

# Contrasting Wisdoms

James 3:13-18

10/4/2025

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## Announcements

Father daughter date night - October 16, last day to sign up is the 13th.

Tasha Layton - October 24 / Shane and Shane Christmas tour December

## Scripture

James 3:13-18 (NKJV) [13] Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. [14] But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. [15] This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. [16] For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. [17] But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. [18] Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

## Two Wisdoms

## Illustration

Authentic versus an imitation James is concerned with what is authentic. Not what we appear to be, or convince ourselves that we are, but what the substance is.

The Bible speaks of two wisdoms that exist throughout the scripture:

In the Garden of Eden, God established a specific boundary and prohibition for Adam and Eve, instructing them not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Before eating, they knew this much: to obey God was right, and to disobey God was wrong. They were governed by a moral innocence. Much like children, their minds and souls were uncorrupted by the realities of sin. In Genesis 3, the deceiving serpent convinces Eve that the wisdom of "Fear and obey the LORD" was actually keeping them from becoming like God; from having their eyes opened to true wisdom. He spun and manipulated the facts to make the lie sound more appealing and convincing than the truth (He still does that today). And notice one of the reasons Eve ate:

## Scripture

Genesis 3:6 (NKJV) [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food (lust of the flesh), that it was pleasant to the eyes (the lust of the eyes), and a tree desirable to make one wise (the pride of life), she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

What God knew that Adam and Eve didn't is that the "wisdom" that would be unleashed in humanity through disobedience to God would be a wisdom that would bring about war, death, pain, suffering, division, hate, selfishness, greed, and every other vile thing along with it.

From the garden until now, there are two wisdoms that exist. The first wisdom is described by Solomon:

## Scripture

Proverbs 9:10 (NKJV) [10] "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

The second wisdom is also described:

## Scripture

Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV) [12] There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Every day, in every decision, and every word, you and I make a choice of which wisdom to operate under. James understood that there were those who liked to boast about operating in wisdom, but what came out of their lives and mouths put their claims to the test. This morning we will see three movements:

Wisdom Declared Wisdom Distorted Wisdom Demonstrated

## Main Point

### Point 1

Wisdom Declared (13)

## Scripture

James 3:13 (NKJV) [13] Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

James clarifies that true wisdom is demonstrated through our “good conduct.”

## Custom

Good Conduct - anastrophe - the consistent actions and behaviors

However, it's not JUST the works that prove the wisdom. It's the way in which the works are done—in the “meekness of wisdom.” In other words:

## Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

“Good works must be done the right way, or they will have the wrong outcome.”

There are many people who do good works without knowing God, but the “why” matters just as much as the “what.” If someone puts their work on display but internally harbors a self-centered, jealous motive, the fruit of that work will eventually be manifested.

## Scripture

Matthew 11:19 (NKJV) [19] “...But wisdom is justified by her children.”

In other words, true wisdom is seen not by the works themselves, but by what those works produce. Someone who declares to be understanding and wise will have fruit in their lives that is accompanied by meekness and heavenly wisdom.

## Custom

Meekness - not weakness or passivity. Meekness is courage, strength, and boldness under the control of humility.

James goes on to practically illustrate what wisdom with meekness looks like versus the fruit of the world's wisdom.

## Main Point

### Point 2

## Scripture

James 3:14-16 (NKJV) [14] But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. [15] This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. [16] For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

James identifies two seeds of earthly wisdom (dead wisdom), which, when planted in the soil, bring forth every evil thing. He repeats them in verses 14 and 16. These are contrasted to good conduct and meekness:

Bitter envySelf Seeking

## Custom

Bitter Envy - Zealous drive that is fueled by bitterness, anger, and jealousy.

## Application

Bitter envy can be traced back to the earliest narratives of Scripture. Cain and Abel is a potent picture of this wisdom from Genesis 4. The first murder recorded in the Bible was driven by Cain's envy of Abel's favor with God. It's a demonstration of how unchecked envy can lead to devastating consequences. The Apostle Paul also encountered these carnal attitudes within the early church. In his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:3), he chastised believers for their jealousy and quarreling, which manifested as worldly behavior unworthy of their calling in Christ.

