

FAITH IN ACTION SEEKS WISDOM FROM ABOVE

Greetings: Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, teaches His disciples to pray, *Our Father who art in heaven...* And in the same chapter, Jesus, in a rebuke of the hypocrites, repeatedly reminds the hearers of the “Father, who is in heaven.” Jesus epitomizes wisdom and yet demonstrates His dependence upon the Father from above. The book of James certainly grasps this truth and source of wisdom from above and highlights it in two passages of the epistle. Today we will be studying the second “*gift from above*” passage, *Faith in Action Seeks Wisdom from Above* in **James 3:13-18**.

JAMES 3:13-18 ¹³Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Our Father in heaven will generously give wisdom to those who ask. *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* The wisdom discussed in **James 1:5** that was needed dealt with finding joy in trials and letting endurance guide us to being *perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*. The perspective of wisdom in chapter three is more connected with how we live our lives (especially in our teaching and influence) and the controlling of the tongue. *So speak and so act.* **2:12**. This passage, therefore, is connected to *Faith in Action is Mindful of the Tongue* and in context is underscoring the responsibilities for the Christian teacher. (**James 3:1**) It is also heavily influenced by the Beatitudes found in the Sermon on the Mount.

WISDOM NOT FROM ABOVE... 3:13-16

- Mature Christians are those who seek to be wise and understanding.
 - James initially starts with a “true wisdom” statement (**13**) as he contrasts the wisdom *not* from above in verses. **14-16**
 - He argues that wisdom must be shown by good behavior, by *deeds in the gentleness of wisdom*. **13**
 - The *gentleness of wisdom* is a Greek way of saying “wise gentleness” or “wise meekness” (same word {*prautes*} in the Greek).
- Opposing “true wisdom” was the fact that some had *bitter jealousy and selfish ambition* and were *arrogant*, thus lying *against the truth*. **14**
 - Jealousy here can also be translated as envy and selfish ambition as strife.

- “Any contentiousness or arrogance, any tendency to self-assertion, any desire to glory over others is an infallible sign that the essential qualifications [of teaching] are, in fact, lacking.” (Tasker)
- “There is a moral foundation in all true wisdom. The true wisdom is found alone in those of moral and upright character.” (Burton Coffman)
- Jealousy and selfish ambition (strife, party spirit, factions) openly show that this wisdom is not from God!

❖ **Internal examination: Are any of these characteristics found in me?**

- Origins of wisdom not from above. **15**
 - **Earthly** — of or pertaining to this earth, worldly, reflecting our culture
 - **Natural** — Unspiritual / Sensual; thus, not from God’s Spirit
 - **Demonic** — influenced and promoted by demons
- Outcome of wisdom not from above. **16**
 - Disorder {*akatastasia*} is an ungodly outcome from wisdom that does not come from above. *Akatastasia* can also be translated as confusion, unstable **1:8**, restless or unruly **3:8**, and is connected to an attitude of insurrections **Luke 21:9** and riots **2 Corinthians 6:5**.
 - Every evil thing covers every wickedness that disorder does not. It is a vile or foul practice originating from the earthly, natural and or demonic.
 - The origin of where we receive our wisdom will determine the outcome.

WISDOM FROM ABOVE... 3:13, 17

- The wisdom from above is “true wisdom” because God and His Word are the Origin and Source.
 - James has previously laid the groundwork for where true wisdom comes from and that we should *ask of God, who gives*. **1:5**
 - Wisdom from above is good, perfect, light, with no shadow of turning. **1:17**

SEVEN “JEWELS” FOR A CROWN OF “TRUE WISDOM” 3:17

(Challenge the class to focus on one for each day of this week, beginning today.)

- Wisdom from above is first **Pure**.
 - *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* **Matthew 5:8**
 - True wisdom is, first, pure: The other attributes flow from purity, which is the quality or state of being free from mixture, pollution, or other foreign elements.
 - *The words of the LORD are pure words: As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.* **Psalms 12:6**
 - *...Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* **4:8**

❖ **How will you be pure and make sure your words are pure?**



- Wisdom from above is **Peaceable**.
 - *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. **Matthew 5:9***
 - True wisdom is controlled by peace, thus inclined to avoid argument.
 - The peace from above that germinates from within will produce an outcome of even more peace. **18**

❖ **How will you demonstrate being peaceable?**

- Wisdom from above is **Gentle**.
 - *Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. **Matthew 5:5***
 - Gentle is forbearing and fair and is often translated as “meek” or “humble”; one writer called it “forbearance even under provocation” (Gibson) and another “sweet reasonableness.” (Arnold)
 - This precise word is difficult to translate but incorporates the “lovely attribute of redeemed character and godly wisdom that is humbly patient, steadfastly gentle, submits to dishonor with an attitude of humility and courteousness and kindness. (MacArthur)

❖ **What will you need to do to be sure you are gentle?**

- Wisdom from above is **Reasonable**.
 - *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:3***
 - Reasonable as used in this text could also be translated “willing to yield,” “compliant,” “easy to be entreated.”
 - This value of being ever ready to listen and obey (willingness to yield one’s own preferences) is in stark contrast to the stubborn, obstinate, disobedient heart— one who is not poor in spirit.

❖ **How willing to yield are you; how reasonable?**

- Wisdom from above is **Full of Mercy and Good Fruits**.
 - *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. **Matthew 5:7***
 - Consider this as one quality as mercy naturally compels one to be filled with good fruits.
 - Remember that chapter 2 of loving others impartially and faith which results in good works (fruit) is bridged by the verse *judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. **2:13***

❖ **What will you do this week to demonstrate mercy with your good fruits?**



- Wisdom from above is **Unwavering**.
 - *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:10***
 - Unwavering is “without dividing of mind, undivided, whole-hearted.” (Souter) Compare this to the double-minded man in **1:8**. And consider the perfect balance in contrast to wisdom from above is *reasonable*.
 - Other translations use such terms as “impartial” and “non-judgmental,” similar to our study in **2:1, 9**.

- ❖ **What steps will you take in your convictions that need to be upheld? How do you plan to maintain an unwavering commitment held in balance with the other mentioned values?**

- Wisdom from above is **Without Hypocrisy**.
 - *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. **Matthew 5:6***
 - Without hypocrisy is “utterly sincere, genuine, not phony, not fake, no pretense, no mask. That’s the climax of true wisdom.” (MacArthur)
 - Jesus addresses the hypocrites in the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 6:1-18** as well as all of Matthew 23 as he confronts the Pharisees who are negative examples for all Christian teachers of today.

- ❖ **Do you need to make any changes to act “without hypocrisy”?**

OUTCOME OF WISDOM FROM ABOVE... 3:18

- “The seed whose fruit is righteousness” or, literally, “the fruit of righteousness” is the outcome of possessing wisdom from above.
 - This fruit is “sown in peace by those who make peace.”
 - This fruit sown is actually from initial seed now being re-sown in peace. This is the inexorable law of sowing and reaping.
 - Consider from **1:1** the faithful “seed” who have been dispersed abroad, having received the implanted word **1:21**, are producing fruit which in turn is producing even more fruit. This is God’s wisdom from above!

- ❖ **How will your faith this week lead you to demonstrate your willingness to seek this “wisdom from above” and be led as you control your tongue?**

Prayer

