

James Chapter 3B

As a child my family traveled to the 1964-65 World's Fair in N.Y. I was amazed by the futuristic cars and the innovative technology that was on display. Western Electric introduced the first video phone. Who could possibly imagine a phone that enabled you to actually see the person you were talking to on the other end?

- Today we walk around with miniature versions of those phones in our pockets.

I think it would be safe to say that we live in a society that is enamored by its technological advances; a society that is content to worship at the altar of scientific knowledge. Listen to this quote from "QZ.com"

"It used to be that traditional religious belief best bolstered well being, providing the faithful with a sense of control in a wild world. Now, however, progress IS the religion that makes its believers feel best. Science satisfies the secular deeply, say social psychologists from the University of Cologne, Germany. In fact, praying at the altar of technology provides more powerful benefits to devotees of progress than the traditional gods give the faithful."

When I read articles like that one, I have to ask, How did we get here? Well, the path to modern secularism finds its roots in the Enlightenment of the 18th Century.

The Enlightenment was a time in which men thought they no longer needed religion to explain the world. Through the power of their own reason, men believed that they could understand and explain the world better than the religious leaders.

As man's abilities and scientific discoveries increased, even though science as a discipline was originally undertaken as a study of God's Creation man's confidence in his own knowledge overtook his need for God, He no longer needed the Word of God to answer his unanswerable questions.

- At this time, the basic principles of God's revelation were laid aside and man himself became the measure of all things.
- In the arrogance of pride and the folly of unbelief, he laid aside his faith in the unseen God and sought for the essence of truth in his observation of the cosmos.
- This change is evident when you consider the motto's of our great universities.

Harvard University, for example, developed a motto in 1692

"Veritas pro Christo Et Ecclesiae" Truth for Christ and the Church

Over time that motto has been reduced to simply: "Veritas" Truth.

- Today students attend Harvard in search for truth APART from Christ. That is far from the original intent of the founders.

In the 18th century when a student entered Harvard University he was given a handbook, Point number 2 in the Harvard handbook read in this way:

“Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well that the main end of his life and his studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life and therefore lay hold of Christ as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning, and seeing that the Lord alone gives wisdom let everyone seriously set himself to prayer in secrete to seek it of him.”

- Moving from the 17th century to the 18th century we see that the enlightenment began a gradual downward spiral where men traded the truth of God for a lie and began worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator.
- The Apostle Paul writes about the abandonment of truth in his Epistle to the Romans:

21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

When man rejects the revelation of God he rejects the source of all true wisdom and even thought he claims to be wise, his lifestyle and the inevitable degeneration of society reveals his utter foolishness.

- Think about it: with all of our knowledge and all of our technology we live healthier and longer lives.
- BUT we can't seem to keep a marriage together, we understand more than ever before about genetics and biology but we can't seem to determine who we are? Am I a man or a woman... A simple question in the 16th century, not so simple in the 21st.
- We may have increased in knowledge but we have decreased in wisdom.
- What should we do when we discover our need for wisdom? James said:

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

- Like James, Solomon understood that God is the source of all true wisdom.

Proverbs 2: 1 My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, 2 making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;

3 yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,

4 if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,

- As we open the book of James this morning the focus of our study is Wisdom. We will attempt to understand the difference between True and False Wisdom

James 3:13-18 presents us with three categories of Wisdom:

1. True Wisdom - James opens with a Test of True Wisdom
2. Worldly Wisdom - Gives us a description of “Worldly Wisdom”
3. Pure Wisdom – And finally we have a description of “Pure Wisdom”

1 The Test of True Wisdom

James opens his exposition of true Wisdom by asking the question.

James 3:13 **Who is wise and understanding among you?**

- For me this question requires considerable evaluation, not only of my own life but also of the lives of those around me. The first thing I need to consider is: “What is true Wisdom.”
- Wisdom and Understanding taken together describe a person who possesses experience, knowledge and the ability to apply the knowledge that he has gained to the unique circumstances he or she faces in life.

We should understand that James is NOT ALONE in seeking individuals who possess the attributes of wisdom and understanding.

When the people of Israel were advancing toward the Promised Land Moses appointed leaders of the people who possessed these same qualities.

Deut. 1: 13 Moses told the people: **Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads.’** 14 **And you answered me, ‘The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.’** 15 **So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officers, throughout your tribes.**

- So we see that the people of Israel chose for themselves leaders who demonstrated the same characteristics that James was looking for.

