

James 3:13-18

“Recognizing Real Wisdom”

What is wisdom? It goes *beyond* the *accumulation* of knowledge; it’s found in the appropriate *application* of knowledge. Perhaps you’ve known or come across someone in life who has an IQ that’s off the charts, (they program complex algorithms or solve complex equations) but they struggle to manage the everyday affairs of their lives. You’ll hear people say things like, “Man, that person is a genius, but they have no common sense.” Knowledge alone isn’t enough; you need *wisdom* in order to appropriately *apply* knowledge. That’s why the Bible says, “*Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom.*”¹

“Well, where do I get wisdom?” Listen, true wisdom finds its roots in J.C. So 1st & foremost I would encourage you w/the utmost of urgency to surrender your life to J.C. (if you haven’t already) that the wisdom of God might come alive in you. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—*”² True wisdom is rooted in the Person of J.C.

But we don’t give our lives to Jesus & just magically/mystically & mysteriously grow in wisdom through some esoteric kind of meditation or contemplation. It’s built into us through our seeking of the Lord in the study of His word. – One day (in speaking to the scribes & Pharisees of His day) Jesus said, “*The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.*”³ She traveled the world to sit & receive at Solomon’s feet & they wouldn’t give Jesus (the Greater than Solomon, the Wisdom from God) the time of day. May that not be true of us, but may we find ourselves marinating in His word, seeking to glean from His heart. Not being conformed to this world but being transformed (by the renewing of our minds) through the study of His word & allowing it to direct & correct the course of our lives.

If you remember right, James has been speaking to us of the power of the spoken word. How the tongue has the power to direct & to destroy. & He’s drawn attention to the inconsistency of our speech. How that blessing & cursing pour forth from the same mouth & it ought not be. Now, w/in this context of the importance of works & words, he wants to talk to us about wisdom.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Pr 4:7]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Co 1:30]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 12:42]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 13

In Vs 1 of Ch 3, James says, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” Evidently there were many who were being drawn to what they considered to be the *prestige & respect* of the platform of the teacher, but they’d neglected to consider the accountability & responsibility before God to be in such a position.

Here, he’s kind of in that same vein. This phrase, “Wise & understanding” is a reference to the would-be teacher. He’s saying, “Who is it that would be seen as the teacher, gifted of God, equipped of the Spirit in your midst?” The idea being, “How can someone know if true wisdom is evident in a person’s life?” & The basic answer is that the words from our lips (let’s remember he’s been speaking of the power of the tongue) should find witness in the works of our lives.

A couple of weeks ago we spent time developing what true saving faith looks like in our lives. Because we can’t see a person’s faith. There’s not some kind of “faith-ometer” that pops up on someone’s forehead or something that shows true faith. We can’t see faith. What we *can* see is the *fruit* or byproduct of faith based upon the way a person lives. Saving faith *produces* good works in our lives. We realize we’re not saved *by* good works, but we *have been* saved *unto* good works which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

In like manner, I can’t see wisdom... You can’t discern whether or not wisdom abides in someone just by looking at them. But just as w/saving faith, true wisdom will “out” itself through the way someone conducts themselves. Just as saving faith will bring forth good works, godly wisdom concerns our conduct. It will impact & affect our manner of living on a day-to-day basis.

I broke it down a little bit differently in the way I underlined it in my Bible. You might think of it like this: “Works, done in the meekness of wisdom, show by good conduct.” In other words, wisdom isn’t measured by PhD’s & college degrees, but it will be proved out by the manner (everyday behavior) of a person’s life.

James says, “Let him show by good conduct...” It’s not about acquiring truth in a lecture (or a Bible study), It’s about *applying* truth in your everyday life. It’s not something that’s flaunted arrogantly, but it’s demonstrated in humility. In “meekness”. Not “weakness”. The person who is meek has plenty of strength (Jesus described *Himself* as “meek”), but meekness senses no need to selfishly assert itself.

This person's aim is the glory of God, not the praise of man. We might say that meekness is seen in the *attitude*, wisdom is seen in the *action*.

But meekness, good conduct, these are the 1st fingerprints that James points to as true wisdom.

Vs 14-16

One commentary (Barclay?) translated Vs 13-14 like this, *"Is there anyone among you who wishes to be a real sage and a real teacher? Then let that person live a life of such beautiful graciousness that it will be proved to all that gentleness is enthroned as the controlling power within the heart. For, if you have a fanatical bitterness and are obviously controlled by selfish and personal ambition, then, whatever claims you make in your arrogance, all you are doing is to be false to the truth which you profess to teach."*

Our attitude & our actions can completely wreck our words. What we say doesn't mean much if those things that we teach don't show out in our lives.

