

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-15-15 AM NOTES  
“WISDOM: WORLDLY OR GODLY?”  
JAMES 3:13-18  
#11 in Series, “James: Practical Wisdom”

**2 Timothy 3:15a (NKJV)** “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise...”

**Proverbs 2:6a (NKJV)** “For the Lord gives wisdom...”

**Proverbs 4:7a (NKJV)** “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom.”

**Proverbs 9:10 (NKJV)** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

**Proverbs 16:16a (NKJV)** “How much better to get wisdom than gold!”

**Ephesians 1:17 (NKJV)** “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.”

**Colossians 1:9 (NKJV)** “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

**Colossians 2:3 (NKJV)** “in whom [Jesus] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

**1 Corinthians 8:1b (HCSB)** “Knowledge inflates with pride, but love builds up.”

\*Knowledge is needed to pass the test in school; wisdom is needed to pass the test in life.

\*Knowledge is learned; wisdom is given.

\*Knowledge comes by looking around; wisdom comes by looking up.

\*Knowledge comes by study; wisdom comes by time with God. —Adrian Rogers

**James 1:5 (NKJV)** “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

**1 Corinthians 1:30a (NKJV)** “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God...”

**1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (NKJV)** “<sup>6</sup> However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. <sup>7</sup> But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.”

I. The Evidence of Wisdom (v. 13)

**Matthew 5:5 (NKJV)** “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

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2. Self-Seeking

**Philippians 2:3 (NKJV)** “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

B. The Origin of Worldly Wisdom (v. 15)

1. Earthly
2. Sensual

**1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)** “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”

**Jude 1:19 (NKJV)** “These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.”

3. Demonic

Demonic—“Such as Satan breathes into the Soul” (John Wesley)

**Genesis 3:5 (NKJV)** “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

C. The Outcome of Worldly Wisdom (v. 16)

1. Confusion

**1 Corinthians 14:33a (NKJV)** “For God is not *the author* of confusion...”

2. Every Evil Thing

III. Godly Wisdom (vv. 17-18)

A. The Origin of Godly Wisdom (v. 17a)

1. The Living Word of God—Jesus Christ

**John 1:14a (NKJV)** “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

**1 Corinthians 1:24b (NKJV)** “...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

**1 Corinthians 1:30a (NKJV)** “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God...”

**Colossians 2:3 (NKJV)** “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

2. The Written Word of God

**Colossians 3:16a (NKJV)** “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...”

**2 Timothy 3:15 (NKJV)** “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

B. The Operation of Heavenly Wisdom (v. 17b)

1. Pure
2. Peaceable
3. Gentle
4. Willing to Yield
5. Full of Mercy and Good Fruits
6. Without Partiality
7. Without Hypocrisy

**Matthew 5:7 (NKJV)** “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

C. The Outcome of Heavenly Wisdom (v. 18)

**Proverbs 3:13a (NKJV)** “Happy is the man *who* finds wisdom...”

**James 1:5 (NKJV)** “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

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“WISDOM: WORLDLY OR GODLY?”

JAMES 3:13-18

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Knowledge is increasing at a rate that makes one's head swim. Author and futurist Buckminster Fuller created the “Knowledge Doubling Curve”. He noticed that until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today, nanotechnology knowledge is doubling every two years and clinical knowledge every 18 months. But on average human knowledge in general is doubling every 13 months [www.industrytap.com].

Here is a question for you to ponder. Has this mind boggling increase in knowledge made our lives better in the areas that really count? I would propose that while knowledge has increased at an incomprehensible rate, wisdom has generally decreased. When I speak of wisdom, I am not speaking of simply processing factual knowledge, but of the consistent applying of truth to things that really count in everyday life. Let's think back 200 years. Are marriages better than they were in 1815? Are people more content than they were in 1815? Is there more genuine love in the world than there was in 1815? Is the state of mental health better than it was in 1815? Are there fewer wars and national conflicts than there were in 1815? Is there more peace in the hearts of people than there was in 1815? I suggest that while we have grown exponentially in knowledge, we have digressed in the area of real wisdom.

