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"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

Faith Produces Wisdom

Central Truth: Living by God's wisdom multiplies Christian graces.

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Topic: Faith: Of Believers; Wisdom.

Is there a difference between knowledge and wisdom? Yes, indeed. Knowledge is a clear perception and understanding of facts. Wisdom goes a step beyond that. Wisdom is the power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action based on knowledge. In other words, knowledge is the understanding of the facts, while wisdom is knowing what to do with those facts you understand. You need both knowledge and wisdom.

There are two sources from which you can receive knowledge and wisdom. You can receive them from the secular world, or you can receive them from the spiritual world. Secular knowledge is subject to demonic powers; sacred knowledge is subject to divine powers. Which would you choose?

There is a clear distinction between secular knowledge and wisdom and spiritual knowledge and wisdom. You can read that distinction in I Corinthians 1:18-31. Sacred knowledge is so far beyond secular knowledge that the most foolish thing in the former is wiser than the wisest thing in the latter. Faith produces sacred wisdom.

Using Wisdom (James 3:13)

Every person has wisdom to some extent. He knows to get out of the rain to keep from getting wet, to stand near a fire to get warm, to eat certain food to satisfy hunger. Some consider themselves to be wise "*and endowed*

with knowledge.” But not everyone who claims superior knowledge or wisdom truly has it.

True wisdom is shown by one's actions. If one claims to be wise, *“let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.”* The call is for a life of good conduct done in the spirit of humility that wisdom produces. The wise person will show his wisdom by proper attitude and proper actions. What actions show the presence of wisdom in a person?

Wisdom will govern your actions. It will tell you where to go. Your steps will be ordered by the Lord, and He will delight in your way, if you are truly wise (Psalm 37:23, 24). You will never go astray when the wisdom which God gives governs your life.

Wisdom will govern your actions by telling you what to do. It teaches you to *“abstain from all appearance of evil”* (I Thessalonians 5:22), keeping you from sin. It teaches you to *“follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness”* (I Timothy 6:11). It never leads you to sinful activities.

Wisdom will govern your actions by telling you with whom to associate. It warns that *“evil communications corrupt good manners”* (I Corinthians 15:33). That keeps us from being unequally yoked with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14).

Wisdom will teach you to guard your words. Boasting and bragging are foolish. Forcing your opinions on others is useless. To lie or use corrupt language is depraving. (Read Proverbs 10:17-21 for a list of blessings from proper speech.) The wisdom of guarding your words is indicated by the warning of Jesus, *“I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36). Only a foolish person is careless about his speech.

Wisdom will teach you to guard your influence. You are free in Christ, but you are free from sin, not free to sin. You do not want your liberty in Christ to become an occasion of stumbling for another person, do you? Then you must guard your influence with special care. Wisdom will keep you from unconcern or from the misuse of your influence. It will teach you that to sin against a fellow Christian is to sin against Christ (1 Corinthians 8:12). It will teach you that to misuse your influence is to become an enemy of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18). Therefore, you will wisely guard your influence.

Earthly Wisdom (James 3:14-16)

In contrast to the wisdom which God gives, there is a wisdom which

relates to this world only. James 3:14-16 describes secular wisdom from a threefold viewpoint: the nature of that wisdom, the source of that wisdom, and the fruit of that wisdom.

The nature of earthly wisdom is envy, strife, arrogance, and deception (verse 13). Examine those qualities more closely.

Earthly wisdom produces envy of what others have. But it is more than envy; there is an element of bitterness involved. Some interpreters use the words “bitter jealousy” to describe the emotion invoked. It may be jealousy of the physical traits of another. It may be envy of the material possessions which another has accumulated. It may be bitterness over the spiritual gifts of a gifted saint of God. Or it may be bitter jealousy at what one is able to do, not at what one has. Either way, it is wise to remember the proverb, “*Envy [is] the rottenness of the bones*” (Proverbs 14:30). When you feel your heart stirred by envy, know immediately from where that spirit comes. Flee from it as you would from a plague.

Earthy wisdom produces strife. Strife is a party spirit which causes one to take sides. It also attempts to enlist people to “my side.” Take heed to the dangers of pride, which is a twin sister of strife. God calls us to peace, not to factions and bitter rivalry. When you see people dividing into contesting factions in the church, recognize from where that comes. It is of the earth, not of God.

