

The Wisdom from Above

James 3:17-18

August 4, 2024

If you would take your Bibles and turn to James 3, as we come to the end of this passage, we're finishing up this section from verses 13-18. And as you're turning there, I just want to begin our time because we're going to spend a little time in review by reading from this section, just making sure the whole section is firmly planted in our minds as we head into the text today.

In verses 13-18 of James chapter 3, we read this: "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good conduct his works in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, natural, and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder in every

evil practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

So we began this section a couple of weeks ago by just kind of taking our time, moving slowly through verse 13, talking about what wisdom is, that God is wisdom, and all wisdom belongs to him. Anything that is truly wisdom can only be defined that way because it is connected to or flowing out of the wisdom of God.

In addition, we looked at places like Proverbs 8 and Job 28, which not only help to define wisdom, but show the immense value that the Bible gives to wisdom. Wisdom is worth more than gold and silver and pearls. In fact, there is nothing, we are told, that wisdom can be compared to when it comes to value. Going to the Old Testament was necessary and needed because these original readers of James, who are all Jewish Christians, would have already had this understanding, this Old Testament understanding of the definition and value of wisdom, which would

have been a different understanding than a lot of those immersed in that Greco-Roman culture of the time would have had.

James asks in verse 13 this rhetorical question meant to challenge the readers on whether or not they do indeed have wisdom, especially those who would have maybe thought that they did possess and exercise some sort of wisdom. But last week we looked at verses 14-16 as kind of the challenge to that, as James showed them that there were those among them who thought they understood wisdom or were maybe even practicing it. There is a type of wisdom that many live according to that is not the wisdom from above. It is a false wisdom and one that many who might not even know it are practicing.

We saw in those three verses the evidence, the character, and the results of false wisdom. And there was a challenge from that section, to really examine our lives, to examine our hearts for selfish ambition, to examine our hearts for bitter jealousy. And the truth is that many people reading this letter originally who would agree with everything that Scripture says about wisdom and what it is, might be practicing this type of false wisdom

and not really thinking about it, maybe even thinking that they are being faithful.

We gave some examples of how that might be true for us today, how easy it is for us to make decisions based primarily on our own ambitions and what makes things easier for us, but then to chalk it up to things like feeling a sense of peace from God, not really allowing ourselves to maybe be confronted with the truth of Scripture, but just kind of going along with our feelings, covering that over with some spiritual-sounding language.

How easy it is to find ways to just do mostly the things that we want to do, whether in our day-to-day lives or with our relationships in the church, and then just kind of give some spiritual-sounding reason to it. But if we really get down to the driving motives in the heart, we would see maybe some forms of selfish ambition or bitter jealousy as primary motivations.

So we are to examine our hearts, really think about what is motivating us primarily in our day-to-day living and in the

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decisions that we make. And also we need to be looking at the results of our lives and seeing if we see what we are told, here, to be the results of a life that's lived according to a wisdom that's not from above.

Do you see in your life disorder and instability and unrest and anxiousness and confusion? Those are all words that fall under that category of disorder. Do you see these things on a personal level in your day-to-day living? But more significantly, do you see this in your relationships, in your close relationships, in your relationships within the church. In your living with others, in your conversations with others and in your interactions with them, does the way that you live your life promote any type of disunity within God's people? Is the church growing in strength and unity because you are a part of it? Those are the questions that we are to ask.

And then we saw another possible result of a life lived according to this false wisdom. It is what James says "every evil practice," and that's a phrase that gets more convicting as we understand that the word, here, for "evil" is a word that's

also easily translated as “worthless.” And this makes sense, but we don't often think about it. But really, as we live in light of eternity, anything that is essentially nothing more than a waste of time we should probably consider evil.

The idea is that this type of wisdom doesn't just lead to a bunch of neutral decisions and neutral practices. No, that which is neutral is worthless, and that which is worthless is evil. Every true believer longs to live for that which brings the most glory to God. Therefore, that which is worthless is evil because it keeps us from running our race well, as as Bret pointed out to us from Hebrews 12 a few weeks ago.

If you were here during that sermon, you'll understand this. If you're running with the microwave, the microwave in itself isn't evil, but if you continue to hold it while you're trying to run, that should be considered evil. If you weren't here that week, you should go listen to that sermon or you're going to be lost. All right, get back in.

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As we examine our hearts, we see traces of the motivations of false wisdom; and examine our lives, we see the results of this false wisdom. And as we do that, we don't just kind of dismiss it as no big deal or something that isn't good. "After all, you know, there are bigger things that I should worry about in my life."

No, James keeps us from any temptation to treat this lightly by pointing out to us that this type of living, living this type of way, isn't just less than ideal. It's demonic. The fact that this is demonic living, that this type of living is from the demonic realm and pleases the devil himself, that should shake us out of any type of apathy that we might have had toward what we now must see is quite a big deal in the life of a Christian.

While occasionally living for what is worthless might not always sound like that big of a deal, having the adjective of "demonic" applied to any part of our lives should be abhorrent for us because the danger of being influenced by and even living according to a false wisdom that does not come from God is such

a big deal. And because James expected that it would be something that existed even within this Christian congregation, then we also need to seriously evaluate ourselves and flee from this type of false wisdom in any area of our lives where we might see evidence of it.

