

An In-Depth Study of the Letter of James

[Part 5]

James 3:13-14 [NIV] *“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. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or **deny the truth.**”*

True wisdom can only be judged and measured by the depth of a person’s character.

James is still on the subject of those who wish to become teachers.

A teacher’s ability to teach well has to be an expression of the life that they lead.

The wisdom that the teacher extends to their pupils must be presented in humble way that has the needs of their pupils in mind.

The bad teacher is governed by bitterness and selfish ambitions, only in the job for their own financial gain or prestige.

Just as you can judge a tree by the quality of the fruits it produces, so you can judge a teacher by the quality of the pupils that they teach.

A good teacher will be, by example, generating character, good or evil, in addition to the facts that given to the pupils.

The Greek word translated “*selfish ambition*” is “*ēritchēia*” which literally means work done solely for what can be got out of it.

Often used for political ambition, as opposed to being a servant of the people, using the office for the peoples’ benefit, not their own.

One temptation that a teacher or preacher must resist is arrogance.

Both teachers and preachers are used to being listened to and having their words accepted, they are used to telling rather than listening.

William Shakespeare said this well *“I am Sir Oracle and when I open my lips let no dog bark.”*

But unless a teacher and preacher remains humble in attitude they will be denying their students the truth.

Another problem a teacher or preacher faces is that it is difficult to argue without passion.

To meet disbelief without wounding the student who as yet **not** convinced of something that is completely true in the teacher’s mind.

Every human being including teachers and preachers are constantly increasing in knowledge.

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will **guide you into all truth.** He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

“*All truth*” – this implies that at **no** time will we have all the truth, but will be guided towards that goal by being led by the Holy Spirit.

Only when the teacher or preacher is aware of this basic truth can they avoid the characteristics of bad teaching.

James 3:15-16 [NIV] *“Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is **earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.** For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”*

The incorrect attitude towards teaching has been influenced by three sources, all of which are very negative.

“Earthly” – the standards and sources are human in origin.

Proverbs 21:2 [NIV] *“All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart.”*

The thoughts of every human seem to be right even when they are motivated by a wrong desire.

The heart in scripture is symbolic of the motivating force within us.

“Unspiritual” –

Proverbs 30:12 [NIV] *“those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth;”*

Every human is a combination of three things:

- a) **The physical body** – flesh, bones, blood, etc.
- b) **Physical life** – the same living force that we share with all animal life.
- c) **The human spirit** – this is a non-physical part of a human being that is **not** found in all other animal life.

Job 32:8 [NIV] *“But it is **the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.**”*

This sets us apart from all other animal life making humans rational creatures and in the “*image*” of their Creator God. [**Genesis 1:26**]

1 Corinthians 2:11 [NIV] *“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way **no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**”*

It is **only** when the Holy Spirit interacts with our human spirit that we begin to have thoughts and wisdom that is **not** only based on human thoughts.

“Of the devil” – the wrong kind of wisdom has as its source Satan and his demons.

1 John 5:19 [NIV] *“We know that we are children of God, and that **the whole world is under the control of the evil one.**”*

At this time God is allowing Satan to control what is happening on earth, including the thoughts that motivate the decisions that world leaders make.

John 8:44 [NIV] *“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, **not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**”*

Jesus Christ sums up the very character of Satan, the very powerful spirit-being who controls society, a liar, who is totally devoid of truth, real godly wisdom.

The end result of the above is what we see in society today, and each generation has experienced, *“disorder and every evil practice.”*

It is very sobering to realise that the vast majority of humans **only** possess devilish rather than godly wisdom.

Also that the majority of humans are engaged in Satan’s work of deception [**Revelation 12:9**] and **not** the work of their Creator God.

James 3:17-18 [NIV] *“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. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.**”*

James then in contrast lists the characteristics of true godly wisdom.

“Pure” – the Greek word *“hagnōs”* meaning **not** contaminated, in this case by human reason or thought, so is acceptable to the Creator God.

“Peace loving” – the Greek word *“ēirēnikōs”* refers to a right relationship between humans and between humans and the Creator God.

This type of wisdom is devoid of arrogance, contempt or clever cutting words that hurt others.

A kind of wisdom that **never** seduces humans away from purity and their loyalty to the Creator God.

Hebrews 12:11 [NIV] *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and **peace** for those who have been trained by it.”*

The same Greek word is used where discipline from God brings to every human a harvest of righteousness and this peaceful relationship.

“Considerate” – the Greek word *“ēpiēikēs”* referring to a person who knows how to make allowances, knows when **not** to stand upon their rights, who knows how to moderate justice with mercy.

“Submissive” – the Greek word *“ēupēithēs”* has two uses.

Can mean ready to obey God and those He has placed in authority.

Also to be easy to persuade, in a sense **not** stubborn.

Willing to listen to reason and to the appeal of others.

Knowing when to wisely yield to such reasonings.

“Full of mercy” – the Greek word used for *“mercy”* is *“ēlēōs”* – meaning compassion for a person who is suffering even if it is their own fault.

Such mercy will result in *“good fruits,”* for a Christian pity and compassion is **not** merely an emotion, but sympathy that results in practical action.

We can never say we have shown mercy until we have helped that person.

“Impartial” – the Greek word *“adiakritōs”* which means without wavering or vacillating.

Christian, godly wisdom is based on God-given certainties that come to us through Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

A Christian **only** has an “*open mind*” to God’s Word, the Christian Bible, and **not** to human reasoning.

This “*adiakritōs*” comes without hypocrisy.

That is to say that Christian wisdom is **not** play acting, and does **not** deal in deception for its own end.

Christian wisdom is honest, it never claims or pretends to be what it is not.

Every true Christian will accept that any wisdom they express has come from the Creator God through the gift of the Holy Spirit as He reveals God’s Word, the Christian Bible, to them.

Finally James says something that every Christian church or Christian fellowship should have written on their hearts and foremost in their thinking and actions.

We cannot harvest righteousness, that is being a person or group being acceptable to the Creator God, **unless we are sowing peace.**

Remember that peace, the Greek word “*ēirēnē*” means quiet uninterrupted right relationships between human beings and human beings and their Creator God.

No seed can ever grow unless the environment is nourishing.

Romans 14:18 [NIV] “*because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.*”

Every Christian needs to be active in producing the right atmosphere in their fellowship and in their community.

Any community or church where people are at variance with each other, where there is bitterness or strife, **no** seeds of righteousness will ever germinate or grow.

Righteousness cannot exist, and all human striving to be right with their Creator God will be rendered ineffective and without reward.