## Custom

Self-seeking - A political word which implies parading oneself or falsely presenting oneself for selfish goals.

## Application

Question: Are your good works intentionally done to bring the attention back to yourself or bring glory to God? Self-seeking is another seed identified by James that has destructive consequences. During Jesus' earthly ministry, the Pharisees frequently exhibited self-serving behaviors through their pursuit of social status and public recognition (Matthew 23:5-7). They sought honor from men rather than God. Their self-interest led many people away from true righteousness.

Do not boast and lie against the truth:

Warning against deception

The book of James is filled with practical instruction, but woven throughout it is a repeated warning against self-deception. James reminds us that it is possible to think we are walking rightly with God while, in reality, we are deceiving ourselves. He warns us not to be deceived about the very character of God, for He is the giver of every good gift (1:16–17). He cautions against hearing the Word without doing it, lest we fall into the trap of empty religion (1:22, 26). He exposes the danger of claiming faith without works, which is no faith at all (2:14–20).

This is where we come to another warning about self-deception:

You can dress your motives in Christianese, hide behind false humility, cover your selfish ambition with righteous proclamations, but ultimately, the fruit of what's in your heart will expose the truth. The truth says: "It doesn't matter if you say you love a person if you're intentionally manipulating them for your own gain." "It doesn't matter if you convince yourself that you're a faithful, loving husband if you're beating her up with your hands or your words when your ego gets stepped on and flirting with the secretary at work." "It doesn't matter if you say you're doing it for Jesus if you're working behind the scenes to ensure you're praised and seen by men." "It doesn't matter if you say you're a social justice warrior who cares about equality, love, and acceptance if you're using it as a cloak to justify your own sinful lifestyle or as a platform to self-righteously slander others." "It doesn't matter if you say you're a warrior for truth and righteousness if your words and actions intentionally damage others for your own self-promotion." You get the point. The truth is what matters. However, human beings are remarkably adept at deceiving themselves, often boasting in their lies rather than humbly examining the evidence of their actions, repenting of relying on worldly wisdom, and embracing humility. How do we know we are lying against the truth and deceiving ourselves? Look at the fruit.

## Quote

— Pastor Josh

We can claim to possess and walk in the wisdom of God, but the fruit of our words and the outcome of our actions will ultimately prove where our wisdom is sourced.

[15] This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. [16] For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

This is terrifying, because James traces this kind of “wisdom” to its source: DEMONIC. It lacks anything that is sourced from the Spirit of God and the fruit of the Spirit that comes from God.

Sensual - doesn't mean sexual (although it includes sexual immorality). It means that which is governed by breath, signifying the natural, animalistic, earthly, carnal life apart from God. It refers to appetites and passions that lie within the sinful nature of our flesh. Earthly - of the earth - It doesn't consider spiritual realities or heavenly truths. It doesn't see past this life.

## Scripture

1 Corinthians 3:3 (NKJV) [3] for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

Demonic - When you operate out of bitterness, unforgiveness, revenge, haughtiness, arrogance, and self-interest, you are taking your cues from demonic beings who are in active rebellion against God and His truth! It doesn't mean you're possessed; it means that you have accepted a lesser, base, and wicked wisdom to govern your life by.

## Scripture

1 Timothy 4:1 (NKJV) [1] Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...

The Fruit of this “Wisdom”

[16] For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

## Main Point

### Point 3

Wisdom Demonstrated (17-18)

Just as carnal, earthly wisdom displays its fruit, so does wisdom that is sourced from heaven and rooted in the nature of God.

## Scripture

James 3:17-18 (NKJV) [17] But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. [18] Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

## 1. Pure

This implies a moral purity. Godly wisdom never exploits ungodly sexuality for its purposes. It also indicates a purity of motive. Godly wisdom is not motivated by self-interest or self-preservation.

## 2. Peaceable

[Mat 5:9 NKJV] 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. There is a difference between a peacemaker and a peacekeeper. Peacekeepers tend to value a lack of conflict above all else. Truth can be compromised as long as it keeps everyone pacified. Peacemakers, on the other hand, are willing to fight the necessary battles for true peace to be achieved. They aim to identify the factors that could lead to future conflict and root them out.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "The followers of Christ have been called to peace... And they must not only have peace but also make it."

