

Chapter XIII

THE WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE

We have learned that James used *wisdom* to denote the salvation of the soul. The Scriptures declare that our Lord Jesus Christ is *the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2). This makes Him the Author of *the wisdom that is from above* (James 3:17). In contrast with God's wisdom, the serpent introduced mankind to the wisdom of this world. This is man's knowledge of good and evil of which our Lord warned: *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof [dying, thou shalt die]* (Genesis 2:16-17, emphasis mine).

This illicitly obtained knowledge of *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life* (I John 2:16) has provided the world with its source of good and evil, its knowledge of right and wrong, and its morality. This knowledge (obtained by disobedience to God) placed man in a new state, and this state is not to be confused with man's original state (when he was created in the image of God). Thus the knowledge of evil obtained from this tree is the source of all of the

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sins, from the least to the greatest, committed by man; while the knowledge of good, also obtained from this tree, is the source of the religions and social mores of this world. These are as varied as the cultures of this world are varied, but they are without absolutes. Even so, the world still views them as good despite the fact that the Psalmist wrote, *For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens* (Psalm 96:5).

Man's knowledge of good may at times even allow him to give lip service to some aspects of the truth. It may even produce rather high standards of conduct; but these standards cannot, with any degree of perfection, come close to satisfying the Holiness of God nor meet the perfect Righteousness of Jesus Christ. Solomon described that which was obtained from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when he wrote: *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death* (Proverbs 14:12, emphasis mine). In contrast, our text states:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. (James 3:17-18)

James began his epistle by posing the availability of the wisdom of God to those, among *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*, who could by the *trial of their faith* discover whether their faith was genuine, or whether it was steeped in *the commandments and doctrines of men*. James enjoined them, if they discovered they lacked the wisdom of God (salvation), to *ask in faith, nothing wavering*, and God would provide salvation without upbraiding those who sought it.

James enlarged upon the wisdom of God in our text. This provided his audience with the obvious difference between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world, which, for the most

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part, was portrayed to the Jews through the traditions of the elders, *after the commandments and doctrines of men*.

First, the wisdom of God is pure. It is not full of the envy, strife and sedition that was so evident among the Jews of the land and the Jews of the *diaspora*. God's wisdom (salvation) rests in the completed work of Jesus Christ. It recognizes all real purity is available only in Him, by imputation, on the judicial basis of His one sacrifice for sin forever.

Second, God's wisdom is peaceable. It provides each believer peace with God. This peace is based upon the judicial reckoning of God through *the blood of Jesus Christ his Son* [which] *cleanseth us from all sin* (I John 1:7). All who have accepted God's grace are at peace with God. Conversely all who have not availed themselves of the salvation that is in Christ are the enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Being at peace with God means the believer in Jesus Christ is at rest. Thus all human effort for righteousness is past:

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour [Greek: *spendo*, be eager] therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:9-11, emphasis mine)

In addition to being at peace with God, the one who possesses this wisdom can obtain, through spiritual growth *in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (II Peter 3:18), *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding* (Philippians 4:7). With this peace the believer is comforted in all of his afflictions and trials (II Corinthians 4:8-18).

Third, the one who possesses the wisdom of God (salvation) realizes it is gentle and easy to be entreated. The believer has direct access into the presence of God on the basis of the blood of Christ. He can come boldly unto the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). His approach is never

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on the basis of his own righteousness. It is always on the basis of the blood and in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus the believer can never be refused access, because Christ stood in his stead in life, fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law and all righteousness, and He stood in his stead in death, providing a just payment for his sins. This means that Christ has borne the believer's judgment and clothed him in His own perfect Righteousness so that he is, because of God's infinite grace, *accepted in the beloved* (Ephesians 1:6).

The wisdom of God is *gentle* (*epieikes*, in the Greek). It means: fitting, meet, suitable. Thus it carries the idea of a thing being reasonable, plausible, fair and equitable. Salvation is all of these. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (John 14:6). This statement is reasonable, plausible, fair and equitable, because our Lord Jesus Christ is God, Who, through His incarnation, fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law; died a perfect sacrifice for sin; and arose from the dead to provide the victory over sin, death and the grave. Indeed, salvation is gentle and easily entreated.

