

TEMPTATION 4: MISUNDERSTANDING AND TWISTING TRUE WISDOM

JAMES 03:13–18

Introduction

What is wisdom, true wisdom? Misunderstanding wisdom is a temptation that attacks all men, but especially teachers. The leaders of this world — politicians, philosophers, preachers and teachers — are all guilty of twisting and adjusting wisdom to mean what they want. But what is true wisdom, the kind of wisdom that brings about the good life — the kind of life and world that we should have? Is there a wisdom that can give us a world in which all men can live in love, joy and peace and have all their needs met, even the need to conquer death and to bring about the fountain of youth? One of the greatest temptations that ever confronts teachers is the temptation to twist true wisdom.

- I. The wise, understanding man or teacher (v. 13).
- II. The false wisdom (vv. 14-16).
- III. The true wisdom (vv. 17-18).

I. *James 03:13 Traits of a Wise Man*

There is the wise and understanding man. Note the question, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” The term “wise” (*sophos*) refers to the teacher; *understanding* refers to the expert, the skilled, the scientific or knowledgeable person (A. T. Robertson. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. 6, p. 45). By teacher, of course, is meant anyone among us who teaches the Word of God including ministers and teachers. Within our church, who are the wise teachers and leaders? Who among us is knowledgeable or understanding? Let us ask another question. What teacher among us wants to be unwise and ignorant? Are there any? Of course not. The point being stressed is this: “Do you want to be a wise teacher? Do you want to be a teacher of knowledge? Then here is how. You must do some things.”

But note this: some of the teachers to whom James was writing did not understand the meaning of true wisdom and knowledge. Some of them were acting most unwisely and about as empty headed as a person can act, yet they thought they were wise and knowledgeable. Too often the same unwise behaviour has characterized ministers and teachers down through the ages, even today. This is the very reason for this passage: to stir ministers and teachers to think about how wise and knowledgeable they really are. A wise and knowledgeable teacher will demonstrate two traits.

Note the words “let him show” (*deixato*). It is one word in the Greek and it is emphatic, strongly emphasized. This means that the wise teacher will strongly show forth these traits. These two traits will be clearly seen in the wise teacher’s life.

1. There is the trait of good behaviour and conduct. This means that the wise teacher does exactly what he should. Wisdom and knowledge have to do with how a person
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behaves and conducts himself, not only with knowing facts and being a scholar. A person must take the facts and apply them. This is true in any field or profession, but it is especially true in the field of Biblical teaching. A Biblical teacher must live what he teaches and preaches. He must speak words of...

- morality and purity
- righteousness and justice
- help and encouragement
- strength and edification
- ministry and challenge
- salvation and deliverance
- hope and life

But as he teaches such lessons of life, he must live a life of *good behaviour and conduct*. He must be a good person and live just what he teaches and preaches. He must live a moral and pure, righteous and just life; and he must go out to minister to the needy of his community and world. The wise teacher knows that he cannot teach one thing and do something else.

Thought 1. Note a critical fact: in the eyes of Scripture the truly wise and knowledgeable teacher is not a person who has all kinds of facts and theories, speculations and notions in his mind. Rather he is a teacher who is a good person — a moral and just person, a loving and caring person — a person who lives what he knows and teaches — who shows a good behaviour in all his works.

Mat 7:24-27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

John 7:17 “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

John 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Phil 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

1 Tim 3:7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.

1 Tim 4:12 *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*

2 Tim 3:15 *And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Heb 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

James 3:13 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

1 Pet 2:12 *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

1 Pet 3:1-2 *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Job 28:28 *And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord — that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'*

Hosea 14:9 *Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.*

2. There is the trait of humility. The truly wise and knowledgeable teacher will show “humility” (prauteti). The word means to be gentle, tender, humble, mild, considerate, but strongly so. Humility has the strength to control and discipline, and it does so at the right time.
 - a. Humility has *a humble state of mind*. But this does not mean the teacher is weak, cowardly and bowing. The meek teacher simply loves people and loves peace; therefore, he walks humbly among men regardless of their status and circumstance in life. Associating with the poor and lowly of this earth does not bother the humble teacher. He desires to be a friend to all and to help all as much as possible.
 - b. Humility has *a strong state of mind*. It looks at situations and wants justice and right to be done. It is not a weak mind that ignores and neglects evil and wrong-doing, abuse and suffering.

