

## Wisdom vs. Wisdom

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There is a story about a young man that had bought a used car. He liked the car, but after a year the car started to run rough. In fact, he started to have trouble starting it in the mornings (maybe it was a Ford). Then, it started to lose some of its power. So, the young man decided to paint the car. The new paint job looked great. The vehicle still ran rough, so he decided to put new chrome wheels with new white letter tires. Now, the car looked real good and people took notice. He was proud of the car. The car still ran rough, so he put in a new stereo system that was loud and clear. He made new friends. The car looked and sounded great, but it still had the same old engine. In a few months, the engine died. Since the young man spent all his money on the other upgrades, he didn't have money to replace the engine. So, he would spend time everyday sitting on the hood of his car with his radio turned up loud. I think many of us would say the young man lacked wisdom or I would say he lacked all wisdom. Whatever it is, the young man should have fixed his engine first and then the outside of the vehicle. I heard a professor a few months ago complain about how the students he has today are so unintelligent. They can't make basic decisions without going to their smart phones first. They have some knowledge, but they don't know how to apply it to everyday life. Maybe we can say they have no common sense on how to handle knowledge. Knowledge without common sense is useless just like common sense without knowledge is useless. When someone has both knowledge and common sense, we might say they are a wise person or someone who has wisdom. I Googled wisdom and I found this definition from Oxford: the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment, the quality of being wise. So, there are three elements that are needed for wisdom: experience, knowledge, and good judgment. What we have to understand as Christians is that there is another element needed for true wisdom that worldly wisdom doesn't contain and this is what we'll be looking at this morning.

Let's turn to James 3: 13 - 18. We've been studying James and he now starts a lesson on wisdom for the Church. He states this through the Holy Spirit, "If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise! But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness (NLT, 1989)"

Now James starts off by saying, "If you are wise". This is very important for a Christian to understand. We have a choice if we really want to be wise as Christians. James had told us in chapter 1: 5 that, "If you need wisdom – if you want to know what God wants you to do – ask him, and he will gladly tell you. (NLT, 1985)" Let's remember the definition of wisdom from Google - of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment, the quality of being wise. What Google is referring to is worldly wisdom. It is wisdom that comes from human nature that is tainted by original sin. Human wisdom is very flawed. In fact, James tells us that in 3: 15 that jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. In fact, human wisdom can be motivated by the Devil. If you do a study of the Nazi regime before WWII, you'll find how smart Hitler and his leaders were in bringing Germany back to world power again right after the country had gone through a total economic collapse. There was wisdom used there, but it was not Godly wisdom because the Nazi wisdom contained jealousy, selfishness, and great hatred. So, the first thing James is telling us here is that there are two kinds of wisdom in the world and we have the choice of using one or the other or neither. The Greek term used by James for wisdom is "Sophia" which means either a secular or divine wisdom (Strong's Concordance). So, there is two types of wisdom. The Greek book I used had this Scripture as an example from Apostle

Paul which is found in 1 Corinthians 1: 24, "But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the mighty power of God and the wisdom of God. This "foolish" plan of God is far wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is far greater than the greatest of human strength. (NLT, 1803)" Here is Paul telling us that the plan of salvation can only be understood through the wisdom of God which can only be received through Jesus Christ. We can't receive Godly wisdom through any other source. Before you were a Christian, you didn't have Godly wisdom, but did have human wisdom. The only time you had Godly wisdom was through prevenient grace where God gave you enough of His wisdom to wonder what salvation is and have a craving for it. When we do allow Jesus into our hearts, we realize how hard it is to understand the ways of God. This is what James is talking about if we go back to James 3: 13. We realize that human wisdom can't understand the ways of God. It just doesn't work. I used this example during Wednesday night Bible study when I used the example of Elie Wiesel and the ten Boom sisters that had to deal with life in Nazi concentration camps. Elie Wiesel, who was a devoted Jew, couldn't understand how God would allow the Jews to suffer under great cruelty from the Nazis. He became bitter against God because he couldn't understand the ways of God during horrible times. While the ten Boom sisters did struggle at times, but their faith in God remained strong and God's wisdom helped them to deal with the horrible conditions and they were able to praise God in the concentration camps. Now, I'm not putting down Elie Wiesel in any way. What he went through was totally horrible and I don't know how I would handle it. What I'm trying to say is that Godly wisdom helps us to understand God better through trying times while human wisdom does the opposite. In fact, human wisdom will make us bitter against God because human wisdom is selfish and wants its own way, not God's way. God's wisdom is not selfish and it will help us to be ok with God's will in our life, even if it means to suffer for Him. This is why Romans 12: 1-2 is so important to a true follower of Jesus. Paul says, "And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you

