



WISDOM

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Do you want to be wise?

If I told you that this bottle is full of pills that will make you very wise, would you want one? Is there anybody here who needs more wisdom? The reason I am asking is that we are faced with a serious challenge today: Our Scripture reading starts with the question, "Who is wise and understanding among you?"

In the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs gives us much teaching about wisdom and the author tells us how we should live and act. He strongly emphasised the importance of wisdom and how it would benefit us.

Proverbs 21:20 says, *"There is desirable treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it"*

Proverbs 25:4 says that *"a wise man is strong and a man of knowledge increases strength."*

Proverbs 16:16 says, *"How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver."*

Let's take note of verses 2 and 3 in Proverbs 30. In the Passion Translation the author says, *"God, I'm so weary and worn out, I feel more like a beast than a man, I was made in Your image, but I lack understanding. I've yet to learn the wisdom that comes from the full and intimate knowledge of You, the Holy One."*

Wisdom does not depend on how grey or white your hair is, the number of university degrees that you have, or the work that you do. It cannot be bought with billions of Rands! Much studying and reading can give you knowledge, but not wisdom. Real wisdom enables you to look at things **from God's viewpoint**. It is more than knowing the facts in the Bible, it enables us to use the facts correctly and this ability God gives as revelation, it's not something that everybody just gets automatically. In Genesis 3 we read that Satan told Eve that if she ate of the fruit of the tree that God had said they should not eat, she would gain wisdom. He is still trying the same tactic today.

READING:

James 3:13-18 ESV

13. *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.*
14. *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.*
15. *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*
16. *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*
17. *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*
18. *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

BACKGROUND:

In the New Testament James fulfils an important role, giving us practical teaching concerning how we should live and act. He was writing to Jews who believed in Jesus Christ. They were scattered all over in areas such as Asia, Galatia, Cappadocia and Bithynia, in amongst the Gentiles. Some of them were from these Gentile areas, and had gone to Jerusalem for the Jewish Feast and had come to believe in Jesus when the Holy Spirit was poured out and Peter started preaching on the day of Pentecost. Others were ones who were forced to leave Jerusalem because of persecution after Pentecost. Life was difficult for them. Historians tell us that in some places they were not allowed to have their own churches, only synagogues were allowed for Jews and the synagogues insisted that they deny Jesus. They had to make a living and it was rather tough. It became very easy to become influenced by the unbelieving Gentiles who lived so differently and some started to become like them, and so it happened that the lives of many became totally different from the way that Jesus had lived and had taught.

James realised that these matters had to be addressed. In the earlier part of chapter 3 he addressed the way we speak and now he addresses the way we live.

It matters very much, not only how we speak, but also how we live and behave. Godly wisdom shows itself in our conduct and it is imperative that Christian believers reflect the very image of the Lord.

Jesus regards your way of doing things, your way of living, as very important. We see this in the Beatitudes as well as in the parables that He told. Paul also, although he taught doctrinal things, also emphasised practical things – he said that we should walk worthy of our calling, we were created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. He urged us to walk in peace with others. He wrote to the Philippians that their conduct should be worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is clear that Jesus and also Paul, regarded the way we did things, and not only what we believed, to be important.

I often hear people say that the attitude of our hearts is what is important, and yes, that is true, it is vitally important, but not only that. The attitude must lead to action. James so clearly tells us that faith, although very important, is not sufficient, but doing is equally important. Believing obedience is what is required!

TWO KINDS OF WISDOM:

In the portion that we read in James 3 we found James telling us about two kinds of wisdom. The one is earthly and the other is from above and is heavenly. Sometimes we just read through portions like these quickly, without taking time to think about the specific words, their meaning and their application in our own lives. How should they affect the way we behave?

So let us take a little time to consider more carefully, the characteristics of these two types of wisdom.

1. EARTHLY WISDOM

Verses 14-16 describe earthly wisdom and verses 13 and 17-18 tell us about the wisdom from above.

Have a closer look at the earthly one – the one we surely don't want. James refers to bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, boasting and lying against the truth.

How does this manifest in a person's life?

Bitter envy means that you desperately want something that someone else has – desiring that, even to the point that it swallows you up. It is an obsession to promote yourself at the expense of others. These people become arrogant and boastful. They cannot handle it that someone

else can have things that they don't have. Everything must be about, and revolve around, themselves. He/she must always be at the centre, the most important person. It is all about I, me and my! Envy destroys unity and develops rivalry.

Selfish ambition, sometimes called self-seeking or even mean-spirited ambition. Ambition of itself is not wrong. We have to do our best with the talents God has given us and the skills He has enabled us to acquire. Jesus told the story of the man who gave his workers talents and expected them to work with them and produce an increase. We must, however, guard against gaining the whole world, but forfeiting our souls. This can happen when we allow ambition to become a wretched urgency. So often we find that some, and I stress some and not all, very wealthy and successful people have trampled on others to get where they are. That is mean-spirited.

Consider your work situation and how you feel about your colleagues, and what about church activities and positions within the church?

