

James 3:13-18  
Earthly and Heavenly Wisdom – 3

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## Introduction

Wisdom is more than knowledge. Knowledge is essential, but wisdom involves how we live according to our knowledge. There are two different types of wisdom. One is of God and is true. With God's wisdom comes blessing. The world also presents a type of wisdom, but it is false. It might seem right in the immediate situation, but it contains the seeds of disaster. James uses wisdom as a test of true faith. Our faith will be evidenced by the kind of life they live.

We have seen that false wisdom is “not from above” but is earthy, fleshly, and demonic. As believers we must recognize that false wisdom is like the “shifting sands”. We must reject it as the foundation of our lives. Rather we must seek out and build our lives on the “true wisdom” which is of God.

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## James 3:13-18

Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup> This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

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## The Motivation of True Wisdom

James 3:17

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

The “wisdom that is from above” refers to God’s own divine wisdom. God gives His wisdom to those who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ. These remaining verses of James 3, which focus on God’s divine wisdom are a refreshing contrast to the “false wisdom” of the world.

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True wisdom is "pure". "**Pure**" carries the idea of being free of contamination or defilement. It was used by the ancient Greeks of a cleansing ceremony whereby a worshiper was made pure and worthy enough to approach the gods. Even the pagans realized that deity should only be approached with a "pure" heart. This Greek word comes from the same root as the word "**holy**". Pure wisdom is holy wisdom for it comes from God.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that, without such purity or "holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

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The sixth Beatitude is, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). John assures us that "And everyone who has this hope in Him (Jesus Christ) purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

The apostle John reminds us, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1 John 3:2–3).

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## The Characteristics of True Wisdom

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The connecting adverb of time “**then**” is the basis for taking “pure” to be a motive for godly wisdom, rather than a characteristic. James gives us a list of seven characteristics of true wisdom.

True wisdom is “peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

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### **True wisdom is peaceable**

**Matthew 5:9** states, “Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.” Those who possess “true wisdom” do not create conflict by their selfishness but produce peace by their humility (Philippians 2:1-4).

The word means “**composed**”, “**tranquil**”, and speaks of one who is at peace with God and seeks to be at peace with others. We can’t be at peace with God and at peace with others unless we have a pure heart. No wonder James says that wisdom is “first pure”.

The apostle Paul says in **Romans 12:18**, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men..” In **Romans 14:19** he says, “Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

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### **True wisdom is gentle**

The Greek word here is more than gentle, it carries the ideas of “equitable, seemly, fitting, fair, moderate, forbearing, courteous, and considerate”. The term was often used in the ancient world to describe a **fine aged wine**. It was not harsh or bitter, but mellow, fragrant, and very pleasing to the taste. The apostle James uses this word here in verse 17 as part of his description of wisdom from above. In contrast to the harsh, critical, strict, and self-centered wisdom of the world, this wisdom was kind, willing to yield, thoughtful, considerate and patient with others.

A gentle person does not deliberately cause fights, but neither does he compromise the truth in order to keep peace.

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### **True wisdom is reasonable**

“**Willing to yield**” means that Godly wisdom is “reasonable”. It is not prideful, nor self-motivated. Therefore, it can yield without disputing. It is teachable, compliant, and not stubborn. The Greek word was used of a man who willingly **submitted to military discipline**, accepting and complying with whatever was demanded of him. It is used in contrast to stubborn and obstinate people who insist on having their own way. It also means a willingness to obey God as we are called into service for Him. It is to pursue the teachings of the Scriptures, and to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A reasonable person is willing to give way on minor and unimportant issues. As the old saying goes: “Don’t sweat the small stuff; keep the big picture in mind.” Such a person takes the first step to resolve potential issues before they become issues. He gives preference to the other person before envy and strife can even become an issue.

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### **True wisdom is full of mercy**

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt. 5:7). The believer who is full of mercy evidences his saving faith and transformed life not only by forgiving those who have wronged him but by reaching out to help them in whatever ways are needed. Like the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), he has concern and compassion for anyone he meets who is suffering or who needs support or assistance. He has special concern for fellow believers, for his brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 3:16–18; 4:7–8, 11).

By contrast, worldly wisdom tends to be self-centered and ego-centered, envying people above them, and treating people beneath them with harshness and disdain.

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### **True wisdom is full of good fruits**

“Good fruits” refers to every sort of good work or deed. The truly wise demonstrates his genuine faith by his authentic good works (James 2:14–20). A believer is known for doing good and for exemplifying the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). In all of this, he reflects his “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt. 5:6).

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### **True wisdom is without partiality**

This Greek word is used only here in the New Testament. It literally means not to be parted or divided, hence without uncertainty, indecision, inconsistency, vacillation, or doubtfulness. The word indicates impartiality; treating everyone equally without favoritism. James has emphasized this spiritual quality in James 2:1-9. The wise man also knows what he believes. He is standing upon the inerrant revelation of God Himself. Therefore he is not the “double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8).

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### **True wisdom is without hypocrisy**

Jesus condemned hypocrisy more than many other sins. He denounced it four times just in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5). He repeatedly challenged the scribes, Pharisees, and other Jewish leaders for their gross hypocrisy and insincerity. He warned His disciples, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).

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## The Results of True Wisdom

James 3:18

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

“Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” This sentence is difficult to translate from the Greek, which literally reads something like, “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” It is possible that James had in mind the idea of fruit being harvested and then, in part, becoming seed, which is resown in peace, and to produces still more fruit, and so on, in the familiar cycle of growing and reaping.

There is a relationship between Godly wisdom, genuine righteousness, and peace. Godly wisdom produces a continuing cycle of righteousness, which is planted and harvested in a peaceful, harmonious relationship between God and His faithful people and between those people themselves. As Isaiah declared, “The work of righteousness will be peace, And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever” (Isa. 32:17).

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## So What ...

The person who professes to be a Christian must prove it by his works, and his daily living. If he is a true believer, he will possess “true wisdom” from God. That wisdom will manifest itself in righteous, selfless, and peaceful living. The Christian has the revelation of God’s wisdom in Scripture and the teacher and interpreter of God’s wisdom in the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul therefore prayed for the church at Ephesus, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph. 1:17). He later admonished them, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise” (5:15). What does your life reveal to the world as they watch you?

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