



Wisdom that Honors Christ

... adapted from the blog series, *Christ-honoring Wisdom*, by Paul Tautges

The difference between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom is the difference between righteousness and unrighteousness, heaven and hell, God and Satan. The contrast is that great. Yet God has made His wisdom readily available to those who seek for it.

In the book of Proverbs, King Solomon personifies wisdom as a woman calling out to the naïve. The call from lady wisdom teaches us of the availability of God's wisdom (Proverbs 1:20-23).

Proverbs 1:20-23, Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; ²¹at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: ²²“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? ²³If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.”

Without God's wisdom, it is impossible for us to live in a manner that receives His blessing. No wonder, then, that God's Word identifies wisdom as a valuable treasure (Proverbs 3:13-18).

Proverbs 3:13-18, Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, ¹⁴for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. ¹⁵She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. ¹⁶Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. ¹⁷Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. ¹⁸She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.

But what is wisdom, exactly?

- Wisdom is more than knowledge. There are many intelligent fools in our world. Just because a person is smart, even brilliant by human standards, does not mean he is wise.
- Wisdom is the application of God's truth to life under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.
- Wisdom does not come naturally; it is gained by walking with God.

Due to the total depravity of our human nature, we have default mechanisms by which we operate. That is, when making decisions about how to live, we naturally default to our own fleshly understanding or the wisdom of this world, both of which lead us away from God's good path of righteousness. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 16:25). When we lean on our own wisdom, we are sure to fail. We are sure to forsake the blessed way.

James 1:5, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

FIVE WAYS WE GET WISDOM

Wisdom comes from God but is mediated to us in 5 primary ways.

1. We receive wisdom when we are in Christ. In other words, when we are truly saved, then Christ is our wisdom. **1 Corinthians 1:30**, But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption. To the Colossian believers, Paul said that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).
2. We receive wisdom from the Holy Spirit, whom Isaiah calls the Spirit of Wisdom. **Isaiah 11:2**, And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
3. We receive wisdom from God's Word. The psalmist declared, “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.” ⁹⁸Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.” (Psalm 119:97-98).

4. We receive wisdom from other believers who love and submit to the Word of God. Proverbs 13:10 teaches, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”
5. We receive wisdom through prayer.

James 1:5, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Let’s look at a key New Testament passage on the subject of wisdom. In the following passage, we are called to seek after the meekness of wisdom, warned to watch out for the marks of hellish wisdom, and then encouraged to apply heavenly wisdom.

James 3:13-18, Who 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.

Since there is no grammatical break between verses 12 and 13, we conclude that James sees this passage as further explanation of his previous teaching on the power of speech. Just as our speech should consistently honor God and not include both blessing and cursing, so we ought to be filled with the wisdom that honors God. Therefore, we are called to put away worldly wisdom and pursue the wisdom that comes only from God.

THE WISE MAN IS MARKED BY MEEKNESS

The wise man must “show” himself as wise; that is, let him display his wisdom and understanding by being meek and gentle. James challenges his readers to examine their own claims to wisdom. The “wise” person is the individual possessing moral insight and skill in deciding practical matters of conduct. The word *understanding* describes one who has the knowledge of an expert, one who can apply fuller knowledge to practical situations. Both of these qualities come from the Lord (Proverbs 2:6).

Proverbs 2:6, For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

James calls for gentleness and wisdom to act in tandem. A person may be gentle and soft-spoken but lack wisdom in the application of biblical principles to his life and to his family. But James says that both wisdom and gentleness should be displayed together. If you are gentle, but *not* wise, then you are merely a soft pushover. If you think you are wise, but lack gentleness, then your wisdom is only in your imagination; since you are actually proud and foolish.

James exhorts us to possess the “meekness” of wisdom, which is displayed in humility and gentleness. But meekness does not equal weakness. Moses, the most courageous leader in the Old Testament, is described as being meek. Numbers 12:3 says he was “was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” Meekness is often defined as strength under control. It is a humble, patient endurance when one is in the midst of difficulties. It is the opposite of arrogance.

Realizing that meekness is integral to godly wisdom, we can also recognize traits of worldly wisdom which is ultimately from below. Worldly wisdom is hellish.

FEATURES AND FRUITS OF HELLISH WISDOM

The features and fruits of worldly wisdom are presented in James 3:14-16.

James 3:14-16, But 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.

