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## Who is Wise Among You?

James 3:13-18

*The inscriptions from Proverbs over the North and South capitol entrances speak of the importance of wisdom for our leaders. Every floor session in the West Virginia Senate and House is opened with prayer. Nearly every one of those prayers has the request for wisdom for our leaders as they make decisions that affect our state. However true wisdom is not really demonstrated in leadership and legislation, but in our attitudes and actions. The New Testament letter from James shows us how we can know if we have true godly wisdom.*

Many consider the New Testament book of James to be a counterpart of the Old Testament wisdom book of Proverbs. If you recall, Proverbs was a book written for the purpose of encouraging every person to pursue wisdom and understanding. It goes on to show how God's principles can be applied to nearly every area of life. James, in much the same way, deals with the practical application of our faith to various areas of our lives. We find in this book a passage that is key in helping us discern the distinction between the true wisdom that comes God and the wisdom of this world.

### James 3:13-18

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

### An Important Question

**"Who among you is wise and understanding?"**

Here are the New Testament words, which are the counterparts to the "wisdom" and "knowledge" we find in the book of Proverbs. James has a pointed answer to his question: one who is wise and understanding will "show by his good behavior". "Show" means to give evidence or proof, and we give evidence or proof of our wisdom by our actions and attitudes.

James also lays out in this opening statement an overriding characteristic of godly wisdom: gentleness. Gentleness speaks of tenderness, and graciousness and is spoken of as a trait that should characterize all believers. It is not weakness but "power under control". What a challenge it is to truly exhibit this characteristic of godly wisdom as you serve here in the Capitol!

### Two Kinds of Wisdom

There are two vastly different kinds of wisdom mentioned in this passage: "**wisdom that is not from above**" (man's wisdom) and "**wisdom that is from above**" (God's wisdom). James goes on to describe these two kinds of wisdom and the results they will have upon our lives.

#### WORLDLY WISDOM

##### Source of Worldly Wisdom

##### Bitter Jealousy

Worldly wisdom springs from an attitude of pointed, sharp jealousy that pursues one's own desires, goals, and ideas at all costs with no thought about the feelings or welfare of others. Anybody or anything that gets in the way of ambition is just an obstacle to be overcome by whatever means necessary.

##### Self-Ambition

Worldly wisdom also comes from an attitude that sees every situation as an opportunity for personal gratification and self-fulfillment. It is derived from a word that originally referred to a day laborer or hired servant and spoke of anyone who did something out of selfish self-interest. Interestingly enough for our study here in the Capitol, this word came to refer to those who serve in official positions for their own

selfish interest, and who, to that end, promote *party spirit and faction*.”

Worldly wisdom is best summed up in the word **selfishness**. James makes the pointed observation that if our lives are characterized by bitter envy and self-seeking, then we cannot say that we are wise and understanding. To do so is to boast and “**lie against the truth**”.

### Description of Worldly Wisdom

James gives us a dramatic description of man’s wisdom when he portrays it as “earthly, sensual, and demonic”. “**Earthly**” simply speaks of that which merely exists upon this earth, that which man can pursue, understand, and accomplish in his own strength and ability. This is the “under the sun” perspective of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, and we need to remember the emptiness that this wisdom brought to his life! “**Natural**” refers to that which is of the flesh. This is the wisdom we have in our old fallen nature as opposed to the new nature we receive from God when we become His children. “**Demonic**” alludes to the wisdom or thinking that comes from Satan himself. This description corresponds to other places in scripture where we learn that the enemies of our faith are the world, the flesh, and the devil.

### Results of Worldly Wisdom

In verse 16, James lays out for us the results of living life with worldly wisdom. We see **disorder** and instability. “**Every evil thing**” refers to that which is worthless, of no account. Again we are reminded of Solomon’s realization that life lived with worldly wisdom is nothing but vanity or emptiness.

## WISDOM FROM ABOVE

### Source of Godly Wisdom

James now turns his attention to godly Wisdom. His term from above describes the wisdom that comes from God and His Word. Throughout our study we have seen that God is the only source of true wisdom.

### Description of Godly Wisdom

**Pure** means clean, pure, or undefiled. It comes from the same word as holy. Some see this as the source from which all the following characteristics flow. First does not just mean first in a list, but first in importance also.

**Peaceable** does not mean the absence of disagreement. We do not foster conflict by selfishness but rather promote peace by our humble attitude.

**Gentle** means we do not respond in anger even in the face of abuse, mistreatment, and persecution.

**Reasonable** does not mean that we are willing to compromise our convictions or beliefs. It refers to our

attitude of reasonableness, even as we may be involved in discussions and disagreements with others.

**Full of Mercy** is described in Strong’s Lexicon as “kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to help them”. One who has true wisdom will realize God’s command and Christ’s example to reach out to those in need.

**Full of Good Fruits** is the good works, actions, and attitudes that are the natural result of our relationship with Christ. This (along with the whole list we are studying) is reminiscent of the fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23

**Unwavering** is a negative form of the word “doubting” in James 1:6 which means to be parted or divided. It can carry the idea of not doubting, or not showing partiality in our dealing with people.

**Without Hypocrisy** challenges us not to say one thing and yet do something else. This is one of the main themes of James’s writing, and he encourages us that Godly wisdom is not something that can be faked!

### Result of Godly Wisdom

In verse 18 James describes the result of godly wisdom as “fruit of righteousness” or “a harvest of righteousness” (ESV). This is the outward expression and demonstration of these qualities in our lives.

## The Important Question

Let’s return to James’ important question: “**Who among you is wise and understanding?**”

James makes it clear elsewhere in his letter that this wisdom, as well as all the other expressions of the Christian life, are a result of the faith we have in Christ. The description of worldly wisdom reminds us how sinful we are. When we repent and place our faith in Christ’s suffering and death for the forgiveness of our sins, our hearts are changed. This change is demonstrated in our changed lives, in our actions and attitudes (see James 2:14-26).

After we come to trust Christ, we are encouraged to grow in wisdom and knowledge and to pray for God to give us wisdom.

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

### BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays, 12:00 Noon

MCMANUS (House) CONFERENCE ROOM

(252-M Located by minority offices near House chamber)