

## The Nature of Genuine Wisdom Part 2

*Epistle of James*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 3:13-18, our text this morning. I appreciate your prayers for us last week as we were in South Georgia. We had a marriage conference and I preached at Houston Lake Presbyterian Church near Warner Robins and it was a wonderful time with the body of Christ there, dear friends of mine and Patti's that we went to seminary with, Paul and Connie B. I really appreciate their ministry. They've been there for about 15 years and a wonderful church. Thanks to Jess in preaching the word. I got to listen to the message myself this week and was blessed, Ephesians 3. So praise God for the beauty of his love that we just sang about, the amazing love of God, love of Christ that is beyond our ability to comprehend.

Well, James 3:13-18, we continue a message we began two weeks ago called "The Nature of Genuine Wisdom." That's the title of the message this morning, so it's the nature of genuine wisdom, part 2. We see in this passage that James is confronting, as he's often doing, he is confrontational in his style throughout his letter. He seeks to confront our pride and complacency. He understands that we, as Christians still having an old nature, we tend to overestimate our spiritual wisdom, underestimate our problems and overestimate our abilities, and then he also is aware that some who profess faith don't genuinely have faith, are only marked by false wisdom. But he wants us to examine ourselves. He asks a question at the beginning of the verse that we're going to read in a moment, "Who among you is wise and understanding?" Basically he says, "Let him prove it. Let him prove that he's wise and understanding." He says, "You think that you're doing pretty well in your understanding of the doctrines of the Christian faith? Well, examine yourself. Prove that you're doing well. Prove that you have wisdom." And the way that you will prove that you have wisdom, or the way that you'll see if you have wisdom, is you look at your life.

One of the things James understands about his readers, he's writing to mostly to a Jewish audience in the first century, Jewish believing audience in the first century, but who have been influenced by Hellenism, who have been influenced by the Greek culture. Hellenism is the influence of the Greek culture upon all the various people groups in the Mediterranean area, Greco-Roman culture. And Greek culture, they loved wisdom. They loved philosophy. They loved to pontificate and to theorize about the meaning of life, the meaning of our existence. We read from 1 Corinthians 2 where Paul is writing, a passage

that Jess read earlier is from his letter to the Corinthians where he's writing to Corinth which is in Greece, and he understands that they love wisdom and he's writing to believers to remind them that we are not manifesting a wisdom of this age; we're not seeking an earthly wisdom, we are seeking a wisdom from above, the wisdom of God, which is something that the world sees as foolishness, but in reality it is the power of God.

So James understands that the men to whom he writes, the churches to whom he writes, struggle with this issue of looking at wisdom the wrong way and then he knows just because of our pride, even though their Jewish background, you know, Jewish wisdom is different than Greek wisdom in two predominant ways. Jewish wisdom or biblical wisdom, better to say biblical wisdom versus the Greek idea of wisdom or man's wisdom, biblical wisdom begins first with the fear of God. It is God-centered. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," Proverbs 9:10; that you can't be wise until you, first of all, come to see yourself before a holy God. That's the beginning of wisdom, so that's the first thing about God's wisdom or biblical wisdom, it's God-centered, it begins with the fear of the Lord. The second thing about biblical wisdom is it is intensely practical. It's not theory or theoretical, it's practical. Wisdom is essentially knowledge applied to life skillfully. So biblical wisdom is seen in your actions, not seen so much in what you say or what you know, but in what you do. Fits right along with James's whole theme in his letter, doesn't it, to be doers of the word, not to be merely hearers.

So he says there is a tendency for us to think that we know more than we really know because we judge knowledge in man's way, the worldly way of just how much content, intellectual content do I have; how much theological understanding do I have. You can imagine he asked, "Who among you is wise in understanding?" I mentioned a couple of weeks ago the study that someone did, they asked people, "Rate yourself: below average, average, above average," and 90% of the respondents replied that they were above average. Ninety percent of the people are above average, that's impossible and it says something about our fallen condition. Everybody thinks they're doing better than they are.

