is from above.
- Dealing with this effectively should enable believers to live more fruitful and effective lives that glorify God and eliminate evil.

1. DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF DIVINE WISDOM

James 3:13 “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom”.

A truly wise man is knowledgeable. His wisdom is not based on mere reputation. He places greater value on the right use and application of knowledge (the twin basic elements of true wisdom) rather than merely knowing things. This implies elimination of craftiness and manipulations. Using a question and answer approach James presents the distinguishing marks and fruits of godly wisdom as being:

1. Good conversation – i.e. goodness in manner of life, and free from vanity and roughness. Words of wisdom are not those that look great while doing mischief or creating occasions for evil, but rather those that inform, heal and do good.
2. Demonstrable in works – i.e. not just good notions or speculations but useful actions. It is not thinking or talking well, but living and acting right.
3. Reflected by the meekness of the Spirit and temper. Wisdom produces meekness, and meekness increases wisdom. The result is better apprehension, sound judgment and impartiality of thought which yield wise actions. Wisdom prudently bridles anger from self as well as patiently bears the anger of others.

2. DESTRUCTIVE MANNER OF DEVILISH WISDOM

James 3:14-16 “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. **For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work**”.

James points out that wisdom that is characterised by envying and strife confirms that such wisdom is earthly / sensual and originate from the devil. Any claim that such wisdom is divine is a lie against the truth. Note that:

1. Envying and strife are opposed to the meekness of wisdom. The heart is the seat of both; but as is the case with light and darkness, envy and wisdom cannot dwell in the same heart at the same time.
2. Set in sequential order, envying comes first and excites strife. Strife generates excuses by vain-glorying and lying, thereby giving rise to confusion and every evil work. Those who live in malice, envy, and contention, live in confusion, and are liable to be provoked and hurried to any evil work. Such disorders generate and

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strengthen temptations as well as involve men in a great deal of guilt. One sin begets another, and it cannot be imagined how much mischief is produced – hence James succinct remark that “*there is every evil work*” (James 3:16) in such situations.

3. such wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual and devilish. It springs from earthly principles, acts upon earthly motives, and is intent upon serving earthly purposes. It is sensual because it indulges the flesh and makes provisions to fulfil its lusts and desires. In terms of origin, it is either mere working of natural reason or it is inspired by the devil. Those who are lifted up with such wisdom fall into the condemnation of the devil (I Timothy 3:6).

3. DISTINCTIVE MODEL OF DIVINE WISDOM

James 3:17-18 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”.

James now paints a vivid picture of the wisdom from above to give believers a model for self examination. Divine wisdom is not gained by conversing with men, nor from worldly knowledge, but comes from above, and is characterised by many things:-

1. It is pure, without mixture of maxims or aims that would debase it. It is free from iniquity and defilements and does not allow any known sin, but studious of holiness both in heart and life.
2. It is peaceable. Peace follows and depends on purity. Those who are truly wise do what they can to preserve peace – either to prevent it from being broken, and / or to restore peace where it is lost in kingdoms, families, churches, societies and individual relationships; wherever possible but without compromise.
3. It is gentle - not standing upon extreme rights nor insisting upon rigorous points of censure; nor being furious about opinions, nor being rude and overbearing in conversation, nor harsh and cruel in temper.
4. It is easy to be entreated – i.e. very persuadable on the basis of God’s word (but will not yield to compromise).
5. It is full of mercy and good fruits, being inwardly disposed to every thing that is kind and good and to actually do them whenever proper occasions arise.
6. It is without partiality. The original word, ***adiakritos***, signifies to be without suspicion, or free from judging, making no undue differences in our conduct towards one person more than another.
7. It is without hypocrisy - i.e. no disguises nor deceits but is sincere, open, steady, uniform and consistent. He does not identify with the tendency of many who count as wise the crafty and guileful. Like Paul he is able to say, “*Not with fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have our conversation*” (2 Corinthians 1:12).
8. It sows the fruits of righteousness in peace – hence reaping the harvest of joy.

Others may be satisfied to reap the fruits of contentions and all the associated advantages; but let us go on peaceably to sow the seeds of righteousness, for our labour will not be lost. “*For light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart*” (Psalm 97:11); “*and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*” (Isaiah 32:17).