Fourth, the wisdom of God is full of mercy. This is true because all of the recipients of it were guilty before God. Nevertheless mercy could not be dispensed without regard for God's Person. Thus mercy, like its twin sister grace, is bestowed by God on the basis of the perfect life and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in behalf of sinners:

Wisdom [salvation] strengtheneth the wise [saved] man more than ten mighty men which are in the city. For there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Ecclesiastes 7:19-20, emphasis mine)

When Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he disqualified himself and his race from the presence of God. The penalty for his sin was death, both spiritual and physical.

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Therefore it is not possible (through natural generation, due to kinship with Adam) for any man to bear the judgment of the human race, other than Jesus Christ.

According to the law of redemption, the Redeemer had to be a near Kinsman. This required the Christ to come into this world, *in the fulness of the time*, by means of the virgin birth. This enabled Him to be both God and Man, but a man without the sin nature of all who are related to Adam by blood (through natural generation). As the God-Man He could stand in man's stead in life and in death. He was a suitable Redeemer, a near Kinsman:

But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest [man] a little lower than the angels; thou crownest [man] with glory and honour, and didst set [man] over the works of thy hands [see Genesis 1:26]: thou hast put all things in subjection under [man's] feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under [man]. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the [Author] of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the [assembly] will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:6-18, emphasis mine)

The incarnation, perfect life (in fulfillment of every jot and tittle of the law and of all righteousness), crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ provided the basis upon which

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God is able to bestow his mercy upon fallen man. Therefore God's salvation is full of mercy and good fruits. Those who are the recipients of God's mercy through faith are the good fruits James spoke of.

Fifth, God's salvation is without partiality. The Greek word James used, which was translated *without partiality*, is *adiakritos*. It is the negative form of *diakrino*, which carries the idea of being discriminating, or separating combatants, thus it came to mean: *to make a distinction of persons*. It also has a secondary meaning: to make a decision. The positive form of the word is *decisive*, while the negative form of the word (as in our text) is *indecisive*.

Our text does not show us positively whether salvation is without partiality or whether it is without indecision, but both are true. The fact is, God has the sovereign right to save whom He will, and this is clearly expressed by the apostle Paul in the book of Romans:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that

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sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Romans 9:1-24, emphasis mine)

Salvation is also without indecision. James declared that the wavering, or indecisive man, would receive nothing of the Lord, and salvation is received as a gift of God. Thus both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace through faith:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of [the] promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye [Gentiles] who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us [Jews and Gentiles]; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain [Jew and Gentile] one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body [the called out assembly of God from all ages] by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you [Gentiles] which were afar off, and to them [Jews] that were nigh. For through him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (Ephesians 2:11-18)

Paul made it clear, in God's called-out assembly we have both Jews and Gentiles, but no distinction is drawn between the Jews and the Gentiles. They are one in Christ. When it comes to the question of whether there could be any partiality in salvation, there is none. Salvation is by grace and grace is unmerited favor, so the concept that God elected men to salvation on the

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basis of His omniscient view of their future lives is false.

There was no indecision on the part of God in providing for mankind's salvation. God cannot be indecisive. Indecision is a human trait which is contrary to the nature of God. In the Bible every promise God has made is yea and amen. His promises are as certain as having already been fulfilled, for in the omniscience of God they have already been fulfilled.

Adiakritos, which can be translated *indecision*, is probably a reference (as previously noted) to the double-minded man, who receives nothing from the Lord. In our lives there may have been much indecision, but when it came to salvation, God changed us completely unto Himself when He quickened us by His Word and by His Spirit:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled [Greek: *katallaso*, changed completely] us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17-19)

Not only is the believer changed completely to God, he is complete in Christ, lacking nothing.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments [regimen] of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2:8-10, emphasis mine)

Finally salvation is without hypocrisy. This was of particular importance in James's argument to the Jews, because Judaism (as practiced by the *traditions of the elders*) was based entirely upon hypocrisy. Our Lord's denunciation of the Jews (in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew) is a revelation of the complete sham of Judaism as it was practiced in that day.

