

“Assessing All Claims to Heavenly Wisdom” James 3:13-18, Sermon Notes
Pastor Eric Borgstrom
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“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.” (Jam 3:13-18 NAS)

We’re going to be looking at a very rich section of Scripture this morning in the book of James. You can turn to James 3:13

And conveniently for me as a preacher, James will jumpstart our introduction this morning. You’ll notice there in verse 13 that he poses a question to his audience:

“Who among you is wise and understanding?” Now, the discerning reader will immediately know that James has an agenda with this question. In other words, he’s not genuinely wondering how many wise people happen to be in the midst of his audience

No, James is setting what we might call a “sanctified trap” for his audience. He’s preparing us to think about wisdom and understanding in a way we typically wouldn’t

So he throws out a pretty basic and fairly straightforward question, knowing that in a Christian audience the vast majority of people who hear this question would answer in the affirmative, “yes, I am wise, I have understanding.”

After all, at the very least I’m a Christian, I have a Christian worldview, I know the gospel, I have the Scriptures to inform my thinking

We could also anticipate many people answering “yes” to this question especially when we think about the alternative to being wise. Just taking the book of Proverbs, for instance, the alternative to being wise is being a fool

So, we are probably safe to assume that the vast majority of the audience this morning did not come to church wholeheartedly affirming, “I’m a fool and I know it.”

No, in a Christian context, most would say they have wisdom and understanding when it comes to spiritual things

And this answer is just what James is expecting and it naturally leads to a second question: How do you *know* you are wise? If someone were to say, “prove to me that you are not a fool, prove to me that you are indeed wise” What would you say? What would you do?

Some might say, “I know I have wisdom because I make sound and responsible decisions in my life. I am dependable and responsible.”

“I have ensured financial stability for myself and my family. I have job security. I have a savings account for emergencies. I’ve planned for retirement well, I have health insurance, life insurance, house insurance, car insurance. So, I’m a wise person because I am a *responsible* citizen in this life and I have planned well for my security.”

Another person might answer the question by saying, “I know I am wise because I have a treasure of knowledge about a lot of life issues. I am well-read on every topic you could imagine. And people seek me out to hear me talk on issues because I have such a depth of knowledge about the way the world works.”

“I know how society works and government and banks and business and various life issues, and therefore I’m wise.”

Still other people, who have lived a bit longer, might answer the question by saying, “I know I’m wise because I have a vast amount of *human experience* to draw from. I’ve lived a lot of life and therefore I have accumulated wisdom by learning from my mistakes and from my experiences. And I can now pass on my wisdom to the next generation.”

Another popular answer might be to equate wisdom with formal education. “I know I’m wise because I graduated high school, I went on to get a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree, a then a doctorate, and on and on. Therefore, because I’m very intelligent and have proven the ability to study and perform well in formal educational settings, I am wise.”

What about in the church? Well, perhaps some in the church might come along and attempt to *spiritualize* the answer and say something like this: “I know I’m wise because I know the gospel, I know a lot of Scripture, I can articulate a lot of orthodox theology, I blog about Christian issues, I read the puritans and reformers, maybe I went to a bible college or a seminary, I can defend the truth well. I’m a great apologist, therefore I am wise.”

Now, obviously there could be many other ways we might answer this question. But the point of bringing up some of those more common answers is to show the inconsistency between the common ways we validate someone’s claim to wisdom, and how the *Scriptures* validate that claim

You will notice that in all of the answers we just looked at, the type of wisdom we are referring to can be attained regardless of whether or not the God of the Scriptures even exists, and even more so, regardless of whether or not a person is a believer with the Spirit of God dwelling in them

Those ideas about wisdom fail to take into account that true spiritual wisdom cannot merely be gained by life experience, it has nothing to do with formal education, it’s not increased by knowledge of how things in the world work. It doesn’t automatically increase as you get older

Those things aren’t bad, they may not be entirely unrelated to wisdom, but those ideas are far from how the Scriptures speak of wisdom

In the Scriptures, heavenly wisdom is reserved for only *true believers*, in fact we can even narrow it further: only *spiritually healthy* believers can possess the wisdom that is worth possessing

In this sense, there is no such thing as a *wise unbeliever*. Because it is impossible to gain this wisdom apart from Christ

You can't study enough, live long enough, think enough, or reason your way to being wise and understanding

