

## James 3:13-18 Dueling Wisdoms

You and I are living in what's commonly referred to as the Information Age. A period of time when we have access to new information and technology constantly. Consider these astounding facts.

- Our accumulated knowledge until 1900 doubled roughly **every century**.
- By the end of World War 2, knowledge was doubling at the rate of **every 25 years**.
- Now knowledge doubles **every 13 months**.

In 2010 Eric Schmidt (former CEO of Google) explained this explosion in information this way: **"Every 2 days now we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization until 2003."** That's astounding.

Many have believed that with this explosion in information and hence knowledge and wonderful advances in science and medicine that mankind has the capability to solve all of it's problems. How's that working out? While we may be able to solve various diseases, as a society we seem to be becoming more agitated and reactive and violent then in the past. There is less tolerance for the mistakes and shortcomings of others even though tolerance is taught everywhere. I think of attending grade school in the 60's compared to what kids experience today. Back then we never worried about someone bringing a gun to school and causing harm to other students. There would be an occasional fistfight break out and someone might get hurt and sent to the hospital for stitches but murder in schools was unheard of.

In this Information Age we have the capability to be better connected to each other than ever before through social media and yet what do you often see when you go out to eat. Tables full of families or friends who are checking Facebook or texting or tweeting on their phones rather than interacting face to face with each other.

Clearly being smarter or better informed or having massive amounts of information at our fingertips doesn't necessarily solve all of our problems. And it's into this malaise of confusion that James talks with us this morning in words that were written 2000 years ago and yet could just as easily have been written in yesterday's editorial section of the Star and Tribune as a commentary on today's society. He talks about a thing called "*wisdom*" and contrasts worldly wisdom with Godly wisdom.

I really like how preacher **Haddon Robinson** puts knowledge and wisdom into perspective.

*"Our generation possesses more data about the universe and human personality than all previous generations put together. High school graduates today have been exposed to more information about the world than Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza or Benjamin Franklin. In terms of facts alone, neither Moses nor Paul could pass a college entrance exam today. Yet by everyone's standards, even with all our knowledge, society today is people with a bumper crop of brilliant failures. Men and women educated to earn a living often don't know anything about handling life itself. Alumni from noted universities have mastered information about a narrow slice of life, but couldn't make it out of the first grade when it comes to living successfully with family and friends. Let's face it, knowledge is not enough to meet life's problems. We need wisdom, the ability to handle life with skill."*

In this section James is going to contrast two types of wisdom: "worldly wisdom" and "God's wisdom." He begins with a great question: **"Who is wise and understanding among you?"**

Let's spend just a few moments pondering this question. Think with me for a moment, "*who is the wisest most understanding person you know.*" Now, describe that person to me. What do they act like?

Being wise and being smart are not necessarily the same thing and in fact they often are not. Scoring high on your SAT's or ACTS's does not necessarily mean you know how to navigate the challenges of life. In fact, often those with a very high IQ don't know how to apply that knowledge to life. Wisdom is the application of what you know to everyday life and decisions and judgments that need to be made on a daily basis.

James, in our passage this morning, contrasts the wisdom of this world from the wisdom that flows from God Himself. After his opening question of who is wise among you, James states that it's one thing to claim to be wise but in actuality the test is going to be in how that individual lives their life. It's the same claim he makes throughout this short little book. Similarly anyone can claim to have faith in God, but the proof is in how they live their lives. Same thing with wisdom. Anyone can claim to be wise, but then watch them outside the classroom or for me the pulpit and see how they live their lives and you'll quickly discover whether their wisdom is from this planet and society or if their wisdom is flowing from God.

What James is going to do in the remainder of this passage is list distinguishing marks for both earthly generated wisdom and wisdom which flows from God. Let me suggest that as we go through these distinguishing characteristics that you fill them out on the sermon outline in your bulletin to see if there are areas where you are displaying worldly wisdom rather than Godly wisdom. Since God calls us to be a reflection of Him to the world than we're going to desire to be motivated and ruled by His wisdom rather than the world's. Additionally James lists some of the effects of both types of wisdom and I think most of us would agree that we'd rather live in a world ruled by Godly wisdom rather than the world's.

