



Lesson 8 April 22, 2010

Wisdom or Folly

James now examines and contrasts the demonic wisdom of the earthly and sensual with the pure and peaceful wisdom from the “Father of lights in Whom is no shadow of turning (1:17).” In identifying the strife, envy, and confusion accompanying worldly wisdom, James subtly continues his theme of the unruly and unbridled tongue which is so often the cause of evil works. He then closes the section with a description of the blessings for those who seek and embrace God’s wisdom in bearing the fruit of good works.

1. In verse 13, James exhorts the wise to display evidence of their wisdom through their behavior (or works) in a spirit of meekness and humility, as attitude and action are inseparably linked to one another. What further thoughts on the subject do these verses provide?

Psalms 37:11; 147:6

Proverbs 15:33

1 Timothy 6:11

1 Peter 5:6

2. In verse 14-16, James identifies the origin of man’s wisdom (v15) characterized by envy, strife, and lies (v14) which, in turn, leads to confusion (the same word as “unstable” from James 1:8) and every evil work (v16). How is this theme underscored in these passages?

Romans 13:13



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1 Corinthians 3:3

Philippians 3:18-19

3. In verses 17-18, James extols the purity found in God's wisdom and its attributes of mercy and all good fruit founded on that wisdom (v17), whose fruit of righteousness is sown in peace (v18). Note that peace follows purity, for without our commitment to righteousness there can be no peace or good fruit. How do these verses relate to James' instruction?

Psalms 85:10

Isaiah 32:17

Luke 6:36

Galatians 5:22



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Personal Application

In returning to the theme of our need for Godly wisdom introduced in chapter one, James now expands his thoughts by describing the vast difference between that Godly wisdom and the wisdom of this world with its attendant problems for those who follow it. James' description of man's wisdom as earthly, sensual, and devilish (or demonic, more literally) parallels Paul's description (Ephesians 2:1-3) of what we as believers contend with -- the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Earthly, or worldly, wisdom is destined to fail. "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent (1 Corinthians 1:19)." Moreover, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:25, 27)." Scripture plainly declares that "there is a way that seems right to a man, but the ways thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 16:25)." These are undoubtedly the same people who "professing themselves to be wise became as fools (Romans 1:22)."

Sensual, or natural fleshly, wisdom is destined to fail. "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14)." Interestingly, this Greek word for sensual forms the root origin of our English word psychology and its practice has never and will never address one of fallen man's greatest problems -- guilt. However, we, as believers in the atoning blood of our Lord, have been "reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Romans 5:10)" and have had our guilt removed forever!

Devilish, or demonic, wisdom is destined to fail despite the fact that Satan, as "the god of this world (2 Corinthians 2:4)" has through the ages caused mankind to believe the deception, beginning in the garden of Eden, that he, too, could become a god as he "who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, Who is blessed forever (Romans 1:25)." Remember that "the world passes away, and the lust thereof, but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:17)." Jesus Himself proclaimed "now is the judgment of this world, now will the ruler of this world be cast off (John 12:31)." It is only a matter of time!

We, as the eternally redeemed (Hebrews 9:12), instead seek and embrace the wisdom of our Lord and Savior, for "we are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30) in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3)." As we choose and devotionally develop the fear of the Lord through diligent study of His word, becoming "wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15)," and through believing prayer (James 1:5-6), we can receive His divine wisdom -- "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy is understanding (Proverbs 9:10)." In Godly wisdom "are ways of pleasantness, and all her ways are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her (Proverbs 2:17-18)." May we therefore have the understanding of Solomon who "saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness (Ecclesiastes 2:13)" as we in faith ask God for His wisdom and walk in His light.