Earthly wisdom produces pride. It boasts of personal superiority. Proverbs 21:4 identifies pride as one of the seven sins which are an abomination to God. Proverbs 16:18 warns that it leads to destruction which comes from a fall. When you are filled with yourself, recognize that secular wisdom prompts that spirit.

Earthly wisdom produces deception, causing one to “*lie...against the truth*” (verse 14). It deceives the person who claims it and seeks to deceive those associated with him. God commands us, “*Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another*” (Ephesians 4:25).

The source of secular wisdom is earth, senses, and demons. This wisdom does not come from above. It is from “*the rudiments of the world*” (Colossians 2:8, 20). Therefore, it is what the unregenerate want to know and to do (Ephesians 2:2). Do not be surprised when earthly people desire to obtain and live by earthly wisdom.

This wisdom is sensual; therefore, it is what the sin nature wants to do. It is unspiritual and appeals to the lower nature of unspiritual persons (Ephesians 2:3).

This wisdom is demonic; therefore, it is what the devil wants you to

believe and to follow (Ephesians 2:2). Flee from that wisdom. It is not from God but from the devil.

The fruit of secular wisdom is envying, strife, confusion, and every evil work (verse 16). This is the same envying and strife mentioned in discussing the nature of this wisdom. It produces what it is. The “evil work” is whatever the devil wants to work in the world: debate, envying, wrath, strife, backbiting, whispering, swellings, and tumult (II Corinthians 12:20). Flee such pseudo-wisdom. There is something better.

Heavenly Wisdom (James 3:17, 18)

The source of heavenly wisdom is “from above” (verse 17). It is the wisdom of God which comes to us in Jesus Christ, “*who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*” (I Corinthians 1:30). Therefore, it is a wisdom that only the saints of God receive.

The nature of heavenly wisdom is manifold (verse 17). Eight qualities of sacred wisdom are set forth. (1) It is pure, free from anything that would defile or cause sin. It is as high above earthly wisdom as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:8, 9). You will be pure as you live by this wisdom.

(2) It is peaceable, seeking to bring harmony between the believer and God and between fellow believers. It is the gift of God through Jesus (John 14:27) and applies to all human relationships (Hebrews 12:14).

(3) It is gentle, remembering and protecting the rights and feelings of others. But it stands firm on moral principles at the same time. It stands for right with great courtesy and kindness.

(4) It is benevolent, willing to listen and receive the counsel of others. A teachable spirit is a Christian spirit.

(5) It is merciful, willing to forgive when it is wronged. Being “*easy to be intreated*” makes it open to reason and willing to yield personal rights for the good of others.

(6) It is helpful, being “*full of...good fruits.*” Kind actions and good deeds mark the person with sacred wisdom.

(7) It is impartial, recognizing the image of God in every person and treating each with respect. It knows that God is no respecter of person: (Acts 10:34).

(8) It is truthful, having no hypocrisy or pretension in dealing with others. The heart that is “*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*” (Jeremiah 17:9) has been changed to a new heart. Therefore, it is pure as the

Father is pure.

Is that the kind of wisdom you would like to exercise in your life? Then go to God; He bestows it through Jesus Christ.

The fruit of heavenly wisdom is righteousness, peace, and approval (verse 18). Consider those three qualities.

(1) Heavenly wisdom produces righteousness. The person receiving it is in a right relationship with God. He whose sins had swept him away from God (Isaiah 64:6) is now brought near and reconciled to God by the blood of His only begotten Son (Ephesians 2:13). Being made right with God, believers are right with one another.

(2) Heavenly wisdom produces peace. The believer is in an undisturbed relationship with God and His people. When one's heart is filled with the graces of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and long-suffering, it is natural that the peace of God rules therein (Colossians 3:12-15). Is that what you are experiencing?

(3) Heavenly wisdom produces approval. Both God and man respect the lifestyle that sacred wisdom produces. Therefore, if you would be the best you can be, seek and live by that wisdom which is *"from above."*

Review these comments on the two kinds of wisdom. Observe the source, nature, and fruit of each. Then ask yourself this question: "Which type of wisdom will be better for me and those I love?" You will choose the wisdom which is *"from above."* Then follow the suggestion in James 1:5: *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."* Be wise!

Questions for Discussion

1. How do knowledge and wisdom differ?
2. What are the two sources of wisdom?
3. How do the two types of wisdom differ?
4. What is the nature of secular wisdom?
5. What is the danger in secular wisdom?
6. What is the fruit of secular wisdom?
7. What is the nature of sacred wisdom?
8. What is the fruit of sacred wisdom?