



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

GODLY WISDOM: PART 3 **JAMES 3:17**
TO: COLORADO LEGISLATORS, SPOUSES AND THE GOVERNOR
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Dan File, PO Box 1088, Lake City, CO 81235 dan.file@capitolcom.org Hm- 970.944.2551 Cell- 303.345.8830 Office- 970.944.1088 www.capitolcom.org

Remember, there are only two types of wisdom; an earthly wisdom devoid of God and a wisdom from above that comes from God. James doesn't want you to be deceived. James 3:14-16 reveals an earthly wisdom that fails to consider God, His sovereignty and will. It is limited to what man can discover himself, leaving no room for spiritual truth. When people pursue their own selfish ambitions and personal agenda, this will only bring about conflict, confusion, rebellion, turmoil and disorder. James goes on to describe the broad kind of destruction that results from earthly, human wisdom for it leads to "every evil thing." Contrasted with this worldly wisdom, James makes it clear there is a wisdom "which comes down from above" and is characterized by a humility and gentleness that's heavenly, spiritual and from God. Our study today will focus on a wisdom that's Divine and comes from above.

I. GODLY WISDOM: PART 1- JAMES 3:17-18

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."

Worldly wisdom is evidenced by jealousy, selfish ambition and pride. It is a wisdom rooted in Satan's lies rather than God's truth. James 3:14-16 describes a wisdom that's characterized by the world, the flesh and the devil. It stands in direct contrast to "wisdom that comes from above" characterized by humility and gentleness that's heavenly, spiritual and from God. James 3:17-18 reveals what **godly wisdom is and what it does**. Remember, true godly wisdom will affect the way we live.

A. WHAT GODLY WISDOM DOES - JAMES 3:17

James 3:17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

James goes on to describe the "wisdom from above" by what it does with seven, descriptive characteristics.

1. THEN PEACEABLE - JAMES 3:17

The sure result of a godly wisdom that flows from purity will be manifested by a desire to foster and promote peace. James says, "Then peace". The connecting adverb, "Then", gives a time reference for us. First, comes wisdom with the prominent, internal quality of purity. Only out of purity will the remaining external qualities flow revealing what true and genuine, godly wisdom does; how it lives and loves.

"peaceable" Greek "eirenikos," peace loving, unites, restraining discord and turbulence. Peace, as the blessing of salvation.

This first external quality surging from a wisdom that is pure and holy will be the passion to pursue peace. That begins with the sincere desire to promote right relationships first between God and man and then between men. A divine wisdom is a peace loving wisdom. Proverbs 3:17 shows that peace and wisdom are connected, "all her paths are peace." It means you are ready for peace, desiring and fostering peace, restraining discord and turbulence, promoting right relationships. And it never pursues peace at the expense of purity. It will not compromise with sin to maintain peace but yearns to heal all division with wise counsel.¹

Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Do you yearn for peace, do you desire to foster peace, do you promote peace? It's hard in this world of sharp disagreements, division and spite. But if you are a true believer then this passion for peace will permeate the way you live and speak for it must flow from a godly wisdom that is first pure. While this peace can never be at the expense of purity, nor compromised with sin to maintain it, it is none-the-less pursued. What is your biggest obstacle to fostering a godly peace in the Capitol, in your home, in your community? What difference could it make if restraining discord and promoting right relationships flowed from your life?

2. GENTLE - JAMES 3:17

James 3:17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

"gentle" Greek "epieikes," difficult to translate because there is no English word to describe it, means forbearing, kindly, courteous, indicates a willingness to yield to others, equitable, fair, moderate, considerate. Gives the sense of patience, gentleness, moderation, contentment, mild, settled, sweet reasonableness, big heartedness, very generous, over generosity, charity towards faults of others, mercy towards failures of others, patience when submitted to injustice, mistreatment without malice, bitterness or vengeance, indulging personal failings of others and not be personally offended or bitter. Submits to dishonor, disgrace, mistreatment and persecution with an attitude of courteousness, with an attitude of patience, kindness and consideration. All of this without hatred, malice or revenge. It is being peaceable and gentle. This word knows no revenge. It is the charity towards the faults of others, mercy towards the failures of others. It carries with it patience and the ability to submit to injustice, disgrace, mistreatment without hatred, without malice, without bitterness

BIBLE STUDIES

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and without vengeance. It says, when you have offended me, misjudged me, maltreated me, misrepresented me, you have not given me what I deserve, in fact you have given me what I do not deserve, you have ruined my reputation with some but I humbly graciously accept it and I still reach out in love to you.

