

I want to tell you about some of the wisest choices that were made in the history of the early church. All of them were made through the leading of the Holy Spirit, so none of us can take credit for making them. I say that emphatically because one of the wisest decisions was made by me.

Wise decisions made by the church or its leaders in the first few years of its existence... here are some:

1. The believers waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit as Jesus instructed them to do.
2. The believers started making disciples as Jesus instructed them to do.
3. The believers listened to the Holy Spirit and fully followed him
4. The church selected seven Greek men to solve the food distribution to the Greek widows.
5. As Jesus instructed them to do, the believers scattered to Judea and Samaria upon the death of Stephen... and that “wisest decision” I made, only the Holy Spirit would have been able to talk me into this one—
6. I vouched for Saul after he had become a believer.

These decisions followed a common pattern of believing and trusting God enough to obediently and lovingly follow him. This was the same pattern we followed as we started making disciples of the Gentiles.

I knew James for almost all of his career as the leader of the Jerusalem church. You can only imagine the respect and love we had for one another. James played a key role in the way we made disciples of the Gentiles. Virtually all of the first Christians were Jews. Even though they believed in Jesus and followed him, they also continued following the laws of Moses as best they could. They continued doing this for many years after the church was established.

Once the Gentiles started becoming Christians, there was a fierce argument whether they also needed to follow the laws of Moses as well as follow Jesus. Those opposed to it were led by me, and Paul, who had started converting Gentiles in large numbers. The case was settled at a council in Jerusalem. The council ended when both parties acceded to James making the final judgment in favor of making it easy on the Gentiles, which resulted in them not having to follow the laws of Moses. This wise ruling of James opened the flood gates to making disciples of Gentiles.¹

¹ Acts 15

Although the ruling of James settled the issue concerning following the laws of Moses, it did not settle another argument that began to bubble up. The argument essentially centered on whether believers needed to do good works or if an intellectual faith was sufficient. Now, James was not a trained theologian, but he had watched many of his church members nearly starve to death. No matter what anybody thought, James knew the truth of the matter; that wise people backed up their faith with deeds, not out of obligation, but out of love for God and for their fellow men.

This was not just an empty argument or point of doctrine. Since Christians were expecting Jesus to return... soon! It was a reasonable thing for them to quit working and quit taking care of their families. What difference would it make if Jesus came back? That thought process got so bad in Thessalonica that Paul had to address it directly a few years after James wrote his letter.

James was a direct descendant of King Solomon, and was a huge fan of Proverbs. Since Proverbs has so much to say about wisdom and folly, James could not help but think in a similar way.

James knew that problems would arise from many sources for Christians, and he knew that it was impossible for him to deal with every type of problem in detail. His solution, inspired by Holy Spirit, was to encourage people to be... wise. That would work much better than giving them rules or detailed solutions to specific problems.

James observed the subject of wisdom from five different perspectives:

It is wise to trust and honor God. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men liberally and doesn't find fault, and it shall be given to him. But let him ask in faith, without doubt. For he that doubts is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.²

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, considerate, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.³

It is wise to be humble. But he gives us more grace. The Scriptures say, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore, submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God and he will come close to you. Clean your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, and mourn, and cry: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to sorrow. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up.⁴

² James 5:1-6

³ James 3:17

⁴ James 4:6-10

It is wise to pray. Is any among you in trouble? Let him pray. Is any happy? Let him sing psalms. Is any one among you sick? Let him call for the church elders; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The powerful prayer of a righteous man is very effective.⁵

Did you hear that last line? “The powerful prayer of a righteous man is very effective.” If you want to have more effective prayers, perhaps you should consider trying to be more righteous.

It is wise to make peace. Peacemakers who sow peace harvest the fruit of righteousness.⁶

It is wise to strive for salvation for everyone. Brothers, if any of you stray from the truth, and someone converts him, remember this: he who converts the sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.⁷

James was the most humble man I ever met. Also the wisest. Hmm. I wonder if those two things are connected?

⁵ James 5:13-16

⁶ James 3:18

⁷ James 5:19-20