

June 10, 2018
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Is Heavenly Wisdom Any Good? James 3:13–4:3, 7-8a

Is it possible for virtue and wisdom to be found together? Can both prudence and righteousness be found in a person? Some say they are like oil and water. St. James would disagree. In his letter he displays the link between goodness and wisdom. While a portion of his letter is directed to teachers it is applicable to each of us. In our Epistle lesson, St. James contrasts two types of wisdom: divine or Godly; with worldly or secular.

The author shows how we can understand both by the kind of lifestyles lived and the characteristics of our hearts. Those who have heavenly wisdom do good things. They are active. Their words are defined by what they do. The motivation for their actions is neither envy or completion, but by a desire to be obedient to God's will. They are humble people, living a simple life. They are acquainted with themselves.

These godly traits are the ones we discover in Jesus; purity is one of them. Here, purity has to do with motives. The actions of those with heavenly wisdom come from Christ-like intentions. Godly wisdom is absolutely opposite secular wisdom.

Devout people are seekers of peace; while demonic people are known for their bitterness, envy and selfishness, that lead to chaos and iniquity. People who own heavenly wisdom are filled with gentleness, which St. James defines as being "considerate, non-manipulative, and not-domineering. Wisdom is used 'pro bono,' for the good of others, never to control someone.

When I mentioned earlier that those who possess heavenly wisdom are gentle, I believe St. James means they are willing to defer, to yield rather than to control. They have little need to dominate or insist on their own way . . . St Paul says something about this in his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter

thirteen. The “C” word is a hard word for most of us. We are often haunted by the myth of our potential, of what might we might have been or might have done.

Another character trait is ‘mercy.’ In the first chapter of this letter, St. James clearly states that merciful acts are indicators that a person is godly. And, in the second chapter, he states that charitable acts are a testimony of genuine faith. Wisdom always leads to compassion. Heavenly wisdom is not to be kept to ourselves, but designed by God to be shared. When we share properly, wisdom will have positive results.

Two additional character qualities of those possessing heavenly wisdom are fairness and sincerity. Godly people are frank and genuine, unwavering in their spiritual walk. They have made their commitment to Jesus Christ and attempt to live their lives with transparency. And, as a result, God works through their lives. These souls are not fighting themselves but are at peace with who they are, always attempting new personal growth.

The end result is that they have a bumper crop of righteousness. Because they are not at odds with themselves, they are at peace with others and they are right with God.

The other side of the canvas are those St. James paints in his letter. He describes them as experiencing internal and external “*conflicts and disputes.*” St. James says he knows this because, being a good Trinitarian, he sees three indicators: there is division in the church; they are ignorant of how to treat one another; and they pay God no attention in their daily lives.

His recommendation is they need to be submissive to God. The foundation of this prescription is God is sovereign and is able to accomplish anything. And, because of this sovereignty, our exclusive devotion is required. This is demanded, not for some obscene narcissism, but because God loves us and wants a lively and dedicated relationship with us, and the entire world. St. James reminds us that we may choose this kind of relationship if we desire to do so.

However, when we choose the secular side of wisdom we produce discord and violence. Grace allows us to resist temptation, but we must choose God over the world. It is my belief that our present culture has chosen the wrong wisdom. Simply look around if you don't believe me. Incorrect choices made by godly and ungodly people have, and are, making it almost impossible to meet human need.

Surrender or submission is not an acceptable word in our society. It appears to reek of weakness or cowardice. But, what St. James is speaking of is not softness but strength of character and will. The type we discover in Jesus all of the time. Of course this kind of submission leads to suffering and often rejection, too. However, it is the narrow way Jesus speaks of. Which way are you walking? Alleluia. Amen.