Gentle conveys the thought of respect for feelings of others and being willing to waive all rigor and severity in one's dealings with others. This adjective is used mostly of God's disposition as King. He is gentle and kind, although in reality He has every reason to be stern and punitive toward man and their sin.²

Possessing a wisdom that is gentle means that you know when not to apply the absolute letter of the law. Sometimes it may be better to back off rather than press. We are to be marked by this attribute as believers. A gentle person will be humbly patient. A gentle person may at times submit to dishonor and ill-treatment, all for the purpose of pursuing peace and glorifying God rather than protecting self. But it takes godly wisdom to discern a course of action each time. We must always remember that we all deserve judgment for our sin. We don't deserve mercy and kindness yet that is exactly what God gives us in His infinite wisdom and grace. Should we be any less?

Jesus tells the story of a servant who had been forgiven a large debt by his master. Yet that same servant turned around and dealt harshly with one of his own servants who owed him very little, having him thrown in prison for failing to pay his small debt. Matthew 18:24-30 recounts this story which reveals the opposite action of a wisdom that is "gentle".

Which characteristic best reveals the kind of wisdom you possess? Are you gentle? Are you willing to lay down your pride and yield to others if that's what would bring God glory? As a leader with authority, are you humbly patient with others, willing to be courteous and considerate even if that's not how you are treated? This attribute must be motivated and empowered by a godly wisdom. If this quality reflects God's disposition, shouldn't it reflect ours?

It isn't easy to willingly submit yourself to dishonor or abuse, but our Lord willingly subjected Himself to worse injury on our behalf when He went to the cross. Should we expect to be challenged with anything less? Those who possess a wisdom from above understand and live as 2 Timothy 2:24-26 says. Do these verses describe you?

"And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of

the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

3. REASONABLE - JAMES 3:17

Next James says that a wisdom from above is reasonable. As we look at each quality, we must keep in mind that every attribute is balanced and regulated by Scripture, never compromises with sin and always possesses the motive of serving God. So what does James mean by "reasonable"?

"reasonable" Greek "*eupeithes*," easily persuaded, not weak or gullible but showing a willing deference to others, submissive, willing to listen.

One who lives within a godly wisdom will be approachable and always willing to listen. It has the idea of giving deference to one another out of love and being skilled in knowing when to yield. It is the opposite of being stubborn. Reasonable means you are ready to listen and cooperate when a better way is shown. It even goes past this. It's willing to yield without rancor or dispute, teachable, compliant, and not stubborn.³ Keep in mind this is wisdom, not weakness.

Here in James, "reasonable" is a verb which means it's something you do and it's the way you live. So ask yourself, are you ready to cooperate when a better way is shown? Would the ones you serve with in the House or Senate say that you are approachable and willing to listen? Do you know when to yield? Are you willing to be open and reasonable even if ideas come from someone who has slandered you in the past or the suggestion comes from someone across the aisle? Does your life reflect a godly wisdom by being reasonable without resentment or dispute and willing to yield if a better way is shown? There can be no selfish ambition or pride with a wisdom that comes from above! Surely to live this way we need "wisdom from above". Since this wisdom comes from God, God graciously gives this divine wisdom to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

4. FULL OF MERCY - JAMES 3:17

James 3:17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

Jesus uses this word to describe a godly person, for true mercy is demonstrated by acts of compassion for those in need.

"mercy" Greek "*eleos*," compassionate, with the sense of goodness, with special and immediate regard to the misery which is the consequence of sin.

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The believer who is full of mercy (*“full”* meaning an abundant measure of mercy) reveals his/her own transformed life by forgiving those who have wronged him/her and by reaching out instead to help them in whatever ways are needed. Mercy will always deal with what is needed rather than what is deserved for mercy is NOT receiving what we deserve. This is an attribute of God Himself. Mercy stands in contrast to an earthly wisdom which is full of *“every vile deed”* in James 3:16.

