

James the Just: Heaven vs Earth

Wisdom just might be the most valuable quality to have. The book of Proverbs is all about wisdom. I'd encourage you to read a Proverb a day, there are 31 of them. You will see the constant contrast between having wisdom and being a fool.

There is a fine line between being wise and being a fool. How are we supposed to know the difference....in ourselves, or even in others?

James 3:13-18 (HCSB)

13 Who is wise and has understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness. 14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and deny the truth. 15 Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace.

Prior to this text, James taught how faith without works is dead. You show your faith by the works that you do. Works do not save us, but they are an evidence of our faith in Jesus which does save us.

Then as we looked at last week, overcoming the untamable tongue. There is the power of life and death in the tongue but by default (because of sin), the tongue is evil and from it comes the overflow of a wicked heart. The only way to overcome the tongue is for Jesus to change your heart!

Now James goes into wisdom. This is Heaven vs Earth....wisdom from above vs wisdom from below. James' entire letter is about righteous living and practical faith. The reason I love it so much is because it challenges me but shows me how I can live it out!

James 3:13 (HCSB)

13 Who is wise and has understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness.

I read this and it makes me want to ask James a few questions.....like "wise and understanding about what?" I mean, there are some areas I have wisdom and some areas I have understanding, so can you be more specific?

What he is asking is this: Who has the theoretical knowledge or philosophy? Who is truly skilled in the art of living? It's not a trick question, he wants to know who has wisdom....

If that is you, then you need to show it by a genuine, excellent manner of life. You better do what you tell others to do. Practice what you preach.

Just as faith without works is meaningless, so to wisdom that does not show itself in good deeds and good character is worthless.

Don't let your wisdom go to waste, it doesn't do you any good to be wise if you aren't going to apply it to your own life! But you must do it with wisdom's gentleness, not boastfully, not in arrogance, but in humility, knowing that if you are wise, it is because you have received it from God. Similar to faith, you can't boast about it because you got it from Him!

How many of you are good at telling others how they could do something better but when it comes down to it, you don't even do it yourself? This is the kind of thing that justifies calling Christians hypocrites. It's easy to tell others what to do but real wisdom has hands and feet!

You don't get wisdom from reading books, that's knowledge. Wisdom is applying knowledge and putting it into practice. If you are wise and understanding, the way you live should show it!

Proverbs 1:7 (HCSB)

7 The fear of the Lord
is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and discipline.

You have two types of people, those who love wisdom and those who despise it. It starts with a fear of the Lord, this means a reverence for God, being humble before Him. It all starts with a realization of how big God is and how small you are. If you get that you will love wisdom and discipline.

Every day I want God to teach me how to live as He desires, and I want Him to correct me if I'm wrong! Wisdom is a knowledge of what is truly right, and it's critical to living a life pleasing to God...

Proverbs 4:7 (HCSB)

7 Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom.
And whatever else you get, get understanding.

Proverbs 8:11 (HCSB)

11 For wisdom is better than jewels,
and nothing desirable can compare with it.

James 1:5 (HCSB)

5 Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him.

But remember there are actually two kinds of wisdom. The wisdom from above and the wisdom from below. Heaven vs Earth. Godly vs Worldly.

James 3:14 (HCSB)

14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and deny the truth.

Wisdom from below is all about ME. It's self centered and self driven. It includes bitter envy - having a harsh, offensive attitude toward others. Because you want what they have so badly, it causes bitterness. Your wisdom will be rooted in bitterness, the directive will always be personal gain.

This is where selfish ambition comes in. This causes a divisive willingness to split a group in order to achieve personal power and prestige. It's all about ME getting ahead, at all costs. In other places it is translated as strife or rivalry.

Philippians 2:3 (HCSB)

3 Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.

We see men in the bible rise and fall because of corrupted wisdom. Saul, the first king of Israel was given wisdom by God. Then He decides to step outside his God given role and be king and priest to that he would gain glory. (selfish ambition) Later, David begins to get more recognition than Saul for his victories in battle, Saul gets bitter envy. His wisdom began to flee, torment came and took it's place.

James 3:15-16 (HCSB)

15 Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

This kind of wisdom is not from God, it's not from above. It's:

- Earthly - It originates from man's wicked heart, it's purpose is to get ahead in life, measured in worldly terms
- Unspiritual - This Greek word here describes animals that are only concerned with survival. It's driven by emotion...what feels right.
- Demonic - it just straight up comes from demonic spirits. They will play on your fleshly desires and manipulate you into thinking it's "good wisdom"

Does your "wisdom" contain envy and selfish ambitions? If it does there will be disorder and every kind of evil.

This means you will have confusion. You will actually think this wisdom is good. But it will bring every kind of evil, this is talking about your works resulting from this wisdom. Every evil thing literally translates to “every worthless work”. Everything that comes from this earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom, is worthless.....good for nothing.

