

Godly Wisdom vs. Worldly Wisdom (James 3:13-18)

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[0 : 00] I love, okay, children, you're ready for, I almost forgot, children, we are ready for! Children's Church, and they can hear this too, but I love coming to church. I love being able to come here with other believers and be able to worship God, grow together as we sing these praises to God, grow together as we read God's Word, and I am so thankful for that. This week, as you heard earlier, we're going to continue in our study of James, in James chapter 3, and the message this morning is going to be coming from James 3, verses 13 through 18, and so if you have a copy of God's Word, I want you to go ahead and start finding your way to James chapter 3, but as you make your way there, I want you to think about something with me for a moment this morning. When you think of wisdom, when you think of someone who is wise, what comes to mind? What's the first thing that comes to mind when when you think of wisdom, when you think of someone who's wise? I think for many of us, we think of an old man with long gray hair, with a long gray beard, something like from Gandalf on Lord of the Rings, or something like that, and that's probably what comes to mind for many of us, but I think for some of us, a person may come to mind. Maybe it's a grandparent, a grandfather, or a grandmother that comes to mind, possibly a parent, or a dear friend. For many of us, it may be somebody that comes to mind, very particular somebody that comes to mind when we think of wisdom, and I think one of the characteristics that many of us look for, many of us understand when it comes to wisdom, is someone who has experienced. Typically, when we think of wisdom in a person, we think of experience. In our passage today,

James addresses this very question of what it means to be wise, and he shares with us what worldly wisdom looks like, and just a spoiler alert for later on in the message, worldly wisdom is no wisdom at all.

In fact, it's not wisdom, it's foolishness, but he shares with us what this worldly wisdom looks like, but he also shares with us what godly wisdom looks like, true wisdom looks like. One commentator put it this way, he says, it's the tale of two cities in this passage, where wisdom is contrasted with selfish ambition and bitter jealousy, but we also see in contrast to selfish ambition and bitter jealousy, we see what it truly means to be wise in how god sees wisdom. And so with this in mind, I want you to follow along as we read these verses here in James chapter 3 verses 13 through 18, and this is what god's word says.

It says, And so as we look at this passage this morning and finish up James chapter 3, I want us to do the same thing that James does at the beginning here. The first thing that I want us to do this morning is to look at this question, to think about this question that is being asked here and go from there. And so he poses a very important question here in verse 13, and it's a question that I want us to consider as we look at this message this morning, as we look at wisdom this morning. So to begin with, we see this question, who are the wise and understanding? Who are the wise and understanding that we are looking at this passage? This is how James words it in verse 13. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. Not only does James ask the question, but he also gives the answer to the question, but he also gives the answer to the question.

[4 : 48] He poses the question, but then he also answers the question, and it is those who, by their good works, by their works, display the meekness of wisdom. James tells us how we know those who are wise.

He says, you want to know who is wise among you? By their works, by their conduct. Does this sound familiar to anything else that we've talked about so far? How do you know that they have faith? By their works. And so James is showing this over and over again, and he reminds us that

faith in Christ produces faithfulness to Christ. And I know that I sound like a broken record every time I say that, but it's true as we continue looking through James, we see this over and over again, that if we have faith in Christ, it produces faithfulness to Christ. And it's something that I hope gets in our hearts and minds so that when we read James in the future, which if you want to follow along with this reading plan, we would love for you to, and you'll be doing that in just a couple months from now, if you follow along with that. But it's something that I hope and pray that as you read through James, it'll be like that broken record that keeps coming back. Faith in Christ produces faithfulness to Christ. And it's something that we see right here as we look at this passage, we see that this wisdom is producing something in us.