will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is. (NLT, 1790) If you tie the verses from James we read today to these verses from Paul, Paul makes a lot more sense. The renewing of our mind is God's wisdom flowing through our mind by the working of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we begin to grasp God's will in our lives. We don't allow culture or this world's wisdom to shape our mind, we allow God's wisdom to shape our mind. Why, because Paul tells us in Romans that we need to give our bodies to God. We had talked about the tongue last week and how our tongue is part of the body and our body is the temple for His Spirit. Our brain is part of the human body as well. We should want God's wisdom to flow through it so it too can be Holy through His Spirit. Then we can start to better understand Scripture and apply it to our lives. His wisdom is needed to understand Scripture. Human wisdom does not work here. Human wisdom rebels against God's Word. This is why we need to allow God to renew our minds or change the way we think. Every time we have a situation that comes our way we can't handle, we need to ask for His wisdom. This would include sickness, death, or any other form of trial or suffering. Remember, James told us back in chapter one that if we need God's wisdom, we need to ask Him and believe He will answer.

Then, when we receive God's wisdom, we need to put it into action. James tells us in verse 13 of chapter 3 that good deeds done in humility comes from God's wisdom. God's wisdom lets us know when we need to help someone. He will send people our way. In other words, we just don't keep God's wisdom to ourselves. We must put God's wisdom into action. When God gives us understanding about His Will or wisdom to deal with a situation, we help others who are dealing with the same problems. We let them know where to go to get God's wisdom and that is through Jesus Christ.

The last question we can ask is how do we know when we receive God's wisdom? Well, we had talked earlier about how human wisdom is selfish and full of envy. James tells us in verses 17 and 18 that God's wisdom contains many elements. First James tells us that God's wisdom is pure. How many of you like to drink dirty water? When we pure water in a cup, a lot of times we'll look inside the cup first before we drink it to make sure there is no floaty things in it. The big

thing now is buying distilled water – suppose to be more pure than just spring water. I think spring water tastes a lot bitter. Dirt adds flavor. If we want pure water going into our body, shouldn't we also want God's pure wisdom floating through our brain instead of dirty human wisdom? God's wisdom is pure because it is holy. Remember, Peter told us in his letters that we are to be holy because God is holy. God's wisdom will make our minds holy. When our mind is pure, then we think peace – loving thoughts, considerate thoughts, and our thoughts will be sincere, impartial, plus will be full of mercy. These thoughts will be transformed into action form. We won't be like the young man who fixed the outside of his car, but ignored the engine and ended up just sitting on the hood of his car. James says we will become peacemakers. James is not just saying we'll stop fights or arguments, but we'll be peacemakers between people and Jesus by speaking out the gospel message to those around us. We'll tell them how their sins can be forgiven through Jesus who will create peace between them and God. God's wisdom is a true blessing to us. This is another blessing that is available to us through Jesus. God's wisdom will give us a harvest of His righteousness.

This sounds so much better than what this world can offer. All we need to do is ask Jesus for Godly wisdom and we'll receive the gift / blessing. His wisdom will help us deal with life's troubles and help us to understand His will in our lives. So, let's continue to ask the Lord for wisdom. We need it in the dying world we live in.

*NLT Life Application Study Bible.* Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996.

*The Strongest Strong's Concordance.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.