- ⇒ If someone is suffering, humility steps in and does what it can to help.
- ⇒ If evil is being done, meekness does what it can to stop and correct it.
- ⇒ If evil is running rampant and indulging itself, humility actually strikes out in anger. However, note a crucial point: the anger is always at the right time and against the right thing.
- c. Humility has *strong self-control*. The humble teacher controls his spirit and mind. He controls the lusts of his flesh. He does not give way to ill-temper, retaliation, passion, indulgence or license. The humble teacher dies to himself, to what his flesh (sinful nature) would like to do, and he does the right thing — exactly what God wants done.

In summary, the humble man walks in a meek, tender, but strong state of mind; denies himself, giving utmost consideration to others. He shows a control and righteous anger against injustice and evil. A humble man forgives and lives for others because of what Christ has done for him.

Gal 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Eph 4:1-3 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

2 Tim 2:25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

Titus 3:2 To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

James 1:21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

1 Pet 3:4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

II. ***James 03:14–16*** *False Wisdom*

There is the false wisdom and wrong teaching of this world. This is a most tragic picture. It immediately shows us that there are teachers, ministers and laymen alike, who follow the false wisdom of the world.

1. Note the description of false wisdom and wrong teaching.
 - a. False wisdom and wrong teaching arouse bitter envy and jealousy. There are teachers, ministers and laymen alike, who are envious and jealous of others, of their...

- church and position
- preaching and teaching ability
- charisma and attention
- leadership and recognition
- associates and friends

Too many ministers and teachers envy others because of these things. In addition to these, the teacher is often compared with former teachers and the comparison cuts and hurts. Therefore, it is subject to creating a bitter envy against the former teacher.

One other situation needs to be noted as well. When a teacher begins to teach some false doctrine or to live an unholy life, he should be corrected by those who follow the truth of God's Word. When he is, there is always the temptation for him to react and become bitter against those who remain true to God's Word.

The point is this: false wisdom or wrong teaching arouses bitter envy and jealousy. It stirs up a terrible division and cleavage between the servants of God and churches. No teacher or preacher...

- should ever envy another person's ability, church, position or recognition.
- should ever hold bitter envy against former ministers or teachers.
- should ever react against being corrected because of his novel ideas or wrong behaviour.

Bitterness, envy and jealousy — they are all wrong. They have no place among those who teach the true wisdom of God. They are aroused by a false wisdom and a wrong teaching.

Mat 20:11-12 *“When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’”*

1 Cor 13:4 *Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*

Gal 5:21 *And envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Phil 1:15-17 *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.*

Prov 3:31 *Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways.*

Prov 14:21 *He who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.*

Prov 23:17 *Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.*

b. False wisdom and wrong teaching arouse a spirit of selfish ambition in one's heart. The term "selfish ambition" (erithian) means friction or more accurately, selfish ambition. Unfortunately, too many of God's people — teachers and preachers included — are selfishly ambitious. Too many want...

- to be put forward, recognized, acknowledged and honoured.
- to be known as wise and knowledgeable.
- *to be seen as the teacher, the preacher, the leader.*
- to be the builder, the creator, the founder, the originator of a new or novel idea and position or movement.

In addition to these, there are those who seek to gather cliques or parties around their position or belief. They are ambitious to be the leader and to have people recognize them as the leader, even if it means opposing the minister of God.

Note how restless the soul is in all of this. The soul is not at peace with itself nor with others. It is dissatisfied and ambitious for self, not for the cause of Christ or for the people of Christ. This is the way of false wisdom and wrong teaching: it arouses strife and selfish ambition.

***Phil 2:3-4** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

***2 Tim 2:14** Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.*

***2 Tim 2:24** And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

***Prov 3:30** Do not accuse a man for no reason — when he has done you no harm.*

***Prov 17:19** He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.*

***Prov 18:6** A fool's lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating.*

***Prov 20:3** It is to a man's honour to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.*

***Prov 25:8** Do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbour puts you to shame?*

***Prov 26:21** As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.*

c. False wisdom and teaching arouse a spirit of boasting. Boasting does not necessarily mean that a person goes about boasting out loud. It refers more to what a person feels within his heart. If a person follows after false wisdom and false teaching, he focuses upon himself. His thoughts are upon...

- preaching a good sermon, not reaching people for Christ.
- being recognized, not building people up.
- securing a position, not ministering to needs.

Very simply, he either seeks or feels pride in his different belief or in the position he holds. He may flaunt it publicly, making his ideas and position known, or he may just hold it silently within. In either case, his belief and position stands opposed to the wisdom and teaching of God's Word. He has allowed false wisdom and wrong teaching to arouse a prideful spirit within him.

