



No:08 James - Wise or foolish?

James 3:13-18

Have you ever known anyone who claimed to be wise, but acted foolishly? True wisdom can be measured by the depth of one's character. As you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, you can evaluate your wisdom by the way you act. Foolishness leads to disorder, but wisdom leads to peace and goodness.

James is summarising for us the previous three chapters. He seems to be building a picture of the real Christian life. He introduces a subject, making a point, moving on, then returning to the subject again, hoping that the reader has made some changes, which he can then build on.

Wisdom versus foolishness

James discusses here the two kinds of wisdom.

1. There is either wisdom from God, which appeals to the spirit and lasts forever. It is shown in humility; purity; peace-loving; considerate and gentle submissiveness; full of mercy and good fruit; wholehearted; impartial and sincere, **James 3:17**.
2. OR wisdom from the devil, foolishness, which is easier to excite the senses and the pleasures are temporary. It is shown in bitter envy; rivalry; selfish ambition; earthly activity; unspirituality; disorder; rebellion; disharmony and evil practice, **James 3:15-16; 1 Corinthians 2:6; Proverbs 3:18-19; Proverbs 9:1-18**.

Solomon was offered anything from God (**1 Kings 3:5**) and he chose wisdom, over wealth and possessions, in order to look after God's children. We too can have the same wisdom if we just ask God (**James 1:5**) then we will know what to do and have the courage to follow it through. Solomon did not ask God to do the job for him but asked for divine help to do the job well. **We should not ask God to do for us what He wants to do through us**. Because Solomon had such wisdom which caused him to have a discerning heart, he also received massive wealth and long life. Solomon was obviously wise in governing the Nation of Israel but he was foolish in running his household. While he remained wise all his life, he did not always act upon his wisdom.

It is not Godly wisdom to chase after wealth, **Luke 12:18-21**. Setting our hearts on money and possessions is worldly wisdom and will only leave us dissatisfied, as the more we have the more we want. As we put God and His work first (**Matthew 6:31-33**) He will not only provide our every need but will satisfy every Godly desire. We will then have plenty of money to give (**2 Corinthians 9:10-11**) into His work, but we will only hold it, it will never hold us.

Wisdom from God is **not** related to intelligence. In fact our own clever mind can be a barrier to following God's wisdom and cause us to feel we can manage a situation in our own ability, **Proverbs 28:26**. This is indeed foolishness as we actually behave as atheists, (**Psalms 14:1**) saying with our actions that God does not exist as we are relying more on ourselves and our ability than on Him. It can cause us to feel we do not need to follow God's guidelines and so do not love Him with all our heart. Christ will save us from this trap if we turn to Him, **Romans 10:9-11**. All who reject God's message are 'foolish' no matter how wise the world thinks they are. The message of the resurrection seems foolish to the cleverest person (**1 Corinthians 15:12-14**) as we all need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the Truth, and we have to allow God to do that in our lives. What we do with God's wisdom is our choice.

Wisdom is both the ability to discern what is best and the strength of character to act upon that knowledge.

The ten points of God's wisdom pointed out by James (see **1**. above) are so different to human wisdom. They are similar to Paul's description of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:22**). Where the points of Godly wisdom are obvious, we know people are walking by the power of

the Holy Spirit. This wisdom should shine out of people in every Church, especially those in leadership, **Luke 12:48**. There is no point in having a grand position in a Church, without God's wisdom to deal with the everyday handling problems involved in Church life?

It will not be long before people looking on, will see a woman setting up her own empire, if Godly wisdom is missing, and worldly wisdom is obvious. It does not matter how wonderful everything looks sooner or later the foundation will be exposed and the organisation will crumble as it is really based on the superficial wisdom described in James, **James 3:15-16**. Our teaching, or preaching, whatever work we do, must be done in the humility that comes from wisdom. Man's wisdom always leads to pride – that is to bitter envy and selfish ambition.

How to have godly wisdom?