1 Corinthians 1:21, "for since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom..."

You can't know spiritual truth, you can't have spiritual understanding through human means of acquiring wisdom

As one of my professors used to say: as an unbeliever, you're only operating on an AM antenna, but God's truth is broadcast on FM airwaves

Now, to be sure, unbelievers can have an earthly or human wisdom with regard to things that serve their anxieties, lusts, idols, and their survival in this life

That's why people in the world become experts in health, money, and politics, and real estate, and the stock market, just to name a few areas

But that's where man's wisdom ends. It begins and ends on this world and mankind. It's nothing more than a *horizontal, worldly wisdom*, achieved through experience and the mere acquisition of knowledge

Is it not such a clear case of irony to consider that the wisest person in the world who doesn't know Christ can't explain the most important and yet basic questions facing mankind? How did we get here? What happens when I die? What is the meaning of life, the reason for existence?"

When brilliant minds like Stephen Hawking get together with other brilliant minds and they can't answer questions that my 6-year-old daughter can answer about the creation of the universe and the existence of God

This is the futility of human or earthly wisdom. It only leads to inconsistent and irrational conclusions, because it is a worldview where man is god

So what has to happen for man to graduate from this natural wisdom and actually become wise, and have the wisdom of God?

Well, listen first to Proverbs 9:10, "*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*"

So, you're not even in the ball park if you don't fear the Lord. That's the starting point of true wisdom. A right relationship with God followed by a deepening knowledge of this God

That is the beginning of wisdom and that is acquiring true understanding

So now we must return to our original question: how do I know which type of wisdom I have? How do I know that I've experienced the beginning of true wisdom, as Proverbs says, how do I know if I truly have understanding of the Holy One?

How do I know that I truly operate under heavenly wisdom and that I haven't just dressed up human wisdom in Christian activities and Christian language?

Well, in the rest of this passage, James is going to assess all claims to heavenly wisdom

Notice how James answers this question: James 3:13-18, “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

You can see right away, as is common in the book of James: He’s going to show us that the proof of which type of wisdom you operate under has nothing to do with merely what you profess with your lips, but what you profess with your life

Are you godly, do you have humility, that’s who we can tell which system of wisdom you operate under, man’s or God’s?

Now, before we get into the details of his answer, what does James mean with his terms? What does it mean to be wise and understanding?

Well, the term for “wise” there described the individual who can reason soundly through the moral issues of life. So, a wise person possesses moral insight and skill in navigating through practical life issues in accordance with the will of God

For instance, when we as believers aren’t sure what to do in a difficult situation, or we need clarity about a temptation or trial in our life, we seek biblical counsel from who?

Those who are proven to be wiser than we are. We don’t go to those who just happen to know more than we do, no, we go to those who have moral insight we haven’t developed, we go to those who are skilled in navigating through life issues in accordance with the will of God. That’s the term for “wise.”

The term for “understanding” there in verse 13 is similar, it’s actually only used here in the NT. It was also used of one having the knowledge of an expert, a specialist in a particular area, who was able to apply his fuller knowledge to practical situations.

So, to restate James’ question in different terms: Who among you is really skilled at reasoning soundly, reasoning biblically, through practical and moral life issues? Who among you is really skilled at applying truth to life?

Who among you has spiritual insight, a deepening knowledge of God, a maturing knowledge of heavenly truth?

If you say yes, that’s me, James is going to assess your claim to wisdom not in theological terms—how much doctrine do you know, how many books you have read, your ability to articulate profound thoughts, win debates, church attendance, or anything like that

No, instead your claim to be wise is put to the test in *practical* terms. James’ answer in verse 13 is basically this: you say you have wisdom, prove it by demonstrating godliness and humility in your life

Notice, there in verse 13 these good deeds or good behavior is done in the “meekness” or “humility” or “gentleness” of wisdom

This humility or gentleness is that attitude of heart that produces a tenderness, a mildness in dealing with others

It's the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance and one's own significance, and then having that mindset permeate all of your relationships

What will this mean practically? People will describe you as tender and gracious. You will absorb pain easily from others because you are humble and therefore you don't view yourself highly or take yourself too seriously, so you don't return evil for evil. You overcome evil with good

Now, James will go on to develop this thought and the characteristics of heavenly wisdom in a little bit, but first he's going to talk about another type of wisdom

In fact, the rest of the text is contrasting two types of wisdom. Worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. If you live according to worldly wisdom, here are the symptoms that will be in your life. If you live according to heavenly wisdom, here are the symptoms that will be in your life

So, first we see the evidences of worldly wisdom. Notice verses 14-16, "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."