Well, our problem is the same thing. We can tend to have complacency and pride over what we know, what we think we know, and James says, "Listen, you need to examine yourself. True wisdom is seen in her deeds." That's what Jesus said in Matthew 11 when he actually mentioned that the Pharisees were accusing him of being a drunkard because he came drinking and eating. He says, first of all, John the Baptist came fasting and you said about him he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you say he's a drunkard. But wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. That is, you can look at these surface things but you will see true wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. Basically what he's saying to the Jewish people, he's saying the Pharisees and the religious leaders are telling you that John the Baptist was wrong, that I am wrong, that we were not teaching the truth. They're saying, "Listen to us. Listen to the Pharisees. Listen to the chief priests." And Jesus says, "The way that you can know who to listen to is look at their deeds." John the Baptist, the holy life. Christ, a perfect life.

Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. That's essentially what James is saying. He says, let's read these verses together, James 3:13-18.

13 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.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we ask that you might grant us according to the riches of your grace because of the death of your Son and his blood which pleads for us, that you might grant that the eyes of our hearts might be enlightened that we might see your truth and apply it to our hearts that we might be possessors of wisdom, that we might walk in ways that please you, that you might be glorified in increasingly holy lives. We ask this in the name of your Son. Amen.*

The nature of genuine wisdom. So James essentially says, "If you think you have wisdom, prove it." We saw last time, you see, basically what he does is he says, "There are two types of wisdom. There are just two types. There is the kind of wisdom that comes from above that is God's wisdom, and there is a kind of wisdom that comes from below," as he says in verse 15, "that is earthly, natural and demonic." Only two kinds.

Now, he tells us how to tell the difference because apparently it's not that easy on the surface of it to tell. You might think it would be but he's saying, "No, it's very easy to be confused about this. It's very easy to think that earthly, natural, demonic wisdom is actually God's wisdom. You can actually be deceived into thinking that. That's why I'm writing this. You can be deceived into thinking about yourself, that you possess God's wisdom when you don't possess God's wisdom. You can be deceived about it when you look at other people." Which is essentially why Jesus was telling them, "You may think the Pharisees and the religious rulers have wisdom, they do not." As he said in another place, "How do you tell who to follow? False prophets are known by their deeds." Look at the life, is essentially what James is saying.

There are two types of wisdom, true wisdom and false wisdom. The wisdom from above and the wisdom from below. The question is: how do you recognize genuine wisdom? How do you tell the difference between true wisdom and counterfeit wisdom? We saw last time we talked about that he basically puts two main points before us. He says this is what false wisdom looks like. This is how you can tell the difference between genuine and false wisdom. First of all, let me show you what false wisdom looks like, and he does that in verses 14 to 16. False wisdom is inward essence. The attitudes of false wisdom

though somebody may have a lot of theology, they may be impressive in the way they can argue for various points of doctrine, they may be able to argue people under the table, but he says that doesn't mean they have the wisdom from above.

How will you know if they have the wisdom from above? Well, one of the ways you'll know that they don't have the wisdom from above, they may have all the theological i's dotted and t's crossed, but if bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are the things you see in their attitudes, you can know that's not true wisdom. The inward essence is that bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, and then the outward evidence we saw was disorder and every evil thing. They create conflict all around them. Now, the truth, true wisdom does at times create conflict because truth, light, darkness hates light. So sometimes we see, we all are going to see conflict but this is self-generated, self-exalting conflict; people that get angry because, really, you're trampling on them. Selfish ambition and jealousy.

So how do you recognize false wisdom? You recognize it when you see this kind of character flaws in ourselves or in others. That's what we saw last time. So he says this is how you recognize false wisdom, now we're going to look today at how you recognize true wisdom because that's really what he does in the bracketing of this passage. In verses 14 to 16, those three verses in the middle talk about false wisdom; verses 13, 17 and 18 talk about true wisdom and present a portrait, a sketch of true wisdom. Verse 13, "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." Verse 17 and 18, you see, he begins to work it out even a little more, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Essentially he does the same thing. He says that you can know true wisdom by its inward essence, the attitudes that you see there, and in a word, the inward attitude is meekness, and you can know true wisdom because you will see people whose lives are righteous, verse 18, and who are always sowing peace. That's what true wisdom looks like. So you may have somebody that has great theology but they are always argumentative and angry and bitter at people for disagreeing with them. Not true wisdom. True wisdom is meek.

