



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## WORLDLY WISDOM: PART 1 JAMES 3:14-16

TO: COLORADO LEGISLATORS, SPOUSES AND THE GOVERNOR

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Dan File, PO Box 1088, Lake City, CO 81235 [dan.file@capitolcom.org](mailto:dan.file@capitolcom.org) Hm- 970.944.2551 Cell- 303.345.8830 Office- 970.944.1088 [www.capitolcom.org](http://www.capitolcom.org)

*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. 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.*

### I. WORLDLY WISDOM: PART 1- JAMES 3:13-18

*James 3:13-18: "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."*

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. 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.

#### A. MOTIVATION OF WORLDLY WISDOM - JAMES 3:14

*James 3:14: "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."*

##### 1. JEALOUS AND SELFISH - JAMES 3:14A

James 3:14-16 are the antithesis of James 3:13. If a person is harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition, that stands in direct contrast to a wisdom from above that displays humility and gentleness. Therefore, if meekness marks a wise man, then bitter envy and selfishness reveal the unwise.

"bitter" Greek "**pikros**," an adjective used of salt or bitter water coming out of a fountain. Pointed, sharp and denotes a bitter or harsh attitude.

"envy", Greek "**zelon**," jealous, zealous.

This word for jealous can have a positive or negative meaning and the adjective before gives us a clear understanding of its implication. This is not

the sort of jealousy we are called to as believers where we are zealous for holiness and purity or where God is spoken as a jealous God calling for our allegiance to Him alone. This jealousy is a desire to possess what isn't really ours. It is an envy which is sharp, cutting and destructive with no regard for others. James is describing the worst kind of jealousy.

"selfish ambition" Greek "**eritheia**," described extreme selfishness.

Originally used by one who spun thread for hire, then one who sowed for hire and eventually used for any work done for personal gain. Only used here in the NT and was used by Aristotle to describe one who sought a high political office or position of influence by unfair means.

"Selfish ambition" then is used by James to describe the self-serving, self-centered, evil attitude of one whose purpose is a self seeking pursuit. This is how a wisdom from the world is displayed. Moo says that Aristotle used the word to describe the narrow partisan zeal of factional, greedy politicians in his own day and this is the meaning here in James 3. Some who pride themselves in their own wisdom and understanding display a jealous and bitter partisanship that is the antithesis of humility which can only come from true wisdom. That one, who, for personal advantage, works to promote a definite cause in an unethical manner. It denotes a willingness to use unworthy and divisive means to promote one's views or interests.<sup>1</sup> This is the direct opposite of the selfless, humble and gentle one who possesses a wisdom that comes from above, a heavenly wisdom. What kind of wisdom does your life reveal? What is your motivation for serving in public office? Is it for some selfish gain or status? Is it to promote your self-serving interests in any way?? Is it for selfish ambition in any way? Remember, the kind of wisdom a person possesses will be revealed by the kind of life he lives.

##### 2. HEART PROBLEM - JAMES 3:14B

Where is the problem found? The problem isn't an external problem. Here in James 3:14, he states, "*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart,*" The problem is with the heart. And Jesus taught that the things which come out of our mouth proceed from our heart. (Matthew 15:18-20) The motivation for why we do what we do is found in the heart. If there is jealousy or selfish ambition in any way, that is a matter of the heart. Remember, bitter water and fresh water cannot proceed from well. What kind of water springs from the well of your heart? Check your heart!

##### 3. DO NOT BOAST OR DENY THE TRUTH - JAMES 3:14C

James places a double demand on his readers as he says do not boast and do not deny the truth if these self glorifying attitudes are present in your life. Granted, the world promotes a self-centered pursuit. But there is no room

### BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAY @ 7:15 AM, RM 0109 – COLORADO STATE CAPITOL

STAFF, LOBBYISTS, SERGEANTS & JOURNALISTS: TUESDAY @ 12:00 PM, RM 271 – COLORADO STATE CAPITOL

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## WORLDLY WISDOM: PART 1

## JAMES 3:14-16

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for such self-serving, prideful attitudes with those who possess a true and genuine faith in Jesus Christ and have a wisdom that comes from above. So James proceeds with his exhortation in James 3:14 with, *“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.”*

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**“arrogant”** Greek *“katakauchaomai”* means to take pride in and put confidence in, boast, prideful, arrogant, to boast over or against somebody or something

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James begins first by instructing us not to boast about being wise when jealousy and selfish ambition reveal a foolish, worldly wisdom.

Then secondly James says do not deny the truth. Literally James was saying not to be lying against the truth. If your life reveals that you possess a worldly wisdom demonstrated by selfish ambition and envy which stems from your heart, then don't be a fool and sin against the obvious truth by boasting about what you don't have. Your selfish actions and attitudes reveal the lie. James rebuked those who claimed to be Christians with a truth they professed to advance, yet repudiated that truth with their lives. Is that contradiction present in your life?

John MacArthur summarized this verse by saying that a professed Christian who is proud, self-centered, boasting, loveless and arrogant is a fraud. To claim otherwise is to lie against the truth, to utterly contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ and teachings of Scripture. There is nothing more characteristic of fallen and unredeemed man than being dominated by self. James is saying that if a person desires to claim to be a Christian and to have wisdom from God, but his/her life is motivated and characterized by selfish ambition and bitter envy, he is simply lying against the truth. Whatever he might be claiming, he cannot be saved and is living a lie.<sup>2</sup> That is a serious accusation you must not ignore for it bears eternal consequences.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 rightly instructs us about boasting. *“Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.”* Truly knowing God and possessing a real and genuine faith is man's highest pursuit. There is nothing greater than knowing God. No self-seeking pursuit or selfish ambition can ever come close.

Do you claim to be wise, to know Christ and yet does your life bear out selfish ambition as you serve in the Capitol? Are you jealous and envious of others in their position of influence or power? Are you willing to seek self-fulfillment at any cost?

We have learned that our behavior is directly tied to wisdom for the kind of wisdom we possess will be demonstrated by the way we live. True wisdom that comes from above will be demonstrated by consistent, godly conduct towards God and man, motivated by humility, love and gentleness. This kind of wisdom is a characteristic of true, saving faith possessing the ability to apply truth to life.

Conversely, James has revealed that the driving force of worldly wisdom is based on self-seeking, self-centered motivation where bitter envy and selfish ambition reign and little or no regard for others exist. James is speaking to you. Examine your life! It is clear from James that these issues are matters of the heart and reveal whether you have a genuine saving faith. If you claim to know Christ, does your life bear out that truth by how you live and what you pursue? What is your motivation for how you live and what you do? Remember, your behavior is tied directly to the kind of wisdom you possess whether worldly or heavenly, for it will be demonstrated by how you live.

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.171.

<sup>2</sup>MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg. 172.