1. Through the Word, **Psalm 119:97-112**;
2. Fear (respect and honour) of God, **Proverbs 1:7; 9:10**
3. Trust God, **Proverbs 1:1-7; Ecclesiastes 8:1-8**
4. Become more like Jesus, **Luke 2:40**
5. Ask for it in prayer, **James 1:5**
6. Use the gift of discernment, **Hebrews 5:11-14**
7. Live right - applying the Word, **Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 18:4**.
8. Die to self-centredness, **Galatians 2:20**

Strife, confusion and every evil work, James 3:16.

The Bible is very clear about strife and division. Where this is allowed to go unheeded and unrepented then the devil is given a free rein in that relationship, church situation, home or town, to cause all sorts of evil and vile practices. If you have an area of your life where you can't seem to have victory, then ask yourself if there is any strife in your life. If so, deal with this immediately asking the Holy Spirit how best to deal with the situation using His Wisdom. If our Churches are going to really experience the greatest revival of all time we have to want Jesus more than our petty personal differences or doctrinal high horses.

In these circumstances we choose to push our interpretation of the Word rather than choosing love and forgiveness and respect for the value of other members of the Body of our precious Saviour, Jesus. As long as the Church is made up of earthen vessels we are going to have problems, **2 Corinthians 4:7**.

Problems of strife in any situation just highlights where we are **not** dead to ourselves and alive to Christ. Dead things cannot rise up to defend, protect or attack, but can only stay dead, **John 12:24; Philippians 1:21; 1 Corinthians 15:31!**
James talks more about conflict and strife at the beginning of **James 4**.

Seeds and sowers, James 3:18.

If a farmer thought that he had sowed barley, but a crop of thistles came up instead, he would not hesitate to plough them up, seek recompense from the seed merchant who sold him the original seed (**Proverbs 6:30-31**), then go elsewhere to buy proper seed. So if you recognise that the fruit of your wisdom is not peaceful, bringing harmony and agreement, then repent, rip out that seed and plant the Word, cast out all doubt and fear and cut out your own intelligent reasoning, conform your thinking to the Word, then you will bear fruit without limit that will last for eternity.

Peacemakers (**James 3:18**) are people who have God's wisdom in a situation, and have learnt to control their tongue so they reap a harvest of righteousness, (**Galatians 6:7**) which brings peace.

The Real Church Home Challenges 08

Read the notes about 'Wisdom versus foolishness'

1. Do you know anyone who you think is really wise? What makes you feel this way about them? Whose wisdom do they have? How do you recognise it?
2. Name two people in the Bible who you think are wise and two people who you think are really foolish. Give examples from their life to prove your point.
3. What do you think is the easiest way to get godly wisdom?
4. What happens eventually in any life where strife is allowed to go unrestrained?

Read James 4:1-12

5. What is the main reason for fights among Christians? Which words in verses one and two show the intensity of this conflict? How might one believer 'murder' another?
6. How do you think these fights affect the Body of Christ? How do they affect the world? How do they affect God?
7. What do you learn about prayer from **James 4:2**?
8. What attitude did the Lord Jesus show us through His prayer in **Luke 22:42** and **John 5:30**?
9. What good spiritual goals might God not honour if our motives are selfish (**James 4:3**)?

10. To whom does James liken a person with wrong motives in **James 4:4**?

11. Read **Ezekiel 6:9-10**. What are the end results of spiritual adultery?

12. How are people in **James 4:1-4** exhibiting a desire to be friends with the world?

13. We can grieve the Holy Spirit by loving the world more than God. In **Psalm 119:169-176** there is a prayer of repentance for one who has chosen to love the world more than God. Pray **NOW**.

14. If you have loved the world too much what encouragement can you get from **James 4:6-7**? What are you called to do in these verses and what will God do in response?

15. List all the commands in **James 4:7-12**. What does each one add to your understanding of what it means to submit your will to God?

16. According to **James 4 :8-10** what can you expect to happen when you draw near to God?

17. What truth is re-emphasised in **James 4:10** that is also in **James 4:6**?

18. What are Christians told in **James 4:11a** that they must **NOT** do?

19. Reread the whole passage of **James 4:1-12**. What has been the most challenging part of this scripture for you? And why?