So you can already begin to see the contrast here. This is the earthly, sinful counterpart to true, godly wisdom. Instead of the gentleness and humility that true wisdom produces, there is first of all "bitter jealousy."

If coveting is wanting something someone else has, jealousy is *hating* them for having it. Jealousy is an *amplification* of covetousness

There's a resentment toward another person's *position* in life or *possessions* of life

And here in James, notice he doesn't even stop at mere jealousy. He actually amplifies it here with the word "bitter."

In other words, this is not just a mild resentment toward someone, a mild jealousy that you're able to keep under control for the most part. No, this is a bitter, harsh, strife-producing jealousy that has such control of your heart that it corrupts and destroys relationships

And what's always helpful to think about when it comes to evaluating sin in our lives is to consider the *sin behind the sin*

In other words, jealousy is a symptom of a deeper heart issue. It's a symptom of living a self-centered life

What is the mindset behind a self-centered life? I am the center of the universe. The world exists for me, people exist for me, things exist for me

Therefore, *whatever* and *whoever* comes under my worldview and worships me, I accept as good, you're my friend, I can have peace and harmony with you

But, whatever and whoever *threatens* those ends, whoever makes it harder for me to live a self-centered life, I reject as an enemy, I get angry

And that's exactly what happens when we are jealous. It means that someone has gotten in the way of our quest to be God. And we just can't tolerate them for doing it

So there's one main symptom of worldly wisdom. The next symptom or evidence James lists is in the middle of verse 14, "and you have selfish ambition..."

Again, notice the amplification. This isn't just selfishness, it's an *extreme* form of selfishness. Selfish ambition

This is personal gratification and self-fulfillment *at any cost*. This is operating in life under this philosophy: I want *what* I want *when* I want it *how* I want it. Again, kind of what it's like to be God

So you can see the consistent worldview here between these two symptoms of jealousy and selfish ambition: the worldview of human wisdom, which is basically equivalent with an atheistic worldview: Because God doesn't exist or He isn't who He said He is in His word, I act as if things and people exist for my glory and therefore my life ambition is to evangelize them and get them to worship me at any cost

And I will stop at nothing to achieve that end. I will have personal gratification and satisfaction at any cost, I'll sin to get it, I'll sin if I don't get it

And I'll resent and hate anyone who gets in my way or anyone who appears to be doing a better job in their life at self-worship. This is human or worldly wisdom

And notice the source or location of these idolatrous desires right there in the middle of verse 14, "in your hearts." This is a deathblow to our pride

As much as we would love to convince ourselves to the contrary, we're shown here that the problem isn't external, the problem isn't circumstantial

No, the reason people respond in ungodly ways to their circumstances and to other people is because in their heart they want to dethrone god and put themselves there

As Warren Wiersbe once said, "the heart of every problem is a problem in the heart." Heart idolatry is a symptom of believing and living under the world's philosophy

Something or someone is ruling my heart instead of the Lord. That's what it means to be of the world

Now, to be sure, all true believers can struggle with these things. All true believers can be guilty of these things. But no true believer can be *characterized* by these sins, and no true believer can be *comfortable* with these sins

Why do I highlight that? Because this text is clear: you cannot habitually hold onto bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart and lay any claim to heavenly wisdom: Notice the end of verse

14, if these things, if bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are in your heart, “do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.”

If you live a self-centered, a self-focused life, where anyone who is different than me, must be doing something wrong, anyone who disagrees with me is automatically wrong, anyone who has easier circumstances than me, I covet their life and I hate them for having it, anyone who is more successful than me, I just can't stand, I am bitter against.

If that's the pattern of a person's life, if they are governed and ruled by fleshly things like jealousy and selfish ambition, and they either have no ability to get victory or no desire to get victory, James says, don't lie against the truth

Don't be proud about your supposed possession of spiritual wisdom and understanding, when in your life and in your relationships you are manifesting a heart that hates God and lives in opposition of the gospel

Don't try to export your supposed heavenly wisdom to others when there is no evidence in your life that the truth has penetrated your own heart

James shows us here that lying with our lips is only one of many ways to lie. We can also lie with our lives when lay a claim to heavenly wisdom and live a life that contradicts the gospel

Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter is known for saying, “Beware, lest you unsay with your lives what you say with your lips.”

