

Place: Lurgan Baptist 2:5:2004

Reading: James 3:13-18

## **PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY**

### **23. WISDOM**

Today knowledge is exploding. There are more young people graduating from University than in any previous generation. Textbooks and encyclopaedias are behind the times almost as soon as they are printed. We can now travel farther and higher and faster than anyone before us. The computer age continues to advance at such a pace that technology is outdated with each passing month. But in the midst of this explosion of knowledge, wisdom is practically nonexistent. Many peoples lives are in shambles. Position, power, and prosperity have not brought peace and purpose. Suicides and divorce rates are astronomical. In our modern world, where so many homes are disintegrating, so many hopes are smashed, and so many dreams are dashed, we need wisdom above all else. Now there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom.

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts.

The Amplified Bible translates the phrase “ *endued with knowledge,*” by the word “ *intelligent.*” Those who claim to be teachers and this is the link back to ( 3:1 ) must first of all themselves be learners of the truth.

But if knowledge can be explained by the word

“ *intelligence,*” then wisdom can be explained by the word “ *insight.*”

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts, wisdom is the ability to take those facts and apply them to life’s situations. I heard about a man in Boston who was entertaining a famous Chinese scholar. He met his friend at the train station and rushed him to the subway. As they ran through the subway station, the host panted to his guest, “ *If we run and catch this next train, we will save three minutes.*” To which the patient Chinese philosopher replied, “ *And what significant thing shall we do with the three minutes we are*

*saving ?*” The intelligence of some people borders on genius, but they cannot practically manage their lives. You see, knowledge is intelligence which can leave God out, but true wisdom is the insight that takes God in and puts the Lord at the very centre of the picture.

As far as I know nowhere in the Bible is wisdom used to describe an unbeliever. Do you recall what the psalmist says ? “ *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” ( 111:10 ) You see until a person’s life is

God-orientated, until it is centred on God, that person may be intelligent, but he is certainly not wise in the Biblical sense. Now never have believers needed wisdom more than today. *Providers* need wisdom to know how to gain financial stability. *Partners* need this wisdom to know how to be the kind of husbands and wives God would have them be. *Parents* need this wisdom to know how to lead their families in the way of godliness. My .... What is the greatest need of young people today ? Wisdom ! You see, most of life's major decisions, whom to marry, what vocation to pursue are made in late teens or early twenties. Wisdom is therefore needed. Now James contrasts two kinds of wisdom here. There is a wisdom that emanates from the word, and there is a wisdom that comes from the Lord. Do you see the contrast in ( 3:17 ) ? I want you to notice that he contrasts true wisdom and false wisdom in 3 different ways. There is:

### (1) A CONTRAST IN SOURCES

True wisdom comes from above, but false wisdom comes from below. In other words there is a heavenly wisdom that comes from God and there is a man-made wisdom that does not come from God. James says:

#### (a) *FALSE WISDOM COMES FROM BELOW:*

The Christian has three enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. ( Eph 2:1-3 ) These enemies are suggested by the terms, “ *earthly, sensual and devilish.* ” ( 3:15 ) You see, the wisdom of the world does not come from God rather:

##### 1. It Originates in the SECULAR:

James says, it is “ *earthly.* ” ( 3:15 ) Paul uses the same word when he speaks of those “ *who mind earthly things.* ” ( Phil 3:19 ) Here is a wisdom that is purely earthly. Its standards are earthly standards, its sources are earthly sources its aims are worldly aims and it measures success in worldly terms. Do you recall that it was secular wisdom that built the Tower of Babel ? The result confusion and failure ! ( Gen 11:1 ) Do you remember that it was secular wisdom that reasoned that it would be wise for young David to put Saul's armour on ? ( 1 Sam 17:38 ) The result would have been disaster. You see, Saul looked to the wisdom of the world, but David looked to the wisdom of the Lord. Now tell me, do you make your decisions in the same way as Saul or in the same way as David ? Is it not a tragedy that so many of us make our decisions using the wisdom of this world, instead of the wisdom of the Lord. 1.

## 2. It Originates in the SENSUAL:

The Amplified Bible translates the word as

“*unspiritual.*” Or another word would be “*natural.*”

Paul says, “*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him.*”

( 1 Cor 2:14 ) Jude describes unsaved people as

“*sensual having not the Spirit.*” ( Jude 19 ) while Isaiah describes the Holy Spirit as “*the Spirit of Wisdom.*”

( Is 11:2 ) He is only One who can give true wisdom, clear insight, and right attitudes. Indeed here is a vital point in our Christian service. You see, all of us have received the Holy Spirit and each of us have been gifted by the Spirit. ( Eph 4:7 ) But the real question is this, are we using our gifts in an unspiritual way ? Now remember that there is a difference between gifts and graces. The Corinthian church was the most gifted, but at the same time the least holy community planted by the apostles. ( 1 Cor 1:7 ) My .... will you note it carefully this .... that ability is no yardstick of spirituality ! Now this false we’re describing. 1: 2:

