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. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 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. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

What is wisdom?
1 When you study the Bible one thing you should do is to read the passage over and over again.
   a And as you do you will begin to see what the theme or main point is and that helps you understand it. With this section of scripture, you only need to read it once to see that James is obviously talking about wisdom.
   b And if you read it through a couple of times you begin to realize that James is making a comparison between Two kinds of wisdom which is expressed in a number of ways.
      • Wisdom of God vs. the wisdom of man
      • Wisdom from above vs. wisdom from below
      • Heavenly wisdom vs. earthly wisdom
      • Godly wisdom vs. worldly wisdom
      • True wisdom vs. false wisdom
2 So, there are two sources of wisdom and we need to be discerning as to which wisdom is governing our lives.
   a There is a wisdom that comes from God, is pleasing to Him, and good for our lives and the lives of others.
   b And there is another kind of wisdom does not come from God and is not good for our lives nor is it good for the lives of others.
3 What James is doing in this passage is contrasting these two kinds of wisdom in terms of …
1. **Origin** - where does the wisdom come from?
2. **Characteristics** - what does the wisdom look like?
3. **Outcome** - what does the wisdom produce?

4. But before James does that he gives us a partial definition of what wisdom is in the 13th verse.
   
   *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.* v13

   a. Wisdom is something that is shown by how a person lives their life and revealed in a person’s deeds. Wisdom is something that is displayed. It is not a secret. It is observable.
   
   b. If you spent a few weeks with a person you would be able to discern whether they are wise or not so wise.
      
      - During your few weeks with this person you may discover in your conversations with them that they are very knowledgeable about certain things.
      - But that does not mean they are wise. Knowledge is revealed in how they talk, wisdom is revealed in how they live. A person can have great deal of knowledge and yet have little wisdom.
      - In the same way person might listen to sermon after sermon, week after week and never grow in wisdom. They would be growing in knowledge (and that’s a good thing) but not growing in wisdom.
      - Wisdom always shows or reveals itself in actions, deeds or behavior …the way a person lives.

5. And here the sign that you are starting to grow in wisdom … you take the sermon beyond what was spoken. You start saying to yourself, “If this is true then there are implications in my life.” If, then. And that’s when knowledge is being converted into wisdom.

   a. For example, If God is loving, then why do I feel worthless? If Jesus died so I could have new life, then why am I constantly depressed?
      
      - If God is holy, then why does sin not bother me? If God is loving and sovereign why do I get so angry when thing go wrong in my life?
      - If Jesus adopted me into his family then why do I live in isolation from that family? If God is faithful then why am I worried?

   b. This is the way that Jesus often taught. It was a part of Jewish culture. But not only Jewish cultures many other ancient cultures. Our culture is knowledge based but most ancient cultures were wisdom based. And so we are kind of swimming upstream when it comes to wisdom.
6 When the “if-then” is happening, your knowledge is being converted into wisdom … it’s changing the way that you live. You are beginning to relate God’s truth to your daily life.
   a And that’s what is means to grow as a Christian. We all have way more knowledge than we do wisdom.
   b We know truths but we have a hard time converting truth into wisdom.
7 So, wisdom is the ability to live out knowledge, to flesh out knowledge. The way you’ll know whether someone is wise is not by what they know but by how they integrate what they know into how they live. We might call this “life wisdom.”
   a When James says who is wise and understanding among you we need to ask the question, Wise about what?
   b And when you read through the passage you will notice that wisdom primarily has to do with how we understand our own heart and how we relate to other people.
8 And again there are two ways to do that, two kinds of wisdom, God’s wisdom and man’s wisdom. And James contrasts them by revealing there 1) origins, 2) characteristics and 3) outcomes.
   a Now the reason for this is that Scripture says there is nothing more important in your life than gaining godly wisdom. Proverbs 4 says … Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.
   b Wisdom is not only supreme it is the key to our future happiness.
   a You can’t grow unless you first see where you are at. So James gives us a contrast between the two kinds of wisdom, the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world.

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b The first contrast has to do with the origin of the wisdom.

[1] Contrast in origins

15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. James 1:15

1 Man’s wisdom does not come down from above but rather is earthly and not heavenly. In other words, it is a wisdom that does not consider the Person of God.

2 Earthly wisdom is living life as if there is no God. Heavenly wisdom, on the other hand, finds its origin knowing and fearing God.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Proverbs 9:10

a Fear, when used this way in the Bible means a wholesome awe. The wholesome awe of a sovereign, all-powerful Creator God is the place where true wisdom begins. I am His creation, he is not mine.

b So, if my worldview does not begin with God then I will never be able to be truly wise. I may have man’s wisdom, but I will never be able to know or begin to know the true wisdom that comes from God.

c True wisdom comes from above. It is not in humanity by nature. It is not inherent within human nature. It must be imported from heaven. James says it must come down from God.

d True wisdom comes from God and is revealed to us in God’s Word and imparted through God’s Spirit.