If you desire wisdom, you need go to the Scriptures. **2 Timothy 3:15a (NKJV)** “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise...” The words “wisdom” and “wise” are used 100's of times in the Bible and about 100 times just in the book of Proverbs. Here are some examples. **Proverbs 2:6a (NKJV)** “For the Lord gives wisdom...” **Proverbs 4:7a (NKJV)** “Wisdom is the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom.” **Proverbs 9:10 (NKJV)** “The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.” **Proverbs 16:16a (NKJV)** “How much better to get wisdom than gold!” Let's look at just a few of the multitudes of verses in other parts of the Bible concerning wisdom. **Ephesians 1:17 (NKJV)** “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”. **Colossians 1:9 (NKJV)** “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”. **Colossians 2:3 (NKJV)** “in whom [Jesus] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

So what is wisdom as it is used in the Scripture? We know that it is much more than knowledge. Knowledge by itself (without love and wisdom) can be harmful. **1 Corinthians 8:1b (HCSB)** “...Knowledge inflates with pride, but love builds up.” I love this comparison that Adrian Rogers gave of wisdom and knowledge:

\*Knowledge is needed to pass the test in school; wisdom is needed to pass the test in life.

\*Knowledge is learned; wisdom is given.

\*Knowledge comes by looking around; wisdom comes by looking up.

\*Knowledge comes by study; wisdom comes by time with God. [Adrian Rogers, *God's Way to Health Wealth, and Wisdom*, page 11].

When it comes to wisdom as the word is used in the Scriptures, there are various definitions. The simplest definition is that wisdom is the ability to see everything from God's perspective, Wisdom is that, but it is much more than that. Someone said wisdom is the ability to know the right goals and the right means of reaching those goals. That's true, but wisdom is more than that. James has already exhorted us to ask God for wisdom. **James 1:5 (NKJV)** “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” That verse assumes that God is the source of the kind of wisdom spoken of in Scripture. What James does in the passage we are examining today is that he shows us that there are two kinds of wisdom. There is worldly wisdom (which is not true wisdom at all), and there is wisdom from God (Godly wisdom). The point in this passage and in so many other places in the Bible is that true wisdom originates from God and only from God. **1 Corinthians 1:30a (NKJV)** “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God...” We see these two kinds of wisdom in **1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (NKJV)** “<sup>6</sup> However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age,

nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.<sup>7</sup> But we speak **the wisdom of God** in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory”.

## I. The Evidence of Wisdom (V13)

James begins this section on wisdom with a general statement on godly wisdom that he will enlarge on later. James’ burden that we have already seen time after time is that what is real, what is from God will be evidenced in our works, our pattern of life. Whereas knowledge by itself tends to inflate us with pride (**1 Corinthians 8:1b** “Knowledge puffs up...”), true wisdom from God manifests itself by good works done in meekness. A person with Godly wisdom doesn’t have to boast about it or even tell anyone. It will be obvious from his way of life. There will be a quality of life that causes him to stand out in a world that operates by the world’s wisdom. The word “meekness” means to be submitted to. In other translations it is translated “gentleness” (NASB) and “humility” (NIV). Meekness is not weakness. It actually refers more to power that is under the control of another. In the days when horses were a main way of transportation, there was a common word that has now passed from usage. When a wild stallion was saddle broke it was said to be “meeked”. It still had all of its power but now that power was submitted to the rider who held the reigns. Meekness or gentleness is one of the 9 characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23-24). When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, we are submitted to, under the control of, meeked by the Holy Spirit.

Often James quotes Jesus or at least referred to what Jesus taught. Jesus said in the Beatitudes in **Matthew 5:5 (NKJV)** “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” James says that the meek will not only inherit the earth, they will also walk in wisdom. The way of wisdom is the way of humility or meekness. James is saying that a true Christian has a changed life that will manifest itself by a pattern of works done in the meekness or humility of true wisdom.

Let’s examine these two types of wisdom

## II. Worldly Wisdom (V14-16)

The wisdom that is worldly approaches life as though God does not exist. Because of a drastically different source, worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom operate in drastically different ways! Worldly wisdom can accomplish a great deal from a worldly perspective. It can bring about great technological advances and even come up with logical sounding systems of thought that give explanations and “solutions” that ignore or even deny God. An example in the solution to problems realm would be Freudian psychology. As a person who has little or no knowledge of the Scriptures examines this system it would sound reasonable and perhaps even insightful. The same can be said for the theory of evolution. Let’s go a little deeper with this worldly wisdom.