Verse 14 begins with *But*. This presents a contrast. In other words, if our behavior is not characterized by the meekness of wisdom then it means we are being controlled by worldly wisdom, which comes from below, from hell. If we are controlled by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, then that is evidence that we are not walking in the spirit of meekness and humility according to godly wisdom. Instead, we are under the influence of hellish wisdom, the wisdom that comes from below. These are strong words, but it is what James teaches. What is this hellish wisdom like? How do we know if we are guilty of being governed by the wisdom from below?

FEATURES OF HELLISH WISDOM

James says that the wisdom from below has three distinctive features . . .

1. **It is earthly** – Hellish wisdom is built on human knowledge that excludes God. Earthly wisdom is worldly wisdom that does not take into account the revelation of God in His Word. It merely operates on what might be called “common sense.” Or in more contemporary lingo: “Just follow your heart.” In contrast, the apostle Paul consciously avoided worldly wisdom because he wanted the faith of others to rest on Christ instead (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

1 Corinthians 2:1-5, And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

2. **It is unregenerate** – The word James uses here is from *psychikos*, which is always used negatively in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 2:14, Jude 19).

1 Corinthians 2:14, The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Jude 18-19, They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” ¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

It refers to that which is natural or carnal—the opposite of what is spiritual. It characterizes life without God. That’s why the English Standard Version of the Bible translates it “unspiritual.” It refers to that which is devoid of the life of God (1 Corinthians 2:14 above). Since God has given us the riches of wisdom by means of Christ, His Word, godly counsel, and prayer; why should we seek the counsel of the ungodly? Indeed, the righteous man described in the first Psalm does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.

Psalms 1:1, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers

3. **It is demonic** – Hellish wisdom is that of a superficial religion, which results in no change of heart and life and is demonic. Adherence to earthly wisdom cooperates with the work of Satan. Peter was under the influence of hellish wisdom when He forbade Jesus from going to Jerusalem to be killed. Jesus rebuked him, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Matthew 16:23)

From this we may conclude it is possible for a believer in Christ to fall prey to the devil’s schemes if he governs his life by earthly wisdom instead of the wisdom that comes from God. Therefore, we must repent of the ways in which we have allowed worldly wisdom to influence how we think and live.

FRUITS OF HELLISH WISDOM

Hellish wisdom bears rotten fruit, four of which are . . .

Bitter jealousy – Bitter jealousy, or envy, denotes a sour attitude toward others whom you see as being more blessed than you are, or who occupy a position you crave. Basically, we may define envy this way . . . envy is the discontented feeling you get when you see the advantages of others. If you are filled with envy, you don’t want others to be blessed. Essentially, you want only yourself to be the object of God’s affection and blessing. Envy is an evil attitude which often results in evil actions toward others. One commentator writes, “Envy is the enemy of Christian living. It is the opposite of grace, for it wants to grasp rather than to give. Envy is the opposite of caring for the needy. Envy sees only its needs and desires. Envy thinks other people should care for themselves. Left to ourselves, we all live for ourselves and envy what others have.” (Daniel Doriani)

Selfish ambition – This may also be translated “rivalry.” The term “seems to be that of one who, for personal advantage, works to promote a definite cause in an unethical manner” (D. Edmond Hiebert). It refers to the man who vies for a position that does not belong to him. Kent Hughes calls selfish ambition the “wretched twin” of bitter envy. Notice *where* James says that envy and selfish ambition exist . . . “in your hearts;” that is, this is first and foremost an internal problem, not external.

Mark 7:20-23, And he (*Jesus*) said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (*insert added*)

What is the cause of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition? We see the answer in the command: “Do not boast.” Arrogance is the cause. To boast, James says, is to “be false to the truth.” Why? Pride makes us think we are something when God really knows that we are just dust.

Disorder – Where envy and selfish ambition exist, there will be “disorder;” that is, a disturbance, trouble, or instability. James corrected the disorder which is caused by prideful people who come into a peaceful situation exalting themselves above others, thus creating a party spirit which destroys unity. The church at Corinth was guilty of this, and it resulted in a church split (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹²What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Because worldly wisdom stems from the flesh, it produces fleshly results.

Unlimited evil – Hellish wisdom leads to “every vile practice,” which refers to that which is bad, foul, or vile. Arrogance is contagious. When envy and selfish ambition (which are the fruit of hellish wisdom) reign in the heart, all kinds of trouble will result.