Selfish ambition means that you are motivated to do things that serve you and your interests. It is possible that someone can feel rejected and left out, if they are not voted onto, or invited to serve on committees, or are not asked to speak, or preach. It is possible that jealousy can easily creep in and then self-seeking rules the day. I'm talking about believers, people who love the Lord. We need to guard our hearts and not allow self-seeking because if we do, divisions will begin to develop and some may even try to build their own dynasties within the church.

In Philippians 1, Paul says that some preach Christ from selfish ambition and others out of love. It is even possible to start sharing your testimony, or a Word, or preach, out of a burning desire to honour God and then have your thoughts turning to self-glory, wondering what people think of you. Will you be recognized as someone who is special and anointed? If you work really hard at some church activity, will you be noticed? In Acts 14 we read that Paul and Barnabas, sharing the Gospel in Lystra, a crippled man was miraculously healed and people proclaimed that they were gods. They, not entertaining earthly wisdom, did not allow this and quickly put a stop to it.

Anyone with bitter envy and self-seeking in their hearts should not try to deceive anyone, especially themselves, about how wise they think they are.

Verse 16 tells us that the outcome of this kind of living leads to confusion, chaos and every evil thing. These evil things remind us of the fruit of the flesh that we read about in Galatians 5:19-21- Adultery, fornication, outbursts of wrath, heresies, murder and many more. In the Amplified Bible James 3:16 says: "For wherever there is jealousy and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil and vile practices." This false wisdom always destroys unity and leads to rivalry. We are also warned not to boast about these things. Don't pretend that you are wise if this is what you are like.

James 3:15 clearly tells us that this is earthly wisdom – it has this life only, in view; it is sensual, having as its object the gratification of personal passions; it is demonic because it is inspired and influenced by demons.

2. WISDOM FROM ABOVE

Now let us look at the Wisdom from above. What is true Godly wisdom? Verse 13 tells us that it is evident by its meek manner. Good works are not done in a way designed to bring attention to themselves.

What is its origin? - It comes from above. To gain this wisdom, you must have come to a place where Jesus became Lord of your life, you've been washed in the Blood of Christ, you are born again into the family of God and then you must walk, led by the Holy Spirit. You must come to know God intimately by drawing near to Him. Then you can receive this wisdom which is a wisdom that is full of the atmosphere of heaven. In James 1 we read that we should ask God

for wisdom and that He gives liberally, BUT he wrote this to those who were already God's children! If you need wisdom, today may be the opportunity for you to get ready to receive it.

Let's look at its characteristics and how they manifest in your life.

First of all, it is pure (can also be translated as holy), we could say that it is single-minded, it is not mixed with anything that is impure – it's not like muddied water. It is not mixed with pride, self-centeredness, greed and such things. There is an absence of sinful attitudes and motives - It will be found in a holy life. Jesus said the pure in heart will see God. God regards a holy, pure life as very necessary. He told Jeremiah to examine and weigh the lives of the people of Israel. The Message Bible says in Jeremiah 6:29-30, "Refining fires are cranked up to white heat, but the ore stays a lump, unchanged... Nothing can refine evil out of them. Men will give up on them and call them slag, thrown on the slag heap by Me, their God." The process of refining silver was used here to show strongly how God desired His people to be pure, but they did not respond.

Verse 17 tells us that after purity comes the aspect of being peaceable. Jesus said, when He was still on earth, that He would leave His peace with us, He was giving that to us. There are so very many verses about peace in the Bible – I counted 45 and there could be more. Jesus is the Prince of peace. Romans 12:18 reads, "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." 'If possible', which indicates that it might not always be possible.

We cannot put peace with anyone above peace with God – it is not peace at all costs. We must not live a life of compromise for the sake of peace. There are times that confrontation is necessary – but it must be done in love. You cannot condone adultery and fornication for the sake of peace when for e.g. with your children should they become involved in these lifestyles. You cannot be seen to condone it.

Another way in which true wisdom is manifest is being gentle. This will mean that you are not harsh and you do not react violently and viciously when somebody upsets you, you know how to forgive and to extend to others the kind consideration that you'd like to receive yourself. This must apply to your work situation as well as at home. Gentleness should not be shown only to those you like, but to everybody, even when they are abusive and aggressive. Consider your reactions towards people who have badly upset you - do you remain gentle? It is not all that easy and we realize that these characteristics are only possible when the Holy Spirit is in full control of our lives.

The next one is being open to reason. Don't you find yourself sometimes responding to something before you've even allowed the other person to finish what they wanted to say or propose? Does only your own opinion count? Are you willing to listen to, and consider someone else's ideas, before making a decision? Be willing to yield to others.

The next way in which this type of wisdom shows in our lives is whether we are full of mercy and good fruits. This requires that you go out of your way not to cause harm to another. You don't want others to live in fear of you, being afraid to face you or discuss things with you, because you could come down on them like a ton of bricks. Are you willing to offer compassion to those in distress? Jesus said that the merciful are blessed; they will receive mercy.

The Aramaic translation of mercy is love. Love is very important in our lives. The Lord is calling us to a higher place of love where we are obedient in loving others, whether they deserve it or not. May the Lord heal and sanctify our hearts to love as He loves.

