

# THE WISE AND THE OTHERWISE

(James 3:13-16)

## INTRODUCTION:

If you could ask God for anything in the world, what would it be? Think about it. If God came to you and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you," what would you ask for? Would you ask for financial independence so you could be free from worry about bills and have whatever your heart desires? Would you ask for perfect health, so you could have a long life. Would you ask for a position of great honor and prominence? It would be interesting to know what we would finally decide to ask for from God, who can give us anything in this world.

Well God did come to a person one time in history and put that question to him. He literally said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" Do you know who that person was? Some of you do. It was Solomon. II Chronicles 1:1-12 tells about the incident. Do you know what Solomon asked for? Yes, He asked for WISDOM. He responded to God by saying:

**Now, O Lord God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?"**

And God granted his request. He gave him great wisdom to lead his people. Solomon was known far and wide as the wisest person of his day.

Wisdom is what we should seek! **Proverbs 4:7 tell us, "Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding."**

James says there are two kinds of wisdom – one from above and one from below. Wisdom from above is the only true wisdom. Let's listen to what James says about this type of wisdom

## TRUE WISDOM IS MORE THAN KNOWLEDGE

First James tells us that true wisdom is more than mere intellectual understanding. Wisdom is not to be identified with academic ability but by a good life and deeds done in humility. He writes in verse 13:

**(James 3:13 NKJV) Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.**

Wisdom is not just the intellectual ability to understand and articulate certain facts but it is the moral discernment and insight on how to make that knowledge guide you in day to day living. Wisdom, in a Biblical sense, has much more to do with the Relational than the Technical. It has very little to do with your IQ, or your academic achievements. But it's a question of how much does your life pattern the truth--especially in your many relationships. There are many men and women who are highly intellectual but who cannot get along with people. There are many brilliant people who are failure in practical living.

*In January of 1970 a brilliant scientist named Max Born died. Max Born was a very close friend of Albert Einstein. He was also a colleague of two famous nuclear physicists. He was one of the great minds of the 20th century. And yet in an interview on German television shortly before his death he said: "I'd be happier if we had scientists with less brains and more wisdom." Prior to his death Born came to realize that there is a big difference between mere knowledge and true wisdom.*

When it comes to the Biblical concept of wisdom, the focus is more on the practical than the intellectual. Someone who is truly wise is someone who has the ability to put knowledge to practical use.

*British novelist and author G.K. Chesterton and several other literary figures were asked one evening what book they would prefer to have with them if stranded on a desert island. One writer said without any hesitation, "The complete works of Shakespeare." Another piously said, "I'd choose the Bible." Then they turned to Chesterton and asked, "How about you?" And Chesterton replied, "I would choose "Thomas's Guide to Practical Ship Building."*

If you want to determine if someone is wise, don't ask for their resume or their number of degrees or their Grade Point average. James says look at their life. Look at their conduct. A man's works, not his words, will tell you if he has true wisdom.

## **TRUE WISDOM IS NEVER SELF-CENTERED**

Secondly, true wisdom is never self-centered, nor envious. James continues in verses 13 through 15:

**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.**

There were false teachers in the early church who were claiming to be men of great wisdom. They were far more eloquent than the Apostle Paul. Far superior intellects than James. They presented themselves as having a greater knowledge than the ordinary Christian. They were really people who only wanted to serve their own ambitions and self-centeredness. James tells us they had a false wisdom. True Wisdom always manifests itself in Humility!

The spirit in which the wise person manifests wisdom is in genuine humility, according to verse 13. The wise person doesn't approach life selfishly--but with others in mind. He doesn't focus on himself. It's been said that "He who calls attention to his own wisdom reveals that he has none."

James tells us that in the heart of an unwise person you will always find the root problem of Envy and Selfish Ambition. Envy is the resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another person, accompanied by a strong desire to possess that advantage.