What we want to do today, we can't really unpack all of this this morning. We're going to take I think this week and next week to really look through this character sketch of true wisdom, but what I want us to do this morning is try to cover a good part of that and what I want to do is, first of all, two points. The two points are, well the first point is: the inward essence of true wisdom. The inward essence of true wisdom. In a question you could say: how do you recognize genuine wisdom? Well, by its inward essence.

So the inward essence of genuine wisdom is meekness. Now I use the word "meekness" because that's really the better translation of the word in verse 13. I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible which is the pew Bible you have in the row there. There should be one or so in each row. It says, "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." Really the NASB should have said "meekness," in my view. The NIV did the same thing. The King James and the ESV got this right. Meekness, it's a much better word for this Greek word here.

So that he's saying, though, so let's substitute "meekness." When you see "gentleness" it's "meekness." So "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the meekness of wisdom." I think he shows you it's an interesting process he describes here. He is basically saying in verse 13 that if you have wisdom, its fruit, its immediate thing it produces is meekness. In fact, you can look at it, he says if you want to show that you have wisdom, you need to show by your... Look at this, your good behavior, it starts at the outside; your deeds, the works that add up to good behavior; and those deeds or works come out of meekness, they flow from meekness; and meekness comes out of wisdom. So wisdom produces meekness, meekness produces works that add up to a good lifestyle. You can see it in someone's life. So do I have godly wisdom? you ask yourself. Do I possess it? What does your life look like? Are you meek and does your meekness come out in everyday life? That's the question.

Meekness. True wisdom always produces meekness. That's, I think, the point of the gentleness of wisdom or the meekness of wisdom. The "of wisdom," that phrase, is meant to tell us the origin of the word that comes before it. "Of wisdom" is telling you the origin of gentleness or meekness. Meekness comes, originates, in wisdom. So wisdom always results in meekness. So wisdom's essence is meekness.

Now let's talk about what meekness is. The word is defined by Spiros Zodhiates in his "Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament" in this way. He said, "Meekness is seen not in a man's outward behavior only." It is seen there but it's not seen, it's not understood in a man's outward behavior only, "nor in his relations to his fellow man. Rather it is an inwrought grace of the soul and the expressions of it are primarily toward God." That the essence of meekness is an attitude toward God. That's why I think gentleness isn't the best translation. Gentleness is more concerned with the outward manifestation of the inward reality so it's a part of it, but it's focusing on not the main thing. Meekness is the main thing. It's the heart.

He goes on to say, "It's the attitude of the Spirit where we accept God's dealings with us as good and do not dispute or resist." We see our lives before God in such a way that whatever he does we're not going to dispute. We believe that whatever he does is right and good. This means and this then turns into gentleness because this means when somebody insults you, you see it as from God at first. They may be wrong. You may have to even speak back in a way that says, "I think you're wrong." Maybe have to reprove them, but there is a different attitude because you first of all see it from God.

You remember when David is making his way along the way and, I forget, Doeg the Edomite, I think it was, curses him and starts hurling curses at him, and the guys with David are like, here's the king and he's with part of his army, and here's this nut that just decides he's going to start hurling insults at him. "You're a loser! You are a bum! You should never have been," whatever he said. We don't have the content of what he said and the guys with David say, "Do you want me to cut this guy down? Let me just go over there and just kill him right now." And David says, "No. The Lord has appointed him to do this." Now later he does get it, by the way. Eventually the Edomite guy, he gets it, but

David receives it first from God. "The Lord is chastising me." Because for a man to sit there, it's like he's committing suicide right here in front of us. "God is doing this. He's chastising me." So he receives the chastisement and he's able to be patient with the guy and gentle.

