

# James Part 8 - Study Notes

## Introduction

Through this manual on Christian living James encouraged his readers to cultivate the Word of God that is implanted in our hearts. When we do so, it leads to living works of faith produced by God's Holy Spirit. We now move from the theme **that real faith produces genuine love to real faith produces genuine humility.**

The real measure of a person's accomplishments can be seen at the end of their life. King Solomon for example accomplished so much in his life. In 2 Chronicles 1:7 God appeared to him and said these words: *Ask for whatever you want me to give you.* Solomon revealed his true character when he answered in 2 Chronicles 1:10 *Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?* He had inherited an overwhelming task from his father David. More than anything he needed wisdom so he could govern his people well. This was Solomon's humble response to God. A thousand years later James wrote in this letter in James 1:5 *if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

James 3:13-18 contrasts the unwise and the wise person. These six verses paint two pictures: one of someone who lacks God's wisdom and the other person who has received the wisdom from above.

James starts off with a question in verse 13 *Who is wise and understanding among you?* He then instructs the wise person to demonstrate wisdom by good behaviour and gentle deeds. *Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.* This refers to the changed lifestyle of the believer. The life of the believer changes towards the good, showing obedience to God's Word. Education does not make a person wise; what makes a person wise is how well their lifestyle reflects the truth.

People today view meekness and gentleness as marks of weak people, who let others walk all over them. Not so in the Bible. Gentleness or humility is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23 and is closely linked to self-control.

It's a word used to describe a high-spirited horse brought under control. It hasn't lost his natural strength, but it carries that strength with gentleness and humility. That's biblical wisdom and has profound practical implications. We can quite often gravitate towards intellectual Bible teachers but it's most important when we do that we know they have a lifestyle patterned after the truth and have an ego under control. Sadly there are some eloquent Bible teachers whose lives are quite the opposite.

James 3:14-16 *But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.* Having introduced the idea of a wise person marked by a good way of life and gentle works, James spent some time describing an unwise person. He started off mentioning bitter envy and selfish ambition. The first usually accompanies the second. The heart of the unwise person has an insatiable hunger to be the top dog. Sadly Christian circles are not free from these things. There can at times be a lot of petty jealousy and selfish ambition. James gave five characteristics of wisdom dominated by the flesh, the opposite of wisdom given from above.

**Do not boast (arrogance).** The Greek word means to exult over others, to proudly justify one's own sinful actions. This is contrary to God-inspired humility.

**Deny the truth.** The truth does not change. It is immovable. The unwise, however, change the truth standard to fit their beliefs or lifestyles. There should be **NO** inconsistencies with our words and THE WORD of God. Our lifestyle should align with the truth in the Word of God.

**Earthly.** The word means *of the earth*, which is a worldly measure of truth, a worldly standard of success, material motives. It is a horizontal perspective rather than a vertical one from heaven.

**Natural.** The Greek word is *psychikos* and is related to our word *psyche* which applies to the inner self – the inner human motives. The source of this wisdom is our own thoughts, attitudes, interests and pursuits. Not the Spirit's wisdom from above.

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**Demonic.** This doesn't necessarily mean that worldly wisdom come straight from demonic beings, though in some cases that might be the truth. Rather the emphasis is on wisdom that reflects patterns of thinking so contrary to God's truth that Satan could endorse it. So we see the heart of the unwise marked by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Such a person may be arrogant, dishonest, worldly, natural and demonic in their character. James ends his portrait this with the brief description: *there you find disorder and every evil practice*. This is certainly not an example for the Christian to follow!

Having described wisdom from below James ends with the stark contrast of wisdom from above. He has already mentioned the truly wise person demonstrating this wisdom by his good behaviour and deeds done in gentleness. He now returns showing the characteristics that marks his or her life and the results that follow.

James 3:17-18 *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

Having described wisdom from below James ends with the stark contrast of wisdom from above. He has already mentioned the truly wise person demonstrating this wisdom by their good behaviour and deeds done in gentleness. He now taught the characteristics that marks his or her life and the results that follow.

**Pure.** This indicates first in order of importance. God given wisdom produces purity of internal motives as well as external actions. In Matthew 5:8 Jesus said *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

**Peace Loving.** In contrast to bitter jealousy and selfish ambition of the unwise, God given wisdom produces peaceful relationships. God's supernatural life within us guards against hurting others. In Matthew 5:9 Jesus has a promise for the peacemaker, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

**Considerate.** This describes a person who surrenders their rights for a higher ideal. With God's wisdom, we meet violations of our rights with different kind of ethic. In Matthew 5:39-40 Jesus said *But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.*

**Submissive.** This is someone who is teachable, who puts aside stubbornness and yields to the truth. When the Holy Spirit is allowed to do His work in our heart, He softens us.

**Full of Mercy.** Mercy is looking at someone with compassion and withholding a just punishment that person deserves. Mercy shows kindness.

**Good Fruit.** Wise people are full of good fruit. Outward actions that accompany mercy abound in fruitful deeds.

**Impartial.** A wise person who will not violate Biblical standards regardless of any situation. They will never compromise on the truth of Scripture.

**Sincere.** This is a person where what you see is what you get. They don't wear a mask. They are unhypocritical. James makes his point clear, *v18 says Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

Is our life characterised by gentleness and humility? Do we act the same way at home as at work or at church or in public. Do we build others up, rejoice at their successes or place the needs and interests of others ahead of our own? Are there are areas in our lives where we can ask the Holy Spirit to make us wise. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to do His work from today!

*Howard Hendricks – Dallas Seminary.* People won't care how much we know until they know how much we care.