It is true, as James continues to bring it out through this book, that that wisdom, that this faith and wisdom here is going to produce something in us. Wisdom for James is so much more than just an intellectual knowledge. Wisdom for James is so much more than just knowing the right things, but it has more to do with what we do with those things. What we do with that knowledge, putting that knowledge into practice. It's very practical. James is clearly trying to say two things here. True wisdom produces good works in us, and true wisdom produces meekness in us. We see this very clearly here in verse 13. True wisdom produces good works in us, and it produces meekness in us. Now, I want us to look at this in reverse order and start with meekness. And I'm going to be honest with you here. Meekness, a lot of times, is not one of those characteristics that we think of as a great characteristic, is it? It's not something that we typically long for in our lives, or as parents, it's not one of the first characteristics that comes to mind when we think of the characteristics that we want to be displayed in our kids' lives. You know, for example, we all want our kids to be truthful. We want them to be honest. We want them to be courageous. We want them to be generous. We want them to be caring. We want them to be considerate. We want them to be all of these things. But many times, meekness or being meek is not one of those characteristics that immediately comes to our minds. However, I think this has much to do with our lack of understanding of what this is.

So many times, we think of weakness when we think of meekness, right? When we think of meekness, our minds immediately go to someone who is weak, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Martin Lloyd-Jones was a physician turned pastor in London for many years, and he shared some very helpful thoughts on meekness when it comes to our relationship with God. And he said this, he says, let me emphasize it by putting it like this. Meekness does not mean indolence. There are people who appear to be meek in a natural sense, but they are not meek at all. They are indolent. That means that they're lazy. This is not the quality of which the Bible is speaking. And he says, nor does it mean niceness. There are people who seem to be born naturally nice. That is not what the Lord means when he says, blessed are the meek. That is something purely biological. He says, the kind of thing that you get with animals, one dog is nicer than another dog, one cat is nicer than another. That is not meekness. So it does not mean to be naturally nice or easy to get along with, nor does it mean weakness in personality or character. Still, it does not mean a spirit of compromise or a peace at any price mentality. How often are these things mistaken? How often is the man regarded as meek who says anything rather than have a disagreement? Let's agree. Let's try to break down these distinctions and divisions. Let's smooth over these little things that divide. Let's all be nice and joyful and happy.

[9 : 24] He says, no, no, it's not that. Meekness, he says, is compatible with great strength. Meekness is compatible with great authority and power. The meek man is the one who may so believe in standing for truth that he will die for it if necessary. The martyrs were meek, but they were never weak. Strong men, yet meek men. God forbid that we should ever confuse this noble quality, one of the noblest of all qualities, with something merely animal or physical in nature. But yet oftentimes this word was associated with those things, with weakness or things. But when we look at the context, and when we look at how the word was used outside of the biblical context as well, we'll see that oftentimes this word was used in conjunction with the breaking of an animal. When you break a horse, you don't make the horse weak. You don't make the horse weak. The strength is just harnessed and it's used for the will of the master. When you break a horse, the horse doesn't all of a sudden just become weak and not able to do anything. No, it's strength is harnessed and it's used for the will of the master. Meekness as a believer is a sign that we are giving our life to be used by God. So in that sense, it's no wonder that meekness is very closely associated with wisdom here and are so closely tied together. But not only is the wise person meek, but he also produces

something. He produces this good work. See, acts of obedience to God perform consistently day after day are what constitute this good conduct of the wise person that's being described here. The word good here is the Greek word halos, which means beautiful and is where we get the origin of the word for calligraphy.