It's because, you see, everything comes from God's hand. That's what meekness is, it's to see everything from God's hand. Everything that happens, every small thing, every large thing is from the hand of God, and if that's the case, my first response is to ask, "What are you doing, Lord, in this situation?" Do you see how that changes everything?" No matter what, you know, your spouse says something to you or someone says something to you that it sounds like maybe there is something there in it, there is anger, there is harshness, whatever. "What are you doing, Lord? Why have you let this happen to me right now? What's your purpose in this?"

Radically changes the way you respond and meekness is to know that I don't deserve any better than what I'm getting right now. I think that's what David was saying. "The guy is hurling insults at me. I know what kind of sinner I am. He doesn't know the half of it." Now he shouldn't be doing it. He's being very foolish but he doesn't know the half of it. When a person is really broken before God, then when insults come there is a sense in which we can agree with it and we don't come back combatively. Pride wants to exalt itself. Humility and meekness humble themselves.

So the essence of wisdom is this kind of meekness. You can see it's the opposite, complete opposite of jealousy and selfish ambition. It's not about self-exaltation. In fact, it's fully embodied, we're told Moses was a man of incredible meekness and you read back through Exodus and Numbers and Deuteronomy and you see that. The people are constantly rebelling against him and his patience. You know, they'd rebel against him, God would threaten to destroy them, and Moses would pray for them. Right away pray for those people that had just been cursing him. How does he do that? He's meek. And Jesus, of course, was the full embodiment of meekness. He says in Matthew 11:28, this is a beautiful thing about our Savior, he says, listen to this, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. For I am gentle, I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and I'm meek and lowly of heart." You can take my yoke upon you and learn from me. You can come and be my servant because I'm telling you I am meek and lowly myself and I will be gentle with you. That's why you can go to Jesus. He is a glorious Savior.

So we need to be like him and that's what he's saying. Meekness is always the fruit of genuine wisdom. If you don't have meekness, you don't have genuine wisdom. If you're not growing in meekness, you're not growing in genuine wisdom. It means when you come to know truth, knowledge, I mean, there are so many wonderful things to learn about God and about his ways, but there is the possibility of learning these things about God and his glory and his ways in such a way that it does not impact our life, and when that happens, that is not wisdom. That is deadly. Knowledge puffs up. Knowledge can inflate our pride. You can become more and more astute theologically and yet look more

and more ungodly at the same time. What a horrible thing. James is trying to wake us up out of that. If that's where you are, he's waking you up out of that. If you think you're wise and understanding, if you think that you're moving on in your Christian life, well, where is your obedience? How do you treat the people around you?

The inward essence of wisdom, its inward essence is meekness. Now, what I want to do for our second point is ask the question: where does wisdom begin? Where does wisdom begin because verse 17 is continuing to unpack for us what the wisdom from above is like. We're trying to recognize what true wisdom looks like and so we've said its inward essence is meekness but verse 17 shows a process of how wisdom is developed and manifested. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy." There are seven things that are said about the wisdom from above in that passage, and I think the first is emphatic. In fact, the way it's written, the wisdom from above is first pure, and then it's these other six things. It's first of all, the NIV says it that way. It's first of all pure and then after that. That's really the force of the conjunctions here. The adverb "first" means "first of all it's pure, and then after that, after you've got that, it's peaceable, gentle, reasonable," all the way down. You see there is great emphasis on that first one.

You have to start with pure. If you don't get that right, you're not going to get anything right, he's saying. In fact, the way these words are used, the "first" and "then" translated in the English, wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, it pictures a process. In fact, it's used in Mark 4:28, the same word "first" and "then." Jesus is talking how crops grow and he says think about the way crops grow. First the blade, then after that, the head, then after that the mature grain. So it's a process and I think James has in mind something of that agricultural image when he even is sharing this because he uses the word "fruit" twice in verses 17 and 18. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits," and look at verse 18, "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Talking about sowing of seeds and the growing of the fruit.

So where does wisdom begin? He's essentially helping us with how do you make sure that knowledge about God does not turn into dead knowledge that just merely puffs up? How when you learn things about God and his ways does it become true wisdom that changes your life? He's acknowledging that it's very easy for that not to happen and that this word "pure" is at the beginning of that. You must, first of all, seek purity. This word "pure" pictures, it's a word which means "to be ritually pure; to be clean and able to go into the temple to worship." It's a word which speaks of purity not so much as cleanness from dirt but in a sense of a religious way. You're clean and pure and able to enter into the presence of God. It's about communion with God.

