

LESSONS ON WISDOM

“The Way of Wisdom”

By Peter McArthur

In Jewish understanding, “Wisdom” is personified in the Torah (the “Law” given to Moses). However, in New Testament understanding, “Wisdom” is personified in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wisdom is both individual (personal) and corporate (accountable). It is a distinct End-Time characteristic that needs to be sought after, for in the days that lay ahead, wisdom and its companion, discernment, will be greatly needed.

So let’s look at how we can lay hold of such a beautiful gift. We start with what the Spirit reveals through the letter of James (Jacob).

James 3:13-18

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good life that his works are done in humility born of wisdom.

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your hearts, stop boasting and lying against the truth.

15 That kind of wisdom does not come from above. No, it is worldly, self-centred, and demonic.

16 For wherever jealousy and rivalry exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

17 However, the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, willing to yield, full of compassion and good fruits, and without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

18 And a harvest of righteousness is grown from the seed of peace planted by peacemakers.

Verse 13: Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good life that his works are done in humility born of wisdom.

- ♦ Many want to be seen as wise, but few actually are.
- ♦ So how do we show (lit. “prove”) that Christ clothes us as new creatures? James tells us in chapter 3:1-12 it is to do with our tongue!
- ♦ A wise man who has understanding can bridle his tongue; he has learnt how to contain his words, and order his thoughts. We should note that the soul cannot control the tongue, but the soul that is controlled by the Holy Spirit can!
- ♦ This is a distinct but very important difference. Many believers try to control their thoughts and tongues merely by using the power of the soul and mind. This will always lead to religiosity and works.
- ♦ We are called on to “show” forth wisdom, not merely “profess” it.

Verse 14: But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your hearts, stop boasting and lying against the truth.

- ♦ “Bitter jealousy” (or “envy”) comes from words that mean “piercing zeal”. Bitter literally means sharp piercing (G4089). Jealousy (or envy) has the literal meaning of heat, zeal, indignation (G2205).
- ♦ There is a zeal that is corrupt or bad. The “zeal” of Hitler or of a terrorist, for example. Compare this to what we might call “good” zeal. Jesus showed this “good zeal” when He overturned the tables of the sellers in the Temple precincts (John 2:17 / compare Psalm 69:9) – “Zeal for Your house has eaten me up”.
- ♦ “Bad zeal” is actually bitter because it pierces and cuts the heart of the hearer. Goodness knows what it does to the doer!
- ♦ “Jealousy” or as some versions translate it, “envy”, is self-devotion because it seeks to exalt itself above others. There is fierceness in this kind of behaviour, and it will often try to punish those it’s envious of. It is born out of rivalry and competition; always contentious, accusing and vitriolic – such things end in boasting. Envy will always attempt to justify and defend itself, even if it means lying!
- ♦ 2 Peter 2:19 gives us a very salutary lesson in what such behaviour leads to – DOMINATION by what we allow to control us. **“Promising freedom, they themselves are slaves to depravity, for a person is a slave to whatever conquers him”**. What an insight; we come into bondage to that very thing that has overcome us inwardly. Yet those who do such things hardly ever realise this great calamity that has occurred within them. No wonder God hates sin – look what it does!
- ♦ To “lie against the truth” is a horrible phrase that makes my spirit recoil. It’s a strikingly accusative statement that no true follower of Jesus would ever want directed against them. It actually makes me shudder. But that’s what the Word says jealousy, envy and bitterness are allied to – lies!
- ♦ And not just any type of lying, but lying against the very Truth of God and all He encompasses. Lying is bad enough, but to set oneself deliberately against God’s Truth and to align with it is extremely dangerous. It’s also futile because it leads nowhere!
- ♦ “Boasting” in one’s own wisdom / ministry / calling / etc is literally “to play false”. How often we hear ministries in the Body of Christ boast about themselves. It isn’t always obvious, but nevertheless if you have ears to hear, you can pick it up. Picture the person who in giving a testimony prefaces it with “This morning when I got up at 4.00 am to have my daily 3 hour prayer time with the Lord, He showed me....”
- ♦ Why not simply say “During my prayer time today the Lord....”?
- ♦ When we brag or boast, even though we might try to spiritualize it, then the inward applause or admiration of the people is our only reward we’ll ever get. Jesus said; “Whenever you give to the poor, don’t blow a trumpet before you like the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they will be praised by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward” (Matt 6:2)

Verse 15: That kind of wisdom does not come from above. No, it is earthly, self-centred, and demonic.