It comes from this same. And so this beautiful handwriting, and I don't know if you know how to write in calligraphy or if, or if you've seen someone do this, Marilyn in the office, she'll do it from time to time for things for us. And it's this beautiful, beautiful handwriting and it's beautiful to see. And I think, and other commentators believe this as well, what James is communicating here is that the wise person is the one who lives in such a way that their life is beautiful, and attractive to the world and ultimately points them to the beauty of God. And so this good conduct, this beautiful conduct that's being described here is a life that people are able to see and it points them to the beauty and the glory of God. Peter in 1 Peter 2.12 says it like this. He says, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God. They may see your good works and then in turn glorify God. And so the wise person here being described is one who lives in such a way that it's, that it's different from the world, that people will see this and they'll see a beauty in the way that we live our lives that is counterculture to this world. And ultimately when they look at our lives, they'll see the beauty and the attractiveness of it and it will point them to Jesus. It'll point them to where this beauty originates in the life of the believer. This wise person lives in such a way that those who are not believers and may even be opposed to Christianity will catch a glimpse of the beauty of God. We must ask the question here, are we living this type of life? Are we living as wise in the world? James is saying this is what it means to be wise, that we live in a way that points others to the hope that we have in Jesus. And we do this in the meekness of wisdom. We do this not only by hearing the word of God, but by giving our lives to it. We do this by putting our, our yes on the table and saying, God, here's my life. Take it, use it for your honor and your glory. This is what it means to be wise, to say, God, I'm, I'm not in control, but you are in control. This is what it means to be wise is to give control of your life over to God, to be used for his honor and his glory. But please don't misunderstand me here. This is, this is for all believers. This isn't an optional thing. It's not for this upper tier of Christian who wants to live as wise in the world. And then every normal Christian can continue just living foolishly. That's not what this is for. This is for every single believer. If you are a child of God, if you've given your life to Jesus, then this is for you that we are to live as wise. If you are a follower of Jesus, this is the life that he's called you to live. The question that we must ask is, are we following him by seeking to live as wise children? And so after posing this question and answering it, James gives some examples of what wisdom oftentimes looks like. And the first thing that we see here is actually, like we said, no wisdom at all, but we'll call it worldly wisdom. This next thing is, is how sometimes wisdom plays out in our life. And it's through worldly wisdom when we don't give our things to, to God. Verses 14 through 16, it says, but if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly. It's unspiritual.

It's demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be dishonor and every vile practice. Kent Hughes calls this section of this passage, wisdom from below, which hopefully we'll see is intended to be an oxymoron because it's actually no wisdom at all. It's coming from below, but it is far from wisdom. And while we just saw how wisdom plays out through good conduct and meekness, we see the contrast presented here with the use of the word, but he says, you know, we, we, the, the wise person lives in good conduct. He displays his wisdom with his good conduct and the meekness.

And, but he says, but there's another type of way that, that people display wisdom, which is no wisdom at all. And he describes it in this next section where he says, but if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts. Now, before we go on any further, I want us to think about what this bitter jealousy and selfish ambition looks like. These are things that, that no one really wants to admit that they have in their life. No one really wants to say, well, I am just bitterly jealous. Um, and I am just selfish as I can possibly be. No one wants to admit this, but yet oftentimes we struggle with this.

[16 : 39] Oftentimes at different points in our lives, we, we struggle with this, this jealousy. That is, you want something, you, you want something to, to, or you crave something that is not yours. You want it, or you crave something that is not yours. But we also see a nice little modifier here that

James gives us to kind of emphasize this jealousy. And he calls it this bitter jealousy. This bitter jealousy brings to mind something stronger. As George Guthrie, he describes it as an intense, inappropriate sorrow over another person's achievements or possessions. So this intense, inappropriate sorrow over another person's achievements or possessions. And this brings to mind something that's even more or even stronger than just wanting something that somebody else has. All of a sudden, now we get this, this picture of, of kind of enjoying it when somebody else loses what they have. We have this, this jealousy in mind.

And, and sometimes that jealousy can get so strong that it's not just that, that we want what somebody else has. But all of a sudden it takes on a little bit more. And so when we see them lose what it is that they have, when we see things not go perfectly for them, when we see that things fail for them, then all of a sudden inside, we're a little bit happy about it. We're a little bit glad that it, it's about time they, they, that everything didn't go their way. It's about time something didn't happen just perfectly for them. And so we have this bitter jealousy that begins to creep in. In addition to this bitter jealousy, we often let selfish ambition in. This most likely refers to some parts of the church setting themselves over others, thinking that their preferences or their agenda is more important than anybody else's. Their preferences on styles and groups and different things, their preferences and their agendas is all of a sudden more important than anybody else's. And have you ever felt this way?

