

“Can We Be Wise and Good?” – October 15, 2017  
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## **Can We Be Wise and Good?**

St. James 3:13–4:3, 7-8a

In an article from the magazine the “National Geographic,” we discover Bertand Piccardmand and Win Verstraeten, whose challenging goal was to be the first to circle the globe in an air balloon. The aircraft was named the “Breitling Orbiter,” a high-tech, solar-paneled, pressurized capsule for high altitude flight, allowing them to use the jet stream at two hundred miles an hour, at a cost of \$1.5 million dollars.

Minutes into the flight catastrophe appeared. In their sealed cabin they began to smell kerosene fumes. They emailed their control center, *“Kerosene’s coming through each pipe on both inside tanks and we cannot tighten them any more. It is a nightmare...Answer quick.”*

The crew was told to lower their altitude, depressurize, and hang on until they reached the coast of Algeria. They could not and were compelled to abandon ship over the Mediterranean Sea, losing their craft. What caused the kerosene leak? A simple clamp, like one used on an automotive radiator hose, had failed. The clamp cost: \$1.16.

It takes so little to ruin a noble venture.

God desires the life of a believer to be a triumphant voyage. Yet, often we permit tiny things like our tongues to destroy God’s ambitious plan for us.

Can we be people of wisdom and goodness at the same time? Some philosophers question the probability of this occurring, saying that you may be good and you may be wise, but not at the same time. Goodness here meaning meekness.

St. James would disagree. In our Epistle lesson he displays a natural link

between the two. It is believed by some that St. James is continuing his emphasis on our need to control our tongue. His forewarning is for every “*Follower of the Way.*”

The apostle distinguishes between two types of wisdom: heavenly or Godly and earthly or demonic. He gives us a description of how we may identify each: they are recognized by their lifestyles and character attributes.

Those who live by heavenly or Godly wisdom do good deeds. They put their belief into action, they do not simply speak about faith. They are unpretentious, doing good not out of competition or envy, but because they desire to do God’s will.

The quality of their character is like the integrity of Jesus. Purity or transparency is one of these traits. This attribute has to do with Godly motivation. Those who are “Followers of the Way” are the exact opposites of those who are from the earthly or demonic wisdom followers.

Christ-like people are peacemakers and gentle, considerate, do not manipulate or dominate, are willing to yield, and are submissive, which St. James does not see as a weakness but as strength; while demonic people are bitter, filled with selfish ambition that brings chaos and evil.

Heavenly wisdom causes us to be merciful. In the first chapter the apostle tells us that merciful acts are an indication that a person has a Godly spirit. And, in the second chapter, he states that deeds of charity are signals of genuine belief. True wisdom always leads the way to compassion.

St. James instructs us that Godly wisdom is a gift to give, not something *to be stored in a safe deposit box*. When wisdom is put into play it is productive.

Objectivity and sincerity are also character qualities found in those who have heavenly wisdom. These people are frank, steadfast, committed to follow Jesus. They live transparent lives; their words and actions are open.

The effect is that they live lives of righteousness in an evil world. Their lives

are not conflicted and they are at peace with themselves, and as they may, at peace with others.

When we compare this lifestyle to those who live by the earthly or demonic wisdom, we are disturbed. The author paints a picture of people who experience “conflicts and disputes” internally, or looking to sow discord. Fighting within and without.

Evidently, those to whom St. James is writing have ‘a trilogy of trauma’ in their church: division, mistreatment, and godlessness. His remedy is simple: submit to God. There are two suppositions here: God is sovereign and can accomplish any change that needs to be made. And, everyone is free to choose the kind of life they want to live.

Since God is sovereign there is the expectation of undivided devotion. God asks for this exclusivity not out of narcissism, but because God desires a relationship with human beings. When we use our freedom of choice to go after ‘things’ instead of God, we generate discord and violence, and we are trapped in the quicksand of self-delusion.

It is by the grace of God that we resist sin and temptation, but we must choose God and not the evil world system. The tragedy of the history of the church universal, and the church of today, is that Christians have often made the wrong choice. I know this because I have seen fighting and gossip in churches, ungodly behavior by famous Christians, and a love of physical things that prevent believers from meeting human need.

A difficult spiritual concept for our culture is submission. Today, it is defined as weakness or fearfulness. What St. James means however, is the power of character and determination. The choice of submission to God’s will and a Christ-like life often leads to suffering, but it is the Narrow Way that Jesus taught, and it’s path brings holy joy and peace. Which way are you going? Alleluia. Amen.