Those are characteristics of hellish wisdom. No wonder James urges us to turn away from it.

FEATURES AND FRUITS OF HEAVENLY WISDOM

Godly wisdom stands in stark contrast to hellish wisdom as James says, “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:17-18)

• THE FEATURES OF HEAVENLY WISDOM

James describes God’s wisdom in 7 ways.

- 1. It is pure** – The word James uses is related to the word translated “holy.” God’s wisdom is this *first*; that is, top priority. All the other qualities flow from this one. As God is holy, so His wisdom is holy. Since believers are “called as saints,” set apart ones (Romans 1:7), the wisdom by which we govern our lives should also be set apart from the world.
Romans 1:7, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2. It makes peace** – The governance of God’s wisdom leads one to be a peacemaker, to relentlessly pursue reconciliation. The Gospel that saves us also obligates us to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3). A person who has been transformed by the Gospel, and thus has been made to be at peace with God through Christ, will not rest until he or she has pursued reconciliation.
- 3. It is gentle** – *Gentle* means “kindly, forbearing, gracious, reasonable, and considerate.” Reinecker says, “this word signifies a humble patience, a steadfastness which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and mal-treatment without hatred and malice, trusting in God in spite of all of it.” Matthew 11:29 records Jesus’ description of Himself as *gentle and humble in heart*.
Matthew 11:29, Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
Paul said he displayed this quality to the Corinthians . . . “Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent (2 Corinthians 10:1).
- 4. It is reasonable** – The word can mean “easily persuaded.” It refers to someone who esteems others as more important than themselves. The NIV translates this word as “submissive,” the New King James as “willing to yield,” and the ESV as “open to reason.” In other words, biblical wisdom strives to guard the unity of God’s people, to listen, be reasonable, and yield to others.
- 5. It is merciful** – The believer operating from the base-point of God’s wisdom will be merciful toward others because he has not lost sight of how merciful God has been with him. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive

mercy” (Matthew 5:7). We must not forget the startling words earlier in his book: For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13).

6. **It is impartial** – A person who is filled with godly wisdom is not one who plays favorites, especially in church. For a clear illustration, read James 2:1-4.

James 2:1-4, My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

7. **It is genuine** – This describes sincerity. Literally, it is “not hypocritical.” A person walking in God’s wisdom is intent on living a life that is sincere. Sincerity includes the removal of spiritual masks, which produces transparency. Jesus repeatedly rebuked the Pharisees, calling them *hypocrites*, for being spiritual pretenders who then looked down on those who did not hide their sinfulness. Worldly wisdom is concerned about outward appearance and behavior. True righteousness is concerned about the condition of a person’s heart. And so is God.

Just as hellish wisdom produces rotten fruit, so God’s wisdom produces good and pleasant fruit.

THE FRUIT OF HEAVENLY WISDOM

James teaches that heavenly wisdom produces the good fruit of righteousness. As believers pursue peace in their relationships, this brings forth the fruit of righteousness. God commands us to strive to be at peace with all—so much as it is in your power—as Romans 12:16-18 teaches.

Romans 12:16-18, Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Conflict stems from the sin of pride. Therefore, it is righteous to pursue reconciliation. The person who refuses to be reconciled with another believer needs to place himself under the influence of heavenly wisdom, which pursues peace.

King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. But where did his wisdom come from? It came from God. First Kings 3:5 says that when Solomon went to Gibeon to make a sacrifice to the Lord, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” In reply, Solomon asked for wisdom, and that is what God gave to him.

1 Kings 3:10-12, It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.”

What about you? What about me? If God were to say to either of us, “Ask whatever you wish,” what would you ask for? God is not stingy. He stands ready to pour out His wisdom in staggering abundance if only we will ask.

This article is a compilation and adaptation of three articles (blogs) by Paul Tautges on **Counseling One Another** (<http://www.counselingoneanother.com/about/purpose>). Paul is a pastor, author, biblical counselor, husband, father, and grandfather. You may subscribe to Paul’s blog at the URL listed above.

The specific articles referenced in this article are available at:

<http://counselingoneanother.com/2017/07/11/the-meekness-of-wisdom>

<http://counselingoneanother.com/2017/07/12/the-features-and-fruits-of-hellish-wisdom>

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