If you're honest with yourself, have you ever felt this way? This bitter jealousy or this selfish ambition that could have been this morning walking into church? You want to know a great way to completely ruin your morning at church? Let bitter jealousy or selfish ambition in. All of a sudden it consumes. All of a sudden it, it creeps in and you see jealousy and selfish ambition can creep in and they can rob us of joy. They can rob us of the joy that, that God wants us to experience from a relationship with him, but it doesn't just affect us. It begins to affect others around us because not only does it rob us of joy, but it can also prevent us from loving others. It can also prevent us from doing what God has called us to do. Have you ever thought about how nothing good comes from jealousy?

Because when, when you're jealous, what is it that you're typically doing? You're comparing, right? You're comparing your life to somebody else's life. You're making these comparisons that God doesn't want us to compare. And two things happen when we start making comparisons. One, we get puffed up with pride. We think, well, look at me, look how wonderful I am compared to everybody else. Or two, we can feel inadequate. And both of these tremendously take away from our ability to see God as our greatest treasure.

Either way, we think too highly of ourselves, or at least I'm not like this person. At least I've got my act together in comparison to everybody else. Or all of a sudden we just have this deep sense of inadequacy. I can't do anything right. Look at everybody else around me. I can't do anything right. [20 : 23] And both of these things take away, they rob us of joy, and they prevent us from loving other people. You see, jealousy is a terrible emotion. Jealousy is the scab that you keep picking at only for that wound to fester and to get infected. Jealousy is a hunger you simply cannot satisfy. So you, you eat more, you drink more in order to try to fill this up. But the more that you do, the emptier you feel. And it forces you to feed it once again. Jealousy is a pain that will not abate. It persists and pounds until we are pushed to the point of no return. You see, jealousy is a terrible and it's a harsh master in our life. And now, because of social media, we have all got honorary doctorates in comparing our lives to everybody else's around us. Because of that, we have this, this doctorate in comparing our life to everybody around us. And that's a dangerous game. I want you to think about it like this with me for just a moment. One summer, several years ago, our family had paid, we had paid to have some professional pictures taken of our family. Anybody ever done anything like that where you pay somebody to take pictures? It's so much fun. And so, and so we had, we had paid to have our pictures taken.

And shortly after, Catherine posted the picture online. Of course, people go, oh, what a beautiful family. This is great. This is one. And, and, you know, we've got beautiful kids. I've got a beautiful wife.

And so that kind of hides me in the pictures. And so, yeah, it's a beautiful family right here. But what you don't see from that picture is the story behind the picture. The stress that goes in with it. It's no secret to my family or extended family that I don't love to take big group pictures.

It's not my favorite thing to do. In fact, we would go on youth trips and there would be youth parents who would, who would say, make sure you get a group picture because they knew if they didn't say that, there's a good chance that I wasn't going to make everybody get a group picture. And then some of them would just take it on themselves to, to organize it themselves and take the picture. And so I don't love those things. And it's also no secret that I sweat a lot. And so this is in August and we're going outside in the heat of the day to take these pictures. I'm already thinking, I'm going to have to take a towel with me just to wipe my face off before every single picture.

[22 : 49] I don't want to do this. And I was griping and I was complaining and we're getting ready to leave. And all of a sudden Jacob starts saying, it's hot. I don't want to go do this. This is not fun. And Catherine looks at me like, I wonder where he heard that from. And all of a sudden it was just like, there's the whole ordeal to go take this picture. And, and so you don't see that story behind the picture. And so when we start making comparisons, what we're doing is when we're comparing what we do know about our life to what we don't know about somebody else's.

