



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Who is Wise? James 3:13

TO: LEGISLATORS, GOVERNOR, SPOUSES

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God's Word says much about the tongue and there is no other place that deals with it as thoroughly as in James 3. In writing this book James has one primary goal in mind...to show what it means to have true, genuine faith and that is a faith which works in every aspect of life. James chapter three has charged the unchecked tongue with the power to hurt, destroy and change the course of one's life through reckless words, malicious rumors, false flattery and verbal venom while at the same time professing to love God. This is a shameful sin that cannot be tolerated. True faith will be demonstrated by a bridled tongue that possesses a wisdom that comes from above. If you think you are religious but have an unbridled tongue, your religion is vain. (James 1:26) If your behavior does not match your belief then your faith is worthless, for true faith works in every aspect of your life.

I. WHO IS WISE? JAMES 3:13

Just as the tongue reveals what's in the heart, so also our conduct reveals the inner quality of our soul. James moves from how we speak to how we act, noting that behavior sheds light on the genuineness of our faith as well. And our behavior is directly tied to wisdom for true wisdom that comes from above will be demonstrated by consistent, godly conduct towards God and man. Here James teaches that wisdom is another characteristic of true, saving faith and wisdom is not just an intellectual trait, but is the ability to apply truth to life.

A. WHO IS WISE? - JAMES 3:13A

James 3:13—“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

James begins his challenge by asking a probing question. Who is wise? As we will see, James isn't referring to a wisdom of words and lofty thoughts, but is more concerned about what we do with what we know. James is speaking about a practical wisdom that affects how we live. He is talking about wisdom and the godly life that comes from it. So he asks those who think they are wise to step forward and examine their life. “Who among you is wise and understanding?”

First we must understand what wisdom is. James uses two words to emphasize his point.

“wise” Greek “*sophos*,” described the individual who possessed moral insight and skill in deciding practical issues of life and conduct. It was careful application of knowledge to personal living. A moral quality.

“understanding”, Greek “*epistemon*,” occurs only here in the New Testament and refers to an intellectual quality, a specialized knowledge or having the knowledge of an expert and able to apply that to practical situation.

James uses these adjectives together describing a wisdom that is more than merely academic learning; but practical, moral and spiritual insight. Wisdom has always been of great value and Scripture has a lot to say about wisdom. It isn't just knowing facts, but the ability to apply truth to life.

- Proverbs 1:7- wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. It begins with knowing God.
- Proverbs 2:9- wisdom enables us to discern what is right and just.
- Proverbs 2:20- wisdom keeps us on the path of the righteous.
- Proverbs 4:7- we are to seek it above all else.
- Proverbs 8- reveals wisdom's noble virtues and great value.
- 1 Corinthians 1:24, 36- Jesus Christ is the source of all wisdom.
- Romans 11:33- speaks to the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.
- Job 28:12, 28- “But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?”... “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”

Here in James 3:13-18, James offers that wisdom is yet another quality of true faith. And the kind of wisdom a person possesses will be revealed by the kind of life he lives.¹ James would say that wisdom reveals an inner quality and the spiritual condition of your heart. Wisdom may be our highest and most valuable possession. It is clear from Scripture that wisdom is the ability to live rightly and righteously. And as James will expand on, there are two kinds of wisdom; an earthly wisdom and a heavenly wisdom that comes only from above.

Think about it. Isn't wisdom what you need in these days? As you make decisions for your life, your family, your state and your nation we need wisdom from above. So how would you answer James' question of “Who among you is wise and understanding?” Is it the same answer that James gives?

B. LET HIM SHOW- JAMES 3:13B

James follows his question with an emphatic command. With the verb, “*Let him show*” placed at the beginning of the sentence; it gives an emphatic emphasis to the action.

BIBLE STUDIES

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Capitol Commission Colorado

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“let him show” Greek **“*deixato*,”** in the aorist imperative tense, calls for an effective demonstration, a once for all action, suggesting a sudden change in “manner of living” is necessary.

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show...” James expects and even demands that the possession of wisdom, just as with faith, must be proven by conduct. There must be an effective demonstration that is consistent. And James goes on to make it unmistakably clear what we are to demonstrate.

C. BY HIS GOOD BEHAVIOR- JAMES 3:13C

What are we to give an effective, consistent demonstration of? Good behavior! If you say you are wise and understanding, that you possess true and genuine faith, then show it first by how you live. If wisdom isn't demonstrated with godly living, it is of no value.

“by” Greek **“*ek*,”** meaning out of, shows where the proof is to be drawn from.

The proof will be drawn from not by what you say but by what you do. You will show you are wise by your good behavior. In chapter two James drove home the point that genuine faith must result in good works. Here James makes the same point by saying that if you possess a real and genuine faith, it will be demonstrated consistently with good behavior.

“good” Greek **“*kalos*,”** noble beautiful, attractive.

“behavior” Greek **“*anastrophes*,”** denotes life of movement and action, a turning here and there of daily affairs of life.

True wisdom will be revealed by a noble goodness reflected in consistent behavior. Right living is the mark of true wisdom. Deeds are the test of true wisdom and provide external evidence of God's transforming work and power within. It is our obedience to God, performed consistently day after day, that makes up the “good conduct” of the wise person.²

D. HIS DEEDS IN MEEKNESS- JAMES 3:13D

The truly wise person will not only show works instead of just words, but will also demonstrate deeds with an attitude of meekness.

“gentleness” Greek **“*prautes*,”** gentle, tender, humility, meekness. Used of a wild horse that was broken and made useful to his owner. Power under control.

Wisdom is characterized by meekness. It's a word that is often looked down upon because it is associated with weakness. Many think meekness is the opposite of a strong and confident person. This quality is not prized or appreciated by the world, yet God sees it as a virtue. Jesus Himself was meek (Matthew 11:29) and blessed those who are meek. (Matthew 5:5) Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23), a direct result of God at work in our lives. That is not weakness. The life that is both wise and meek is the one controlled by the Lord Jesus Christ and possesses the attitude which surrenders my selfish *“rights”*. You see, meekness understands our own unworthiness before God and thus a corresponding humility and lack of pride in our dealings with our fellow man. As we understand our position as sinful in relationship to a holy God, this translates and transitions into humility and graciousness towards others. And so our good works are to be done with the attitude of gentleness and meekness. Therefore, a meek and humble life actually becomes the result of godly wisdom at work in our lives. Gentleness must characterize the life of a believer; tender, gentle power under control submitted to God.

Here in this verse, James asks a probing question and then answers it with a challenging command. He insists that good conduct is the basis on which we can demonstrate wisdom in meekness. If you were to answer James' question and your evidence could only be given on the basis of good behavior and deeds done in meekness, how would you fair? Do you value meekness as a virtue as you work in the Capitol? Who among you are wise and understanding? And as you evaluate your life, keep in mind that the evidence is never more important than what it proves...*true faith!*

¹MacArthur, John, MacArthur Commentary on James. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.168.

²Moo, Douglas J., The Letter of James. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.170.