

## Trapped Between Two Portraits

by Chuck Swindoll  
(James 3:13-18)

Imagine yourself sitting in the center of a small art gallery. The brightly lit room is empty except for two contrasting portraits on opposite walls. On the one side hangs the portrait of an arrogant, worldly, devilish fellow on a dark backdrop that stirs emotions of anger and envy. A scraggly beard and mustache veil his features and a large hat casts a shadow over his shifty eyes. He leaves chaos and destruction in his wake as he advances unflinching toward the pursuit of his goals, driven by jealousy and ambition. The caption beneath the portrait reads: "The Unwise" painted by "Self."

The portrait on the facing wall couldn't be more different. That man bears a gentle demeanor, his posture relaxed and expression serene. His eyes are inviting, and his hands appear ready for service. Behind him people follow, eager to hear his words and mimic his actions. Children celebrate his arrival, delighted to see what gifts he might bring. Clearly respected, he shows no signs of pride, and in his path are joy, peace, and prosperity. Below this portrait the caption says: "The Wise" painted by "The Spirit of God."

In light of the two contrasting pictures of the wise and unwise in James 3:13-18, with which portrait do you identify? Do you struggle with jealousy of others' successes? Is your life motivated by personal pursuits at the cost of peace? How have these inward feelings and outward actions affected those around you? Do disorder and pettiness mark your life? Do you pursue the things of the world rather than the things of God?

Or is your life characterized by gentleness and humility? Do people know you as a person of mercy, authenticity, and peace? Do you act the same way at home as you do at work or at church or in public? Do you build others up, rejoice at their successes, and place the needs and interests of others ahead of your own? Do you leave harmony and joy in your wake?

As you seriously think through these questions, avoid answering the way you wish things were. Answer the way things really are. Try to defend your answer with actual evidence from examples that come to mind. Ask yourself whether your closest family members or friends would answer these questions for you the same way.

After you've identified with either the portrait of the wise or the unwise, it's time to think through your response. For the wise, respond to God with thanksgiving, praising Him for molding you through the unfolding years of your life. You're not wise by your own making, but by the inner working of God's Spirit. For the unwise, ask God for wisdom, then determine which character problems you need specifically to address by God's help.

Do you need to mend a particular relationship? Do it. Need to forsake a certain selfish pursuit? Stop it. Need to start a neglected spiritual exercise like prayer, worship, or Scripture reading? Get started now. It's never too late to start doing what's right. Don't let the effects of folly spiral out of control. Allow God to begin repainting your portrait with life-transforming colors. You'll begin to reflect not your own frail character but the character of His Son.