We're comparing what we do know about our life to what we don't know about somebody else's. In other words, we're comparing the truth and the struggles of our life to, to everybody else's best. We're comparing our worst to everybody else's best. And that's a dangerous game to get in. That will rob us of joy and prevent us from doing what God has called us to do. So don't let this earthly wisdom, which is actually no wisdom at all, which is, which is bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Don't let this, as James describes as earthly, unspiritual, and demonic, don't let it into your life. It will rob you of joy and will keep you from loving people the way that God has called us to love them. The world says, think about yourself, only be concerned with you, only be concerned about your ambitions and comparing yourself to making sure that you're better than everybody else. The world says, this is what is important. Don't go down that road. It's what James is telling us here.

Finally, I want us to see the fruit of living lives in good conduct and meekness. And the fruit of this, we now see is this, it's godly wisdom. We see the fruit of, of living a life that is with this good conduct and the meekness of wisdom. And the fruit of that is godly wisdom. Verses 17 and 18, it says, but the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere, and a harvest of righteousness is shown in peace by those who make peace. What an incredible contrast to what was just described. What an incredible contrast to the earthly wisdom we just discussed. This wisdom, this true wisdom, this godly wisdom from above, it has effects in our life. It produces things in our life. Just like faith, it can be seen in our lives.

[25 : 37] The wisdom that comes from heaven does something to us. It's, it's pure. It produces this holiness in us. It is peaceable. It's gentle. It's open to reason. It's full of mercy and of good fruits. It's impartial.

It's sincere. The wisdom that comes from God, it produces these things in us. And it is in stark contrast to the things that this worldly wisdom produces. And so as we look at that, finally, I want us to see the contrast between verse 16 and verse 18 here. The fruit of worldly wisdom in verse 16 is disorder and every vile practice. That's what that leads to is disorder and every vile practice. While the fruit of godly wisdom in verse 18 is a harvest of righteousness and it is, and it is sown in peace by those who make peace. James must have in mind the impact that this has that goes far beyond our lives.

He must have this in mind that, that this type of life is a great commission life where it actually impacts other people's lives. Sam Albury, he knows, he says, the language of harvest suggests such an attractive way of life that others are drawn to God through it. A behavior so compelling that it becomes a clincher for someone who some who are coming to trust in the gospel for the first time. What a remarkable difference this godly wisdom produces in our lives. And so the question that we must ask is, what kind of fruit do you want to be growing in your life? What kind of fruit do you want to be growing in your life? Do you want this disorder and every vile practice? Is that the type of fruit do we want? Or do we want this, this fruit, this harvest of righteousness? Or maybe the, the more telling question that we can ask ourselves if we're honest is, what type of fruit is already being produced?

Maybe we don't need to just answer what kind of fruit do we want to be produced in our life? Maybe we need to answer the question, what kind of fruit is being produced in our life? Because that will show us so much about what is important to us. It'll show us so much as, as to what we're looking for, for this wisdom. What we're looking for, that hopefully this morning we've been able to, to see

what wisdom in turn is in terms of the Christian walk. So much of the Christian walk is keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus and responding to this world in a way that points other people to Jesus. And it shows that our lives are not our own, but they belong to Christ. This is what wisdom looks like, is living this life, keeping our eyes so fixed on Jesus that others will see him in us. They'll see the good works in us, this beautiful fruit that is produced in us, and it will point them to the source of that beauty. And also we see that, that we're recognizing that our life is not our own, but it belongs to Jesus. He bought and paid for it, and it belongs to him. But oftentimes people have a wrong understanding of what wisdom is. It's been compared to such thing as being able to, to see the control room of a subway station. I've heard people describe it this way. Think of wisdom like this. So you could go to a subway station and you could stand on the platform and make all kinds of observations. You can see how people come in, how they get on trains, that the trains are going places, and you can make all kinds of observations. But if you truly want to know how a subway system works, then you need to be invited into the control room. Because you go into the control room and you can see where all of the other trains are. All of a sudden you can see why some trains are coming through and not stopping, while some trains are accelerating, while some trains are slowing down, while some trains are at a stop. You'll be able to see all of these things and you'll be able to understand all that is going on. And oftentimes we think of wisdom in these terms, where if we are close enough with God, then we'll have inside information of the happenings in our life and the happenings of the things that are going on in other people's life. But this is not the picture of wisdom that we see in this passage. In fact, I think it can be somewhat harmful to think of wisdom in those terms. In one of his chapters of a wonderful book that I highly recommend called *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer addresses the issue of God's wisdom versus our wisdom. And he notes that wisdom is more like learning to drive a car than it is seeing the control room of a subway station.