So wisdom must first be pure. It must be about communing with God. I read a quotation by John Street last week or two weeks ago when we last preached on this, which shows that there is this tendency to learn for the sake of learning and not learn for the sake of godliness. He says this, "If we had more men in seminary studying God's word, if we had more men in seminary studying God's word for greater sanctification than for mere

scholarship, we'd have less pastoral failure in the churches. Biblically or biblical scholarship is only good if it leads to greater holiness. Pray for the godliness of men in seminary." John Street.

Biblical scholarship is only good if it leads to holiness. To learn and to not live out what you learn is deadly and damaging and that's what James is warning us against, and it's much easier to do than you think. I remember hearing, I was getting ready to go off to seminary when I was 24 years old, Patti and I moved to Jackson, MS and started attending Reformed Theological Seminary. I was so excited to be going off. Just to go and spend time studying the Bible and theology as my job for three years. I mean, you know, little part-time work. Basically my wife put me through seminary with help from my folks and others.

Anyway so my job was to study. Man, I was fired up. I couldn't believe it. "This is going to be so awesome!" I can't wait to get there. I remember an older pastor telling me, he said, "I want you to be very careful as you go. There is going to be a great, you'll be amazed at how dry seminary can be spiritually." I thought, "There's no way! I mean, thank you, sir, for telling me." I didn't tell him that way, but I was thinking in my heart, "There is no way. It's not going to happen to me, to be able to study the things of God, that's going to be incredible!" But he was exactly right. There is something very dangerous about learning and not obeying. There is something very dangerous about learning and not drawing near to God in the process that puffs up and deadens and it can appear to be wisdom because of what you know, but the truth of wisdom is seen in her deeds.

How can you learn, though? So knowing that, it shouldn't just make us not want to learn. "I don't want to learn. It's dangerous." Some people want to do that. "I know enough to get to heaven. I don't need to know anymore." That is not the mindset of a true disciple of Jesus Christ because a disciple of Jesus Christ is by definition a learner. That's what the word "mathetes, disciple" means. It comes from the verb "manthano" which means "to learn." So when Jesus says, "I'm calling you to be my disciples," he says, "I'm calling you to be a life-long learner." And how do we make disciples? We baptize them and we teach them "to observe all that I have commanded you." It's a life-long teaching ministry and learning ministry to be a disciple.

So we have to learn. It's a good thing to learn. Truth, the word of God is that which has all power but how can that which is so good be possibly damaging? It's when we come to it with the wrong attitude. We must be careful how we learn.

J. I. Packer has a very helpful word about this in his book "Knowing God." In the first, actually in the introduction, he says, "How are we to do this?" He's talking about the difference between and listen to this, "The difference between knowledge about God and knowledge of God." Here's the difference he said, "How are we to do this? How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God? The rule for doing this is demanding but simple: it is that we turn each truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God leading to prayer and praise to God. We have some idea,

perhaps, what prayer is but what is meditation? What does it mean to meditate about something before God? Well, we may ask for meditation is a lost art today and Christian people suffer grievously from their ignorance of the practice. Meditation is the activity of calling to mind and thinking over and dwelling on and applying to one's self the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God." I want to say that again. This is what meditation is: it's the activity of calling to mind and thinking over and dwelling on and applying to one's self the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. He goes on to say, "It's an activity of holy thought consciously performed in the presence of God under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. Its purpose is to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart and life."

That is what it is. It's not just learning about God and rejoicing that now I know something wonderful about God. Not even isn't it amazing that God is like that. It's turning it from a third person thing into a second person thing. "God, I'm amazed that you are like that and then I see this about you, I want to worship you and love you more. I want to surrender to you more. I want my life to conform to what you've shown me." That is what makes the difference. That's the genesis of true wisdom and that's what he's talking about when he says it's first of all pure. Think about that. You learn something, truth comes, but how does it become wisdom? It's first of all pure. What is pure? Pure is something that you're trying to do so that you can be in the presence of God. So you're taking truth and you're wanting to take that into the presence of God. You're wanting this truth to purify you so that you can go into the presence of God more fully. It's the idea of increasing our communion with God.

