

- *Its origin, characteristics and results*

James moves on to speak of true wisdom. *'But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable'*¹. In the same way as before he describes its **origin**. It is 'the wisdom that is from above'. Again he describes its **characteristics**. It is *'... first pure, then peaceable.'* And, *'It is gentle, willing to listen, full of mercy and good fruits. It is without a critical spirit and is free from hypocrisy'*². Then (as before) he describes its **results**³.

1 3:17a

2 3:17

3 3:18

1. True wisdom is from above

1. **True wisdom is from above.** It only comes into our lives by the new birth, by our walking in the Holy Spirit, by our drawing near to God. No 'natural' or 'soulish' person knows anything about it. It does not derive from ordinary human nature at all. God's wisdom is full of the atmosphere of heaven. It is totally surprising to unconverted people. It is 'from above' and is utterly unlike worldly sinfulness.

2. Wisdom's characteristics

2. **James spends some time describing its characteristics.** He mentions seven of them. It is *'...first pure, then peaceable . . . It is gentle, willing to listen, full of mercy and good fruits. It is without a critical spirit and is free from hypocrisy'*¹.

1 3:17

- *It is first pure*

The **wisdom from above is 'first pure'**. It is single-minded. It is not mixed with impurity. It is not like muddied water or diluted wine. There must be a love for the will of God that is free from self-centredness, free from love of the world and its ways, free from pride and secret greed. There will be no wisdom if there is no purity.

- *Then peaceable*

The **wisdom from above is 'then peaceable'**. We notice that James stresses the order and deliberately puts purity above peace. Christian peace is not 'peace at any price'. It is not flabbiness. It goes out of its way to be at peace with all people but it does not put peace with other people above peace with God and peace of conscience.

- *Gentle*

The **wisdom from above is 'gentle'**. It is a matter of restraining oneself from harshness and refusing to be offended easily. When people are irritating and infuriating, we need a sense of sympathy that will not react too severely. We remind ourselves that we all have weaknesses, that others may not have gifts that we have, and we have our weak points too! We refuse to react violently or hastily to what is painful and distressing in our relationships to others. You have to show this gentleness to everyone, the likeable and friendly, the aggressive and abusive, in the office, in the home, everywhere. The nearness of God will make it easier.

- *Willing to listen*

The **wisdom from above is 'willing to listen'**. Devilish wisdom will not take other's convictions into account. Some give way too easily. Like Zedekiah they say 'All right. Do as you like. I will do nothing to stop you' (see Jeremiah 38:5). Others are the opposite. They say in effect 'Only my opinion counts. I will not even listen to you.' But the wisdom from above is somewhere in-between. It is ready to listen, and then it is ready to make its decisions in the presence of God.

- *Full of mercy and good fruits*

The **wisdom from above is 'full of mercy and good fruits'**. It is willing to hold itself back from punishing others. It does not want to make others afraid. They sometimes know they should simply

overlook some wrong that has been committed (see Proverbs 19:11). They want mercy for themselves and so they treat others with mercy also. It also produces the fruit of good and sound activity. It is full of the good works that come from a good heart. It is not lazy or idle but is up and doing what needs to be done in the kingdom of God.

- Without a critical spirit

The **wisdom from above is ‘without a critical spirit and is free from hypocrisy’**. It is obvious that there was a lot of wrangling and suspicion and criticism among the Christians to whom James is writing. The word I translate ‘without a critical spirit’ is the same as a word used in James 1:6 (*‘with no doubting’*). It means without disputing, without arguing and wrangling, without being full of doubt towards God and towards other people. The wisdom from above dislikes a critical spirit. Of course we have to make decisions but we have also to avoid a critical spirit. Wisdom will be ‘free from hypocrisy’; there will be honesty, freedom from play-acting or pretending.

3. The results of the ‘wisdom from above’

3. **James describes the results of the ‘wisdom from above’.** *‘And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace’*¹. Fruit becomes a seed! Of course this is what normally happens. You plant a seed and it eventually becomes fruit. But the fruit gives you more seed, and so on. The same thing happens with the heavenly wisdom of which James speaks. It starts with the peacemaker – the wise Christian. In his or her life is the ‘fruit of righteousness’, the life that comes from the wise person. But that lifestyle itself becomes a seed. Everything we do in life becomes a seed. Everything we do will yield some kind of fruit. All sorts of blessings come from it. ‘Sow for yourself the seed of righteousness. Reap the harvest of mercy’, says Hosea 10:12. So the wise Christian is like a gardener; he or she sows seeds of righteousness. The garden is a garden of peace. The harvest is even more peace! The peacemakers help to enlarge a whole kingdom of peace. Most of us get bogged down in petty and small matters, disputes about selfish concerns, strife about little rules and regulations. James wants us to be truly wise with the wisdom that comes from above. It will give us a new attitude, a new spirit, a peaceable disposition which sows seed into a garden of peace and brings about a whole kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

1 3:18

- Seeds produce fruit and fruit produces more seeds
- Seeds of righteousness reap a harvest of mercy
- More peace and righteousness

		<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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