Don't claim to have heavenly wisdom to pass along, don't claim to have a true understanding of the God of the Scriptures when in your heart *you're* still lord of your life

I can't think of a more important and timely truth for the church at large to consider today:

Have we not cultivated an environment in evangelicalism which communicates it doesn't really matter if there is evidence of pride and significant foolishness in my life, I still have wisdom to offer people, and God would want me to give it

In other words, the qualification for having spiritual wisdom and instructing others has been reduced down to one thing: knowledge and the ability to communicate. That has now become the qualification for pastoral ministry

As long as I have something helpful to say and I have the ability to say it clearly, God would want me to spiritually instruct others regardless of my character, regardless of what my life looks like

I saw a great headline this week which said, “the next generation of the church must demand purity, must demand holiness, from its pastors.”

The implication is, today, we don't demand or even expect those things from church leaders. The bar has not been set where the New Testament has set it

Today, as long as someone is compelling to listen to and they have a charismatic personality and they can attract a crowd, give them a pulpit, we can overlook the other things in their life, after all,

God has clearly gifted them to teach we would be short-changing the church by not allowing the church to benefit from this man's gifts

That's worldliness, that's operating under the world's wisdom. And it's not just church leaders who speak as if they have heavenly wisdom when their life doesn't match up, it can also happen with lay people

We've got this very convenient platform to teach and instruct others in our day, called social media, with things like Facebook and Twitter. And by all means, those things can be used well and for good purposes

But it is remarkable how quick some can be to teach and instruct others with spiritual truth when they have no victory whatsoever over sin, they are constantly plagued with guilt, they lack assurance they're even a Christian, and there's significant evidence of foolish living in their life

And yet there they are on Facebook boldly proclaiming the gospel, getting into debates with people who have differing views

There they are exhorting other Christians to be as passionate at defending the gospel as they are, but they fail to see that the way they live their lives they are undoing the very gospel they are so passionate about proclaiming to others

I've heard it wisely said, "If your Christianity doesn't work at home, *don't export it*. God doesn't need your help."

James says here in verse 14 there is a direct connection between the *credibility of your Christian message* and the way you live your life. Those who are living as if they are merely of the flesh, in bondage to the same things as those outside the church, they prove they don't have any understanding of heavenly things to pass on, regardless of how much knowledge about the truth they think they have

Notice what category James places this human wisdom in: Verse 15, "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic."

Those are three categories that you never want to be true of you if you are a Christian. Notice what is represented here: The three great enemies of the believer. The world, the flesh, and the devil

First, James says that it is earthly, of the world. It springs from the fallen and finite and rebellious system of evil that the world represents. It's only what man can theorize, discover, and accomplish by himself, with no place for or assistance from God

He then says that is natural, or fleshly. It springs from the mental and emotional impulses of fallen humanity, marked by its depraved concepts, desires, and aspirations

What I feel like doing is automatically right. What I think is true is automatically true. (1 Cor. 2:14 – the *natural* man)

And lastly James says that it is demonic, or of the devil. It is evil in character. It's hostile to God at its core. In other words, it acts the way it acts because it wants to be god and hates the true God, it wants to dethrone God

So think about what James is saying here: If you perpetually live with bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, these things have taken up residence there and found a comfortable home, then your wisdom, your life worldview, is more of the world, more like the unconverted, natural man, and more like Satan, than God

The devastating testimony continues in verse 16 as James now describes the *fruit* of one's life when they operate under earthly wisdom is now described in verse 16, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, (where these things take up residence and become comfortable in your heart) there is disorder and every evil thing."

That word for "disorder" James used in 1:8 to describe the double-minded man *unstable* in all his ways

He has a case of spiritual schizophrenia in his heart, living like an atheist one day and a Christian the next. It's a picture of instability and chaos. In his heart he can't decide if he wants to be god, or allow God to be God

The next word James uses there in verse 16, "every evil thing" or "every evil practice."

The word "thing" you see there, or "practice" is the word *pragma*, where we get our word "pragmatic."

So worldly wisdom produces absolutely nothing pragmatically of any value at all. At its best it produces worthless things, vile things

It will only produce rotten fruit in your life. Every kind of evil practice, there's no limit to where worldly wisdom will take you.

One implication we can't miss from this text is that the person of worldly wisdom will have a hard and miserable life

There's no way around James' language, "there will be disorder and every evil practice." Disorder and chaos internally, every evil practice externally

Proverbs says it this way: Proverbs 13:15, "the way of the transgressor is *hard*."

