

# WHICH ROAD WILL YOU TAKE?

## A STUDY IN JAMES

### *The Two Wisdoms*

*Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)* <sup>7</sup> *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

**Real Wisdom Is the Fear of God.** Wisdom brings understanding; knowledge brings information. The Israelites realized early that wisdom is needed to use knowledge correctly. All of us know people who are very intelligent, perhaps almost geniuses, and yet who seemingly are unable to carry out the simplest tasks of life. One can be knowledgeable without being wise. For example, knowledge is knowing how to use a gun; wisdom is knowing when to use it and when to keep it holstered. Earthly wisdom will tell you that Jesus walked this earth. Godly wisdom will tell you that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of Souls. This lesson examines how the wisdom that comes from above will always triumph over earthly wisdom.

Earthly wisdom appeals to the senses and the emotions. In contrast, the wisdom that is from God reflects the Presence of Jesus in our lives. Earthly wisdom says ‘follow your heart’. Yet, godly wisdom tells us in *Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)* <sup>9</sup> *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

Earthly wisdom says ‘seeing is believing’ while God’s wisdom tells us in *John 20:29 (ESV)* <sup>29</sup> *Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

As earthly wisdom murmurs, ‘there are many ways to God’, godly wisdom shouts: *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12 (ESV)*

We should never be so ‘smart’ and knowledgeable that we miss the gentle and pure wisdom of God’s message and fail to relate biblical truth to our everyday life.

**Earthly wisdom produces trouble. God’s wisdom produces blessings.**

*Read James 3:13-16 (ESV)* <sup>13</sup> *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.* <sup>14</sup> *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.* <sup>15</sup> *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* <sup>16</sup> *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

True wisdom can be measured by a person’s character. Just 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. You don’t have to be smart to have faith but if you have faith you will be wise. *Proverbs 11:30 (ESV)* <sup>30</sup> *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise.*

Those who have a right relationship with God are understanding and concerned for others. They demonstrate heavenly wisdom in their behavior. On the other hand, we see people who boast about their education, their job, their car, their house while displaying bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. They have no genuine concern for others. They are going down the path of earthly wisdom. Seeking God's wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves to others and to want what they have.

Are you growing spiritually? Does it even matter to you? We hear the advice of the world constantly. “Go for the gold,” “If you can dream it, you can do it!” Avoid being drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness. Focusing on your job, your hobby, your home can be perfectly acceptable until it becomes all-consuming. Stop and consider! What are you doing that will matter in 100 years or 10 years from now or even next week? Begin consistently focusing on things eternal. **Colossians 3:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

We should guard against being consumed by the material successes of others because it causes us to lose the joy of our own salvation. What is wrong with looking out for number one? Self-centeredness leads to a selfish lifestyle.

**Read James 3:17-18 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.* <sup>18</sup> *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Let's look into the *wisdom from above!*

Heavenly wisdom is **pure**. To be pure means to not be mixed with any other substance. God's wisdom leads to purity of life. Man's wisdom may lead to sin. Godly wisdom has pure motives– not doing something to get something. **James 1:27 (ESV)** <sup>27</sup> *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

Heavenly wisdom is **peaceable**. Man's wisdom leads to competition, rivalry, and war but God's wisdom leads to peace – a peace based on God's holiness, not on compromise. When we trust in Jesus Christ we have His peace – the peace that passes all understanding. (**Philippians 4:7**)

Heavenly wisdom is **gentle**. Carl Sandburg described Abraham Lincoln as a man of 'velvet steel'. That is a good description of gentleness. The gentle person does not deliberately cause fights, but neither does the gentle person compromise the truth in order to keep peace. Our Savior is known for His gentleness. Jesus said in **Matthew 11:29 (ESV)** <sup>29</sup> *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Heavenly wisdom is **open to reason**. God's wisdom makes the believer agreeable and easy to get along with. Man's wisdom makes a person hard and stubborn and difficult to get along with. A person filled with heavenly reason can disagree without being disagreeable. **James 1:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*

Heavenly wisdom is full of **mercy**. The biblical concept of mercy always involves help to those who are in need or distress. Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of God's mercy. If others are to see Jesus in us, we must show mercy. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."*

Heavenly wisdom is full of **good fruits**. People who are faithful are fruitful. God's wisdom does not make a life empty; it makes it full. The Spirit produces fruit to the glory of God. **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)** <sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* <sup>23</sup> *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

