

James 3:13-18 Heavenly vs Earthly Wisdom

The phrase "**there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death**" comes from **Proverbs 14:12**, repeated in **16:25**. It highlights the fallibility of human judgment: what appears logical, beneficial, morally acceptable from a human perspective may not align with God's wisdom and can result in spiritual or even physical harm. The proverbs emphasize that self-reliance without seeking divine guidance is risky, as human understanding is limited and prone to error. In short: bad ideas hurt people.

James 3:17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."

- **Grammatical Usage:** "**Wisdom**" or in the Greek "sophía" meaning, "clear; proper clarity".
- **Literal Interpretation:** Real clarity, God's clear way, is first utterly pure, then peace-loving, gentle, approachable, full of tolerant thoughts and kindly actions, with no breath of favoritism or hint of hypocrisy.
- **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word. James describes two different kinds of wisdom, making several contrasts:

I. **A CONTRAST IN THEIR "ORIGIN"**

A. **EARTHLY WISDOM IS NOT FROM ABOVE (v. 15)**

1. It is EARTHLY
 - a. Wisdom that is according to the world's standards
 - b. But this wisdom is foolishness to God - cf. **1Co 1:20**
2. It is SENSUAL
 - a. Appealing to the senses, the emotions, the passions
 - b. Wisdom according to what FEELS right (but that doesn't make it right)
3. It is DEMONIC
 - a. The kind of wisdom possessed by the devil and his angels
 - b. A wisdom that often finds its origin in the influences of Satan!

B. **HEAVENLY WISDOM IS FROM ABOVE (v. 17)**

1. It comes from GOD - cf. **James 1:17**
2. It comes via PRAYER - cf. **James 1:5-8**

II. **A CONTRAST IN THEIR "NATURE"**

A. **EARTHLY WISDOM (vv. 14, 16)**

1. Full of BITTER ENVY
2. Possessing SELF-SEEKING IN THE HEART
3. This wisdom extols as virtues such qualities as:
 - a. Power
 - b. Position
 - c. Privilege
 - d. Prestige
4. It was this kind of wisdom...
 - a. That prompted Satan and his angels to rebel against God

- b. That prompted the disciples to argue over who would be the greatest in the kingdom
- B. **HEAVENLY WISDOM (v. 17)**
 - 1. It is first PURE
 - a. Above all else, it is true to God's Will
 - b. Not one to compromise truth for the sake of peace
 - 2. Then it is PEACEABLE
 - a. Holding firm to the truth, it makes every effort to be at peace (**Romans 12:18**)
 - b. For example, speaking the truth in an attitude of love (**Ephesians 4:15**)
 - 3. GENTLE
 - a. That is, kind in one's dealings with others
 - b. Not harsh, even when right and dealing with those who differ (**2 Timothy 2:24-25**)
 - 4. WILLING TO YIELD
 - a. Not in matters of truth
 - b. But in matters of opinion - **Romans 14:1**
 - c. In matters of liberty - **Romans 14:19-21**
 - 5. FULL OF MERCY
 - a. Quick to forgive the offenses of others
 - b. Wisely understanding one's own need of mercy (**James 2:13**)
 - 6. Producing GOOD FRUITS
 - a. Notice **v. 13**, where it says we are to show by our conduct our true wisdom and understanding
 - b. This wisdom takes one beyond being a HEARER to being a DOER - **James 1:22**
 - c. Understanding that "**faith without works is dead**" (**James 2:26**)
 - 7. WITHOUT PARTIALITY
 - a. Showing no respect of persons (**James 2:1-13**)
 - b. Rather, treating all fairly, on the same basis
 - 8. WITHOUT HYPOCRISY
 - a. Indicating that all of the above is not an "act", a "show"
 - b. But that it comes from a heart desiring to please God, not man

Certainly the superiority of "Heavenly Wisdom" over "Earthly Wisdom" is apparent in this passage. But as additional proof, notice:

III. **A CONTRAST IN THEIR "FRUITS"**

- A. **EARTHLY WISDOM (v. 16)**
 - 1. Causes CONFUSION
 - 2. And EVERY EVIL THING
- B. **HEAVENLY WISDOM (v. 18)**
 - 1. Produces PEACE, instead of confusion
 - 2. Bears the fruit of RIGHTEOUSNESS, instead of every evil thing

➤ **Conclusion:** We opened with there is a way which seems right...but ends in death. How is your way working out?