

The Litmus Test of Wisdom

James 3:13-18

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Introduction: Omar Bradley, A General in the US Army, has said that, *“The world has achieved brilliance without Wisdom.”* Think of a person that you know that has great intelligence but no wisdom. They may have a lot of education but little sense. If you needed good counsel right now, where would you go?

Give me an example right now of a person you know that is wise. What sets them apart? What is it that makes them wise?

The scripture is clear about what true wisdom is and who has it. It is also clear about how to get it.

Prov 1:7

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

NIV

Prov 4:6-7

6 Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;
love her, and she will watch over you.

7 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

NIV

Our outline tonight will be quite simple. I want to take each verse and simply look at each word and let it tell us about wisdom. What does James tell us about it and do you have it- **A test so to speak.**

It is important that you understand the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Wiersbe shares several examples of

mistakes made by people who had intelligence but had no wisdom.

- The Tower of Babel
- Saul trying to put his armor on little David
- The disciples wanted to dismiss the people to find their own food. Five loaves and two fish.
- The Roam “expert sailors” who thought it wise to leave port with Paul onboard.
- Abraham left the place God told him to stay at during a famine.
- You took the wrong job for more money.
- You went to the wrong school because of personal reasons.
- You left a ministry or church because of some fleshly reasons.
- You followed a person that led you away from God or your church only to be left lonely and without support.

Quote: Henry David Thoreau (American poet, historian, philosopher, and essayist) said that, ***“We have improved means to unimproved ends.”***

Verse 13 shows that James makes a distinction between two words. **Sophos** is wisdom and understanding is **epistamai**, which refers to understanding or comprehension. To understand or to know. In the middle voice. **Wisdom is the proper use of knowledge, (Bobby Brooks). It’s knowing what to do with your knowledge.**

- James tells us that you can tell who is wise by looking at their life. This works well with our scripture because the man who properly uses wisdom will do it first in his own life. If a man

has a life that is in the state of destruction because he doesn't use his knowledge, then he is a fool. He's not wise at all.

Illustration: I literally had a person who was asking me for material to use in a bible study that they were going to be teaching. This person was openly in a relationship with a person that was married. You can imagine the look on my face when I was asked this. The first step in wisdom is repentance.

True biblical wisdom will be shown in a person's life.

Anastrophe- conversation or life. It refers to how you live or behave. It's not what you know but what you do.

- Then James says that there will be deeds. Works. This is **ergon**. You may be wondering how a person can act this way. How could they be so confused? Let's look at a few things Paul says in the word.

1 Cor 1:17-22

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of **human wisdom**, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

18 For the message of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19

For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 **For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him**, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

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- The meekness of wisdom- you may not have ever connected meekness and wisdom, but the text literally is translated as the meekness of wisdom. This is **prautes. This refers to mildness and gentleness (NIV humility)**.
- Who was the wisest man in the world? Jesus! Who was the meekest man in the world? Jesus.

A wise man lives like Jesus and shares his wisdom like Jesus. Wisdom is hard to transfer to others when a man is harsh or arrogant. A wise man has knowledge and uses it. He lives it and shares it with behavior pleasing to God. He has deeds to prove his wisdom and an overall conversation and way of life that is wise.

No one likes a know-it-all. Obnoxious wisdom or knowledge is not going to be well received. You know these people well.

Verse 14: We look from the negative side at this point in the text.

- **pikros-** acrid (sharp, bitter, smell or taste), piercing and *pungent*. Bitterness and acid. Bitter people are hard to deal with. They keep it with them a long time. Many times forever. Bitter people are cancerous in the house of God. They eat their lives up and the lives of others.
- **zelos-** Here used in the negative sense. Zeal is the word. Here used to describe a passionate cancer or bitter jealousy. This is indignation and emulation with **envy (NIV)**. These are some pretty nasty emotions folks.
- The next word is strife. **Eritheia-** some translate as selfish ambition. The idea is of those who have factions and strife. Those who stimulate or provoke to anger. Debate, strife and variance, contention.
- This is point blank about people who do not get their way so they provoke a fight by division and strife. These individuals

get others on their side because they have to control issues for God.