Why does selfish ambition and bitter jealousy lead to those things? Because people who are jealous and self-centered will constantly be angry and frustrated at their ever-changing circumstances and at other people

And their trust and hope are in those things, not the Lord. So when people let them down, their hope and trust is crushed. When circumstances fail, their foundation for happiness and hope is gone

As we've mentioned those symptoms are signs that in their heart they want to be god, they want to dethrone god because after all, He's not living up to their standards of how He should govern their life, so their life is one of trying to dethrone Him and replace Him with a better alternative

And the misery and frustration and anger they constantly experience are the result of failing over and over and over in their quest to be God. This is the irrational nature of sin, this is the bondage of a self-focused worldview

Now, before we move on and consider the godly counterpart to this worldview of man's wisdom in verse 17, I think it will be helpful to think about the opposite of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition

How do we crucify these things if we see symptoms of them in our lives? Well, first of all we could say that gratitude and contentment are jealousy killers

As we've said, when a person is jealous their problem is not with another person. That might be how it shows up, but they're problem is ultimately with God and His providence. They're not satisfied with God and the way God is governing their life

So, we confess those things to the Lord and we replace them with godliness. We regularly thank God for our salvation blessings in Christ. We regularly thank God that anything hard we are experiencing in this life is infinitely less than we deserve in light of our sin

We thank God that although people might let us down, Christ will never let us down

We rest content in the purposes of God, knowing that He is sovereign, loving, and wise, and I certainly can't improve on any of those

And then there's selfish ambition. People exist to serve me, things exist for my enjoyment and pleasure and I'll do whatever it takes to have it

How do we crucify that sin in our lives? Humble service. Sacrificially loving and laying down your lives for others

We could call this one "getting lost in the needs of others."

How does this crucify selfish ambition? First, you will experience the truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive

Secondly, all of the energy and time we would normally consume on ourselves, we now consume it on others, and therefore we no longer have time or energy to think about ourselves. Our flesh doesn't have as many opportunities to sin because we're so busy serving others

And one final principle that might be helpful when we are tempted with these things in our heart: We need to remind ourselves of the words of one theologian: God is not accepting applications to join the trinity. There's not a "help wanted" sign in heaven

And I like to remind myself, even if God was accepting applications to join Him, my resume would be the last one He would ever consider

Well, next, in verses 17-18, we see the godly counterpart to worldly wisdom, namely, the wisdom from above, heavenly wisdom

How do you know if you have this wisdom? How do you know if you truly believe all of the knowledge and truth you know about God? How do you know if you fear the Lord and thus have experienced the beginning of wisdom, as Proverbs states?

Notice verse 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."

First of all, James says, it's pure. It's pure in the sense that it is free from the contamination of vices, it's undefiled

This is a spiritual integrity, a moral sincerity, no contaminants of jealousy and selfish ambition. It's not a compartmentalized heart, where Christ is merely one of many lords being worshipped

Next notice James says it's "peaceable"

James picks up a theme of the beatitudes, Matthew 5:9, "blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God."

Why are peacemakers referred to as sons of God? Because God is in the business of reconciliation, making peace where there was hostility

So when you follow that pattern, striving to make peace instead of perpetuating conflict, you are sons of God, in the sense that sons represent their fathers

So this characteristic is one which promotes healthy and peaceful relationships. It means you will do all you can do to heal the strain of any relationship, so much as it depends on you

And this is not to say that even the most godly people can't have relational difficulty, relational strains

But with godly people, those difficult relationships are typically the exception in their lives, not the norm. And godly people can truly and sincerely say that if any relational strain exists it can't be traced back to my unwillingness to act and reconcile and humble myself

So, if you truly have heavenly wisdom and understanding, you will be good at relationships, so much as it depends on you

You ever notice what we do sometimes when evaluating difficult relationships and why some people aren't as peaceable as others?

How often we might put a secular or psychological label on things that the Bible gives us pretty clear categories for?

In other words, why does person A have conflict in a lot of his relationships while person B lives perpetually in a state of peace with others?