Mercy is an attitude of compassion that is genuine towards others leading to practical help and is especially given to those in distress. I remember a time when I was the founder and director of a Christian challenge camp. We had leased an incredible piece of mountain property for nearly ten years where we spent our lives in the outdoors challenging young and old alike to know God and grow in their relationship with Him. The owner of this land was not willing to sell and our lease of ten years was about to expire. He had made it clear that this ministry which God had flourished, was not included in his future plans. Surprisingly, the owner, being desperate, at one point disclosed his severe, financial troubles. Not wanting to lose all he owned, he asked if we knew anyone who could help him. He was in great distress. His financial predicament could actually push him towards having to sell the property and bankruptcy. If we helped him out of his plight, then we might be sealing our own future. Yet, what was the wise course of action for us to take? What would please God? There was no question as we provided the help he needed, putting him in touch with the President of our Board who was a godly, financial planner. After a period of time, a solution was worked out where, with discipline, this owner could be debt free and out from the bonds of crushing debt. If this man would have taken the counsel he was given, he would have been okay. But he didn't, and less than a year later, he was forced to sell his land. God then amazingly provided every penny needed to purchase that land debt free and the ministry continues to this day. Genuine mercy is an attitude of compassion that's genuine towards others leading to practical help, especially towards those in distress. We must be willing to live on this level.

Is your life characterized by a love for your neighbor where it shows itself in acts of mercy? Are you willing to give what is needed even if someone doesn't seem to deserve it? Is compassion the quality you are known for in your home, your community and your state? Jesus said in Matthew 5:7, *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”*

5. FULL OF GOOD FRUITS - JAMES 3:17

Genuine mercy and sincere, godly wisdom will always produce good and beneficial fruits towards others.

“good fruits” Greek *“karpon agathon,”* good expresses the beneficial

nature of the fruit, and plural fruits indicate many and every sort of good work.

Good fruits will result from your words and works if you possess a wisdom that comes from above. There will be many acts of mercy and love in your life that yield a rich harvest of beneficial, good fruits. Does this describe your life? Would others say this is true of you?

6. UNWAVERING - JAMES 3:17

Heavenly wisdom is *“unwavering”*.

“unwavering” Greek *“adiakritos,”* means not to be parted or divided, without uncertainty, indecision and inconsistency, not making partial distinctions.

What is James saying here? The one who possesses a divine wisdom will not vacillate, will not be divided in loyalty or pursuits, remains consistent and constant. This kind of wisdom doesn't take one position in one circumstance and then another position in a different circumstance. Have you ever been accused of that? This type of wisdom isn't rude one moment and kind the next. It is unwavering not making partial distinctions of any kind. Oh that we could live in light of such godly wisdom. Do you find yourself vacillating from time to time? Are you consistent?

7. WITHOUT HYPOCRISY - JAMES 3:17

James 3:17: “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.”

James says lastly that divine wisdom is sincere and never deceptive. It does not put on airs of any kind posing as one thing yet really being something else.

“hypocrisy” Greek *“anypokritos,”* sincere, free from pretense, does not need to work under a mask.

This word came from one who acted as another working under a mask. But a true believer has nothing to hide and is free from pretense and charade of any kind. It remains free from attempting to make a good impression because it is pure and without selfish ambition. This wisdom is transparent which may be a word difficult to live in your position yet you are called to be transparent. In fact, hypocrisy is one of the sins Jesus condemned most frequently. Look at Matthew 6:2-16 and 7:5. This wisdom is completely, wholly genuine.

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Is that the kind of person you are? Are you transparent and wholly genuine? Or are you hiding something, just playing the part of being a Christian yet deep down, it is really a facade? Do you pose or posture yourself in anyway? Most do, but as a believer, you cannot. Peter places hypocrisy in the same category as malice, deceit, envy and slander in 1 Peter 2:1. Those words describe a wisdom that's earthly, natural and demonic with selfish ambition and envy. It does not characterize a true believer that possesses a wisdom from above.

A wise person with wisdom from above will be consistent, stable, trustworthy, and transparent. Their life will overflow with words and works of good deeds. They will be willing to extend mercy giving what is needed rather than what is deserved. They will be ready to cooperate when a better way is shown, approachable and willing to listen. They will be equitable and fair, courteous and considerate, pursuing peace but never at the expense of purity.

Proverbs 9:10 equates wisdom with loving God. Examine your life. Does it bear fruit of a wisdom that comes from above?

¹Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 210.

²Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 211.

³MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.179.