3 On the other hand, man’s wisdom does not come from above but from below, from Satan the devil (v15).

a Yes, it is earthly, yes, it is unspiritual, but ultimately it is of the devil. In Genesis chapter three Satan tempted Eve to trust in his wisdom which was essentially to live your life as if there was no all-powerful, creator God who has revealed what is right and what is wrong and to whom you must give an account.

b Instead you determine what is right and wrong for you. Your ultimate authority is not God, it is you. You are in charge of your life.

c Therefore, do what feels best to you. Live by that impulse. Go ahead and eat that fruit. Don’t believe what God has said. Do what you want to do and eat of the forbidden fruit because when you do you will be like God. You will become a god. You will be in control. That is the wisdom of the world.
When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6

e That’s where the wisdom of man originates and it led the fall, to disorder, chaos, brokenness -and we can also see that in our world today.

- The human race is exponentially growing in knowledge. But in spite of that, human wisdom can’t seem to use that knowledge to truly solve any problems. The increase of knowledge has only produced more problems, more disorder, more dysfunction.
- The world is simply becoming more chaotic which is disheartening. But is also an opportunity to what God’s wisdom is. And ultimately God’s wisdom is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

f Now the second way James contrasts these two kinds of wisdom is in terms of their characteristics.

[2] Contrast in characteristics

- Since they come from radically different origins the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God have radically different characteristics.
- Before we look at this in a little more detail allow me to sum it up. Earthly wisdom is characterized by pride while heavenly wisdom is characterized by humility.
- So you know when you see true humility in a person that humility comes from Godly wisdom. Conversely, if you see pride you know it comes from human wisdom.

The characteristics of earthly wisdom: envy, selfish ambition, boasting and denial.

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

1 Envy

a The Greek word translated envy here is “zelos” (zay-los’) where we get the English word zeal. It is a neutral word that is used either positively or negatively depending on the context.

b In this case the context is bitterness. So, envy is a bitter zeal. It is a bitter desire for something because somebody else has it and you don’t.

c The wisdom of the world says I want what you have whereas the wisdom of God says, I am content with what God has provided.
2 Selfish ambition
   a The wisdom of the world says to do what is best for self-advancement and self-promotion. In every conversation and circumstance, the question at the forefront is always, What can I get out of this?
   b How often have you heard a person say, I just need to do what’s best for me? It doesn’t matter how it affects anybody else, I just have to do what’s best for me.
   c To most people in our culture that sounds like excellent advice. I want what I want and I want it now regardless of how it affects others.
   d On the other hand, the wisdom of God says, I want what God wants for me when he wants me to have it.

3 Boasting
   a When envy and selfish ambition get what they want it consummates in boasting which is the vocalization of pride in the heart.
   b Look at what I have done. Look at what I have. Look how hard I have worked. Look at what I have accomplished.
   c Look at me instead of look at what the Lord has enabled me to do. He gave me life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:25). A man has only what has been given to him from above (John 3:27) and it is only God’s grace that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:13). So … 
     Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. 1 Cor 1:31

4 Denial (a predisposition to deny the truth)
   a Earthly wisdom denies God’s truth. It is the pride that says there is nothing wrong with my thinking, my feelings and desires, my actions or my way of living. I’m OK, your OK.
   b To the contrary heavenly wisdom says I can’t even keep my own moral standards let alone God’s standards. I am a sinner in need of God’s grace. And that grace has come to me in a Savior who because of his great love has saved me from the penalty of sin and daily saves me from the power of sin. I am what I am only through the grace of God.

The characteristics of heavenly wisdom:
If a person has heavenly wisdom they have a humility (v13) which is manifested in eight qualities found in verse 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. v17
1 Pure
   a Since God is pure, his wisdom leads a person to pursue moral purity. Therefore, impurity is unwise and always ends in pain and suffering of some kind, whether that be the pain of broken relationships or the pain of the guilt of displeasing God.
   b Scripture says that sin may be pleasurable for a moment in the end it bites back and produces misery in our lives. On top of that, impurity also hurts other people.
   c That’s why God establishes boundaries of right and wrong in order to protect our hearts and keep us from hurting other people. And this in turn increases our joy because much of life’s joy has to do with how healthy our relationship are. Now a person who understands that is wise.

2 Peace-loving
   a This is the ability to get along with others and to bring people together.
   b Earthly wisdom leads to competition, strife and conflict because it is driven by envy and selfish ambition. Heavenly wisdom, God’s way of seeing things and doing things always produces peace.

3 Considerate or gentleness.
   a There is a sweet reasonableness about a person who has heavenly wisdom. They can disagree without being defensive or attacking. They are open to hearing someone out without losing their convictions.
   b They are, as James said earlier, quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.

4 Submissive
   a A person who has really grown in God’s wisdom is easy to live with and work with. They are secure in who they are and so when told to so something they do not recoil in pride or complain under their breath.
   b They live unto the Lord and work as unto the Lord. They are enjoyable to be around. You may think it is because of their personality … but probably it has more to do with their wisdom.