It starts with bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart. The result is confusion and worthless wisdom.

1 Corinthians 14:33a (NKJV)

33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace

All wisdom that comes from God leads to peace. This is the opposite of self motivated wisdom.

At the men’s conference I was in a workshop where the leader said every interaction you have with others is either manipulation or ministry. You are either trying to manipulate someone or a situation to benefit you. Or you are ministering to someone or a situation where you are trying to help them.

The telling fact is who does this benefit more, me or someone else, what is the motive? The same holds true for earthly wisdom vs heavenly wisdom.

James 3:17 (HCSB)

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy.

Wisdom from above is first, before anything else, PURE! This means it has not fault, it is undefiled, clean. He is talking about purity of motives – that we would use the wisdom given to us to seek after God’s glory, his praise, and the furthering of his kingdom, not the furthering of our kingdom!

- Peace-loving - (bring peace with it, peace promoting)

There are times when we think that wisdom is the ability to strategize so that your way wins out. If you can come out on top and been seen as right, that is wisdom. But God’s wisdom is not a wisdom of winning, it is a wisdom of reconciliation.

Romans 12:18 (HCSB)

18 If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone.

This doesn’t mean someone who is a pushover. Instead, it’s someone who strives to be at peace, to be calm, a person who is untroubled and undisturbed. This is a person who has let go of anxiety and trusts God.

- Gentle - (fair, mild, reasonable)

Someone who doesn't abuse a position of power, but remains calm & seeks to be true to Godly ideals.

- Compliant - (easily obeying, open to reason)

This can sound like a person who is passive and a pushover, but it really means someone who is steady, who thinks and recognizes the truth when heard and willingly receives that instruction.

Wisdom that is compliant is able to listen to the people around it, for both advice and explanations. We might think that wise people should have all the answers, but the reality is that truly wise people are able to listen for the answers.

Biblical compliance is not allowing yourself to be walked all over by people want to have their way over you. Biblical compliance is defined by putting others interest over yours – it is the opposite to selfish ambition, it is the opposite to self interest – it is “other interest”

- Full of mercy and good fruits -

Many times we might think that wisdom is about handing out justice. The wise person makes sure that everyone in their sphere of influence gets what they deserve. But the wisdom that comes from above gives people more than they deserve..... kindness and compassion in the name of God because of our love of God.

- Without favoritism and hypocrisy -

James describes God as the Father of lights in whom there is no shifting shadow. God's wisdom comes straight out of his character – there is no shift from what is in his heart and what comes out of his mouth. We must be the same way. If our wisdom is to be truly wisdom, it must be sincerely what it is, nothing hidden, nothing tricky, but pure and simple.

James 3:18 (HCSB)

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace.

Here's a challenge for each of us today. Let's plant peace in other people this week. But first, we need to be at peace ourselves. When God grows purity and peace in us, then we can plant it in others.

If the root is right the fruit will be right. You have a choice today. You can follow the ways of the world or you can follow God's way of wisdom. Which will it be?

Isaiah 32:17 (HCSB)

17 The result of righteousness will be peace;
the effect of righteousness
will be quiet confidence forever.

Wisdom from below comes from reason. Wisdom from above comes from revelation.

To follow this Godly wisdom is not always easy. There are so many pressures that are thrust our way everyday, that it becomes easy to give in to the wisdom of the world. We can take the path of least resistance, the path which has the smallest chance of personal harm and then we can make all the rationalizations we want to justify our decisions.

Yet, the ultimate goal is peace within the community, not because we are people who "want to keep the peace" at all costs and avoid conflict and confrontation like the plague, but it is to experience a Godly peace when we make the correct decisions, even the difficult ones. This becomes so difficult when there are so many competing voices, but we can always be assured that we are making the correct decisions if we stop and pray for God's wisdom, the wisdom that is 100% pure, wisdom that has no imperfections, wisdom that will always, if we desire lead us to the right path, the path of righteousness, for His names sake.

Everyday we are confronted with decisions, not so much which pair of shoes will we wear, but how am I going to honor God. My friends, as we seek to become more authentic Christians may we heed these powerful words of James and ask God for His wisdom and may we know that we will be blessed for following Him

Wisdom from above sees things through God's eyes and starts with purity and ends with purity. We need to listen to His wisdom and not the wisdom from below. .

1 Corinthians 1:30 But it is from Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became God-given wisdom for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption

Remember that line between wisdom and foolishness is a fine line. The difference between God and man. Apart from Him we are foolish, in Him we have wisdom.

The fool refuses to repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and he chooses the wrath of God. The wisest thing a person can do is bend the knee, confess your sins, repent of them, and then put your trust in Christ. There is simply no other way to be savedeven the "because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom" - 1 Corinthians 1:25