Mat 23:12 "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Mark 10:37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

1 Cor 8:2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

Gal 6:3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

James 3:5-9 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

James 4:16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

1 John 2:16 For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.

Rev 3:17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

Psa 10:3 He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.

Psa 49:6-7 Those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him.

Prov 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Prov 17:19 He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.

Prov 21:4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!

Prov 25:14 Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.

Prov 27:1 *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

Isa. 14:13-14 *You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”*

Oba 1:4 *Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord.*

d. False wisdom and wrong teaching arouse a lie against the truth. This means at least two things.

=> First, the false teacher is inconsistent with the Word of God. He is not living and teaching the truth. He is living a lie and teaching a lie — some false doctrine, some false behaviour.

=> Second, the false teacher is inconsistent in what he teaches and does. He teaches the truth, but he does not live the truth.

Mat 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

Mark 7:6 *He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”*

Rom 2:21-23 *“You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law?”*

Titus 1:16 *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

1 John 3:18 *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

Ezek 33:31-32 *My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.*

2. Note the source of false wisdom and wrong teaching: they are not of God, but of the earth, unspiritual and devilish.

a. False wisdom is of the earth: it centres and focuses upon the earth...

- it follows the nature of men — men of the earth — instead of God and His Word.
- it teaches the great ideas and principles of the earth instead of God and His Word.

- it challenges people to seek after the aims of the earth and its leaders instead of the aims of God and His Word.
- it focuses upon life now — life upon the earth — and neglects life eternal.

The point is not that the great ideas and aims of the earth and its leaders are all wrong. They are not. There are some great leaders upon earth just as there are some foolish and evil leaders. And the ideas and aims of great leaders are often for the betterment of man and the earth. Therefore, we are to do all we can to help these leaders. The point is that heavenly wisdom, the wisdom of God and His Word (the Bible) are the basis of true wisdom. Therefore, any wisdom that neglects heavenly wisdom has a serious flaw and shortcoming. No teacher, minister or layman, is to ever forget this. False wisdom and wrong teaching focus only upon the earth and neglect the wisdom from above, of God and His Word.

- b. False wisdom and wrong teaching are natural and unspiritual. They are of man himself, and they focus upon man as an animal and neglect the fact that he is a spiritual being. They concentrate upon man as a physical and mental being. They stress humanism, education, technology, science, health, comfort and peace. They tend toward bettering man's life on earth and ignore and neglect and deny that man is spirit. They have no belief or at most a hazy belief in life after this world.
- c. False wisdom and wrong teaching are devilish or demonic. Such things as pride, self-ambition, bitterness, envy, strife, creating uneasiness and division, and teaching false doctrine are not of God. They are of the evil one, of the devil himself. Any teacher who selfishly seeks to promote self and does these things is following and acting just like the devil himself acts.

Isa 29:14 *“Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”*

Jer 4:22 *“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.”*

Rom 1:22 *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*

1 Cor 3:19-20 *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”*

James 3:15 *Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.*

3. Note the terrible effects of false wisdom and wrong teaching. The person who follows the false wisdom of the world, who selfishly seeks position, recognition, wealth and authority — who seeks recognition for some novel idea or doctrine he has — who envies and strives with others — that person is a false teacher and he causes confusion and every evil practice. When that person is a minister or teacher in the church...

- he causes confusion and evil in the church: people become disturbed, divided, form cliques and begin bearing tales. They become angry and hold feelings against one another and some even leave the church and forsake God.
- he causes confusion and evil within families: various members question, wonder and differ with other family members. They cease to grow and return to the world.
- he causes the weak to return to the world and to forsake God and His Word: the weak forsake Christ as the true Son of God, and Christ alone can save man.
- he causes persons to attach their lives to an earthly religion of ritual, ceremony and morality — all of which die at the grave. The false teacher dooms the person to an eternity apart from the Son of God, even Jesus Christ our Lord who is the Saviour of the world.

The confusion and evil caused by false wisdom and wrong teaching — by teachers who live and teach contrary to God and His Word — are endless. But this much needs to be said: the effects of wrong teaching, of following the false wisdom of this world, should cause every minister and teacher of the church to awaken and examine his life and his beliefs and ministry. The effects should stir many of us to repentance and confession before God.