This search raises the question: What does a wise man look like? How did Israel know, better yet how can we know when someone possesses the qualities of wisdom and understanding?

- Well according to James wisdom and understanding can be seen in a person’s behavior, these qualities are demonstrated by their deeds;

James 3: 13 **Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.**

- James is not simply suggesting things we might want to consider, he is actually describing some of the mandatory characteristics of Godly wisdom.
- Good conduct is the inevitable outgrowth, the reoccurring fruit of true wisdom.
- But it doesn't stop there, the works of a wise person, the deeds of an understanding person are performed in an attitude of meekness, humility and gentleness.

We tend to think of humility, meekness and gentleness as those personality traits displayed by a person who is shy or reserved, but they are much more.

They are the sweet fruit of a branch that is connected to the vine of Christ. They are divine characteristics, manifestations of the Spirit in the children of God.

- Matthew points to these characteristic in Christ

Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

There is a real beauty and majesty displayed in a life, lived in meekness and humility. We see this wonderfully displayed for us in the Life of Jesus Christ.

- Although He was the all-powerful God, the creator and sustainer of all things, He willingly laid down his life for the sins of his beloved people. This is the ultimate display of meekness.
- It is the meekness of Christ, his power and humility that are at the very heart of divine wisdom.
- NOW James sets out to compare and contrast the wisdom of God to the wisdom of the world. First we look at worldly wisdom.

2 Worldly Wisdom

IN direct contrast to the godly wisdom that is displayed through meekness and good conduct, James describes the corrupt human logic that is passed off as wisdom in our fallen world.

James 3: 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

- The Motivation behind worldly wisdom is described as “Bitter Jealousy” and “Selfish Ambition.” These are the base attitudes that identify this wisdom as worldly.

In the corporate world individuals are able to advance their position and display worldly wisdom when they show great zeal and ambition.

- James actually uses these words (Zeal and ambition) in his description of worldly wisdom but he adds the adjective “BITTER” to the word zeal and “SELFISH” to the word ambition to show the depravity of this worldly wisdom.

Bitter jealousy is a fierce desire to promote one's own agenda; and when you combine that with selfish ambition you have a chaotic group of people engaged in an angry competition pushing their way into positions of power and prominence.

- This my friends is worldly wisdom.
- Did you know that there are times when this same corrupt, worldly wisdom enters into the church? That may be why James is addressing it in his letter.
 - Believers vying for positions of influence, Seeking offices of power in order to lord over others within the church.
 - When we operate with worldly values, seeking our own honor and status we are being driven by the flesh and NOT led by the Spirit.
 - James unveils the corrupt nature and source of this kind of “wisdom.”

James 3:15 **This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.**

- First: **“This is not the wisdom that comes down from above.”**
- In Chapter 1 James said: 1:17 **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.**
- James wants it to be perfectly clear that this worldly wisdom is NOT the wisdom that comes from God. The origin of this wisdom is EARTHLY and not heavenly. Let's look at those three words that James uses to describe worldly wisdom.

EARTHLY – This wisdom has its origin in and is limited to this present material world of time and space. It is restricted to the things that man can theorize, discover and accomplish by himself.

- This is where the church desperately needs the discernment that comes from consistently handling and honoring the Word of Truth.
 - Those who reject the authority and sufficiency of the Bible promote things like “Theistic Evolution” in the church. They embrace alternative forms of marriage and allow men rather than God to identify gender.
 - We need to recognize this as worldly wisdom and admit that it has no place in the church.

There are many preachers who present pragmatic, moralistic motivational talks, thinking that they are feeding God's sheep when in reality they are focused solely on the things of this world.

- Prosperity, success, health and wealth; In our flesh we all want these things, and God may actually bless us with them, nevertheless the constant promotion of these things in the church is the promotion of worldly wisdom. Example:

“The more you talk about negative things in your life, the more you call them in. Speak victory not defeat.” – worldly wisdom from Joel Osteen

“There is a winner in you. You were created to be successful, to accomplish your goals, to leave your mark on this generation. You have greatness in you. The key is to get it out.” – Joel Osteen,

UNSPIRITUAL – False wisdom is natural, sensual, fleshly. This is wisdom that originates in the mind of the natural man *who* (According to Paul) *does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.* (1 Corinthians 2:14)

- The natural man is one who is governed and influenced by natural instincts; the animal passions and desires as opposed to being led by the Spirit.
- The natural man who is dead in sins and transgressions actually lives in opposition to the things of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:17 *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

- The natural man’s feelings, his desires and appetites, his standards and impulses are motivated by “Bitter Jealousy and Selfish Ambition.”
- BUT it goes deeper than that. There is a dark and sinister source behind the wisdom of this world.

