

## **We Have Been Given Wisdom From Above**

We believe, teach and confess that we, as people of Christ, do not have salvation that originates in our hearts or abilities, but we have been given salvation that is from above. In other words, when Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3 that he needs to be born again, very literally, Jesus is saying to Nicodemus that he needs to be born from 'above.' The source of our salvation is outside of us in Christ; it does not originate within us.

It is also the same way with wisdom. Our wisdom is also from above. This wisdom is revealed from heaven and does not come from the human heart. The Holy Spirit, through the Word, is the one that teaches and gives us this wisdom. We are given this wisdom as the Word of God shapes us, as our sinful nature is killed, and we are daily resurrected in the Gospel. It happens as we die daily and are raised anew in Christ every day. This wisdom is a gift.

Now, let us take a moment and examine this wisdom.

This wisdom of God, in the first place, is pure. There is nothing fishy added to it. But more specifically, this wisdom seeks the welfare of others. This wisdom isn't concerned with me, myself and I, but focuses on the need to serve one another. This wisdom teaches that we 'give in' for the sake of another person. This wisdom teaches that when we are driving, we don't have to swear at the other driver when we are cut off. This wisdom teaches that an employee can fulfil his boss' demands without sputtering under his breath or talking behind his back. This wisdom teaches that students don't have to put down a loner classmate to stay in the popular opinion of friends. This wisdom teaches that siblings don't have to argue about whose turn it is to tidying up the living room or clear off the table. This wisdom is real, not some abstract idea. This is the wisdom that James, the writer of our Second Lesson today, wants all his readers to have.

When we think about this wisdom from God, we can all agree that this is the way that it simply should be. When we think about this wisdom from God, there is a sense of peace, which causes us to say, "That wisdom is good. Wouldn't it be nice to have this? It would be like heaven on earth." So, why aren't things peaceable? Why do our world, or even our church and families, not live in this blissful state of selfless and all-serving wisdom? The reason is that we follow empty wisdom.

This empty wisdom only yields a life full of bitterness, envy and selfish ambitions. It is not heavenbound but earthbound. This empty wisdom is not of God, but it is of Satan. It is not of the Spirit, but it is unspiritual. This empty wisdom springs forth not from faith that receives the Word. This empty wisdom brings about disorder, evil, disunity and chaos. More specifically, this empty wisdom teaches us to look out for the needs of self. It says to look to our own cravings and to do whatever pleases me, myself and I. The disorder and evil that comes from empty wisdom can be seen in government, business, the church and the home.

But where does this empty wisdom come from? This empty wisdom cannot be traced to a profound philosopher. It cannot be traced back to an idea that was cultivated by a particular culture. Rather, this empty wisdom can be traced right back here. Yes, right here in our midst, we can find the origin of this empty wisdom. The source of this empty wisdom comes from you and from me. James is addressing the readers and us by showing us that we have been given wisdom from above but we then so easily become snared in empty wisdom. He confronts the reader by saying he has been plunged into empty wisdom. Realistically we have three enemies that literally bombard us with this empty wisdom. The Devil, the world and our own sinful nature attempt to point us back to the spring of empty wisdom, and that is our own desires, ambitions and cravings.

But how do we know when we are drinking from the fountain of empty wisdom? We can most be assured that we fooling the ways of empty wisdom when we hear and see words like, "Me, myself and I" as a basis for why we do what we do. When the opinion, motive and reason for our emotions, actions and identity are "me, myself, and I," we are captive to empty wisdom, which will most assuredly bring about division, war and conflict.

In fact, James gets right to the point. The reason for the divisions, conflicts and disputes in the church is because of sin. This empty wisdom goes the way of the sinful nature. Anytime there are divisions in the church, it is due to sin. Anytime there are divisions and conflicts in the family, in the government, in the workplace, and in your life, it is due to sin and following empty wisdom. The temptation for all of us is to point to anything but ourselves as the reason why conflict and disputes exist. We want to blame others. We blame our spouses. We blame the culture. We blame our history. We blame others. We try to shift everything away from ourselves. This is the way of empty wisdom. Empty wisdom teaches us that the problem is outside of us and that the solution lies within us. In contrast, the Scriptures show us that the problem is within and the solution is outside of us in Christ. Even in marriage counselling, when one of the spouses is responsible for 95% of the problems, I will look to the other spouse and say, "You are still responsible for 100% of the 5% that you have contributed."

Now, here is where it gets interesting. Doesn't it make sense that conflict arises from people wanting to fulfil their desires? It makes sense that there is peace and harmony when everyone seeks the good of one another. Right? So, the temptation for you and me is for us to think, "I better not give into my own cravings and my own desire, and I better work harder at loving others. I better stuff my feelings, shut down my wants, and try to do more good stuff to others." What has just happened here? We are looking to ourselves! May this never be! James says that God opposes the proud (4:6). Believing that you can stop

going the way of empty wisdom and go the way of God's wisdom is spiritual pride! You can't do it. God opposes this arrogance. What needs to happen is that our sinful nature that curves us inward on ourselves needs to be crucified. We need to die. Our selfish desires and our self-centred ideas need to be put to death. That old sinful nature needs to die today, tomorrow and every single day. We need to be brought to repentance and humility, confessing, "Lord God, have mercy on me, a self-centred person who drinks the from the fountain and buys into the ideology of empty wisdom."

God does have mercy on you in Jesus Christ. In fact, for you and I, He gives grace. God opposes the proud. But in our brokenness of sin He gives grace. Hear the Gospel! God forgives you and me who are centered on self. For you and I as children of God there is an avalanche of undeserved grace. God desires to draw you and me ever closer to Him to gift us His love, grace, forgiveness and wisdom. God wants you and I not bound up in the deception of empty wisdom but as His children bound up in His grace and mercy given to us because of what Christ accomplished on the cross.

Think about this now! Paul says we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). Everything! We have grace upon grace. In Christ we are given the wisdom of the Cross. We are given wisdom that says, "You have been freed from the condemnation of Hell and Satan. You have been ravished by the forgiveness of God in Christ. You are God's son and daughter through the blood of Christ." This wisdom then goes on to teach us, saying, "God has done absolutely everything that is necessary for your salvation. You need to do nothing except receive what has been done for you! Given such a great God who has overwhelmed you with riches beyond number - why should you not freely, joyfully and with all of your heart and with an eager will serve your neighbour?" Wisdom goes on to say, "You can serve all, because you have been served. You don't have to worry whether a person is a friend or an enemy or worry if they are going to be thankful or not. Rather, you are free to spend yourself and all that you have. Don't worry about whether you squander your love towards those that are ungrateful. Don't worry about yourself. You are forgiven. God has taken care of your salvation for you! Relax in His grace. Rest in the promise. You are freed to get your eyes off of yourself. God doesn't need your good works; your neighbour does. You are completely free of everything so that you can be completely attentive to the needs of all!"