## 3. It Originates in the SATANIC:

For it is “*devilish,*” or “*demonic.*” You see, Satan is the power behind the wisdom of this world. That wisdom began away back in the Garden of Eden when Satan successfully deceived Eve into using the wisdom of the world. ( Gen 3:1 ) Satan convinced Eve that she would be like God. He told her that the tree would make her wise. And ever since that event people have continued to believe the lies of the devil. Why do you think the theory of evolution is so popular among secularists today ? My .... its so popular because its origin is satanic. it’s the devils attempt to explain everything that exists without God. Why do you think the New Age Movement is so popular ? Its so popular because its origin is Satanic. It encourages people to search for wisdom in such things as horoscopes. This is the false wisdom (a) but;

**(b) TRUE WISDOM COMES FROM ABOVE:**

Do you see the word “*but,*” in ( 3:17 ) ? Its not there by accident. James wants us to contrast the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of the Lord. (b) The Christian looks up to Heaven for all that he needs. His Citizenship is in heaven. ( Phil 3:20 ) His Father is in heaven. ( Matt 6:9 ) His Treasures are in heaven. ( Matt 6:19 ) His Home is in heaven. ( Jn 14:3 ) His Wisdom is from heaven. What is the Christians wisdom ? Do we need to look to the philosophies of this world ? No !

The Lord Jesus is our wisdom. ( 1 Cor 1:24, 30 ) In Christ are  
“ *hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* ”  
( Col 2:3 ) The Word of God is our wisdom. For the Scriptures are able to  
make us “ *wise unto salvation.* ”  
( 2 Tim 3:15 Deut 4:5 ) And ( 1:5 ) indicates that we find wisdom through  
Believing Prayer. My .... We don't find wisdom from education or  
practical experience. Its not learned. It's a gift to us from God, who gives  
it generously when we ask. Get your wisdom from God. 1:

## (2) A CONTRAST IN SYMPTOMS

Now remember James is still contrasting true wisdom and false wisdom.

### (a) *What are the MARKS of FALSE WISDOM ?*

**ENVY:** do you see ( 3:14 ) ? It means “ *selfish ambition and zeal.* ” You  
see, it ties in with ( 3:1 ) where James warned them not to be ambitious  
for spiritual offices.

It's the kind of attitude that cannot bear someone else's success or  
popularity and given the opportunity will humiliate and degrade, even it  
hurts. One of the most honest prayers even prayed by a minister of the  
Gospel, was attributed to F.W. Robertson of Brighton. He prayed, “ *Lord  
I would sooner your work was not done at all, then done by someone  
better than I can do it.* ”

My .... does that strike a responsive chord in your  
heart ? Do you rejoice when others succeed or are you envious and  
critical ?

**STRIFE:** ( 3:14 ) The Amplified Bible uses,  
“ *contention rivalry, selfish ambition.* ” ( 1 Cor 3:3 2 Cor 12:20 ) The  
word means “ *party spirit.* ” It was used by a politician out canvassing for  
votes. This is the sort of person who will do anything, say anything, go  
anywhere, lobby anyone to get somewhere in the church. Now these are  
the marks of false wisdom !

**BOASTING:** ( 3:14 ) Pride loves to boast and nothing is prouder than the  
wisdom of men. Do you know there is a way to report blessings so that  
God gets the glory, but there is an approach that gives man the praise !  
( 2 Cor 10:12 ) My .... it is tragic to see mutual admiration societies  
among the Lord's people !

**DECEIT:** “ *lie not against the truth.* ” ( 3:14 ) Do you see the sequence  
here ? First, there is selfish ambition that leads to party spirit and rivalry.

In order to “ *win the election,* ” we must resort to boasting and boasting usually involves lies. My .... a man’s life is not read in his press releases, it is read by the Lord in his heart. That’s why Paul says, “ *judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise of God.* ” ( 1 Cor 4:5 ) What a relief it is to ponder the question.

**(b) What are the MARKS of TRUE WISDOM ?**

**1. MEEKNESS:** ( 3:13 ) Now this is an interesting word. The Greek word was used for a horse that had been broken so that his power was under control. Meekness is the right use of power. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. They go together. Now the truly wise person will show in his daily life that he is a child of God. 1.

**2. PURITY:** ( 3:17 ) The idea behind this word is “ *chaste, free from defilement.* ” Do you remember Daniel and his three friends down there in Babylon ?

They would not defile themselves with the kings meat nor with the wine which he drank. ( Dan 1:8 ) But do you know why ? Let me give you the answer, “ *As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom.* ” ( 1:17 ) They possessed a heavenly wisdom and the result was that they had a sensitiveness to sin. Do you see that James puts our state here before our service ? He examines our heart before he looks at our hands. “ *First pure .....* ” This is an inward experience. There is an intriguing verse in the O.T. that reads, “ *they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.* ”

( S.S. 1:6 ) My .... has God called you to be a pastor, an elder, an office-bearer, a leader in the work ? Has He made you a keeper of the vineyard, other people’s vineyard ? Tell me, have you kept your own ? Are you seeking to lead others into areas of Christian experience that are utterly foreign to you ? You see, it possible to feel that we know the doctrine of sanctification from beginning to end, to be able to quote all the Scriptures about holiness of life, and still not be living close to the Lord.

