

## The Way of Wisdom – James 3:13-18

James 3:13-18 (read it)

It's about wisdom today – what it is, what it's not, why it's important

If you remember from James 1:5, wisdom is simply knowledge applied

The capacity to understand a situation, and apply the appropriate truth or take the appropriate action

I believe there are two main thoughts here that James is emphasizing, starting with this . . .

**When it comes to wisdom – don't be a fool (James 3:13,17)**

In Prov 1:22 Solomon personifies W, saying that she cries out in the streets – *How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?*

How long are you going to . . . be a fool, and like it?

. . . Be satisfied with what you already know?

. . . Think you know enough when it comes to W?

. . . Wait around for more to just magically come to you?

The Bible says that W doesn't just happen like that

You don't get more just by eating, sleeping, and breathing each day; You have to . . .

• **Pursue it (Prov 2:1-5)**

You have to go after it; That's the way of W

Prov 4:5 – *Get wisdom; get insight*

2 verses later Solomon says it again – *Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight*

As in, get after it; Pursue; Don't be a fool

James 1:5 – *If any of you lacks wisdom* [and we all do], *let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach* [criticism for not having it], *and it will be given him.*

Prov 2:6-7 – *The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright.*

It's there for the asking; It's at our disposal; But you must pursue it; Go after it

Like Prov 2:1-5 says (read it)

All good things do not come to those who wait; Especially when it comes to W

You must pursue it; The alternative is to remain a fool

When it comes to W, pursue; And as you get it . . .

• **Treasure it (Prov 3:13-18)**

Prov 1:7 – *Fools despise wisdom*

Implying that the wise love it; They treasure it like we just read (Prov 2:1)

That they value it above all else in this world

And no wonder, because look at the benefits listed in Prov 3:13-18 . . .

Blessedness, long life, peace, pleasantness, riches, honor, gain

With that as the potential fruit of W – you'd be a fool *not* to go after it; *not* to treasure it

You'd be a fool not to *prize her highly* (Prov 4:8)

When it comes to W, don't be a fool; Don't ignore the treasure at your disposal

The treasure of W you *have* because you have Christ living *w/in* you

The treasure of W you *have* because you have the word of God in *front* of you

The treasure of W you can have more of, because you have access to God

When it comes to W, don't be a fool – pursue it, treasure it, and . . .

• **Cultivate it (v17)**

Yes, W comes from God; Yes, it's given to us; Yes, we have it

But we must also cultivate it – we must nurture and develop it

And create a climate in the greenhouse of our hearts, within which it will flourish and grow

You know James doesn't list these qualities of godly wisdom in v17 just for info sake

He's well aware that they don't come naturally, and he wants us to cultivate them in order for W to take root in our heart and grow

And it starts with honoring/revering God

Over and over again, the Bible says – *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*

Honoring/revering/worshipping God is where W starts

It starts with putting God on the throne, and you on the floor

It starts with exalting *him* and humbling *yourself*

That's where W starts

And it's from that perspective and that mindset then, that we can cultivate the characteristics of W that James lists in v17, starting with . . .

1. Purity

17 – *The wisdom from above* [from God] *is first pure*

Pure in the sense of being undefiled and clean in your heart/life

You cannot cultivate and apply godly wisdom in your life, if you're living in sin – that's like mixing oil and water

W from above is pure and requires purity in order for it to flourish

That's why people who are living in sin, make such dumb decisions in life

They aren't cultivating the purity necessary for W to flourish/grow

When it comes to W, you must cultivate a soil of purity within which it can grow

The second characteristic of W that we need to cultivate and grow in is . . .

2. Peace

The W from above is *peaceable*, or peace loving – meaning willing to yield

Willing to yield for the sake of peace in a relationship, or peace in our church

Willing to yield in order to live at peace as far as it depends on them

Willing to yield in order to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace

Those who cultivate peace are no strangers to W, as we'll see a little later

3. Gentleness

The person who cultivates this quality makes allowances for the weaknesses, and inabilities, life-situation of others

It's the person who takes the kindest, most tender approach possible, when something else would do just as well

Even to be able to discern such a need for gentleness, let alone show it, reveals a W from above

The way of W is gentle – are you cultivating that?

4. Open to reason

Open to persuasion – King David demonstrated this when his friendly overtures toward a certain Nabal were spurned

So he gathered his men, they armed themselves, and David set out to take revenge. Fortunately, Abigail, Nabal's wife heard of it, and had the courage to meet David beforehand, and urge him to relent, to let it go. And in his anger, you'd think that David would have pushed her aside and pressed on to the battle; but instead, listen to his response in 1 Sam 25:32-33 . . .  
*Blessed be the Lord . . . [and] blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand!*

Even in his righteous anger, David was open to reason and relented – that's W. Just like v13 says, he showed his good conduct in the meekness or control of wisdom. IOW, having cultivated an openness to reason, he restrained his power (that's meekness) and applied the W God had given him.

#### 5. Full of mercy and good fruits

Wisdom is not wisdom *apart* from mercy and good deeds.  
W is not W unless it is *full* of mercy and good fruits.  
The most brilliant philosophers in the world lack wisdom if they lack works.  
The most accomplished theologians lack W if they lack mercy.  
The smartest people you know lack W if they lack compassion and fail to act on it.  
This is just another example of James' unrelenting admonition to tie information to action.

