

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

How to Recognize God's Wisdom

James 3:13-18

1 How to recognize God's wisdom. 2

What is wisdom? 3

The American Heritage Dictionary defines wisdom as an understanding of what is true, right and lasting. The ability to live successfully. How to know and practice what is right. How to relate to people and make decisions. 4

There are two types of wisdom described in the Bible: worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. 5

How can you recognize them and make the right choice? Our scripture today will help us with those answers. 6

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish

ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.^{1 7}

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.^{2 8}

Let's take a look at what this scripture calls . . .

I. The Wisdom of the World - v14-16

The wisdom of the world.⁹

Notice the wisdom of the world's source. Verse 15 says, Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.¹⁰

Earthly³ means sensual, having the worldly orientation.¹¹

Unspiritual⁴ means, literally, “of the soul”.¹²

¹ James 3:13-16.

² James 3:17-18.

³ ἐπίγειος.

The ancient people divided humans into three parts. The body was the physical, flesh and blood, material part of the human you could touch, feel and see. ¹³ The soul was the physical life, that which animates us. We share this attribute with animals, birds, reptiles and fish. ¹⁴ The spirit is something only humans possess which makes him a rational being akin to God. ¹⁵

The wisdom of the world is no more than thinking on the animal level. ¹⁶ Those who are involved with the wisdom of the world have world characteristics and are described in James, chapter 1, verse 14, . . . **but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.** ¹⁷ Another description is found in First Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 14, **The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.** ¹⁸

⁴ ψυχικός.

The third source of worldly wisdom is described as of the devil - enticed by Satan. Genesis, chapter 3, ⁵ illustrates what happens. Eve, the first woman created by God, sees the forbidden tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. She notices the fruit is beautiful and alluring. Satan, in the form of a serpent, tells her the yummy fruit will give her wisdom apart from heavenly wisdom, but will make her “like God”. Wow! So she yields, knowingly disobeying God’s instructions, and eats. She also gives some of the fruit to her husband and he, knowingly disobeying God, also eats. They are hooked and become oriented to the world’s wisdom. ¹⁹

Notice the wisdom of the world’s characteristics.
Verse 14, **But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.** ²⁰

⁵ Genesis 3:1-7.

Selfish ambition ⁶ is a technical term which means it has a different meaning than the literal translation of the words. It literally meant “spinning for hire” where women would make clothes and yarn to sell or be hired to do that work. ²¹

Then, it came to mean any work that was done for pay.

²²

Eventually the meaning of the word evolved to mean doing whatever it takes to get what you want. ²³ So, this word implies an eagerness to display itself more than the truth. It is a willingness to even cause division in order to get to the top. ²⁴

Bitter envy ⁷ is jealousy and bitterness. This eats away at you emotionally and eventually affects your health. ²⁵ It was jealousy that sent Joseph to Egypt in chains to be sold as a slave. ⁸ ²⁶

⁶ ἐριθεία.

⁷ ζῆλος.

⁸ Genesis 39:7-20.

Shortly after Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead the religious leaders held a meeting. They decided that they needed to kill Jesus to preserve their leadership positions.⁹ ²⁷

Selfish ambition then leads to boasting and lying against the truth.

Having wisdom from above, you are more aware of what you do not know than what you do know! ²⁸

Notice the wisdom of the world's results. Verse 16 says, **For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.** ²⁹

Disorder ¹⁰ literally means “a negative standing down”; ³⁰ so, confusion and instability. ³¹

Chapter 4, verses 1 and 2 describe it this way, **What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.**

⁹ John 11:45-53.

¹⁰ ἀκαταστασία.

³² This becomes a breeding place for evil practices.
Not good! ³³

What should you do about it? Don't glory in your wisdom, but in your humbleness! ³⁴

Now, let us take a look at . . .

II. The Wisdom from Above - v13 & 17-18

³⁵ The wisdom from above. Verse 17, **But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.** ³⁶

Notice its source. Its from above; heavenly, from God.

³⁷

You can get this wisdom a couple of ways.

First by asking God. Chapter 1, verse 5, **If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.** ³⁸

Second by drinking in the word of God. Second Timothy, chapter 3, verses 15 through 17 read, . . . **and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** 39

Notice its characteristics. 40

It is pure. ¹¹ Pure is a technical term that literally means innocent, clean and unmixed, like pure gold. 41

Then, it came to mean “without spot or blemish”. This is something qualified to be an acceptable ceremonial sacrifice to God. 42

Then, it also became a person. This was a person who went through the process to function as a priest in the Temple. 43

¹¹ ἁγνός.

It is peace-loving.¹² This is peaceful, characterizes the people of God.¹³ 44

It is considerate.¹⁴ This is seemly, equitable, yielding. It goes beyond the written Law. This is someone who would forgive when the Law would give him the right to condemn. 45

It is submissive.¹⁵ This word appears only here in the New Testament. It is ready to obey or yield; openness to reason and ready to be convinced. But it is not gullible or weak. It's the opposite of the Archie Bunker character in the "All in the Family" and "Archie Bunker's Place" series on television several years ago. 46

It is full of mercy; ¹⁶ mercy or pity. It is a compassion for people even when they are suffering the

¹² εἰρηνικός.

¹³ Matthew 5:9 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁴ ἐπιεικής.

¹⁵ εὐπειθής.

¹⁶ ἐλεάω.

consequences of their own sin. This word is used only of God and godly people in the New Testament. We have a tendency to say, “He made his own bed. Now he can lie in it! Serves him right.” ⁴⁷

But God had compassion on you even when you were hopelessly lost in sin. ¹⁷ When you are full of mercy, you can, then, receive mercy from God. ¹⁸ ⁴⁸

This, then, produces good fruit. Here, this probably means good practical help. ⁴⁹

It is impartial. ¹⁹ It is undivided, unwavering. It makes decisions based on the absolutes of God! ⁵⁰

Finally, it is sincere. ²⁰ Sincere means to be unhypocritical, open and honest. It’s not pretending to be something you are not. ⁵¹

¹⁷ Romans 5:6-9 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

¹⁸ Matthew 5:7 - Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

¹⁹ ἀδιάκριτος.

Notice its results. Verse 13 states, **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.** ⁵²

You get understanding. Understanding comes from having the “mind of Christ”. ²¹ ⁵³

This results in a harvest of righteousness, from verse 18, **Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.** A harvest of righteousness is a good life and reputation! ⁵⁴

What should you do about it? ⁵⁵

Seek wisdom from above through the word of God which is the example of Christian people and godly counsel. ⁵⁶

Weed out of your life any worldly wisdom that opposes the wisdom from above! ⁵⁷

²⁰ ἀνυπόκριτος.

²¹ I Corinthians 2:15-16 - The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Demonstrate the wisdom from above in your life!

Again, verse 13, **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.** 58

Your life should become abundant, purposeful and meaningful.

That's how the world recognizes God's wisdom!

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