[30 : 40] He says, when driving a car, it is important to make appropriate responses to our surroundings, responding to the constantly changing scene around you, to exercise sound judgment regarding speed, regarding distance and braking, to drive well. He says, it is not necessary to fret over things like, why is there a roundabout here? Why did we put a traffic light up? Why do we use the colors red, yellow, and green? Why is the person in front of me driving the way that they're driving? He says, to drive well, you don't have to understand all of those things, but you have to respond well.

Packer says, you simply try to see and do the right thing in the actual situation that presents itself. And he says, the effect of divine wisdom is to enable you and me to do just that in the actual situations of life. You see, in order to drive well, you need to keep your eyes wide open to what is before you and what is ahead of you, what is to your, in front of you. To live wisely, you must be clear-eyed about people and life, seeing life as it is, and then responding with a mind that is dependent on the wisdom of God. You see, some drivers may have an immense knowledge about everything. They may can explain to you all of those different things, why there's a roundabout, why it's better than a stop sign, why all of these things occur, but yet you would never want to ride with them, and you certainly wouldn't want your kids to ride with them. But there's people who may not understand the ins and outs of everything, but they are able to respond rightly to the situations around them because their eyes are fixed on God. They're able to respond to the situations around them because we are thinking about the things of God. Yet, when we see this, we see the picture of two types of wisdom in here. The wisdom from the world and the wisdom of God. You see, wisdom does not mean we understand everything that is going on because of our superior knowledge, but that we do the right thing as life comes along. We follow God in the midst of uncertainty. Even though we may not know the ins and outs of this life, we follow God throughout it all.

So he says, who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. And so may we show wisdom by the way we live our lives, pointing a lost and dying world to Jesus and submitting ourselves, giving ourselves, putting our yes on the table and saying, God, here's my life. Take it and use it. It's yours. That's what wisdom looks like. That's what James is calling us to do is to give our lives to God and say, it is yours. Use it for your honor and for your glory. I, more than anything else, want to follow you. Father, thank you so much for your word.

Thank you for what it teaches us about you. Thank you for this passage where we can look at it and see where wisdom comes from. And so, Lord, help us to see that clearly this morning. Help us to

see what wisdom is, how wisdom is displayed in our lives. It's displayed through that good conduct, through that beautiful conduct that points other people to the hope that we have in you. And Lord, it is displayed through meekness, where we're giving our lives to you, where we're saying, God, use my life. Here it is. I want you to have my life. Take it and use it for your honor and your glory, because you are a far greater treasure than anything this world has to offer.

And so, Lord, give us the boldness to live this type of wisdom out, where we say, God, this life is not mine. It's yours. And I want you to use it in a way that points other people to you.

[34 : 54] I want you to use it in a way that points people to the hope that we have as believers, the hope that we cling to, that you sent your son, Jesus, to live the life that we couldn't live, to die the death that we deserve, so that we can have new life in you. So, Lord, help us to live lives.

Help us to live this wisdom out by pointing people to the only source of hope that we have, to the only source of joy that will last. And that's a relationship with you. So, God, thank you for that. And give us the boldness and courage to live this out in everything we say and do.

And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation this morning. And if God is speaking to you, won't you respond as we stand together and sing?