Now, it's important for us to understand this. The Gospel of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, the fact that when you become a believer, in the truest sense you are justified and you are sanctified even, in one sense, in Christ and what Christ has done. That is, you're made holy. That's what sanctified means. You're made fully holy before God, as holy as you will ever be positionally before God at the moment you believe. That is, you can't become more holy than you are because you're robed in the holiness of Jesus. This is your standing and your performance doesn't affect that. Your sin today, tomorrow, the next day, does not change your standing of holiness before God. But there is another aspect of sanctification but that's positional sanctification, what's yours because of Christ through faith. The other aspect of sanctification we could call experiential and that is your growth in making your life more and more conformed to the word of God by the grace and power of God. It's all by Christ's power again, the Spirit working, the word working, but making yourself more experientially holy does make an impact on your experience of his presence. This is why as Christians we can find ourselves very distant feeling from the Lord. It's not always the case but often, most often it's the case is we've been sinning, we've not been keeping short accounts with God; we've not been seeking him in his word like we ought to; we have not been praying; we have not been pursuing him, and we find that we have less experience of his presence.

Now, positionally, nothing has changed. He still sees you, if you have repented and placed your faith in Christ, he sees you as if you had never sinned, as if you were clothed

in the righteousness of Jesus, but experientially, he's dealing with you according to the way that you're living. He is disciplining you and the reality is we can grow in our experience of his presence and this is what he's saying, we need to come to the word of God with the first goal, "Lord, I want to know you more so that I can dwell in your presence more. I want your word to purge me and to purify me. I want it to cleanse me because in cleansing me it will make me more able to stand in your presence."

Turn over to John 14. When we were going through John's Gospel this was a verse that really impacted me in a way I hadn't seen before. Interesting in the context too. Verses 21 to 23 are what we're going to look at. "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, 'Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.'" Very helpful and interesting picture. He's telling us that when we love Christ, when we believe, when the Spirit comes to dwell in us, at faith the Father and the Son come with him. This is why Jesus can say though his body is in heaven, his physical human body is in heaven, remember he says to them, actually earlier in this chapter he says, "I'm going away and where I'm going, you can't come." In fact, in verse 2 he said, "I'm going to prepare a place for you. I'm going to prepare a dwelling place for you in heaven." That's the wonder of what Christ is doing for us. We're going to have a place to dwell in heaven, a wonderful place to live in heaven. But then he uses the same exact word for dwelling place. "I'm going to go and prepare a place for you in heaven." He uses the same exact word for "place, dwelling place" in verse 23. We will come to him. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling place with him." Jesus is going to prepare a dwelling place for you but in Christ, in the Spirit, he's going to come and dwell with you. The picture is our hearts are the dwelling place of God the Father, Son and Spirit; that he comes and dwells with us.

Experiential sanctification is making your heart and your life a better home, more accommodating for God so that you can experience his presence and this is the motivation of why we should want to be holy, to please him and to make a place for him. The reason I want to put off more and more of my sin, the reason I ought to want is not so that God will accept me because I'm already accepted in Christ. Nothing can change that. I'm not trying to earn my salvation. But the reason I should want to put off more and more of my sin is to please him and to experience in loving him, to experience more of his presence in my life. "I want more of you, Jesus. That's why I want to lay this down and be holy."

That's what James is talking about when he says, "It's first of all pure." It's that we're trying to take the wisdom of God and the first thing I want to do is apply this knowledge to this still sinful heart and I want to clean it up. Isn't it challenging? Isn't it amazing how when you hear a message, how easy it is to think, "I wish So-and-so was here today." Or, "I can't wait to share this with them. They really need this." And you may be right, right? They really may need it, but meekness and genuine wisdom is always first saying, "Lord,

it's me. It's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer. I'm the one who needs to be helped. I'm the one who needs to be cleansed. Let this word come and wash me. Purify my heart, O God. Cleanse me. There is so much that's wrong in me. Cleanse me and make my heart more accommodating and pleasing to you." That's what makes the difference. That's where genuine wisdom begins and if we don't get that right, we don't get genuine wisdom. We get some sort of knowledge that puffs up. But if we get this, we will get everything else that follows after it.

