

JAMES

LIVING FAITH



Heaven's Wisdoms

James 3:13-18



Introduction

Accents are fascinating. It is enjoyable to listen to people who are from somewhere other than we are from. You can't get out two words in a conversation with someone without tipping your hand as to your home. Accents reveal not only the country of origin but also the region of that country. Bostonians and New Yorkers have different accents.

Like accents give away our home, the quality of our relationships give away the origin of our wisdom. You can observe a person's relationships and know where they are getting their wisdom. It will either be earthly and marked by strife or heavenly and marked by peace. In this passage, James talks about wisdom and relationships by contrasting two different sources of wisdom – earthly and heavenly.



Study

Context: 3:13-18 is a bridge section. It connects with James's discussion on the tongue where the "bitter" water of 3:11 connects with the "bitter" jealous in 3:14. Most of the sins in 3:14-16 are the result of sins of the mouth. The contrast in 3:13-18 between two kinds of wisdom sets up James' discussion on the contrast in 4:1-12 between friends of the world (earthly wisdom) and friends of God (wisdom from above). In chapter 3, James establishes that the words of some in the congregation reveal earthly wisdom. In chapter 4:1-12, James talks about the source of this earthly wisdom they are vomiting out of their mouths (i.e., the human heart that is still friends with the world). They are exalting themselves over others (2:1-13; 4:1-3, 11-12) but the path to exaltation is humility (4:6-10). James returns to hit one more aspect of the earthly wisdom in 4:13-17.

Structure:

- I. Principle: The source of wisdom is revealed in deeds (3:13)
- II. Worldly wisdom reveals itself in selfishness and strife (3:14-16)
- III. Heavenly wisdom reveals itself in gentleness and peace (3:17-18)



Reflect

Principle: The source of wisdom is revealed in deeds (3:13)

1. How do people reveal that they are wise? Where else in the letter have you heard James make similar statements?

Note: “Knowledge” and “wisdom” are two related concepts in the Bible. Knowledge relates to truth we comprehend from studying God’s word. Wisdom, then, lives according to what we’ve learned. Wisdom asks, “what is the best way to apply my knowledge in my life?” See *Theological Connection* for more information on wisdom.

Worldly wisdom reveals itself in selfishness and strife (3:14-16)

2. In v.13 we read about the “meekness/gentleness of wisdom.” What do you see by way of contrast to this in vv.14-16?

APPLY → James tells us that relational strife and conflict all trace back to the truths (wisdom) we tell ourselves. We are surrounded by false wisdom in the world (i.e., earthly wisdom) and in our own sinful hearts. Write out some of the false wisdom popular in our day. Which one of these are you most tempted to believe?

3. There is a great deal of sensationalism related to demonic activity. What does James say is demonic? How does this influence the way you think about demonic activity?

APPLY → In v.16, James says that selfishness and jealousy result in all kinds of sinful outcomes. James holds up a mirror to us and asks us to take a hard look at ourselves. Where are you most vulnerable to selfishness in your life? It might be worth asking your spouse or a trusted friend. What is the outcome of your selfishness in your life?

Heavenly wisdom reveals itself in gentleness and peace (3:17-18)

4. List out all of the characteristics of the wisdom from above in v.17 and write a short definition of what you think each word means. How does it differ from the earthly wisdom of vv.14-16?

APPLY → God's wisdom is pure. It comes down "from above" into a world affected by sin and yet it remains holy. The virtues listed in v.17 are so distinct from the earthly wisdom we see in this passage, in the world around us, and in our own hearts. What are some of these virtues you think you need to practice and cultivate this week? How might you do that?

5. In v.18 James uses a farming analogy. What do you think he is saying?

APPLY → Consider some of the relational conflict you are currently experiencing in your life. Wouldn't you want a "harvest of righteousness" to replace all the difficulty? Peacemaking is the answer and we need God's help to do it. Read James 1:5, 17. God is willing to provide such heavenly wisdom for you. With something specific in mind, write out a prayer to the Lord asking for wisdom to be a peacemaker in your current relational conflict. If you are in a Growth Group, it might be a good night to share and pray for wisdom for each other.



Connect

Gospel Connections. We are separated from the Lord because of our sin. How did God make a way for sinners to be reconciled to Him forever? In other words, how did God apply His knowledge and understanding? What was God's wisdom? The gospel is the revelation of God's wisdom. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were **wise** according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is **foolish** in the world to shame the **wise**; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us **wisdom** from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

- 1 Cor. 1:26-31

Whole-Bible Connections. Throughout the Old Testament we learn that the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10; Prov. 1:7, 9:10, 15:33; Job 28:28). When we see God as majestic, sovereign, holy, and all-powerful, it produces in us a respect and reverence for Him. It’s not that we fear Him the way we fear a cruel tyrant, but rather the fear a child has for their loving father. When a child gets disciplined by their loving father for disobeying, they also run to that same father for comfort and assurance. This kind of reverential, respectful, and humble “fear” of the Lord is the doorway to wisdom. Why? Because we start to understand and embrace His thoughts and ways as right, true, and good. We also gain a healthy and realistic perspective of ourselves. We are so limited and small. So we come humbly but expectantly to our Heavenly Father for the truth and wisdom He offers.

Theological Connections. Wisdom is one of God’s attributes. Wisdom puts knowledge and truth into practice in the best way. God is all-knowing. He lacks no understanding. He knows everything that can happen and will happen. He has all the options before Him. He puts truth and knowledge into practice perfectly. He formulates and executes His plans perfectly. Therefore, He never has a bad plan. We look at His plans for our lives at times and do not see God’s wisdom. However, we can be sure that the One who knows all and sees all is doing the wisest thing possible.

Praise Connections.

The Perfect Wisdom of Our God

By Keith & Kristyn Getty

The perfect wisdom of our God,
Revealed in all the universe:
All things created by His hand,
And held together at His command.
He knows the mysteries of the seas,
The secrets of the stars are His;
He guides the planets on their way,
And turns the earth through another day.

The matchless wisdom of His ways,
That mark the path of righteousness;
His word a lamp unto my feet,
His Spirit teaching and guiding me.
And oh, the mystery of the cross,
That God should suffer for the lost
So that the fool might shame the wise,
And all the glory might go to Christ!

Oh grant me wisdom from above,
To pray for peace and cling to love,
And teach me humbly to receive
The sun and rain of Your sovereignty.
Each strand of sorrow has a place
Within this tapestry of grace;
So through the trials I choose to say:
“Your perfect will in your perfect way.”

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