

## **"JAMES" SERIES**

### **#7: "Wisdom and Understanding"**

**SCRIPTURE: James 3:13-18**

***13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.***

**INTRO:**

**This is actually a continuation of his warning about our tongues. First of all, he says that...**

***...THE "WISE AND UNDERSTANDING" IS KNOWN FOR HIS GOOD CONDUCT (13).***

**In other words, the wise and understanding will walk the walk and talk the talk. His (or her) devotion to and love for Christ will be unmistakable. There will be no action nor practice nor habit in his life that would give anyone cause to question his Christianity.**

**There are things that we may do or say that are in the realm of Christian liberty. In other words, they may not be sinful. But they may cause others to question our conduct. For example, you may choose to smoke cigarettes. Smoking won't send you to hell, but it may cause people to think you've been there. Another example is**

drinking alcoholic beverages. Having a drink or a beer on occasion may not be sinful, but there are many who will question your conduct. Overeating is another example. There's no Scripture that says that overweight people are sinning, but such will raise questions regarding your conduct. Maybe you can think of other examples.

Paul writes about our liberty in Christ in Romans 14. He points out that there may be activities or practices that are not expressly forbidden and that we are therefore free to engage in them as long as it doesn't offend or cause another Christian to stumble. Such activities revolve around social "dos" and "don'ts," such as whether to wear certain kinds of clothes, make-up, jewelry, tattoos, piercings, and/or practicing certain other things, such as smoking, social drinking, or recreational gambling. According to the apostle Paul, these things may not be prohibited by Scripture, but they can be bad for one's spiritual growth or Christian testimony and can cause other Christians, especially those new to the faith, to stumble.

Then he points out that...

***...JEALOUSY AND SELFISH AMBITION CAN BLOCK GOOD CONDUCT (14-16)***

He says that jealousy and selfish ambition lead to "*disorder*" and "*vile practices*." True wisdom comes only from God, but there is a worldly wisdom that enables those who would allow jealousy and selfish ambition to motivate their conduct. Their egocentric, selfish attitudes inevitably lead to "*disorder and every vile practice*."

Just what is "*disorder*," and what are "*vile practices*"?

Another word for "*disorder*" is "tumults." What are "tumults"? We might call them "church fights." Such things often break out in churches where groups in the church or leaders of the church are

more interested in pursuing their own ambitions or causes than the edification of the church body. Such *“selfish ambition”* can lead to an unlimited variety of sinful behavior.

*“Vile practices”* could be any form of unwise behavior. In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul describes what James is talking about here: *“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* Jealousy and selfish ambition are more times than not the motivation behind these things.

Then James says that...

**...THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE RESULTS IN TRUE CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR  
(17-18)**

In contrast to human or worldly wisdom, *“the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”*

*“Pure”* refers to the unmixed motives of the wise, who seek not self-glorification but living out the truth of God.

*“Peaceable”* reflects the relationship the wise has with God and with his fellow men.

*“Gentle”* encompasses the traits of reasonableness, fairness, and leniency.

*“Open to reason”* literally means “easily persuaded,” not in the sense of being pliable, wishy-washy, or weak, but in the sense of not being stubborn, willing to listen to reason and appeal.

***“Full of mercy and good fruits”*** means more than pity or sympathy, putting feeling into deeds, taking action to meet the needs of others.

***“Impartial and sincere”*** means without moral vacillation, unhypocritical, without religious pretense.

Such a wise believer is prime material for the leadership of the Lord’s church. Leaders, are you such ***“wise”*** men?

The chapter closes with James saying that ***“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*** With such an attitude, the wise believer will follow in the footsteps of his Lord, who also was characterized by His gentleness.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

In closing, note that the church of James’ day was full of bitter, contentious quarrels and disputes that were causing divisions. There were the Judaizers who refused to let go of the Law, who wanted Gentile believers to be circumcised and conform to the Law. Then there were the Gnostics, who emphasized personal spiritual knowledge above biblical teachings, believing God to be a supreme, hidden God and the biblical God to be a malevolent lesser divinity. They believed material existence to be evil and salvation to be had through direct knowledge of the ***“hidden deity,”*** which came via mystical esoteric (or private) insight. Needless to say, when these beliefs were mixed with Christianity, Christ became no more than a ***“messenger.”***

These were just a portion of the false teaching that the apostles and other church leaders had to deal with.

**While today's church doesn't have to confront Judaizers and Gnostics, there are all sorts of "worldly wisdom" that seek to divide the Lord's church.**