

# Walking in Wisdom – Part 3

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – James instructs his audience to work out their faith in wisdom and understanding
2. aim – to cause us to put aside selfish ambition and to seek the wisdom from above in all things
3. passage – James 3:13-18

### b. outline

1. The Place of Wisdom (James 3:13)
2. The Perversion of Wisdom (James 3:14-16)
3. The Purity of Wisdom (James 3:17-18)

### c. opening

1. the **opening** of the sermon
  - a. a visit with the grandchildren proves that grandparenting is **exhausting** ...
  - b. reminding me of the **falsity** of the old adage “with age comes wisdom” – greater age in a fallen world does not equal **true** wisdom, only the greater **shortcomings** of understanding this world
2. the **second half** of the letter
  - a. **chaps. 1-2** concentrated on the **definition** of faith (**i.e.** what is genuine saving faith?)
  - b. **chaps. 3-5** concentrates on the **transformative effects** of faith (**i.e.** what are the works of faith?)
    1. James started by giving insight into the nature of language – **faith = transformed language**
    2. (**now**) James discusses the nature of **knowledge and understanding** – **i.e.** we show our faith by how we **apply** what has been revealed to us **in the way we relate to others** – **faith = transformed understanding of ourselves and others**
    3. first, a **rhetorical question (v. 13a)**: who is wise and understanding amongst you (all of us!)
    4. second, an **imperative (v. 13b)**: the believer is to walk “**in the meekness of wisdom**” – he is to **demonstrate** his faith in God by how he applies **what he knows from God**
    5. third, the **opposite (vv. 14-16)**: the nature of “wisdom” in the mind and heart of the **unbeliever**
      - a. fallen humans see themselves as **autonomous beings** and see others as nothing more than “evolved animals,” hateful beings of which they are jealous, resulting in every form of evil perpetrated between and against them in all manner of selfish ambition
      - b. this form of thinking is **utterly inconsistent** with what it means to embrace the wisdom of God
    6. **now**, the **application (vv. 17-18)**: the nature of **Godly wisdom** that should permeate the heart and mind of the person who **claims** to trust in Christ
      - a. the **application** of the imperative in **v. 13b** – these are the **characteristics** of those who do the “work” of wisdom as they demonstrate their faith in God

## III. The Purity of Wisdom (James 3:17-18)

### Content

#### a. the nature of pure wisdom (v. 17a)

1. “**wisdom from above**” = the revelation given by God (from above) that is applied well (wisely) by those who receive it; what God reveals as to his intentions in the world applied **consistently by his own**
  - a. **note**: this is contrasted with **v. 15** – wisdom that is “from below” (**i.e.** earthly, base, lit. from hell)
    1. **i.e.** an understanding of the world based on the **lie** whispered by Satan: that human beings are **autonomous creatures**, free from the whims of a creator, able to “set” their own destiny, etc.
  - b. wisdom “**from above**” = **revelation**, not **intuition** or **analysis** or **experience** or **observation** or **feeling**
    1. **question**: if Jesus were to come and sit at your dinner table, what do you think **his** topic of conversation would be? would it be your “life problems,” or would it be something else?
      - a. **pause**: how you answer this question reveals a great deal about what you think the Christian religion (and the Bible) is all about, and what living in this world is all about!
      - b. would it be a discussion of **eternal matters** (your sin and redemption), or a discussion of **temporal matters** (how I **feel** about social justice, race relations, the economy, pandemics)?
        1. **i.e.** examine what Jesus and his disciples spent **most** of their time discussing ...
    - c. **answer**: the “human experience” **from a biblical perspective** has little to do with the temporal problems of life – the Bible insists that the primary issue facing humanity is our broken