Well, person A came from a family that always argued so it's just normal for him to argue with people and get angry

Or person A is an extrovert or an introvert and that's why they aren't good at relationships and being peaceable. It's just personality differences

Or person A has endured a lot of hurt in past relationships and therefore he has trust issues and his fuse is pretty short because he's been so badly hurt in the past. That's why he has a lot of conflict

Now, to be sure, it can be helpful to consider the ways our personalities might make it harder to obey the Lord in certain areas

Sure it can be helpful to consider the family dynamic we came from and even how certain things in our past might contribute to certain tendencies in our lives now

None of these things are irrelevant, while at the same time, none of them even come close to going far enough in the discussion

Biblically speaking, why does person A have conflict with coworkers, with particular friends, with certain family members, with their spouse, or whoever it may be, while person B rarely has conflict with anyone?

It's pretty straightforward biblically: God says, because person A is prideful and person B is humble. The Word of God says that the person with most relational conflict in their life is the person with the most idolatry in their life.

And you say, "Where is that connection? I've never thought about relational conflict like that before."

Glance over at James 4:1-2, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel."

It's pretty clear in that text why I have conflict with other people: Someone or something is ruling my heart other than the Lord, someone gets in the way of that idol, and I sin in my response. That's why I have conflict, that's why I'm not a peacemaker

Idols always get in the way of peaceful relationships

Back to 3:17, if heavenly wisdom is operative in my life, if I truly understand God and myself, I will promote peaceful and harmonious relationships

The next characteristic in verse 17 is gentle, maybe translated as considerate or forbearing. This is a hard word to translate but it basically means a willingness to yield to others

Practically speaking, in matters of preference you don't insist on your own way. You love to defer to others

Furthermore, you humbly submit to dishonor, persecution and mistreatment

Gentleness here also involves waiving your right to demonstrate that you were right. This one is really hard

This means you don't rub salt in people's wounds, even when it was their own foolishness that got them there

If they reject your biblical counsel and fall flat on their face, you don't respond with "I told you so." "you should have listened to me, now look at the mess you've made."

No, that's harshness, the opposite of the term James is using here

This means that if it would benefit them some way, you might even have to allow another person to feel like they won, or feel like they were right, even though maybe they were wrong and foolish

This means having the humility to allow other people to view you wrongly, to maybe even get the upper hand in a relationship, because in your overlooking that offense it might profit them spiritually in some way

Worldly wisdom has to insist and prove that it is right. Heavenly wisdom waves the right to demonstrate that it was right

It has a gentle disposition toward others, considering them more significant than themselves

Fourthly, in verse 17, godly wisdom is reasonable, or open to reason. It's easily persuaded because it is open to reason and willing to listen

You've talked to the person who always assumes they are right and always assumes their ideas are that much better than everyone else's ideas. Again, sort of what it is like to be God

Well, "reasonable" here means you will have a disposition of a learner. You're ready and eager and willing to listen and change your view or practice if necessary

This is really the opposite of a natural man in his state of unbelief. 1 Corinthians 2:14, "He does not accept the things of the spirit of God because they are foolishness to him."

He's unwilling to accept it because his mind isn't open to reason. Which ultimately is simply a form of pride

So, a telltale sign of a person void of heavenly wisdom is someone who is unteachable. They are unwilling to listen to reason, unwilling to change a viewpoint after being given sound reasons to do so

James says the person of godly wisdom is teachable, open to reason, he has a disposition of a learner

Next, verse 17, it's full of mercy and good fruit. This is the only double characteristic on the list

This means you love to overlook offenses. It's an attitude of compassion. It prefers to deal with people in terms of what is *needed* rather than what is *deserved*

Good fruit is attached to this one because that is the rich harvest your life will produce if you are full of mercy

There is an emphasis placed in Scripture on the importance of being merciful, and what that says about the authenticity of your faith

Basically, in the Scriptures, if you aren't merciful with other people then how could you have possibly experienced the mercy of God in Christ?

In other words, if God could do the unthinkable and greater and much harder act of forgiving someone like you, then what naturally should result from that is a merciful and gracious disposition toward others, who have offended you to a *much lesser* degree than you have offended God

You read the gospels and you can see over and over there's one group of people who were consistently harsh toward others and unmerciful in their dealings: The Pharisees

They couldn't handle Christ's merciful treatment of other sinners, they hated the compassion of God

They are represented by the older brother in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. He just couldn't stand that his father would be compassionate and merciful toward his rebellious younger brother

Why did the Pharisees lack compassion and mercy? Because most of the Pharisees had not experienced God's forgiveness, they were trusting in themselves that they were righteous. That's why Jesus said in Luke 7:47, "her sins (the sinful woman who cried tears on the feet of Jesus), which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