But probably the thing that strikes us the most regarding what we just read is the fact that there's more than one kind of wisdom that we can walk in! & What James is developing for is that there is a godly, supernatural, fruitful wisdom that we can walk in... & There is an earthly, natural, destructive (even demonic) wisdom we can walk in... There is more than one kind of wisdom available to the child of God & we have to be careful to discern/distinguish which one we're drawing from & James is giving us the tools here to do just that.

Initially, James begins to develop the nature of true wisdom (the wisdom of God at work in a person's life). But then it's as if he says, "But before we get too far into that, let's draw attention to this as well so that we *not* be deceived." Natural wisdom (man's wisdom) operates on a completely different level & from a completely different motive than God's wisdom. **In fact, they're completely the opposite, both in origin & in outcome. The wisdom that James was speaking about in Vs 13 was earmarked by good conduct & meekness. The wisdom of Vs 14 (earthly wisdom) is marked by bitter envy & self-seeking, which leads to boasting (comparing yourself to others, making yourself look somehow better or more desired) & self-seeking (messed up motives).**

It's a deceptive wisdom, it lies against the truth. What truth? The truth of the motive in their heart (self-seeking, bitter envy, personal promotion). It tries to disguise itself as something spiritual when in truth it's simply carnal. The Bible is clear...

*"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."*⁴

Think about it like this, do I rejoice when others succeed, or do I have secret envy and criticism? Do I feel burdened when others fail, or does it somehow satisfy me? When the wisdom of God is at work in me, I'll have a sense of humility/submission, my desire will be for God to be glorified... it's not going to be me comparing myself amongst ourselves. Jesus is the standard, He deserves the glory.

"Bitter envy", hostile, punitive zeal. A person w/a critical, contentious, fight provoking kind of manner about them.

"Self-seeking", selfish ambition. Think of a political debate & the extent to which these people will go to smear & destroy what you might think of any other potential candidate & put themselves forward as the only rational or appropriate choice... Political debates, media narratives & pop cancel culture are all saturated w/these characteristics.

It's a wisdom (a manner of navigating life) that does not descend from above. – It's "earthly". Meaning it's not from above, it's from beneath, it's of this world. (Btw you might write down so as to read it later, 1 Cor 1:18-25) The wisdom of God & the wisdom of man are mutually exclusive. Man sees God's wisdom as foolish & God sees man's wisdom as foolish. But as to where man's wisdom will be destroyed, God's wisdom is eternal.

Man's wisdom is *earthly* & it's *sensual*, meaning that it appeals to the flesh & fleshly appetites. So, it has a limited view (it has only this life in mind), it's carnal in nature (promotes self & selfish desires) & it's characteristic of the devil... it's *demonic*.

Quick question: what are the 3 enemies of the believer in this life? #1 The world, #2 The flesh, #3 The devil. Man's wisdom encompasses them all. Demonic wisdom is that which will feed into the desires of man rather than champion the heart of God... Perhaps you remember the scene there in Matt 16. Jesus was beginning to inform His disciples that they were going to make their way to Jerusalem & there He would be taken, tried & crucified... Peter pulled Him aside & began to rebuke Him, "Far be it from You Lord, it's not going to happen!" Makes sense from an earthly perspective... What did Jesus do? *"But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, (don't miss it) for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*⁵ "Peter, you're not drawing on godly wisdom, your thoughts are inspired of the devil... the things of man."

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Php 2:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 16:23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You 1st find this “wisdom” coming into focus in Genesis Ch 3. It’s there that Satan deceives Eve by convincing her that eating of the fruit was in *her* best interest. It would promote her status... but in the end it resulted in death... What does the Bible say? **“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”**⁶ Satan’s wisdom is confounding & confusing, leading to deception & destruction.

Vs 16

What’s the fruit, the net effect of the wisdom of this world? Confusion & every evil thing. The word “evil” just means “worthless”, “base”, “immoral”. Nothing of any real value.

Quick question. When you look at the world today. Think “media reporting”. Think “global volatility” & “warmongering”, think “gender identity”. Would you say that the word that describes most people’s perspective is “clarity” or “confusion”?

The standard isn’t the absolute truth of the Word of God. It’s the ever-changing barometer of human emotion... whatever *feels* right. But scripture is clear, **“God is not the author of confusion but of peace,”**⁷ The confusion found in the world today is demonic at its root... If it causes division, strife, contention, confusion... God is not the One presiding over that course or direction. It’s not godly wisdom leading the charge... **You can always tell when church members or family members fall prey to worldly wisdom. You’ll find jealousy, sometimes its because someone wants their opinion to be acknowledged as no different or just as important (feeling as though they’ve been slighted, like Aaron & Miriam did w/Moses, Num 12). There will be little digs toward someone leading to a divisive, uncomfortable, confusing kind of atmosphere...**

Vs 17-18

If Vs 14-16 are the characteristics of earthly/demonic wisdom. Then Vs 17 houses the attributes of heavenly/godly wisdom.