### A. The Operation of Worldly Wisdom (V14)

James describes this worldly wisdom before he names it. There are two primary things that characterize worldly wisdom.

#### 1. Bitter Envy

These two words put together give the idea of a harsh, bitter, self-centeredness that produces a resentful attitude toward others. The person who leaves God out and operates on worldly wisdom is always seeking to promote himself. The best way to make yourself look good is to make those around you look bad. The two words that are put together translated “bitter envy” have the idea of a harsh bitter self-centeredness that produces a resentful attitude toward others. I submit that this is a good description of most offices.

#### 2. Self-Seeking

This word was used in the Greek to refer to a politician out canvassing for votes. The world’s wisdom says “promote yourself and sell yourself in order to get ahead of others”. It is an attitude that totally ignores the sovereign providence of God. The Bible speaks to this selfish ambition in **Philippians 2:3 (NKJV)** “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” Oh how totally different is worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom! There is humility and a desire to lift others up in Godly wisdom.

The logic of worldly wisdom works something like this: “I have to look out for my interests. If I don’t, no one else will. I must get what I deserve. I see my peers from school. I see the people who were hired with me. Some have surpassed me even though they have no more skills and work no more than I do. I deserve more. I deserve what they have and I’m going to get it.” [From Daniel Doriani, *James, Reformed Expository*

*Commentary*, page 123]. That's a picture of worldly wisdom! The bitter envy and self seeking result in a pattern of boasting ("arrogance" in the NASB) and lying against the truth.

## B. The Origin of Worldly Wisdom (V15)

James gives us three words to describe the origins of man's wisdom or worldly wisdom.

### 1. Earthly

Worldly wisdom does not have its origin with God. Being "earthly", it is tied to this world system, and it is tainted by the fall of man into sin. Being earthly, this kind of wisdom does not see beyond the earth and earthly means. God is denied, ignored, or considered irrelevant. This wisdom has only a horizontal scope and no vertical scope. This kind of wisdom can unlock some of the secrets of the universe, but doesn't know what to do with them.

### 2. Sensual

This word is translated "unspiritual" in the ESV. It's the same word as "natural" in **1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)** "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned." The same word is used in **Jude 1:19 (NKJV)** "These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit." "Sensual" means that which can be perceived by our senses. It leaves out the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Again, worldly wisdom simply leaves God and the revelation of God out of the picture. I am amazed at how many professing Christians operate using sensual, worldly wisdom. They never run decisions through the grid of the Word; they never seek the Lord's guidance. There is no difference in how they operate and make decisions than those who don't even profess to know the Lord.

### 3. Demonic

Worldly wisdom is actually demonic in its origin. John Wesley translated this word "demonic" as "such as Satan breathes into the soul." You see Satan's promise of this kind of worldly wisdom all the way back in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3, he seduces Eve to disobey God, and in Genesis 3:5 we see Eve's primary motivation in her disobedience. **Genesis 3:5 (NKJV)** "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." What is really sad is that this demonic, sensual, worldly wisdom is being proclaimed in pulpits all across our land. Preachers dispense psychological advice and give only token exposure to God's word and Biblical doctrine. "Pop psychology" is likely dispensed more from America's pulpits than any other location. A while back there was a story in some religious publications about a man in a devil's suit and mask with a pitchfork parading in front of a North Carolina church with a sign that said "Don't go to church here". Little children were petrified and adults got nervous and called the police. It is illegal in North Carolina for an adult to wear a mask, so the man was arrested. It was the Pastor of the church behind the mask. I'll tell you something scarier than that: to pull off some preachers' masks and find the devil behind them.

This worldly wisdom as to its origin is earthly, sensual, and demonic.

## C. The Outcome of Worldly Wisdom (V16)

### 1. Confusion

This root of this word translated "confusion" is translated "unstable" back in 1:8. The world's wisdom brings confusion, instability, and inner turmoil. The same word is used in **1 Corinthians 14:33a (NKJV)** "For God is not *the author* of confusion..." When worldly wisdom reigns in a church, an office, a factory, a school, or a home, there will be instability, confusion, and dissension. That's why we see so many divorces among professing Christians. They may say they know the Lord, but they are ignorant of His Word and operate with worldly wisdom and the home becomes confused and unstable.