- Then they boast about it. The Greek word is *euchomai*. *It means to pray against, or boast, or stand against, while you are praying or seeking a wish from God.* This is actually praying as if God was on your side and should help you because you have so much wisdom. Yikes!!!
- James says that the way this happens is that you lie against the truth. **Pseudomai**- from the middle voice, to lie or use falsehood. To deceive. This is taking the truth and changing it. You cannot change the truth and expect to get wisdom from it. Wisdom comes from the truth of the Word so if you change it to a lie... you void the truth. Simple.

Illustration: God brought a wonder man into my life or woman into my life. They lead them away from church and the things of God. Then they swear God brought them into their lives.

God blessed us with a lake house. Right?

God blessed me with finances and now I have more time for myself....

True wisdom never denies the truth. No truth, no wisdom.

Verse 15: This is not biblical wisdom but earthly.

- This wisdom is not from above. There is a division in man. Once you give your life to Christ, everything is different. Your life is from above now. Evil is from below. Your wisdom is from above and the evil worldly wisdom is from below. Note 1:16 Every good gift and perfect gift comes from above.
- The word for earth or earthly here is *γη* (ghay). It refers to soil or land or the terrestrial. Then the word “sensual” or

“natural” is **psuchikos**. **This is the opposite of spiritual. The wisdom from above is not like this.**

- Then James tells us why this is such a bad wisdom. It is from below and it is devilish... **daimoniodes**.
- I get strange looks when I say people are demonic. People think I am being cruel or just mean. They say I am just talking. The Greek text says that if you **act** like this it is demonic. If you destroy the work of God, what else could it be? If your selfishness and sensual life are full of factions and selfish ambition, with jealousy, is being displayed in the house of God, then you are demonic. Be very careful that you are not the reason that people are not coming to Christ.

Verse 16: James says that when there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there is every kind of evil work. Maybe this letter should have been sent to Corinth.

- Strife- **eritheia- factions, strife, contention**.
- Confusion- **akatastasia- disorder, instability, confusion, tumult, commotion**.
- Evil- **phaulos- foul, wicked, and evil. Every kind of evil the text says**.
- Work- **pragma- work, business, affair, deeds, or thing**.

Verse 17: The wisdom that is from God is first of all:

- **hagios**- sacred (physically, pure, morally blameless, or religious, ceremonially, consecrated): KJV - (most) holy saint.
- **hagnos** from the same as NT:40; properly, clean, i.e. (figuratively) innocent, modest, perfect: KJV - chaste, clean, pure.

- **eirene-** gentile, peaceable, quiet and rest. Not forced upon.
- **epiekes- gentile.** One of my favorite words in the NT. Moderation or between two extremes. Patient. Appropriate. i.e. what falls between rage and apathy. The middle.
- Easily entreated **eupeithes** (yoo-pi-thace'); good for persuasion, i.e. (intransitively) complaint: KJV - easy to be intreated. This means that you are approachable. Like Jesus. Wisdom from above is open to speak with.
- Full of Mercy- **eleos- Can others come to you without condemnation? Would someone be afraid of you? If you have wisdom but are condemning, you will never get to share your wisdom unless you have mercy.**
- Do you have good fruit to offer? Is your good fruit full of nutrition?
- Without partiality- **adiakritos** impartial: KJV - without partiality. To judge fairly.
- Without hypocrisy- **anupokritos- feigns. Sincerity.**

Verse 18: Plant wisdom in peace and raise a harvest of righteousness. James is really concerned by the discord among these readers. It is a serious thing to sow discord among the family of God. The church's choice is discord and trouble, or peace and righteousness. What are we planting. We simply cannot sow discord and raise a crop of righteousness. The fruit of righteousness has to be cultivated. Peace is the great cultivator.

Prov 6:16-19

16 There are six things the Lord hates,
seven that are detestable to him:

17 haughty eyes,
 a lying tongue,
 hands that shed innocent blood,
 18 a heart that devises wicked schemes,
 feet that are quick to rush into evil,
19 a false witness who pours out lies
and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.
NIV

Closing: The law of the harvest comes into play. What kind of fruit do you want in your life? You reap what you sow, more than you sow, later than you sow.

Prov 3:13-26

13 Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, 14 for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. 15 She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.

19 By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; 20 by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew. 21 My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; 22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. 23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; 24 when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. 25 Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, 26 for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.

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