“The wisdom that is from above is 1st pure.” Underline that. Now, it’s not a reference to sexual purity (though wisdom would certainly lead us in that course). This is the kind of purity that’s free from anything that would contaminate, it’s clean. Think, pure gold. In our text it’s the absence of any type of sinful/selfish attitude or motive. It’s *pure*.

Man’s wisdom may lead to sin. Something that defiles. God’s wisdom maintains purity, not seeking to serve self-centered desires, impure motives. – & I love the inspired order here because “peaceable” comes *after* “pure”.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 14:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 14:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In other words, though we do all that we can to order & maintain peace. We can't champion peace at any cost. The 1st thing that needs to be established is purity. Which is to say that I can't violate or compromise the clear teaching of the Word of God for the sake of peace. There has to be purity 1st. Man's way will say, sacrifice purity for the sake of harmony. God says, "No." The wisdom that is from above is 1st of all pure, **then** peaceable.

God will not have "peace at any price". Peace amongst God's people is predicated upon purity amongst God's people (honoring the word of God from the heart). Isaiah 32:17, "*The work of righteousness will be peace, And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.*"⁸ We won't find peace in sweeping sin under the carpet. The world wants you to just "cover" sin & pretend it isn't there. The word says, "Confess" your sin, be cleansed & find peace. God's wisdom will lead people to right relationships. 1st w/Him, then w/one another.

Next, it's "gentle". Evidently this is a difficult Greek word to translate directly into English, though the concept is not. One commentator referred to it as a "sweet reasonableness". Which is to say, you may have the *right* to penalize, but you're willing to listen, exercise discretion & offer forgiveness. It's having that ability to extend & do unto others as you would have others do unto you should the shoe be on the other foot, should the table be turned, or the situation reversed.

The wisdom from above is, "willing to yield." Again, this doesn't point to a willingness to compromise in the arena of truth. It simply means that you're willing to listen openly & honestly to someone else & if they're right, or their way is better, you'll concede to that. You're not stubborn & unable to be moved, you're open to reason. Listen, don't allow your stubbornness to mask itself as "conviction" or "resolve". **Stubbornness is of the flesh. The opposite of what we're reading here. Be willing to listen, to pray & to obey the leading of the Lord. Don't approach a situation like you already know everything. Someone might be able to give you an angle that adds to your depth of understanding that will lead to a different course of action... Wisdom is willing (if need be) to yield.**

It's "full of mercy & good fruits". We spoke back in Ch 2:13 about the critical need & nature of mercy. Mercy doesn't give someone what they deserve. & Since I need God's mercy, I want to be *merciful*. – As for "good fruits" you might just think of "practical helps". Serving others, praising God, leading others to Christ, giving of your time, your talents & your treasure, quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath... good fruits.

⁸ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [\(Is 32:17\)](#). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Not sentimental thoughts or empty gestures... action. We might say that God's wisdom leads people to be *faithful & fruitful*.

He's already told us that heavenly wisdom is *pure*, here he kind of expands upon that. It's "w/out partiality & w/out hypocrisy". Meaning, it won't show favoritism, & it won't wear a mask. It won't be two-faced. It won't put forth a false impression or pretend to be something it's not. It's genuine. It won't tell you what you *want* to hear, but what you *need* to hear. Wisdom speaks the truth in love.

Vs 18

Don't be a troublemaker in the body of Christ. Be a peacemaker. Blessed are the *peacemakers* not the *peace breakers*. The *peacemakers* shall be called the sons of God.

We reap what we sow. Real wisdom (godly wisdom) will lead you to peace. Worldly wisdom will make for contention, confusion & a real mess.

I'm not sure what decisions you're faced w/right now. It could have to do w/work, w/family, your kids, any # of things. But there you are, you're praying for wisdom. How do you know that the solution you're leaning into is of the Lord? Run it through the grid. Purity (honorable motives), peaceable, gentle, willing to yield. Is this the net effect... or does it have at its root; bitterness, jealousy/envy, self-seeking, is there confusion, contention... you get the idea.

Pray for wisdom, run the way you're leaning through the grid & see which side of the line it falls. Trust in the Lord w/all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him & He will direct your paths.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for Your word. For giving us the tools to discern when You're leading us, or when our flesh or the rationale of this world is influencing our behavior & our decisions. We recognize that wisdom in the principal thing, set it in our hearts to get wisdom Lead us in Your word, for the glory of Your name.

Where do we get wisdom? From the word of God, & it comes alive through God the Word. J.C. The very wisdom of God loves you & gave Himself for you upon the cross. He died for our sin, that we might live in Him. The wisest thing you could do, would be to surrender *before* Him, believe *upon* Him & you will be saved *by* Him. Forgiven of sin, a new creation in Him.