The first characteristic we see is listed in the latter half of verse 13 where James says,

*"Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."*

Here James is talking about Godly wisdom and he lists two characteristics to fill in on your chart. Godly wisdom results in a "good life" and "humility."

A "good life" is the type of life that you don't need to be ashamed of. There's nothing to hide from others when you're living a "good life". If you're living a "good life" you shouldn't have to worry about somebody hearing what you said about them behind their back or what you tweeted or texted to them or about them. It's a life lived with integrity. **Daniel** lived such a life. It says that when his enemies tried to discredit him to the king they couldn't dig up any dirt either in what he had done or in what he neglected to do. That's a good life when someone can't dig up any dirt on you.

**Secondly**, the Godly wise life is a life of **humility**. That means that you're not trying to get others to be impressed by you, but rather you're living life as a servant of God Himself and you're looking for ways that you can encourage and lift up others. To live your life in such way that others feel loved and important and valued.

In the next 3 verses James goes into detail about what a life lived from worldly wisdom looks like.

**James 3:14-16 (NIV)** *But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

### Worldly Wisdom:

- **Harbor bitter envy:** the word "*harbor*" means to keep it close to you. You don't want to let this go and so you live in it. It feels good to hang on to it, it's self-satisfying and self-justifying. "*Envy*" is that you see what someone else has and you want it. And you want it so much that you become resentful that they have it and you don't. And you become obsessed with this object and often several objects. And if you really live in this lifestyle and mind-set it becomes not so much about the object itself but it's this sense of entitlement. I "*deserve*" this and so you become resentful that they have it and you don't. And in reality it takes your focus off of God and even relationships with others and it becomes all about what others have that you don't. And this dynamic doesn't need to be limited to possessions. It could be a job, or popularity or abilities someone else has.
- **Harbor selfish ambition:** This is a good partner to bitter envy. For while bitter envy is focused on what I don't have, selfish ambition is focused on what I'm going to get. And it doesn't matter who I need to use or step on to get it. I'm obsessed with getting something and I strategize and

calculate and plan how to get it. And once again, there's no thought of helping others or on what God wants for your life – it's pretty much what you want for your life.

- **Boastful** – worldly wisdom wants others to be impressed with you and your accomplishments. It's all about trying to control the perception of others of you. So, people will often make up fictitious facts about themselves on their Facebook profile in order to impress others.
- **Denies the truth** – worldly wisdom doesn't care that much about what's true, especially God's truth. What matters most is my success in life and what others think of me. Worldly wisdom is all about insisting or demanding that I get my rights. I deserve to be treated better by others than how I'm currently being treated.
- **Unspiritual and demonic:** James says that it's pretty clear that the source of this type of wisdom is from Satan himself. Remember, Satan was not concerned about others welfare, He was only concerned with His self-promotion and that's what worldly wisdom is all about as well.
- Living life with this worldly wisdom results in **disorder and every kind of evil**. And this shouldn't be too surprising when you're always trying to promote yourself and get what you think you deserve out of life it's naturally going to cause discord in the relationships with people around you.

In the remainder of our passage, James lists the characteristics of wisdom that flow from God and that we should desire to live in.

- **First of all pure** – this means someone who is clean and innocent. Jesus talked about these people at the very beginning of his first sermon when he said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*" They might not see Him physically with their eyes while living here on earth, but because their focus is on Him and not on themselves, they can much more clearly detect Him at work in their lives and can more clearly hear His voice because the distractions associated with focusing on yourself are removed. With this type of person there are no ulterior motives with what they say or do. Their hearts are pure and therefore their motives are pure. The beauty of this type of person is because their hearts are pure you can trust their actions. You don't always have to be second-guessing what they meant by this or the reason they did such and such. Because they live a pure life you can trust that they have your best interest in mind.
- **Then peace-loving.** Notice the contrast to worldly wisdom. That resulted in discord but Godly wisdom produces peace, quietness or rest. These individuals aren't always driven by having to prove they are right all of the time. When a disagreement comes up, these individuals communicate that they are much more interested in hearing your viewpoint than they are in proving they are right. They make for great listeners.
- **Considerate or gentle.** Like James said earlier they have put into practice James' earlier instruction to be "*quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry.*" These types of people take your needs and your opinion into high regard. What you think and feel matters greatly to them because you matter to them.
- **Submissive** – those living with God's wisdom don't have to be in power or control over you. They are content in who they are in Jesus Christ so they don't have to prove anything. They are free to support and encourage you. Their identity is not threatened by being in a serving role, because they view themselves as servants of Jesus Christ and therefore it's an honor for them to serve others' needs. They can be submissive because they keep their focus continually on God and therefore adopt the model of Jesus and follow the teachings of Paul in his instructions where he said, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above*

*yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*  
(Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV))

- **Full of mercy and good fruit** – mercy is knowing that someone may deserve judgment but you choose to offer them grace and release instead, because God has given you mercy as well. We all deserve God's judgment but because of Christ's death on the cross we receive His mercy instead. Therefore we are freed up to do the same to others. God is described as being "*rich in mercy*" (Eph 2:4) and therefore we should be as well.

While mercy is an attitude, good fruit is what it looks like on the outside. Releasing someone when you could have been bitter and unforgiving. And again, you have the freedom to do this because God has already done it for you. And remember that Jesus said the key to any of us producing good fruit is by being tied into Jesus, as our vine. Everyday we spend time with Him, everyday we find our source of nourishment and strength from spending time with Jesus and trying to display His servant's attitude and actions of love in our relationships with others.

- **Impartial and sincere:** Individuals living life from Godly wisdom see everyone as valuable and important to God and therefore to them as well. Earlier in chapter 2 James addressed the issue of favoritism and showing partiality and here he reemphasizes it. And then he adds that this shouldn't be a matter of just acting one way on the outside but being a different person on the inside. Sincerity involves being consistent both inside and outside. He's emphasized this several times in his writing so far, that the key is being filled with God on the inside so much so that God's character in us produces right actions out of us. No matter when someone sees you they see the same person, someone who is in love with God and therefore loves others naturally as God flows into and out of them.

James wraps up this section with these words:

*"Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness."* James 3:18 (NIV)

Note the contrast with his earlier statement about the results of people living with worldly wisdom. There he said the result of such type of living was "*disorder and every evil practice.*" However people living with Godly wisdom are *peacemakers who sow in peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.*" People living life filled with Godly wisdom are change makers. Where there is strife and disagreements they tend to diffuse the situation by listening and focusing on meeting others' needs rather than their own. People who encounter them and live with them sense a difference about them and they are drawn into a right relationship with Jesus Christ (hence the harvest of righteousness). They are change makers for the kingdom of God. We could sure use a whole lot more of these types of people in our culture today.

So, let me ask you – which type of wisdom are you living your life with? Worldly wisdom or God's wisdom? If you need more of God's wisdom I've got great news. James earlier in this book told us that if we're lacking in this area to ask God for His wisdom and He will freely give it to you.

**James 1:5 (NIV)** *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

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Worldly Wisdom	Godly Wisdom

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## James 3:13-18 Dueling Wisdoms Going Deeper

**Psalms 90:12** What is the psalmist asking God for as a means to establishing a heart of wisdom? What would this look like in your life?

**Proverbs 1:7; 9:10** – What is the beginning of knowledge? Do you have this in your life?

**Proverbs 2:6** What is the source of wisdom according to this verse?

**Proverbs 3:13-26** What do you learn about wisdom from this passage?

**Proverbs 12:15; 13:10** What characteristic of wisdom is listed here?

**Isaiah 28:29** How is God's wisdom described here?

**Ephesians 1:17** Paul prays for us to receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation for what purpose? How does receiving that help us?

In our passage this morning, James contrasts different fruit of both worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom.

- Which fruit of worldly wisdom do you see in your life?
- What fruit of Godly wisdom do you see in your life?

How can you promote peace that yields "*a harvest of righteousness*."

If "self" is at the heart of worldly wisdom, how can you dethrone "self" in your life?

How does "*selfish ambition*" destroy individuals, families and churches? How has "selfish ambition" affected your life?

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