Proverbs 19:11 says, "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." This verse deserves consideration.

The last one is that we should be impartial and sincere. We cannot agree with everyone about everything – that will not lead to anything good, but we must be impartial. This is a principle of

justice – beware of prejudice, or just preferring one person and agreeing with that one, for some personal reason.

We are also not to pretend about ourselves or situations, but be honest and free from play-acting. People must know where they stand with us, we must be trustworthy, not flatter someone to his face and then gossip and slander him behind his back.

What about the good fruits? Verse 18 says *"The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."* From the fruit you get seeds and when you plant a seed it will grow and you'll get more fruit and more and more seeds and fruit. Everything we do yields some kind of fruit and then blessings, or the opposite, come from them. Remember the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5... The wise Christian is like a gardener who sows seeds of righteousness.

Hosea 10:12 says, *"Sow for yourself the seed of righteousness and reap the harvest of mercy."* It all starts with a peacemaker, a wise child of God whose garden is a garden of peace.

Are you a peacemaker? When we look at the confusion, division and hostility in our country, we realise how desperately South Africa needs peacemakers. Even in small groups, or our homes, we can help this process by getting two opposing people, or groups, together to discuss, consider and find a way that can work. Jesus said that peacemakers will be called sons of God.

CONCLUSION:

Let us keep in mind that this whole book was written to believers – one wonders, is it really possible that born again Christians can be so imperfect, so lacking in the manifestation of wisdom from above? We need to remember that when we get born again our spirits are made new, but there is a road ahead; our souls, our minds, thought processes and attitudes must also be changed as we grow in the LORD AND BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS.

While preparing this message I became so conscious of the importance and depth of all these requirements, these characteristics that are needed must be within the deepest depths of our hearts. They are not just on the outside where others can see them. If the love, mercy and all the others do not come from deep inside, we will never be able to sustain them. Being kind is not just a smile and maybe giving something to eat. It also involves how we feel inside our hearts about the person we are dealing with. I realized that there were areas in my own life that require change and refinement and I spent time with the Lord and asked the Holy Spirit to speak to me, in strong terms, if need be, when I go wrong. The reason? - I desperately long to grow more like Jesus every day! We are not able, no matter how hard we try, to avoid the negatives and do the good things on our own. Our only hope is that Christ lives in, and consumes us, saturating us, and that when we open our mouths to speak, it will be Jesus speaking through us and acting through us. May we feel what He feels and see in others what He sees in them.

Smith Wigglesworth said, *"God has privileged us in Christ Jesus to live above the ordinary human plane of life. Those who want to be ordinary and live on a lower plane can do so, but as for me, I will not."* That's the cry of my heart also. What about you?

Let us search our hearts and our lives. Is Jesus truly seen in the things that you do, the way you act and speak? What does your tongue reveal about your heart? Remember that what your heart is full of, that is what will come from your mouth and what you believe about God will be seen in your relationships with other people.

Having considered the characteristics of wisdom from above, let us return to the question we are faced with today: WHO IS WISE AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG YOU? Answer honestly, are you?

To be able to answer in the affirmative, you need to have a character like Jesus's. Is that you?

Maybe today is the day for you to make right with God, for you to become wise and understanding.

If Jesus is not yet Lord of your life, then don't postpone it to another day. You cannot afford to wait, come to Jesus now. Pray this prayer from your heart:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Saviour."

If you prayed this prayer, tell someone!

Get connected in the community of God, the church, and find someone who can help you to know and follow Jesus. A community group is a great way to do this. We meet in small groups in homes. This is where you can become known and get to know your Christian brothers and sisters. We need each other!

To join a community group, contact Marli (072 986 4368) or Jen (084 308 5185) or one of our community group leaders directly. To see the groups on our website:
<http://christiancentre.co.za/community.html#groups>

APPLICATION

This is a challenging Word from God. Let us consider which wisdom we are operating in - earthly wisdom or wisdom from above?

1. Consider your work situation, family and even your church activities and position.
 - a. Is there bitter jealousy or envy in your heart? How do you feel if someone else gets promoted ahead of you or if they have things you don't have?
 - b. Are you self-seeking? Do you do stuff to be noticed, for self-glory? Is there mean-spirited ambition lurking in your heart?

If any of these are present, confess it to God as sin and repent. Find a trusted Christian friend that you can talk to and who can pray with you and walk with you through it.

2. Are these characteristics present in your life, in attitude and behaviour? (see notes above)
 - a. Pure
 - b. Peaceable
 - c. Gentle
 - d. Open to reason
 - e. Full of mercy and good fruits
 - f. Impartial and sincere

Is Jesus seen in the things you do and the way you act and speak? Recognise that we are in a process of growing and becoming more like Jesus; our souls are being sanctified. Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight areas that need refining then yield to His work in you. Our only hope of change is Christ living in us.

3. Commit to become a peacemaker and pray for unity in the Body of Christ.

Assistance:

If you need prayer or assistance, please contact our pastoral care line 072 986 4368 or one of our pastors directly.