1 Cor 2:1-5 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Cor 14:33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

1 Th 2:4-5 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness.

Ezek 33:11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

Thought 1. This is a day when humility before God and His Word is needed. Why? Because there is so much false wisdom and wrong teaching being followed. We desperately need to turn back to the worship and ministry of God and His Word alone. We need to get away from worshipping ourselves, from following our own selfish ambitions. We need to get away from seeking position, recognition, new and novel

ideas and the human comforts and ease of this life. Our call as ministers and teachers of God is to proclaim His Word and to minister to the needs of people everywhere. The confusion and evil of the world can be corrected only by proclaiming the truth of God and His Word. This we must do. And the first step is to straighten out ourselves first. How? By humbly bowing before God in repentance and confession of our selfish ambition and lack of discipline, complacency and worldliness. We must repent and confess our failure and turn completely away from it. And then we must get up and go forth in the strength of God's Spirit and proclaim the pure truth of God and His Word — proclaim His Word and nothing else.

Mat 11:28 *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

John 7:37 *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”*

John 15:5 *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

John 15:16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

Mat 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”*

Rom 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

1 Cor 2:1-5 *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.*

1 Cor 9:16 *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

2 Cor 5:19-20 *That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

1 Th 2:9-13 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

1 Th 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Psa 46:10 “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Isa 1:18 “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

Isa 43:10 “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.”

Isa 55:1-3 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

Jer 5:14 Therefore this is what the Lord God Almighty says: “Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.”

Hosea 6:1 “Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.”

III. James 03:17–18 The True Wisdom and Teaching

There is the true wisdom of God. Note three significant points.

1. The source of true wisdom is God. True wisdom comes from above, not from this world. It comes from God, not from the princes and scholars of this earth. True wisdom does not come from seeking the knowledge and wisdom of men and of this world; it comes from seeking God — from seeking the knowledge and wisdom of God.

2. The description of true wisdom is clearly stated. What is the wisdom of God? What is this wisdom that is so superior to the wisdom of the princes and scholars of this world? What is this wisdom that the ministers and teachers of God are to be teaching? Scripture says that it is eight things.
- a. True wisdom is first of all “pure” (hagne). The word means to be pure from fault and defilement; it means moral purity; to be completely separated from impurity and wrong-doing and set apart unto God. It is not being half good and half bad, but totally pure and clean. A person who has true wisdom lives a clean and pure life.
- => A truly wise person keeps his body pure. He does not damage himself by overeating, drinking, taking drugs, smoking and letting himself become flabby. He disciplines himself in all things and keeps himself fit in order to get maximum use out of life.
- => A truly wise person keeps his relationships pure. He lives a moral and just life, protecting his spouse, children, family, loved ones, the name of Christ and his own testimony and ministry.
- => A truly wise person keeps himself pure before God so that his relationship with God is always open and so that God can use him as much as He wishes.

This is what true wisdom is. It is first pure, and note the word first. Purity is first in importance and the first thing that God gives to a man who seeks true wisdom. A wise teacher, minister and layman alike, is a teacher who lives a pure life and teaches that men must be pure before God.

Mat 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

1 Tim 1:5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

1 Pet 1:16 For it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

1 Pet 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

2 Cor 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

- b. True wisdom is “peace-loving” (eirenike). The word means to bind together; to join and weave together. It means that a wise teacher is bound, woven and joined together...

- with himself
- with God
- with his fellow man

And the wise teacher does all he can to keep the peace and to make peace where it has been broken, whether between two individuals or two groups, a family, a community or a nation. A wise teacher, a teacher of true wisdom, works to reconcile people to God and to each other. He works to bring men closer to God and to each other.

Rom 12:18 *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

Heb 12:14 *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

James 3:17 *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.*

2 Pet 3:14 *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

- c. True wisdom is “considerate” (epieikes). The word is difficult to translate into English. It is translated by others as gentleness, forbearance, reasonableness, consideration, agreeableness, courtesy, patience and softness. There is the tendency to say that either forbearance or gentleness is the better translation. It means that there is *something better than mere justice* — a gracious gentleness. The wise teacher is to be gentle and forbearing in dealing with other people.

Thought 1. The point is well-taken: we must be gentle and forbearing in dealing with people. The last thing that we must do is to criticize, condemn, censor, neglect and ignore people. We must reach out to the world with the gospel, and must treat people with a *loving gentleness*. We must be gentle, having absolutely nothing to do with harshness. Too many of us are harsh and critical or neglectful and withdrawn. Too many of us are wrapped in the cloak of religion having nothing to do with reaching out to the lost. The desperate need of the hour is for us to reach out with the gospel in a spirit of *love and gentleness*.