If you are harsh and unmerciful toward others, that's ultimately indicative of your relationship with God. One undeniable proof that you have been a recipient of heavenly wisdom is that you will be full of mercy in your dealings with others

Two final descriptions of heavenly wisdom remain at the end of verse 17. First, it is not partial. "Unwavering" is how the NASB has it

It's not uncertain, or inconsistent, vacillating. It's a picture of consistency and stability. It's predictable because it operates in life out of *conviction*, not convenience

So it treats all people and all circumstances out of the conviction it has derived from the Word of God

As opposed to responding out of emotion or mere convenience in those situations

I think one of the more meaningful compliments that we can receive as Christians, often it's a compliment disguising itself as a criticism, meaning the other person doesn't mean it as a compliment, but it actually is a compliment in light of what James says here

It's when a coworker, a friend, a family member, a spouse, even a fellow church member, says to you, "you're so predictable, I knew if I asked you this question, I knew you were just going to go to the bible and give me passages that deal with this issue. You're just so predictable and one-dimensional."

And you respond with “amen, thank you.” If somebody says that to you, what an encouragement that should be to you that people in your life have noticed that you are consistent and stable and unwavering in your convictions. That’s a sign you operate under heavenly wisdom

And lastly, there in at the end of verse 17, heavenly wisdom is sincere, or without hypocrisy. You will be *genuine*

You’ll strive to please God when no one else is watching and no one will ever know what you are thinking about in any particular moment. You’ll strive be the same person you are at church as you are in the home, or around friends, or family

Or we could state it negatively: You’re not a spiritual chameleon, always changing your character based on the specific circumstance you’re in

What’s the result of heavenly wisdom in a person’s life? Well, remember the fruit of worldly wisdom in a person’s life? Verse 16, “Chaos, disorder and every evil practice.”

Well, here is the end result of heavenly wisdom: Verse 18, “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

Pretty tricky phrase there, the language could technically go a few different ways. But I think the main idea is clear: There is an undeniable causal relationship between godly wisdom, righteousness, and peace

Godly wisdom produces righteousness, righteousness promotes peaceful and harmonious relationships

In other words, righteousness will only be cultivated in a climate of peace. A crop of righteousness cannot be produced in a heart climate of jealousy and self-seeking

Those heart sins manifest themselves in dysfunctional relationships. But where righteousness dwells in the heart, it manifests itself in harmonious and peaceful relationships

Righteousness and peace are inseparably linked to heavenly wisdom. And when that climate of peace exists in your heart, there’s going to be stability in your life. You will live a righteous life before God, not a sinless life, but a life that is growing in conformity to the will of God

So you can see, really what we’ve seen represented in this text this morning is two worldviews, and we could even narrow it down to 2 types of people

The first person, of worldly wisdom, lives a self-centered life. They don’t have harmonious relationships because they have an elevated view of themselves

They are perpetually discontent, always focusing on what they don’t have and why they have a right to have it

They are frequently jealous because everyone else has it so much better than them

Their employer is out to get them, maybe they’re always changing jobs, their family doesn’t understand them, nobody at their church appreciates them or reaches out to them

Their spouse won't change the way they want them to change. They love their kids but they can't figure out why they're so much worse than everyone else's

They just can't seem to understand why nothing ever goes their way. This is fruit and frustration of the worldview of self, the worldview of unbelief, where I want to be God and people and things exist for my happiness and pleasure. And therefore my life is one of internal disorder and externally every kind of evil practice

And then there's the worldview of God's wisdom. I dethrone myself and my own understanding and I treat people with the dignity, mercy and the love that God treats me with

This person views every difficulty as an opportunity to trust the Lord and put the gospel on display in their lives

Their life is characterized by peaceful, harmonious relationships and stability. They are content, they have joy and gratitude in their lives no matter what is going on circumstantially

These are the two options: So, back to James' original question in verse 13, "who among you is wise and understanding?"

Here's the litmus test. If your life fits into the picture of verses 14-15, and you're not grieved by those things and repent from those things, don't boast and be false to the truth. Don't lay a claim on heavenly wisdom when your life can't back it up.

But if your life fits into the picture of verses 17-18, not perfection, but the consistent direction toward those things, you operate under heavenly wisdom and thus you are in a position to instruct others and pass that wisdom along

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