- relationship with our Creator, resulting in a failure to *acknowledge him* and *gross idolatry* permeating us – it is *not* primarily about our “happiness” in *this* world
- d. **thus, the church that abandons revelation at its core (in an inspired Scripture) quickly spirals away to a focus on “secondary” matters, and its people abandon the church (ironically, because it becomes irrelevant) and perish**
2. **principle: wisdom from above is revelation, given to us in the Scriptures, being specifically about the person and work of the Son, and interpreted for us by the Holy Spirit as he applies it to our existence in this fallen world**
2. “*is first ... then*” (*prōton men ... epeita*) = a conjunctive of *order*, placing one thing *first*, then other things *to follow from it* or connected to it in a subordinate fashion (translated “first this, then that”)
    - a. **e.g.** “if x, then y” or “both x and y” *except* (in this case) something designed to be explicitly *first*, with the remaining items *subordinate* to it
    - b. **IMO:** James is *explicitly* using this language construction to order the list of items that follow – there is *one item* that must be *explicitly* understood to be the *genesis* of all the others
    - c. **IOW:** James considers the wisdom of God to be *one thing first*, then *from that one thing* the rest
      1. in this case, the wisdom of God is first “*pure*,” with all of its other attributes subordinate to that purity – purity is the *basis* of all of the elements of wisdom; without purity, the rest mean nothing
      2. **i.e.** the “wisdom” of the world starts with *impurity* since its *source* is fallen, resulting in a stream of corrupted understanding flowing out of a faulty starting point
      3. **e.g.** a fundamental flaw in *evidential apologetics*: the fallen mind cannot grasp the meaning of evidence in a fallen world – arguing for the existence of God through “evidence” in men corrupted by sin *cannot* lead to a proper understanding of God – a presuppositional approach *presupposes* that men *already know there is a creator*, but are *suppressing* that knowledge
        - a. the beginning of *true wisdom* is fear (recognition) of the Lord (**Prov. 1:7**)
  3. “*pure*” = free from (ceremonial) defilement; holy; sacred; innocent = the reality of God whereby he is utterly “singular” in both nature and purpose; without stain or error or anything imperfect in either himself (as a being) or in his intentions (in his decree) – **with three (3) possible meanings:**
    - a. it is a wisdom that comes *from one* who is pure – a revelation flowing from perfection itself
      1. the **source** of true wisdom is God, who *himself* is utterly pure – such wisdom (revelation) is based on the inexhaustible knowledge and understanding of God himself
      2. **meaning:** the believer (**i.e.** the regenerate man) is able to comprehend the world *through the eyes of God himself* – he “thinks God’s thoughts after him” (Johann Kepler; **1 Cor. 2:11-14**)
 

“Referring to his work in astronomy, Kepler said: ‘I was merely thinking God’s thoughts after Him. Since we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature, it benefits us to be thoughtful, not of the glory of our minds, but rather, above all else, of the glory of God.’ – For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

        - a. the fallen man can only comprehend the world *through his own limited “experiences”*
        - b. **i.e.** without revelation *from a Creator*, the world is nothing but randomness and chaos, the world has no answers to deep *existential* questions
    - b. it is a wisdom that is pure *in itself* – a revelation that is undefiled in what it reveals
      1. the **content** of true wisdom is absolute purity – such wisdom (revelation) is utterly *singular in nature* because it comes from One who has a singular purpose (decree)
      2. **meaning:** the believer (**i.e.** the regenerate man) is able to see the intention of God in everything that takes place because he knows there is *divine purpose* behind it all
        - a. the fallen man can only comprehend the world *through his own corrupted “observations”*
        - b. **i.e.** without error-free revelation, man is left to search for “truth” from *conflicting sources*, including his own error-prone mind and heart
      3. **note:** many “Christians” no longer believe that the Bible is the *inerrant* and *infallible* revelation of God – **thus, they go to-and-fro seeking “wisdom” from every imaginable sage**
    - c. it is a wisdom that produces a *pure result* – a revelation to produce a singular goal
      1. the **outcome** of true wisdom is *experiential purity* – such wisdom (revelation) accomplishes the singular task of making a people into the fullness of what they were *originally intended to be* as image-bearers of God
      2. **meaning:** the believer (**i.e.** the regenerate man) understands that the singular intention of God is to make him *holy* – to *glorify* him through the process of *sanctification* in this life
        - a. the fallen man utterly **hates** this intention – he desires *only* to be rebellious against the holy law of God and to continue in this “autonomous” state forevermore
      3. thus, the remaining characteristics of the “*wisdom from above*” is this *outcome* in the believer