### 2. Every Evil Thing

The word "evil" here doesn't mean so much morally evil as it means "worthless" or "useless". The word Solomon used in the book of Ecclesiastes was "vanity". Worldly wisdom results in a life given to worthless, useless pursuits that are all vanity or empty. When worldly wisdom prevails in a church, that church consumes itself with worthless, useless things. Oh, dear people I don't want us to waste the one life we have here on earth. Don't operate based on worldly wisdom.

## III. Godly Wisdom (V17-18)

### A. The Origin of Godly Wisdom (V17a)

James describes this wisdom as being from above. Godly wisdom has its origin in:

## 1. The Incarnate Word of God – Jesus!

The source, the origin of Godly wisdom is Jesus. In John 1:14 He is the Word made flesh. ***1 Corinthians 1:24b (NKJV)*** “...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” ***1 Corinthians 1:30a (NKJV)*** “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God...” He is our wisdom. ***Colossians 2:3 (NKJV)*** “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” This Godly wisdom in Christ gives us insight beyond our intellectual abilities and our physical senses. It is the ability to see God’s hand in our circumstances and in our pain. It is the supernatural ability to see all of life from God’s perspective and to discern that He has a plan and is providentially working out His plan in our daily circumstances. As we allow the Spirit of Christ to fill us, He gives us insight beyond our physical sight. Christ in us is the source of wisdom – the source of seeing from God’s perspective and making decisions according to what God is doing and not on the basis of how things seem to the natural senses.

## 2. The Written Word of God – The Scriptures

Our standard, our measuring stick, our grid through which we run everything is the written Word of God. As we line up with God’s word, we are lined up with the truth. ***Colossians 3:16a (NKJV)*** “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...” We learn God’s perspective from His word. ***2 Timothy 3:15 (NKJV)*** says, “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Wisdom, real wisdom, Godly wisdom, is ours when we have the source of wisdom living in us and the written Word of wisdom engrafted into our souls.

### B. The Operation of Godly Wisdom (V17b)

In the last part of verse 17 he gives some characteristics of Godly wisdom.

#### 1. Pure

That means unmixed with evil; free from contamination. When we operate through God’s wisdom, there will never be evil associated with it.

#### 2. Peaceable

Purity brings peace. ***Isaiah 57:20-21 (NKJV)*** “<sup>20</sup> But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. <sup>21</sup> There is no peace, Says my God, for the wicked.” However, those living in Godly wisdom are internally like the calm sea a few hundred feet beneath the surface. There is peace for the pure. The peace wisdom brings is always based on purity and not compromise to avoid offending worldlings.

#### 3. Gentle

This is the opposite of stubborn. It has concern for the thoughts of others. A harsh mean spirited person is never walking in wisdom. 2 Corinthians 10:1 speaks of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Since He is the source of wisdom, when we are walking in wisdom we will look like Him and that includes gentleness.

#### 4. Willing to Yield

This was a military term meaning one who is willing to take instructions. A wise person submits to the authority over them.

#### 5. Full of Mercy and Good Fruits

“Full” means to be controlled by. A wise person is controlled in relationships by mercy. A wise person realizes the truth of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount when He said in ***Matthew 5:7 (NKJV)*** “Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” I know how much I need mercy so I want to be free in giving it.

#### 6. Without Partiality

This literally means without wavering. A person full of Godly wisdom doesn’t vacillate or waffle. They stand on convictions and not on the shifting tide of what is socially acceptable.

#### 7. Without Hypocrisy

The hypocrite is one who acts like or gives the appearance of being someone he is not. That’s how worldly wisdom operates. Godly wisdom is without hypocrisy.

### C. The Outcome of Heavenly Wisdom (V18)

Look at the contrast: The world’s wisdom results in confusion (V16), but Godly, heavenly wisdom results in peace. The result of the world’s wisdom is “every evil thing” (V16). But the operation of Godly wisdom is righteousness. The righteousness (fruit) is sown and then multiplies.

## CONCLUSION

***Proverbs 3:13a (NKJV)*** “Happy is the man who finds wisdom...” I know where you can find it! It is in the living word – Jesus, and in the written word, the Bible. True wisdom is appropriated by faith as we ask for it and believe God to give it to us as we yield to the Lordship of the Living Word and are filled with the written word. ***James 1:5 (NKJV)*** “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”