*There's an old legend about a greedy man and an envious man who were walking along when they were overtaken by a stranger who got to know them. After a while he said, as he departed from them, that he would give each of them a gift. Whoever made a wish first would get what he wanted, and the other would get a double portion of what the first had asked for. The greedy man knew what he wanted, but he was afraid to make his wish because he wanted the double portion for himself and didn't want the other to get it. And the envious man felt the same way, and he was also unwilling to wish first. After a while the stronger of the two grabbed the other by the throat and said he would choke him to death unless he made his wish. And at that the other man said, "Very well. I make my wish -- I wish to be made blind in one eye." Immediately he lost the sight of one eye, and his companion went blind in both.*

The wisdom that is driven by envy and greed will in the end end up a loser in life. "Bitter envy" also can leave you a lonely and disillusioned person, even if you are a great intellect.

*Armand M. Nicholi, M.D., professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, explains that Sigmund Freud died at the age of 83, a bitter and disillusioned man. Freud was one of the most influential thinkers of our time, but had little compassion for the common person. In 1918, Freud*

*wrote, "I have found little that is good about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all. Freud died friendless. Even his famous pupils, Carl Jung & Alfred Adler, were expelled from his life, because they chose to disagree with him. Freud died a bitter and lonely man. (Unfinished Business, Charles Sell, Multnomah, 1989,*

Wisdom applied to further your greed or self-centeredness isn't from God. This wisdom is earthly, sensual, demonic. Bitter envy is self-destructive. It's worse than a cancer. Proverbs 14:30: **"A heart at peace gives life to the body. But envy rots the bones."**

False wisdom is motivated by envy and selfish ambition. True wisdom shows itself in good conduct and in meekness and humility.

## **TRUE WISDOM COMES FROM GOD AND IS CENTERED IN CHRIST**

Thirdly, true wisdom comes from God and is centered in Christ .

**(James 3:17-18 NKJV) 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. {18} Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

How do we get true wisdom? Where do we look for it?

Solomon tells us in the Proverbs that the Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. The first step to receiving God's wisdom is to fear the Lord, that is, to admit your own ignorance and self-centeredness, and yield to God as your Lord. Without this step we will not receive much Godly wisdom.

Back in James 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God..." When we get ourselves in a place of asking God for his wisdom, what does He show us? It is Christ, for Christ is the wisdom of God.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 2:3 that it's in Christ that **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden**. In I Corinthians 1:24 Paul tells us that **Christ is the Wisdom of God and the message of the cross the power of God**.

Do you know Christ as your Wisdom? Do you trust Christ to be your wisdom?

In 1 Corinthians 1 we see that the cross of Christ is the ultimate source of True Wisdom. Why is the message of the Cross the source of True Wisdom? Because it was at the cross that Jesus dealt with our sin problem. It was at the cross that he took upon Himself the punishment we deserve for all our bitter envy and selfish ambition. And because of His death and resurrection for us we can now have not only deliverance from sin's penalty but also deliverance from sin's crippling power.

Because of the Cross you can now be set free from your bondage to envy and self-centeredness so that you can enter into a new kind of life, the fullness of a life of True Wisdom. That is a life marked by an ongoing love for God and Selfless love for others.

When we know Christ as our wisdom it means that we have experienced the power of the Cross to remove our self-centeredness. True wisdom comes from God and is centered in Christ and His cross. Do you know Christ as your wisdom?

True wisdom is marked by a life of humility before God and a giving of ourselves to others. This is the life of Jesus being expressed through you.

What is the greatest act of love you can do for someone? It is to help them come into a saving relationship with Christ and to grow in Him. It is interesting that Proverbs 11:30 says **“He that wins souls is wise.”**

Just think of what your life would be like if no one had cared enough for you to help you come to know Christ and to grow in Him. If no one taught you spiritual truths from the Bible. If no one provided a place for you to worship. If no one prayed for you for victory and knowledge of God. On and on. You get the picture, don't you?

True wisdom is giving my life to help others come to know the TRUE WISDOM of life and that is Jesus Christ. This is the wisdom from above.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We need to seek God's wisdom and come to know Christ as our wisdom.

Do you want to be known as a wise person? Then you need to seek the wisdom that comes from God. The wisdom that is pure, peaceful, and filled with fruits of righteousness. Not the wisdom that furthers your greed and self-centeredness.

True wisdom is to know Christ as your wisdom. To do this is to yield to Christ to be in control of your life.

True wisdom is to live for others -- giving yourself to help others come to know Christ as their wisdom.

As Proverbs exhorts us:

**(Prov 4:7 NKJV) Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.**

Amen? Amen!