

Pure Wisdom

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But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:17-18)

Notice this “wisdom from above” is described: It “is first pure.” Purity. That is something noticeably lacking from much of the wisdom of the world. Dallas Willard, a philosophy professor who taught at USC for over 40 years commented on his experience interacting with those, who, in his words “thought they are something great in the academic world, only to find that they are as impure as anyone you can imagine.” He makes this observation, “They saw no connection between their supposed moral sophistication and the depravity of their actual lives. There have been university professors among my colleagues who thought it was open season for sex with any student or person with whom they associated. If you said something to them about it, they’d smugly reply, ‘Well, what’s wrong with it? It’s fun.’” Impurity abounds, not just in sexuality, but in many other ways as well.

Besides being pure, heavenly wisdom is also “peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” What a list! These beautiful qualities are marks of persons who have learned in their heart of hearts the great freedom of death to self, and out of their peaceful lives comes everything that is right and good: “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” Such people no longer promote themselves; they no longer exalt their wants and their way as the condition of getting along with them. They are not trying to dominate others. They are ready to simply stand for the truth, to speak what they see to be right in a peaceable, pure, gentle way, and to let it rest with that. As a result of that, God gives them a life of beauty and power that is obvious to others. I assure you, he does.

One of the interesting—and most common—things you will see when you become like this is that people struggle to believe you are real. Lust, envy, domination, and self-seeking are so pervasive that purity shocks people. We all know people who readily give up what they want, but they make sure you recognize them for doing so. Or they may be using it as a technique of domination, in effect saying, “Look, I’ve given all this up, so you should do what I want you to do.”

The prophet Jeremiah pointed to this dynamic when he wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). Of course the answer is, God can know it. Not only that, but God can make the condition of our own hearts known to us, and he can give us new hearts marked by the wisdom from above. The requirement on our part is to die to self.

REFLECT

What it will mean to die to self in your own life is a matter only you can decide. No one can spell this out for you or test you on it. People have played all sorts of games with this and created even greater misunderstanding. Think of all the external things that have been presented as dying to the flesh: from one’s hairstyle to the clothing they wear, the vehicle they drive, or the vacation they take - confusion abounds.



What games have we played, or witnessed others playing when thinking of the things involved in dying to the flesh? In what area of your life is Jesus personally inviting you to die to self in order to experience the wisdom that, as James describes, is “from above?”

Note: The devotional content has been made available through a partnership with [Dallas Willard Ministries](#).