Heavenly wisdom is **impartial**. Those who possess heavenly wisdom do not discriminate against others. Heavenly impartiality does not take one position and then change when under peer pressure. **Galatians 3:28 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Heavenly wisdom is **sincere**. In the ancient world, dishonest pottery dealers filled cracks in their inferior products with wax before glazing and painting them, making worthless pots difficult to distinguish from expensive ones. These worthless pots appeared genuine on the surface but they were not. The Greek word translated *hypocrite* in our New Testament means 'one who wears a mask, an actor'. As children of God, we must live a sincere life. The sincere Christian lives a life of faith without scheming.'

The life who follows heavenly wisdom sow a harvest of righteousness. Righteousness comes before peace. Pleasant endearing speech and wise, loving words are the seeds of peace. God loves peacemakers. **Matthew 5:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."*

**Read James 4:1-3 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* <sup>2</sup> *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.* <sup>3</sup> *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*

The Christian faith is hindered by strife and contention, by prayerlessness and by worldliness. In contrast, the Christian faith is magnified by the virtues that Paul described in **Philippians 4:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* Avoiding quarrels and fights will be a continuing life battle since no one is immune to being sucked into disagreements.

We may not murder with our hands, but it is so easy to 'murder' with our words. One of the easiest things in the world to do is – CRITICIZE somebody else. It often begins with a pleasant intro "I love her to death, **but...**" and we proceed to commit 'murder' with our words. We allow our carnal nature to overcome our spiritual nature.

James says in verse 3: *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* This is one explanation from God's Word as to why our prayers may be answered 'no'. I like the Life Application Bible Commentary that says, "James mentions the most common problems in prayer: not asking, asking for the wrong things, or asking for the wrong reasons. Do you talk to God at all? When you do, what do you talk

about? Do you ask only to satisfy your desires? Do you seek God's approval for what you already plan to do? Your prayers will become powerful when you allow God to change your desires so that they perfectly correspond to his will for you." *Psalm 37:4 (ESV)* <sup>4</sup> *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Keep in mind that the natural heart is never contented. Solomon's book of *Ecclesiastes* reveals how nothing under the sun can satisfy the heart of the man who is made for eternity. When continually looking for some new thing that will satisfy, remember this: nothing can ever satisfy your soul like Jesus.

*Read James 4:4-6 (ESV)* <sup>4</sup> *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* <sup>5</sup> *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?* <sup>6</sup> *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

When James called the people adulteresses, he was speaking of spiritual infidelity. The Old Testament book of *Hosea* reveals how Hosea's relationship with his adulterous wife Gomer was a picture of God's relationship with the adulterous nation of Israel. Spiritual adultery is being married to Christ and loving the world. Spiritual adultery begins just like physical adultery – by flirting – in this case – flirting with the things of this world. Flirting or friendship with the world involves seeking pleasure over obeying God. Pleasure that keeps us from pleasing God is sinful. Believers who are friends of the world grieve the Spirit who jealously yearns for our love. Show your real faith by humbly submitting to God.

Pride is undue confidence in and attention to one's own skills, accomplishments, possessions, position, or even our own assessment of a given situation. During the Battle of the Wilderness in the Civil War, Union general John Sedgwick was inspecting his troops. At one point he came to a parapet, over which he gazed out in the direction of the enemy. His officers suggested that this was unwise and perhaps he ought to duck while passing the parapet. "Nonsense," snapped the general. "They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance." A moment later Sedgwick fell to the ground, fatally wounded.

Pride is easier to recognize in others than in oneself. Pride is rebellion against God. The prophet Isaiah wrote of how the highest of God's angels tried to usurp the throne of God and capture for himself the worship that belongs only to God. If pride could cause an angel in heaven to fall, then humans should be very aware and cautious regarding the sin of pride.

Solomon, the son of David, is known as the wisest man in the world because the LORD granted his prayer for discernment. As a young man he depended on God but as he aged, he chose to depend less on God and more on himself and his own worldly wisdom. If Solomon could stray so far from the LORD, it can happen to us. We must live constantly focused on God's Word, never believing that we know it all or can do it all on our own. James says *God ...gives grace to the humble*. The grace from God to us is Jesus. It is the wisest choice to always trust in Him!