Eph 4:2 *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

Col 3:13 *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

1 Th 2:7 *But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.*

2 Tim 2:24 *And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

Titus 3:2 *To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.*

James 3:17 *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.*

- d. True wisdom is “submissive” (eupeithes). The word means reasonable; being willing to listen to reason and to appeal; being willing to change when one is wrong. True wisdom is not stubborn or hard.
- => The wise teacher listens to the voice and reasoning of God and of his fellow believers, and when he is wrong, he changes his behaviour.

1 Sam 12:7 *Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your fathers.*

Rom 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Isa 1:18 *“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*

Job 13:3 *But I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God.*

- e. True wisdom is full of mercy (eleous). The word means to have feelings of pity, compassion, affection and kindness. It is a desire to succour; to tenderly draw unto oneself and to care for. Two things are essential in order to have mercy: seeing a need and being able to meet that need. God sees our need and feels for us (Eph. 2:1-3). Therefore, He acts; He has mercy upon us.

Note: mercy does not discriminate; it knows no discrimination at all. It has pity upon all, both saint and *sinner*. The wise teacher, the teacher of the true wisdom, reaches out to help those in need, no matter how low they are or how far they have fallen. The teacher who lives and shows true wisdom is the teacher who is moved with compassion — moved so much that he reaches out to help every human being who has a problem and need.

Mat 5:7 *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

Luke 6:36 *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*

Luke 10:34 *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.*

Job 29:15-16 *I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger.*

Isa 50:4 *The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.*

Prov 31:20 *She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.*

Micah 6:8 *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

- f. True wisdom is full of good fruit (karpon agathon). This means that the wise teacher actually reaches out and helps those in trouble. He does not experience feelings of compassion and then push them out of his mind. He acts; he meets needs; he helps the suffering, the shut-in, the prisoner, the widow and widower, the orphan, the single parent and the single parent child, the grieving, the poor, the destitute, the homeless, the hungry, the sinner, the backslidden, the lost and the wicked.

The teacher of true wisdom reaches out and leads his followers to reach out to the needy of their community, city, state, nation and world. The wise teacher does all he can to meet the desperate of our world. In fact, he gives all he is and has — every dime he has — sacrificing everything beyond the needs of his own family — to meet the needs of the lost and destitute of our world. The teacher of true wisdom is totally committed to good deeds and works in order to reach people for Christ and to help them through all the problems and troubles of life.

Mat 25:35-36 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Gal 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Eph 5:9 For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

Titus 2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.

Heb 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

g. True wisdom is impartial (adiakritos). This word in the Greek actually means two things.

=> The wise teacher is impartial; he shows no partiality or favouritism to anyone.

1 Tim 5:21 "I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism."

James 2:4 Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Lev 19:15 "Do not prevent justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great but judge your neighbour fairly."

Job 13:10 "He would surely call you to account if you secretly showed partiality."

=> The wise teacher is undivided in his convictions and judgments. He knows the truth, exactly what God's Word says, and he will not entertain false ideas or teachings. He is totally committed and undivided in following and teaching God's Word.

1 Cor 2:2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Cor 9:16 *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

Gal 1:7-11 *Which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.*

Phil 3:14 *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

- h. True wisdom is “sincere” (anupokritos). This means to be free from insincerity, hypocrisy, play-acting and wearing a mask. The teacher of true wisdom does not try to fake people out; he does not teach one thing and do another thing. He does not claim to be a teacher of God and teach something else other than God’s Word; he does not claim to be a teacher of God and live an impure and unrighteous life nor an undisciplined and complacent life.

2 Cor 1:12 *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.*

2 Cor 2:17 *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.*

Phil 1:9-10 *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.*

Titus 2:7 *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness. And soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

1 John 3:18 *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

3. The effect of true wisdom is a harvest of righteousness, a life and world of righteousness. But note how righteousness is brought about: by making peace. Righteousness — men living like they should, men treating each other and treating God like they should — can never come about unless we are at peace with each other and with God. This means something of critical importance: *the greatest need that*

man has is for peace — peace with each other and peace with God. The true teacher will work and work for peace, struggle and struggle to get men to make peace with each other and with God. Just picture the scene:

=> men at peace with each other

=> men at peace with God

=> a world of peace

The result would be a community and a world of righteousness — men and women living like they should — everyone experiencing and living a life of love, joy, peace, of caring and looking after each other. All things would be right, exactly like they should be. The world would be a world of righteousness, a world just like the world for which God longs. How can we ever have such a world? Only by the teachers of God — ministers and laymen alike — becoming teachers of true wisdom, teachers who make peace and who lead people to make peace with God and with each other.

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Eph 2:13-14 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

1 Cor 15:54 *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*

Phil 1:11 *Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*

Heb 10:12 *But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ■*