At the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Council of Trent, one bishop said that Protestants were “ *orthodox in life, however faulty in belief.* ” Today, we have things the other way round. We are orthodox in belief but faulty in life. 2.

**3. PEACE:** or “ *Peace-loving.* ” Some believers seem to be determined to prove that they belong to the church militant by constantly fighting each

other. My .... even when we differ on things we should do so in an attitude of heart that is concerned for the well being of our opponent. John Wesley and George Whitefield were both mighty men of God, yet on certain theological issues they were diametrically opposed. One of the issues came to a head toward the end of 1740 after Wesley had published a sermon on the subject of Free Grace. On Christmas eve 1740 George Whitefield, then in U.S.A. wrote a long letter to Wesley. It was clear, firm, decisive and showed them to be in opposite camps. Yet towards the end of that latter Whitefield wrote, “ *I love and honour for His sake, and when I come to stand before God will thank you before men and angels for what you have under God, done for my soul.* ” Is that not what it means to be peaceable ?

**4. GENTLENESS:** ( 3:17 ) A good paraphrase might be “ *willing to make allowances.* ” To be gentle mean to see the best in the worst of people. Gentle ! Courteous ! Considerate ! Are you like that ? Or are you reluctant to forgive, overlook, to make allowances ?

**5. COMPLIANT:** “ *Easy to be entreated,* ” or as the Amplified puts it “ *willing to yield to reason.* ” During an U.S.A. Presidential Election some years ago, a man put this sticker in his car. “ *My mind is made up. Don't confuse me with facts.* ” Is that you ? Headstrong, stubborn, unyielding ?

**6. COMPASSIONATE:** “ *full of mercy,* ” ( 3:17 ) or “ *full of compassion.* ” Thomas Manton said, “ *it is the great fault of some that when they begin to religious they leave off to be human.* ” Do you know churches and Christians where everything is done in such a cold, critical kind of way, without any “ *heart,* ” at all ?

**7. FRUITFULNESS:** “ *and good fruits,* ” or “ *kind actions.* ” Several years ago there used to be advertising slogan that ran something like this. “ *When there is need, there is the Salvation Army.* ” My .... does that not sum up the whole thrust of James's epistle ? Whatever the need here were believers prepared to help.

**8. IMPARTIALITY:** “ *without partiality,* ” you see the wisdom that come from God does not play favourites with either the rich or the poor. Its not like the short sighted usher in ( Ch 2 ) who courts the rich and rejects the poor ! No ! “ *Without partiality.* ” Finally James says the wisdom that is from is marked by:

**9. SINCERITY:** “ *without hypocrisy,* ” ( 3:17 ) The Greek word translated hypocrite in our N.T. means

“ *one who wears a mask, an actor.* ” You see, when the wisdom of the world is at work, there may be insincerity and pretence, but when the wisdom of the Lord is at work, there is openness and honesty. ( Eph 4:15 ) I wonder do we need to examine our church in the light of James’s teaching ? My .... are we using the wisdom of the world, methods that make secular business’s succeed, in the work of the Lord ? You see, there is a difference between True Wisdom and False Wisdom. There is a (1) (2)

### (3) A CONTRAST IN SEQUELS

You see, origin determines outcome. Worldly wisdom will produce worldly results, spiritual wisdom will give spiritual results. You see:

#### ***(a) Wisdom from HELL produces TROUBLE:***

Envy, strife, confusion and evil works. The word “ *confusion,* ” here might refer to rows and divisions in the church, what the Bible calls “ *discord among brethren.* ” ( Pro 6:19 ) My .... when there is a division in this church as a result of envying and ambition, its not God’s work, for God is “ *not the author of confusion, but of peace.* ” ( 1 Cor 14:33 ) The word “ *evil,* ” here means “ *worthless, of no account,* ” it reminds us of the “ *wood, hay and stubble,* ” that will be consumed at the Judgment Seat. ( 1 Cor 3:12 ) You see, a ministry operating in the wisdom of this world may appear to be great and successful, but at the Judgement Seat, it will burn up. For anything we do as the result of envying and ambition proves in the long run to be worthless. My .... will you service for God burn up at the Judgement Seat ? Why ? Because you used the wisdom of this world ? Because you used your own ingenuity to gain your own ends ? Because you were marked by selfish ambition. (a)

#### ***(b) Wisdom from HEAVEN produces BLESSING:***

“ *And the fruit of righteousness .... peace,* ” ( 3:18 ) Or “ *those who seek to make peace in a peaceable way, produce a harvest of righteousness in themselves and others.* ” Do you see what James is saying ? The result of possessing heavenly wisdom is a life that is utterly pleasing to God ! Oh, that we may lay hold of this wisdom in order to produce this fruit. My .... what is our greatest need as persons ? As providers ? As parents ? Its wisdom. Where do we get it ? We need to ask ! Who gives it ? God ! How ? In response to our believing prayers. How much will He give ? Generously.

The psalmist put it like this, “ *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of*

*wisdom.*” ( 111:10 ) My .... almost anyone can gain knowledge but only those who seek God can gain true wisdom. “ *Wisdom is the principal thing therefore get wisdom.*” ( Pro 4:7 )