- ♦ Clearly there is a “wisdom” that seems wise (like Islam, Evolution, Philosophy, etc) but which breeds contention and fear. It has no standard by which to judge itself, except itself!
- ♦ Such “wisdom” seems skilful, shrewd and even logical – but is in fact talk disproved by life! James 1:22 says, “Keep on being doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves”.
- ♦ The wisdom that does not come from above, no matter how fine-sounding it is, no matter how appealing to the mind, no matter how much finance is behind it to publish and disseminate it – all this is empty and in the end goes nowhere. It may seem to satisfy the mind, the soul and the sensual, but it is NOT from above and so is a lie.
- ♦ James tells us that such “wisdom” is three-fold in nature. Earthly, Self-centred, and Demonic. Strong words indeed. Let’s unpack these a little.
- ♦ = this kind of human wisdom is limited, has no knowledge of Holy Spirit revelation or truth, and originates in the mind of man (being seeded by demonic thought). It is based on worldly man-inspired thoughts, and therefore only has THIS earthly life in view. By nature it’s directly opposed to that wisdom coming from the Father of lights (James 1:17).
- ♦ (sensual or natural) = it actually means “animal-like” or “animal-souled” meaning it is not born of God, so does not have the Spirit of God. This simply means that there is a “wisdom” that is self-gratifying and has as its main objective the satisfaction of animal-like passions (1 Cor. 2:14 – “a natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned”). Such “wisdom” only wants to feed the soul, and brings a corruption.
- ♦ = this is a disturbing word that means to exhibit a so-called wisdom such as demons exhibit. It is a partaking of a true demonic work. It has the idea of not only being inspired by demons, but also continuing in their work through their on-going influence upon the mind. It is “from hell” and not “from above”. Nothing could be plainer here. Serves the interest of Satan’s kingdom only.

Verse 16: For wherever jealousy and rivalry exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

- ♦ Where jealousy (envy) and rivalry (self-seeking) exist there will also be Confusion and every Evil Thing.
- ♦ = a disorder and instability. The root word actually means “tumultuous anarchy”. James 1:8 shows the consequence of this in an individual.
- ♦ Every evil thing = such things start out as trivial, then move onto things that are “cheap” with the result being “against God”, hence evil.
- ♦ Both of these are part and parcel of the Jezebelic pattern. Note that James does not refer to these as “fruit” as he does with true wisdom (see vs. 18), but as “works” of the flesh (Gal. 5:19).

- Godly wisdom will always bring about a reconciling peace between God and man, whilst ungodly wisdom can only ever produce confusion – and that in abundance.

Verse 17: However, the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, and without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

- “The wisdom that comes from above” is a joyous phrase. We are Born-Again from above, Jesus came from above, we will ascend to above, and we are to look to the things that are above.
- Here is the great declaration that true wisdom always comes from the Lord above. God is its only author; it is never a mixture of God and Man. It is pure because it comes from one source only.
- Such wisdom can be noticed in any true believer by the following three characteristics: Pure • Peaceable • Willing to yield
- “**Pure**” here has the connotation that such heavenly-born wisdom is pure because it comes first in all essential and true things. All else is secondary to the purity and perfection of Wisdom. How we need this. Do you hunger for it? It is indeed pure because this is the first effect it has on our mind!
- “**Peaceable**” isn’t so much internal peace of mind, but more the peace that is evident between persons the believer associates with. The man of wisdom will instinctively promote peace between people. It literally means to be a “lover of peace”.
- “**Willingness to yield**” here refers to the wise saint being the kind of person who approachable, one who always yields to the Truth when it is presented. It has the sense that such a wise peaceable person is never over-bearing or obstinate.
- Out of these pure characteristics the following fruit will blossom; mercy, no partiality, and no hypocrisy.
- “**Mercy**” = it means to be disposed towards compassion. It is a practical and active thing being considered here, not simply a doctrine or ideal.
- “**No partiality**” = most probably refers to the wise one making no distinction between people, and treating them all alike. It of course also means that a wise man will not be swayed by self-interest, preservation or reward.
- “**No hypocrisy**” = the word literally means “without wax” and alludes to the ancient practice of unscrupulous potters disguising cracked pottery with wax, that when dried, looked as if there was no blemish. However when put up to the light, or in the sun, the wax would readily show up as a defect. For us in context of this teaching it means that we are not to pretend to be more than we are.
- Note that all these relate to our conduct towards other people.

Verse 18: And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for the ones making peace.

- ♦ Just as earthly “wisdom” (so called!) has certain results, so too does godly wisdom. They are: Fruit and Peace.
- ♦ “**Fruit**” = remember the Biblical principle that “you reap what you sow”. We can only impart to others what we’re truly ministering in (no second-hand revelation). If you’re into some secret sin, then no matter what you preach, teach or say the sin (or its consequences) will come to the fore at some time, exposing the sin in you, or worse – affecting those to whom you minister. I have noticed that those who are in literal adultery will eventually bring forth spiritual adultery in the form of wrong teaching. The reverse is also true: teach wrong doctrine (spiritual adultery) and it won’t be long before you’re also into physical adultery.
- ♦ “**Peace**” = nearly always in Scripture peace refers to the reconciliation between God and Man. It can have the same meaning in relation to other people, but in the New Testament is usually confined to that peace between God and Man brought (and bought!) about solely through the saving work of Jesus.

So we come to the end of this short study – but because wisdom is wise, there is no end to studying it – and living it! Blessed are those who have such godly characteristics in their hearts and who sow it, so that in due season others might reap.

If we would be truly “wise” then we should SHOW it, not in vanity, self-righteousness or pride, but by being wise ones. We also have the duty to ACT in a peaceable manner to others as Righteous Ones. (Proverbs 2:2-6)

**“If you attend to wisdom, you shall extend your heart to understanding.
For if you cry for discernment, lifting up your voice for understanding;
if you seek her as silver, and search for her as hidden treasures,
then you shall understand the fear of the LORD and find knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom; out of His mouth are knowledge and understanding.”**

And finally, this most beautiful text (2: 10-11)

**“When wisdom enters into your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul,
discretion shall keep you, and understanding shall watch over you.”**

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