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Hypocrisy is a common word in the English language. Nevertheless few people know the true meaning of the word as it comes to us from the Greek language, where it is used in its various forms for *acting* and *actors*. Consequently people are called hypocrites who are not hypocritical at all. In fact those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and take their stand firmly in the grace of God, are often called hypocrites. These believers have trusted that the *one sacrifice for sin forever* has clothed them in the perfect Righteousness of Jesus Christ. They do not pretend to be something they are not. They know God has known all about them from all eternity, because David has revealed that nothing is hidden to God's omniscient view (Psalm 139). Therefore there is no room for pretense in the believer's relationship with the Lord. He has been separated completely unto God by God's judicial decree; and he is, therefore, deemed holy, even though he retains his sin nature until the day of his glorification (Compare 1 John 1:8 with I John 3:1-2).

All of the religious systems of the world, as we noted earlier, have a common denominator. They all predicate the attainment of their religious goals on human behavior. However Biblical Christianity declares all men to be sinners. Therefore, in terms of their relationship with God, nothing can be obtained by human behavior. In order to be accepted by God, man must come on the basis of God's grace. Grace is the unmerited love and favor of God in man's behalf. It was revealed in the sacrifice of God's Son as a vicarious atonement (covering) for the sins of the whole world. Thus God is judicially satisfied with the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This has enabled God to bestow His grace on whoever believes.

Despite this, man will not leave the leaven of hypocrisy alone. He corrupts the grace of God by imposing all kinds of restrictions of *touch not, taste not, and handle not* into the gospel

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of the grace of God. In his desire to produce *holy living*, man actually produces another gospel; so that Paul wrote:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For [am I now persuaded by man, or by God]? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-10)

The perversion of the gospel, which had come to the churches of Galatia, was the adding of the necessity of circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses to the simple message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This was a complete misunderstanding of the *schoolmaster* role of the law which was designed to condemn the Jews that they might come to Christ to be justified by faith, because they could not be justified by the deeds of the law.

If a man is proven to be a sinner by his failure before the law and is thus driven to faith in Christ for justification; he will nevertheless continue to have his Adamic nature until he is delivered from it by his resurrection and glorification. But if by that Adamic nature, which is called the flesh, he continues to sin, then all that can result from an attempted performance of the law is self-condemnation.

An honest appraisal of oneself before the law produces condemnation, whereas a dishonest appraisal produces hypocrisy. The Bible states that in salvation there is neither the condemnation of the believer, nor is there hypocrisy. Therefore all of the legalistic *do's and don'ts*, which have been added to salvation, are clearly additions to and not a part of salvation. The believer is declared to be dead with Christ by the judicial reckoning of God. Thus the believer is judicially

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dead to the law, and where there is no law, there is no transgression (Romans 4:15). Consequently the law no longer has dominion over the believer, because *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh* [the law, see Galatians 3:2-3], *but after the Spirit* (Romans 8:1).

Finally, with respect to the wisdom that is from above, James wrote, *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*. By this James declared there is no internal war for the believer who understands his right relationship with God. This believer is at rest. He knows God is just and the justifier of those who do no more than to believe. Thus he is at peace with God.

This, after all, is one of the precepts our Lord proclaimed to the Jews in His sermon on the mount. The Jews were either guilt ridden because of their failure before the law, or they were puffed up in their own self-righteousness and hypocrisy because of their sham performance of the law (by the *traditions of the elders*). Therefore our Lord told them, *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*. This is not the so-called peacemakers of this world, who try to effect world peace, but those who bring a man into a relationship of peace with God through the gospel:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did,] sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:2-4, emphasis mine)

Thus James has revealed to the *twelve tribes scattered abroad* what true salvation in Jesus Christ is. He has removed all grounds for boasting. He has laid them bare by his description of

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the wisdom that comes from above. He reduced the Jews to the place where most of them would have to admit they did not have the *wisdom of God*. They also would have to admit that they had lied against the truth. Nevertheless if they would have recognized their relationship before God, and if they would have changed their minds, salvation was available to them by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).