5 Full of mercy
   a Grace is getting what we do not deserve. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve.
   b And when you realize that … that you deserved divine judgment for your sins but Jesus took that judgment for you, it changes your disposition towards others. You become less demanding, less judgmental and more merciful and understanding of others.
c Jesus said it like this: Be merciful (with others), just as your Father is merciful (with you). Luke 6:36

6 Fruitfulness
a God’s wisdom leads to a fruitful or blessed life. The Proverb says it like this: *Blessed is the man who finds wisdom. Proverbs 3:13a*
b If you endeavor to walk in God’s wisdom, regardless of your imperfections, you will be blessed and a blessing to others. James repeats this truth in verse 18.

*Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. v18*
c What James is saying is that a person who pursues Godly wisdom will be like a farmer who sow seeds of peace in the fields of their life and at harvesttime it will produce a harvest of righteousness for both them and the people in their life.

7 Impartial
a Since earthly wisdom is self-centered it is easily swayed to whatever viewpoint is most advantageous. It says, I will take the position that gets me what I want.
b On the other hand, heavenly wisdom is God-centered and stable and not easily swayed by the opinions of others or changing circumstances. Godly wisdom doesn’t look out for itself and therefore leads to consistently doing the right thing and treating people fairly and with impartiality.

8 Sincere
a Whenever you find people pretending to be something they are not they are operating in worldly wisdom. The wisdom of the world is hypocritical by nature.
b On the other hand, when God’s wisdom is at work in a person there is openness, honesty, vulnerability and authenticity.

[3] Contrast in Outcomes
1 Earthly wisdom produces disorder.
   *For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. v16*
a Earthly wisdom is characterized by envy, selfish ambition and boasting and ultimately produces disorder.
b And in that disorder there is the potential for all other kinds of evil.
2 On the other hand, godly wisdom produces order.
In the beginning of this passage of scripture James says, \(^{13}\) Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his **good** life.

- In the Greek language there are two words for good. There is **agathos** (aga-thos’) which means morally good and there is **kalos** (ka-los’) which means beautiful.
- The word used by James is **kalos**.

b In other words when you are pursuing the wisdom of God there is an increasing spiritual beauty that begins to flow from your life.

- And what is it that makes something beautiful? For example, what make song beautiful? There are only twelve notes with which to compose it but they are not beautiful in and of themselves.
- What makes them ugly or beautiful is how they are arranged or ordered, how they relate to each other, how they balance each other. When they are arranged with order it is called harmony and it sounds beautiful.

c So the outcome of earthly wisdom is disorder or disharmony. But the outcome of Godly wisdom is harmony. There is a growing and beautiful order about our life.

- Our lives are like a musical composition and God, the great composer, through His wisdom is rearranging the notes in such a way that they are harmonious.
- As you seek God’s wisdom the notes of your life are in process of becoming a beautiful song. There is an order to it, a balance to it, a beauty to it. It doesn’t happen overnight. It’s a work in process on the way to becoming a masterpiece.
- But the work God started in us, the song He begin to compose, he will complete (Phil 1:6). And one day He will present us to himself without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25). All the notes will be perfectly arranged. So much so that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2b).
- The masterpiece will be complete to the glory of the Great Composer.
How to get wisdom – (To see this we need to go back to the first chapter of the book of James.)

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

1 Now the first way to get more heavenly wisdom is to get the most out of your trials or leverage your trials. In other words, don’t waste your trials.

a When trials happen, you can get mad at God or grow closer to God.

What James urges you to do is to grow closer to God, to mature in your faith and to do that you need to make the most of your trial.

b Trials have a way of showing us that we are not that strong and that we need the Lord more than we think we do. Trials reveal the futility of our self-sufficiency and drive us towards being more dependent upon God’s grace. Now when we embrace that we grow in wisdom or mature.

2 The second way to grow in wisdom is to spend more time with God in prayer. That’s why James says … If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God … James 1:5a.

a Notice it does not say if any of you lack wisdom, study more, read more, gain more knowledge. No, he says to ask and asking God is prayer. We grow in knowledge through learning God’s Word. We grow in wisdom by seeking God in prayer asking Him for wisdom.

2 Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. 3 Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. 4 Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. 6 For the Lord grants wisdom! Proverbs 2:2-4,6a NLT

b So, wisdom doesn’t just happen. It must be asked for. But this is not a one time or occasional asking. It is a continual asking, a lifestyle of asking, a lifestyle of prayer, a lifestyle of fellowshipping with God.

c Wisdom does not come like a lightning bolt, it comes like a sunrise. It takes time but it will come … as surely as the sun will rise.
Ultimate wisdom

1 James says God’s wisdom comes down from above. Ultimately, God’s wisdom came down to us in a Person. His name is Jesus Christ. Through His incarnation, life, death and resurrection God has most gloriously revealed His wisdom. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 says …

18 The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. 21 Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. 22 It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. 23 So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense. 24 But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:1,21-24

2 That means the wisest thing you could ever do it to believe that God sent his Son into the world to save you … to believe the gospel.