

## TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

### JAMES 3 v 13-17

**Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil. But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy.**

If you do something rather stupid you might well be asked the question, ‘Are you wise?’ The tone of the voice and the facial expression of the questioner clearly implies that you are anything but wise. Someone may say to you; “Wise up”. That’s not very complimentary. Are you a wise person? Are you blessed with wisdom? It might be better for other people, like the people you live with or the people you work with, to answer these questions objectively. Some people are noted for their wisdom. The evidence of this is seen in the way they handle difficult situations or relate to difficult people. To be regarded as a person who is blessed with wisdom is a great compliment. We must be clear on what we mean by wisdom. It is the power of discerning and judging properly as to what is right and true; to be shrewd, judicious or prudent. In our modern world, being wise is often equated with intellectual expertise. We think of wise people as those who have a profound scholarly knowledge in a particular field or subject, have a high IQ, and are eminently sensible. However, it is a big mistake to confuse wisdom with knowledge. They are distinctly different. A person may be highly educated, but not very wise. A person may be very wise, but not highly educated.

James talks about two kinds of wisdom; James 3 v 13-17. James interestingly links them to earth and heaven; v 14, 15 & 17. One type of wisdom is earthly and is grossly unpleasant. The other type is heavenly and is exceedingly beautiful. Tom Wright wrote; **“It’s clear that this ‘wisdom’ isn’t a matter of knowing a large number of facts. Nor is it a particular skill in negotiating, or managing, or leadership, or academic scholarship. It is much deeper than any of these. It is ‘holy, peaceful, gentle, compliant, filled with mercy and good fruits, unbiased, sincere’”**.

James has already told us early on in his letter, that God will give wisdom to anyone who asks in faith; 1 v 5. He now makes a sharp contrast between two kinds of wisdom. In the middle of giving warnings about the consequences of ‘earthly wisdom’ in v 16 James offers a lovely, compact description of ‘heavenly wisdom’ in v 17. In our natural sinful state we display ‘earthly wisdom’. When James singles out ‘earthly wisdom’ he emphasises bitter envy and selfish ambition. He mentions them twice; v 14 & 16. When we look at the present state of our world so many of the problems in it can be traced to these vices of bitter envy and selfish ambition. The characteristics of ‘heavenly wisdom’ that James lists in v 17 don’t come naturally to us. They are hard to acquire and even harder to maintain. They can only be produced in our lives when we exercise rigorous self-discipline.

I'm going to suggest that you do the following exercise. Spend some time working through James' list in v 17. Do it slowly. Review your life in the light of the list. You might find it helpful to make a note of the times, the places, and particularly the people, that make it hard for you to live your Christian life in this way. When you have completed the exercise offer a prayer to God requesting the wisdom that comes from above i.e. a heavenly wisdom and ask to be released from the unpleasantness of earthly wisdom.

Think of it like this. Take the neighbourhood where you live. Suppose some of the people you meet every day along the street or at the local shops are like the people James describes in v 16 and others are like the people he describes in v 17. Which type of people would you rather have as your neighbour? The answer is obvious. The challenge is how to become that neighbour yourself.

James tells us that there are two kinds of wisdom. One is from earth, and one is from heaven. Are you wise? Is your life characterized by wisdom from earth or from heaven? Perhaps you need to wise up?