



SPIRITUAL WISDOM

Spiritual Wisdom
James 3:13-18
September 20, 2020

You may have noticed people have different opinions about all sorts of things today. And you may have a few of your own! I know I do. It can be difficult and confusing to navigate all the issues and differences and know who is truly understanding and wise (v. 13). To answer that, we need wisdom from God!

James contrasts two kinds of wisdom, earthly-demonic, and heavenly-spiritual (vv. 15, 17). Some of us may consider that a “false binary opposition,” but we should value God’s truth over post-modern sensitivities. If James’ contrast seems too neat to us, it may be because we vacillate between the two types. Reading this passage closely again this week convicted me that my wisdom is not as purely spiritual as I like to assume.

James tells us first that wisdom is not a matter of what we know and say but how we live our lives (v. 13). This is the Bible’s perspective on true wisdom in the Old Testament and also matches Jesus’ words about how to evaluate spokespersons (Matthew 7:15-23). Both deeds and an attitude of humility matter (cf. Matthew 5:3, 5; 11:29). Our attitude about ourselves and our view point can easily disqualify us from being wise.

“Envy” (v. 14) is passion. When properly directed the meaning is “zeal.” But the word “bitter” (v. 14) makes clear this is a harsh envy or jealousy. Coupled with “selfish ambition,” the idea seems to be zeal for their faction or viewpoint. “Selfish

ambition” is factionalism or strife. It is like a politician stumping for their party while also advancing their own glory, pride, and personal interest. Even merely having such inclinations “in your heart” disqualifies us from true wisdom.

These attitudes will destroy Christian community, creating disorder and leading to all sorts of sin. The fruit of our approach is telling (v. 16).

In contrast, spiritual wisdom is pure (v. 17)—sincerely and wholly devoted to following God’s moral truths, with no stained motives. This starts in the heart (Matthew 5:8; James 4:8). “First of all” suggests this quality leads to the ones that follow (17-18):

Peace-loving—not so much personally as communally. Free from strife with others.

Considerate—deferential, rather than rigid and exacting
Submissive—teachable, correctable. Proverbs says much about the need to be open to correction (Proverbs 15:31).

Full of mercy—in the sense of lovingkindness and forgiveness (Matthew 5:7; 9:13; 12:7).

Full of good fruit—again, the outcomes matter. Not strife, factions, and division but peace and righteousness (v. 18).

Impartial—not biased

Sincere—single minded and without hypocrisy

Peacemaker (Matthew 5:9). Your wisdom should create peace not strife or disorder.

Righteousness (Romans 14:17). The fruit of a tree reveals the inner health of the tree.

This week you will probably be in conversations or meetings where you will hear others talk and talk yourself. Don’t be swayed by cleverness, emotion, statistics, or status. Evaluate people’s wisdom by their behavior and attitude. And if you want to be wise yourself, pray to God that you will fear him, listen to him, shun evil, and follow his ways (James 1:5; Psalm 110:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Matthew 7:24-27). This will lead to the qualities James mentions in the list above.