

WHO IS WISE AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG YOU?

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James 3:13-4:10

Heavenly Versus Demonic Wisdom

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Pride Promotes Strife

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Humility Cures Worldliness

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

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I'll state it up front, that the book of James, written by the half-brother of our Lord and Savior Jesus, is like one perfectly flowing sermon. To get the fullness of his message, so as to not take his words possibly out of context, you should read through his whole message from chapter 1 through chapter 5. It is finely connected, from one thought to the next. I have said in the past that the book of James used to be one of my least favorite books in the New Testament. Yet, it is not as one would suppose. It is not because I was joining the handful of scholars who have argued against James being divinely inspired because of James' emphasis on works. I

wholeheartedly agree with others, that works are intrinsically tied into our faith in Christ Jesus, meaning, works are an essential element to our faith. It is like how cream is a necessary ingredient to have ice cream. You can have a resemblance to ice cream without cream, but it won't really be ice cream. Likewise one cannot be a child of God without the evidence of His Spirit that is working in you.

Similarly to what I said about James being one flowing message, from beginning to end, we have the whole of Scripture, the Holy Bible from Genesis to Revelation, as one continuous flow of God's Word to His people. It is God's redemptive plan, His instruction manual, His personal love letter, to His people. As we looked at the Psalms and gathered that God wants us to know Him, trust Him, and honor Him, the more we know of His Word will benefit us in knowing Him, trusting Him, and honoring Him. Therefore, we can carefully examine some of James, in context to God's Word, and in context to what James is really saying to God's people.

A foundation for us to begin, before wading out in the deeper waters of "works" is to remind ourselves of **Ephesians 2:8-10**. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." That is what James is talking about when he says "faith without works is dead". James first addresses the works tied into our faith in the first chapter. He says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was." (**James 1:22-24**) Taking that out of context, to say that we are saved by our works, will leave you to becoming like the Pharisees, who were just following the letter of the law, as they interpreted it, to which Jesus rebuked them saying, "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (**Matthew 15:7-9**) Or you will possibly just throw up your hands in frustration and say it is all hopeless. "I can't do all that", one may say. I have said that.

To add to one's frustration, as they strive to do good works, Jesus stated that the greatest commandment of God's is to love Him with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind and that the second is like it, in that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. (**Mark 12:30-31**) Guess what, that only begins to take place for us when we do get to know God, trust Him, and honor Him. It is in Him working in us that we begin to love God wholeheartedly and then to be able to love

others. After all, love is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (**Galatians 5:22-23**) While I haven't ever opposed James doctrinally, I have in the past avoided James because of conviction. That conviction was based upon my own selfish desires, wanting what I wanted versus what God's intended purpose was for me. I didn't want to surrender to God, through Christ my will, so that He could work in me His workmanship. Therein lies the rub, so to speak.

That is the proverbial mountain, to many professing "Christians", that never gets conquered. In **chapter 2**, James speaks of the keeping of the law, of which no one is able to completely and thoroughly do on their own, including what he refers to as the royal law, to "love your neighbor as yourself". (**James 2:8**) James then sums up that chapter by saying, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (**James 2:26**) That was a very calculated use of words and phrases. "The body without the spirit is dead" and "faith without works is dead". Indeed, although James may have been speaking of the spirit within man needing to be present, to be a living soul, it also has a double meaning for us. Without God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, also referred to as the Spirit of Christ-without the Holy Spirit we are dead, spiritually speaking. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (**1 John 5:12**) Then, without works our faith is dead. Tie those together and you basically have, for those who have believed on Christ, you then receive His Spirit and then His Spirit then begins working in us. Just as the Apostle John tells us, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (**John 1:12-13**) Without the Spirit of Christ working in us, we are dead, spiritually speaking. That is the same as what Jesus told the Jewish leader, Nicodemus, saying that one must be born-again, that is born of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. (**John 3**)

As we have gone over week after week, after we have believed on Christ and received Him, the Apostle Paul tells us, in **1 Corinthians 1:30**, that God, through His Son, that is, through the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, works in us His Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. As we looked at last week, the writer(s) of Hebrews starts chapter 6 saying, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." (**Hebrews 6:1**) There is but one way that can happen. We do the repenting, having a change of mind and focus, not to look to continue sin but to God. God's works are perfect (**Deuteronomy 32:4**) and all of His ways are perfect (**2 Samuel 22:31**). We can only be "perfect" as He works in us His perfection, which includes His Wisdom, His Righteousness, His Sanctification, and

His Redemption. Jesus also told us in **John 14:6** the He alone is our Way, Truth, and Life, and that no one can come to the Father except through Him. Similarly, Jesus said in **John 15:5**, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

That is how we begin loving God with all that is in us, because He first loved us. (**1 John 4:19**) That could say because He "loves us". We believe on Him, we receive His Holy Spirit, and then He begins working in us His perfection which leads us to love Him and trust Him. The more we get to know Him, the more we get to trusting Him and honoring Him through our obedience to Him, and loving Him, loving others, and we then naturally begin to praise and worship Him and long for Him, more and more!