According to James, It is DEMONIC – James 3:15 *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

James is very aware of the spiritual battle in which the saints of God are presently engaged.

- In 3:6, He told us that the corrupt tongue was “*Set on fire by hell.*”
- In 4:7 He will exhort us to “*resist the Devil*”

James tells us that the origin, the inspiration for “earthly, unspiritual” wisdom is demonic.

- In the very beginning, Satan gave the promise of greater wisdom to the mother of all humanity as she stood by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 3: 4 *But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

- Original Sin brought spiritual death to all men and brought all of us under the dominion of darkness.

Ephesians 2: 1 *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

- James moves on to say that this earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom produces disturbances and uproars among men leading to all kinds of immoral practices.

James 3: 16 **For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.**

- OK enough about the earthly, fleshly, demonic wisdom of this world.

Now let's brush ourselves off, wash your hands, let's set aside the defilements of worldly wisdom so that we can gaze upon the PURE wisdom that comes from the Father of lights.

- Verse 17 opens with the word BUT, and turns our eyes from worldly wisdom to pure wisdom.
- Just the mention of the word PURE marks a dramatic change in the character of the wisdom that is being discussed.
- We leave behind that which is corrupt in order to gaze upon that which is holy; we turn away from the earthy in order to consider the heavenly.

3 Pure Wisdom

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.** 18 **And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

- True heavenly wisdom is everything that earthly wisdom was not. It is the complete antithesis of jealousy, the opposite of selfish ambition. Earthly wisdom is demonic BUT Heavenly wisdom is PURE.

Like a prism through which a white light passes as it is broken down into all of the colors of the spectrum, SO the wisdom of God is FIRST PURE white light.

- It is morally blameless, free from any stain, blemish or defect; it is unmixed with anything that is worldly, dark or demonic.
- This is the wisdom that comes from God and it is incapable of producing anything that is fleshly, immoral, dark or sinister.

Issuing from that White pure wisdom are seven virtues that James separates into three groups that would have made it easier for believers of his day to remember.

- The first three all begin with the same letter (in original language)
- Peaceable, gentle, open to reason – these three attributes stand together in opposition to the worldly wisdom which was described as bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.
- Take note how closely the attributes of Divine Wisdom correlate to the Fruit of the Spirit as described for us by the Apostle Paul:

Galatians 5: 22 **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** 23 **gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**

- When you view these attributes in light of the afore mentioned purity they describe a person who lives at peace with God and seeks to live at peace with his fellow man, one who does not insist on his own way but yields to the will and the ways of God.
- Peace loving, gentle and open to reason, describe that individual who is submissive to God and accommodating to men, one who does not insist on his own way.

Instead of producing strife and evil actions Pure Wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits.

- When we walk in mercy we do not: **repay anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.** 1Th 5:15

This wisdom reminds us of the mercy and good deeds that James spoke of in Chapter 2: James 2:8 **If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.**

- Finally James describes Pure Wisdom as “Impartial and Sincere.” This wisdom carries no prejudices and it is Unhypocritical.

The life that is lived in the Wisdom of God is a life of purity and peace, a life that is lived in gentleness and reasonableness, a life of mercy and good fruit, a life of righteousness, justice and truth.

- If you are a believer, you have seen this wisdom. You are familiar with its ways.

YOU have seen it in the face of Jesus Christ. His purity has cleansed you, his suffering has brought you peace with God,

- There has only ever been one life that was lived in the purity of God’s wisdom.
- Only Christ:

Speaking of Christ Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 11:1 **There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.**

Colossians 2:3 Paul says:

in whom (In Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

HE is the wisdom of God

1Co 1:24 **to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

YOU can only walk in true wisdom as you abide in Christ.

- When we are born of God by the Holy Spirit, When we repented of our sin and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, we were cleansed of all our sin and grafted into the vine and now his life flows through us like the life of a vine flows through the branches.
- Because of HIM you now produce the fruit of godly wisdom.

John 10:4 **Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.**

5 **I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**

6 **If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

Now consider your own life, are you In Christ? Abiding in the vine

Walking in the wisdom of God that is **pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.**

- Trust in him, abide in him and you will produce fruit.