I mean, think about, you know, have you ever had, I'm sure some of you have had this. Some of you probably have not. Some people, you get in their car and you think, "Did you just take this and have it detailed?" You don't ever think that unless you get in my car after I just had it detailed. You don't normally think that, did he just do it. Some people are just really, you know, better at that, but most of us are not as good at that and some of us in varying grades, right? You sit in somebody's car sometimes and, like, there is stuff there. You go to ride in their car in the passenger seat and they've got the things that they were carrying, maybe there is even like a cup there, and imagine they don't remove it for you. "I can't sit here." No, nobody does that, right? If you want somebody to ride in your car, one of the first things you do is you begin apologizing, "Hey, I'm sorry. My car is a mess. We're going to have to move stuff. Just give me a minute." And you move things and you make room for this person so they can sit and feel comfortable and no matter how messy it is, you do what you have to do to make it acceptable so that this person will feel comfortable in your car. That's what a civilized person should do, right? I haven't had an experience where somebody didn't do that for me, by the way. I'm not embittered about that. Anyway.

No, but think about our life. Essentially we should be thinking about, "How can I make my life more pleasing to my Savior? More accommodating to him? More delightful for him to be here? Lord, I know there is so much wrong with me but help me. By your word, cleanse me. Show me how to put stuff off and put on the right things and make my heart your home in making it more pleasing to you." When that's the essence of how we approach the word of God and learning truth, that's going to always lead to a change of life. That's when you're actually hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Remember what Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." When we are hungering and thirsting after righteousness not for the wrong motive, not trying to earn our salvation, but hungering and thirsting after righteousness because we love our Savior, we want to be pleasing to him, we want our lives to be more accommodating to God that we could be more full of his fullness, so when we come to the word every time the word is taught, every time we have an opportunity to sit under, every time that we are talking to another brother and they share something with us, wisdom, true wisdom, the mind that is set on wisdom humbles yourself under that word and says, "Lord, teach me. Teach me."

One of the blessings of being a pastor through the years is seeing how God works through his saints to encourage ministers. One of the ways he does that is by people who really

have genuine wisdom and a lot of it as they mature in the Lord, and you preach a bad message that's not clear and maybe you're thinking but they got something out of it because they were so hungry for the truth that they put themselves under it and genuinely were blessed and they were able to come up and share it with you, and they tell you what it meant to you and you say, "I wish it sounded like what you just said."

But praise God, to the pure all things are pure. When your heart is set on the Lord, he's going to bless you and this is the heart of genuine wisdom. Genuine wisdom is humble and teachable. It's meek and it strives after purity. Then when you get purity, what you're doing then is you're living your life before the face of God. "I want to be in your presence." And we're talking about genuine wisdom, remember? Doesn't that sound like the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom? "I want you, Lord. I want to walk before you in more holiness. Help me. Give me your word for that reason." Then God is going to give you wisdom. He's going to show you how to apply it and then after that, these other things come. James is going to unpack for us in the rest of this section, after you get purity, first pure, then peaceable and gentle and reasonable and full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy. These things follow after.

We'll take time next week to unpack those but this week, let's focus on, "Lord, make me diligent to apply my heart to wisdom. Every time I read your word, every time I hear your word, make me diligent to put myself under it and to be more holy for your glory." that we might study God's word for greater holiness.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we're grateful that you are a God of grace and mercy. We confess our sinfulness, our foolishness. We confess our pride, our complacency. Too often we think we're doing fine and we're like the Laodicean church who said they had no needs and yet they didn't know that they were naked, poor and blind. Father, help us. Help us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Help us humble ourselves under your mighty word. And help us focus when we come to you and your word, all our hearts on you and obeying you for your glory. Make us like Jesus. Make our lives testimonies to the beauty and glory of following him, such a glorious Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.*