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Jesus, in His sermon on the mount said, "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**" (**Matthew 5:9**) Biblegateway.com, of which I use to copy and paste Biblical text, entitled the section I just read as "**Heavenly Versus Demonic Wisdom**".

While that may sound harsh, and James' drawing of the distinction between Godly vs. worldly wisdom may seem extreme, nevertheless, it is what it is. Christ Jesus, who is the Word of God IS our Wisdom from God (and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption). The Apostle Paul asks, "[D]o you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and **you are not your own**? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**) That "meekness in wisdom" is in letting God be our wisdom, as we have nothing to pride ourselves in or boast about. When Paul spoke of Christ being our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption, he continued in the next verse, **1 Corinthians 1:31** saying, "as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." We are to be His light, His Way, His Truth, His Life, His testimony, His works, as He dwells in us, and yes, eventually His glory. As the Apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 8:17**, if we are God's children, we are "then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

We're not intended to walk around with our noses in the air, and chests puffed out, because we are better than others. The good in us, as children of God, is that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and that we are children of God, by His amazing grace! To operate in His wisdom does not mean that we will always and instantly have His Wisdom flowing through us. A rule I have for myself is that if I am confronted with a situation that needs His Wisdom, if it comes, I then operate in it. Until it does come though, I'll think of an answer as it comes to me through His Word, or maybe even from just plain old common sense. Until then, I have learned to be quiet and wait on the Lord. No one needs to know my opinions. We need Jesus, plain and simple. An example, maybe not the best example but it was a situation that led me to wait upon the Lord, was the other day when Susie and I were in Sam's Club. Susie had gone off looking for something and I was waiting near the checkout lanes. A lady next to me suddenly blurted out her dismay about losing her phone. I helped her look in her buggy for the phone but it was deemed to be clearly gone. While I thought about, and waited for an answer to her dilemma, I said, "wow, that's a bummer" or something like that and just then Susie showed up. Susie asked what the problem was and we told her. Susie then suggested that she use our phone to call her phone. She did, and an employee at the help desk answered and said they had her phone. While not all problems are solved as efficaciously, meaning to produce the desired effect, as well as my example, nevertheless, it is just an example of how we are being taught to rely upon God and His Wisdom, not in worldly wisdom. God alone has the Way for us, the world does not. God's Word has the Truth for us, the world does not. God has provided the life for us in Christ Jesus, the world has not.

Pride Promotes Strife

"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but **gives grace to the humble.**"

You ever notice how the times where you most want to just go home or get away is when someone shows up with a need or a problem? Those times will reveal to you whether you're willing to surrender to God's will or follow your own selfish will. Also too, our answers to world peace and to global conflicts as well as local conflicts will not be solved by fighting one another and wars. God is a big God, great and mighty. The battle belongs to God alone. We are His representatives,

His ambassadors yet it is not up to us to save, heal or deliver anyone. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: **Preach the word!** Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort [to personally make a call, to encourage and comfort], with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

There will always be those opposed to you, as a child of God. There will always be those who will try to entangle you in vain arguments that profit nothing or turn on you after you've attempted to help them. As Paul told Timothy to do it all with longsuffering, and James says to operate in the meekness of wisdom, as much as is possible, we are not intended to stir up trouble just for the sake of winning an argument or to be right. Backing out of a conflict does not make you weak, it makes you wise. How so? Because in that we are obeying the Words of our Lord and Savior who tells us, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:44-45)

We can do our best to share and show the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ, yet if someone opposes us, they are ultimately opposing God. Sometimes it is best for us to just walk away, not causing any damage to our testimony and pray for them and to also seek the Lord's Wisdom for anything we can learn from the encounter. **Romans 12:18** says, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." Some people though will hate us for just being a Christian, yet we can always have that hope that God will get ahold of their heart and He did yours and mine. The beauty of knowing that we are His Workmanship, is that we find our liberty in Christ Jesus as we continue to get to know God, trust God, and honor Him. That doesn't alleviate the times we are grieved, heartbroken, and just plain sad-mourning for the souls of others and praying for God's grace and mercy. WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP!

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.**" Elsewhere we are told, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that **He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**" Humble yourself before God and continue to diligently seek Him. That

drawing near to God speaks of us being drawn into God's presence. Yet it is also up to us to diligently seek Him. As we get to know Him, trust Him, and honor Him, we acknowledge Him as our Lord, God, and Savior, and that He alone is God Almighty. That humbling ourselves in the sight of the Lord so that He will lift us up is brought forth in our relationship with God, as we honor God through our obedience, letting Him be God, our Lord, letting Him be our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and our Redemption, that He alone is our Way, Truth, and Life, and that without Him we can do nothing!

At the end of all that is us saying, as Jesus did, "not my will but Your will be done". WHO IS WISE AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG YOU? The answer will be, all those who love God with all of their heart, soul, strength, and mind, treating others as you would want to be treated, and then acknowledging God in all our ways, trusting God with all of our heart, as all of His Ways and Works are perfect! Praise the Lord!