## 3. Gentle

The word "gentle" carries the idea of being considerate, gracious, and patient with others. It's not weakness—it's strength under control. Paul urged Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24–25 that "a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition." Gentleness is the ability to stand firm in truth while treating people with dignity. It is the opposite of harshness or a combative spirit. A gentle person doesn't have to win every argument, but instead seeks to win the person.

## Illustration

The hands of a surgeon are of utmost importance. A surgeon has to do hard things: cutting out cancerous spots, removing tumors, inserting rods, and cutting around sensitive organs. I'm confident you would be concerned if the last thing you saw before the anesthesia took effect was your surgeon walking into the OR with a chainsaw in his hands! Sometimes it takes gentle hands to accomplish difficult tasks.

## 4. Willing to yield

Willing to yield does not mean willingness to impotently compromise that which is true or right in the sight of God. It doesn't mean passively lying down and being run over as soon as someone challenges your faith, mocks your truth claims, or calls you a name. It's cowardice that yields the truth to lies. It's the "fear of man" that yields righteousness to evil. It's the desire to be liked that yields biblical conviction in the name of unity. It means that the one operating in heavenly wisdom is not stubborn, arrogant, and pridefully obstinate with their opinions. There is a humble flexibility that discerns the truth, and when one discovers they are on the wrong side of the truth, they are willing to yield to that which is right. It means having the humility to receive correction, not just give it. It means being open to hearing the full story before dying on the hill of your convictions.

## 5. Mercy and good fruits

Judgment gives people what they deserve; mercy is slow to anger and judgment.

### Scripture

[Psalm 103:8] (NKJV) [8] The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

James 3 alludes to the Sermon on the Mount several times. There, Jesus told us, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." He also warned us that whatever measure we use toward others will be measured back to us. James already seconded those words back in chapter 2:13 when he said, "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

Good fruit simply implies that the outcome of the usage of godly wisdom brings fruit that represents the character of Jesus. Reconciliation is achieved, forgiveness is reached, compassion is expressed, and God is glorified.

### Illustration

Erika Kirk forgiving the assassin who murdered her husband is a picture of the mercy and good fruit that comes from operating in godly wisdom; thousands of people praying and worshipping God instead of angrily looting, mobbing, and violently protesting.

## 6. Without partiality

The word means being unwavering, steady, and consistent, showing no favoritism or double standards. James had already condemned partiality earlier in the letter (2:1–4), where the rich were given honor and the poor dishonored. Godly wisdom doesn't play favorites because it understands that the truth is more important to loving people than loyalty to a relationship.

### Scripture



1 Timothy 5:21 (NKJV) [21] I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

## Scripture

Romans 2:11 (NKJV) [11] For there is no partiality with God.

### 7. Without hypocrisy

Godly wisdom doesn't play behind the scenes with one motive and resent itself in front of others with a different motive.

## Scripture

[Romans 12:9] (NKJV) [9] Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

## Custom

The term comes from an acting context - one who wears a mask.

Wisdom doesn't have to hide its intentions because there is no malicious intent. This is the capstone. Heavenly wisdom is sincere, genuine, and consistent—what you see is what you get. It does not wear masks, play church, or put on a show. It's authentic inside and out.

## Scripture

1 Thessalonians 2:3-5 (NKJV) [3] For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. [4] But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. [5] For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.

I like how John Stott sums up the wisdom from above:

## Quote

— John Stott

“The Christian's wisdom is cross-shaped.”

## Scripture

James 3:18 (NKJV) [18] Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

If you're one who likes to start fights because you enjoy fighting and winning, chances are the outcomes in your life are not very good. If you're doing that in marriage, friendship, politics, community, debates... You will find that not much good is coming out of your efforts.

On the other hand, if your desire is for peace (peace with God, peace with others, peace within), then you will fight only the necessary battles to achieve peace, you will sacrifice yourself and your rights for the sake of others, and you will plant seeds that bear fruit of righteousness.

Which wisdom governs your life?