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The last portion of James 3 is an important passage about true wisdom. The spiritually mature believer understands that godly wisdom is very different from worldly wisdom and cultivates godly wisdom in his life.

Proverbs 4:7 speaks to godly wisdom, saying "*wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom*". This begins with a proper attitude towards God: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding*" (Prov. 9:10).

This section of James helps us identify true wisdom versus false wisdom. First, they have different origins. True wisdom comes from God, but 'manmade' wisdom is "*earthly, unspiritual and of the devil*" (v. 15). *Ephesians 2:1-3* reminds us that the believer has three major adversaries: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness to God, and the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world (*1Corinthians 1:20, 2:14*). By its own wisdom, the world rejects God, and the gospel of God. "*For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who perish*" (*1Corinthians 1:18*).

Man's wisdom comes from human reasoning which is very flawed. God is omniscient (all-knowing), and His wisdom is perfect. But the sinful nature of man will lead him to go his own way unless he yields to the Spirit of God.

False wisdom is also "*sensual*" or "*natural*" (v.15). The Greek word here is "*psukikos*", from which our English word *psychology*. Sensual or natural is the opposite of spiritual. This is a type of wisdom that originates within man's nature completely apart from God. It will come to nothing, but God's wisdom will last forever.

Another source of this false wisdom is that it is "*of the devil*" or "*demonic*". From the Garden of Eden in *Genesis 3* when Satan's deceiving lies convinced Eve (and Adam indirectly) to reject God's wisdom and fall into sin, the 'wisdom of Satan' has been actively at work in the world. From that time on, people have continued to follow such demonic wisdom and have sought to become their own gods (*Romans 1:18-25*).

True godly wisdom and false wisdom have different sources, and they are manifested in different ways. False wisdom operates through *envy and selfish ambition* (v. 14). This is evident in the natural man. Even the disciples argued about who would be the greatest in Heaven.

Paul also contrasts the wisdom of the world with true godly wisdom in *1Corinthians 1*. He explains that God has not chosen to reveal Himself and His truths to the worldly wise, and why. God works as He does "*that no flesh should glory in His presence*" (*1Corinthians 1:29*). God deserves all the glory. So, "*he who glories, let him glory in the Lord*" (*1Cor. 1:31, Jeremiah 9:24*).

*James 3:14* describes selfish ambition, strife or boasting (depending on the translation). The Greek word literally means a "*party spirit*", which would have been used to describe a dishonest, self-seeking politician deceiving others in order to gain support. But, in describing the mind of Christ, *Philippians 2:3* says, "*let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.*"

True wisdom involves meekness (v. 13). As we have discussed in the past, meekness is a strength; it is power under control. It is not at all weakness although the world often misinterprets it as such. The meek person seeks the glory of God rather than his own glory. Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:23*).

Godly wisdom is pure (v. 17), which reflects the holiness of God. Such wisdom leads us toward purity in how we live our lives. God's wisdom also leads to peace... true peace based on holiness, not a false peace based on compromise. It also leads to gentleness, which seeks to avoid fighting, but without compromising the truth. The spiritually wise person is willing to yield (without compromising truth) - agreeable rather than hard and stubborn. It is merciful and produces fruit for God. It is without partiality and hypocrisy. God's wisdom produces blessing in our lives and in the lives of others that He blesses through us.

## James 3

## The Untamable Tongue

**3** My brethren, not many of you should presume to be teachers, knowing that we who are teachers will be judged more strictly. **2** For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he *is* a perfect (mature) man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

**3** Now if we put bits into horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we can direct their entire body as well. **4** Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. **5** Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

Consider that a great forest can be set on fire by a little spark. **6** The tongue *is* also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. **7** All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man.

**8** But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.

**10** Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. **11** Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring? **12** My brethren, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

## Heavenly Versus Demonic Wisdom

**13** Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good conduct, by works done in the meekness that comes from wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. **15** This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil.

**16** For where envy and selfish ambition *exist*, there is confusion and every evil thing. **17** But the wisdom that is from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and without hypocrisy. **18** And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

## Memory Verse

*"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding" (Proverbs 3:13).*