



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Key Requirement for All Leaders (James 3:13-18)

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As the 2013 General Assembly session is well underway, I'm sure the burdens of your office are being felt many times every day. Scores of issues are flying across your desk and call for immediate attention. My prayers and the prayers of many of your constituents are with you during these busy days, that you might sense what is right when making your important decisions.

I'd also like to point out that each day, members of Maryland's federal officers and state General Assembly are listed on a prayer blog so that we all can remember to ask God to bless and guide you regularly. You can find the site at www.pray1tim2.org/states/md.

Without a doubt, the main prayer request I hear from members is for wisdom. With so many crucial decisions to be made and with so many voices trying to convince leaders of what those decisions should be, there is no question that wisdom is desperately needed by anyone in a governmental position. With that as a backdrop, let's turn our attention back to the book of James for a passage that may be as important for public officers as any in the Bible.

James 3:13-18 - Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

I. THE CRUCIBLE OF HUMAN WORKS (3:13)

A crucible is a place of testing and you and I know that the daily living of life is a place where we are constantly tested. We look around us to see how others are handling their tests and we may be inspired by them or disturbed by them. It is also true that we are being watched by others as we live our lives and make our decisions. Why is this so critical?

According to this first verse the display of our wisdom, or lack thereof, shows up in our works. Who has wisdom? One who has conduct that shows he has understanding. But what does he understand? What standard of proof are we looking for as we observe the works of a wise person?

The Bible gives us many examples of those who were wise and unwise, but the standard of wisdom can be found in passages like this, written by **King David** under the inspiration of God:

Psalm 25:8-10 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

These verses are stunning in their clarity. The Lord has revealed himself to us. His ways, his paths, his wisdom are all available to us – what a thought! What is tragic is how often people reject the ways of God. As a society, 21st-century America continues a slide away from the ways of God. His ways are found in his Word. Anyone who is not reading and meditating on the Scriptures, by God's definition will not be wise in their thinking or action.

We also have to acknowledge that the Bible doesn't address every possible situation to give specific guidance in all things. But wisdom from the principles in the Word will lead us to right living.

WISDOM MUST INCLUDE A SENSITIVE, MATURE JUDGMENT OR DISCERNMENT OF HOW THE FEAR OF THE LORD SHOULD WORK ITSELF OUT IN ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES NOT SPECIFICALLY DEALT WITH IN THE BIBLE.
- JOHN PIPER -

You may not even have a Bible. If not, call the phone number above and I will deliver one to you soon! If you do have a Bible, I urge you to spend time daily consulting the source of true wisdom and ask the Lord for his help to apply his ways to your daily life.

II. THE CATASTROPHE OF HOSTILE WORLDVIEWS (3:14-16)

You have seen these qualities in the halls of Annapolis. Bitter jealousy. Selfish ambition. Vile practices. Sometimes these are the things that characterize politics itself. James doesn't beat around the bush when he says these are displays of evil, the antithesis of what godly wisdom is.

You know the temptations of politics much better than I do. The heart is drawn to all kinds of corruption when prestige, pomp and power are on the line. Maybe in our political culture selfishness and jealousy have become accepted, even promoted if one is to advance.

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But if a leader is truly concerned about living a life pleasing to God, this kind of bitterness and ambition must be guarded against, while still carrying out the work of the people.

Scripture tells of many leaders who embodied this kind of unspiritual, demonic, jealous ambition. **Herod** was such a king. After hearing of the birth of Jesus (a rival since he was called “the King of the Jews”), he directed the wise men from the east to find Jesus so he could worship him as well. They found the baby, but were warned in a dream to avoid Herod. Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph, also had a dream that told him to take his family to Egypt until Herod died. What was Herod’s response to all this?

Matthew 2:16-18 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

It’s an extreme example, but the desire to grasp power at all costs pervades the political culture. Our text here in James gives a stern warning to abhor the pull of the heart to corrupt, earthly, human-based “wisdom”.

III. THE CHARACTER OF HEAVENLY WISDOM (3:15-18)

Here is the clear answer to the question we started with: Who is wise and understanding among you? The list starting in verse fifteen is a curse and a blessing to read through. It’s a curse because it is impossible for sinful humans to live out. It’s a blessing because with God’s Spirit empowering a believer, it is possible to have these qualities as a pattern in one’s attitudes and actions. Let’s take a look at the list.

PURE – “Hagnos” is a Greek word meaning immaculate and clean. How often can we truly say that our motives are without deception and pure?

PEACEABLE – A pacific person loves the presence of peace in relationships. The importance of this quality is underlined by James once more when we get to the end of this paragraph when he says, *“A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* In other words, peace doesn’t just happen because there is agreement in the room. True peace is something that is intentional and worked on over time, planted, watered and reaped as a reward after much waiting.

GENTLE – This is from a word meaning equitable, fair, mild. Does this characterize our dealings with others? In the political realm, what would this look like? To be gentle is not to be weak. Great influence can be exerted from one who is truly fair to others.

OPEN TO REASON – Again we see a word that could be considered a weakness by conventional wisdom. It means “easily obedient or compliant”, but can this openness be seen in private deliberations with a colleague or public discussions in committee or on the floor? A good rule of thumb is found in Proverbs:

Proverbs 18:13 - If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS – Mercy is literally “kindness to the miserable”. There are obviously differing opinions in the political arena how to accomplish this goal, but a merciful spirit cannot be hidden from those who watch us. This is the same word used in this verse that presents God himself as the model of mercy:

Ephesians 2:4, 5 - But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved -

IMPARTIAL – The Greek word “adiakritos” carries the meaning “not to be parted”. This is literally someone who is not uncertain or indecisive. A solid moral core is indispensable to the person who must make decisions as a leader. It doesn’t mean that questions shouldn’t be asked or information sought, but the confidence that comes with a decisive nature must be balanced with being “open to reason”. It might remind you of James’ reference to the “double-minded man” who is “unstable in all his ways” from chapter one.

SINCERE – How much sincerity can be found in politics? Relationships that are two-faced do not show wisdom from above. This word means “unfeigned” or “undisguised”. No masks, no obfuscation. No hypocrisy. This word is used six times in the New Testament including this verse in Romans:

Romans 12:4 - Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

This passage may be one the most crucial paragraphs in the Bible that paints a picture of a leader who pleases the Lord. The political sphere is a tremendously difficult place to live this out. I and many in Maryland will continue to pray your wisdom will come from God.