#### 6. Impartial

This is the idea of being objective – objective in judging situations, assessing people, or discerning truth.  
They're not adversely influenced by the madness of crowds, or allegiances with people.

Like Abraham Lincoln, who on one occasion during the Civil War, issued a command to move some military regiments in order to please a certain politician (a person with whom he had an allegiance, a friendship).  
But when Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War received the order, he refused to carry it out saying the President was a fool.  
But when Lincoln got wind, instead of being angry, he was picture of impartiality. And he was quoted as saying this, "If Stanton said I'm a fool, then I must be, for he is nearly always right. I'll see for myself."  
When the 2 men talked, Lincoln quickly realized that his order was a serious mistake, and withdrew it . . .  
Despite the fact that it cut against the grain of his friendship with the politician, He was impartial.

This is a characteristic that requires constant cultivation and honing – because we are so very prone to rationalize our thoughts and opinions.  
W from above is impartial, and last, it's . . .

#### 7. Sincere

It lacks pretense; What you see is what you get in a wise person.  
They're transparent – ever thought of that in connection with W?  
Wise people are transparent people; sincere people; people with no masks.  
People in whom there is no hypocrisy; People in whom there are no secrets.  
How refreshing is that?

- 13 – *Who is wise . . . By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of W.*  
Let godly W control/permeate every single aspect of your life – every decision, every relationship, every situation.  
Do all that you do *in the meekness of W* – make sure it's guided and constrained by sincerity, impartiality, mercy, reason, gentleness, and purity.

When it comes to W – don't be a fool; and second . . .

#### **When it comes to righteousness – don't be deterred (v14-16,18)**

Having just mentioned *peaceable* in v17, it almost seems like an after thought in v18 when he says (read v18) . . .

But on closer scrutiny, I don't think it's so much of an afterthought, as it is an application/summary of what he's just said . . .

That in applying our W, at least the peaceable part of it, we stand to reap/harvest righteousness . . .

And he doesn't want anything to deter us from that, especially bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.

Keep in mind here, the righteousness in view is the same righteousness he talked about in Ch1 – and refers to right conduct/action.

As opposed to the legal righteousness that has been credited to us by God on the basis of our faith in Christ's work on the cross – that's the righteousness as Paul uses it.  
But here it's godly conduct.

And we stand to gain and grow in it, if we apply our God-given wisdom to all of life.

He highlights the peaceable characteristic of godly W, not to imply that it's the only way to a harvest of righteousness . . . (etc)

But to contrast it with the *strife* of unrighteousness – the strife that results from bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.

It's James way of making the point, that when it comes to applying your W, and the righteousness that results – don't be deterred, especially . . .

#### **• By your own selfish ambition**

The *selfish ambition in your hearts* (14); That built-in desire to promote yourself.  
That's why he says, *do not boast* (14b).

When it comes to righteousness – don't let your selfish ambition get in the way.

Selfish ambition that comes oh so naturally to us, doesn't it?

Selfish ambition that leads to subtle boasting.

Know where this shows itself most?

When people lobby for a position in church.

When they serve with the hopes of getting a promotion and working their way up the leadership ladder.

When they hope beyond hope that they'll be a deacon, elder, or staff member someday, and wonder out loud why it's not happening – don't do that . . .

That's selfish ambition.

At best, it's frustrating/distracting; At worst, it will lead to strife, every vile practice-16b.  
And always, it will deter you from a harvest of righteousness.

Serve in the meekness of wisdom, and don't be deterred by selfish ambition.

\*Doesn't mean all ambition is bad

There is an ambition that is very God-honoring because it desires to glorify God in all it aspires to, and all that it accomplishes

That's good ambition, that's godly ambition, that's righteous ambition

But anything short of that, is selfish

When it comes to righteousness, don't be deterred by the selfish ambition of promoting yourself, and don't be deterred . . .

- **By living in denial**

By *being false to the truth* (14)

Like when parents refuse to acknowledge the limit of their kid's ability in sports – they're living in denial

In their denial they wine, complain, manipulate, and stir the pot in order to get little

Frankie more playing time

None of which leads to righteousness on the soccer field

Unfortunately, you see the same thing in church-world from time to time

Where people live in denial about the limits of their ability, thinking they're capable of something they're not

Thinking they have a gift that they don't

Thinking they should serve where they shouldn't

In so doing, they rationalize their situation, ignoring the hand-writing on the wall, and live in denial

The problem is, it doesn't matter what you say to those kind of people, or how you say it – they don't get it, because they don't want to

If they did, it would shatter their little imagination world of God's will for their life

So instead of cultivating a W that leads to righteousness, they perpetuate a foolishness that leads to jealousy; and bitter jealousy at that

Jealousy that will eat you alive, cloud your thinking, and lead to needless confrontations and discussions that waste precious kingdom time

Are you guilty? I hope not; And I'm pretty sure I'm preaching to the choir on this one

But if you are, that kind of thinking (v15) – *is not the wisdom that comes down from above* [it's not W that is conducive to righteousness; W marked by peace], *but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic*

Of all the reasons to lay aside your selfish ambition, and stop living in denial – these rank right up there

Not only do they deter you from a harvest of righteousness, but they're the furthest thing from heaven (*earthly*), they're depraved through and through (*unspiritual*), and they're evil (*demonic*)

- A harvest of righteousness (both in your life, and in our church), grows best in a greenhouse of peace – don't be deterred

And when it comes to W, don't be a fool