So that was kind of our assignment, the assignment we left with last week, knowing that this is a very real and present danger for us, to examine ourselves to identify any areas of this false demonic wisdom in our lives, to confess it and then repent of it, turn from it and prepare our hearts for this week. That was the last week. That was the putting-off aspect when it comes to embracing and living according to the wisdom that comes from God.

Today we're going to look at the putting-on aspect. So we're going to examine verses 17-18 and see what true wisdom is, so that we now, having turned from false wisdom, might live according to the wisdom of God that as reconciled believers in Christ we now have full access to. So look again at these last two verses that we're going to be covering today, verses 17-18.

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"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy, and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

So James ends this whole section on this very positive note. After thinking through the value of wisdom, and then being warned about the extreme danger of living apart from wisdom, he gives us instruction on what hopefully by now we are longing for. What does it mean to live according to the wisdom from above? What does that look like?

We're going to examine this morning true wisdom in these two verses through five points. Number 1, the source of wisdom; number 2, the character of wisdom; number 3, the conduct of wisdom; number 4, the disposition of wisdom; number 5, the picture of wisdom. The source, the character, the conduct, the disposition, the picture of wisdom.

So first, the source of wisdom, the source of wisdom. And we've already spent a good amount of time talking about this in

that first sermon from this section, so we're not going to take long on it here. But it is foundational for everything we're going to talk about today. And there is a little bit added to it in this verse. So again, verse 17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy."

True wisdom comes from above. This is just another way of saying that it's from God. That's how everyone would have understood this. And again, this is based in everything that we said about wisdom as an attribute of God, that he is wisdom and therefore he is the only source of wisdom, the only source for wisdom. We will not go into, again, all of the explanation and Scripture for that. Again, you can just go back and listen to the sermon on verse 13 if you need a refresher on that. You're getting a lot of sermon homework today.

But for now, let's just point out a couple of other ways we can see this wisdom from above, that its source is in God, just from just from this verse. So this list of qualities that we see in verse 17, as you read through those, those should remind us

of other such lists in Scripture. They do, don't they? Most notably would be Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

If you want to turn over to Galatians 5, you can. But in fact, even though James was written before Galatians, and he has not read Paul's letter, there are some similarities in this passage and the entirety of this passage, and the entirety of that passage in Galatians 5, that are worth pointing out and that'll help us to see our point. Galatians 5, beginning in verse 16, I'm going to read through verse 26, we read this, and just note the similarities, not just between our two verses today, but the entirety of this passage in James 3:13-18.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are in opposition to one another, so that you do not do the things that you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. Just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk in step with the Spirit. Let us not become those with vain glory, challenging one another and envying one another."

So notice, there, the wording of what it looks like to walk according to the desires of the flesh. Look at some of the words you see, there: impurity, enmities, strife, jealousy, selfish ambition, all kinds of words having to do with, if you think about it, the disunity and disorder that we looked at last week. He says to Christians in verse 26 in Galatians 5, "Let us not

become those with vain glory, challenging one another and envying one another." This whole thing, this is right in line with what James has just described in verses 14-16, with that false type of wisdom. Therefore, then, to walk in that false wisdom that we talked about last week is to walk in the flesh.

Similarly, look at the verses on the fruit of the Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Notice how similar those words are to the words that we were looking at, that we just looked at in James 3:17: "Pure, peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, and without doubting, without hypocrisy," words that are similar to each other in pointing away from selfishness, away from your own self, and outward from self with love towards God and others.

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Since these qualities in Galatians 5 are natural outworkings of the Spirit of God indwelling us, here's the connection then: They come from God, they come from above. There's a direct connection, here. What the wisdom of God

produces in a life is the same as what the Spirit of God produces in a life. So since God is wisdom, then the Spirit of God is the source of wisdom in us. So because of the connection between the description of wisdom and the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we can see the obvious answer for where wisdom comes from. It's from God. It's from above, and therefore God in us teaches it to us.

But it's also worth noting, something else that many other commentators have pointed out, and you can turn to 1 Corinthians 1 again if you want, but you don't have to. I'll read it here, but 1 Corinthians 1, a passage we looked at a couple weeks ago, 20-24: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased, through the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe. For indeed, Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

And then a little further down in verses 30-31, we read, "But by his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption. So that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" Jesus Christ is the personification of wisdom.

If you go back now to James 3:17, and you read that list again, you will see that he is the one who perfectly exemplifies all those qualities that you read there. When we read this list in James 3:17, we are reading a description of Jesus Christ. So this is so helpful and instructive for us, making these connections between the Holy Spirit and the person of Jesus Christ with wisdom, because this means our pursuit of wisdom and our pursuit of being conformed to the image of Christ, they're the same thing.

It means that as we have hopefully rightfully come to conviction about the need to possess and live out the wisdom from above, one of the most helpful things for us in this

conviction will be not necessarily to focus on all the things which we might have been convicted of coming out of last week and forsaking them.

Yes, it is some of that, but even more so, it is looking at our Savior, the precious Christ whom we love and adore, and to gaze at him as he has been revealed to us in the Word and to follow his example, to mimic him, to mimic his life, to look to our Savior, to try and be like him, the source of wisdom in human flesh. To be like Christ and to be wise are the same thing. And it's something to keep in mind when we read through the Gospels and then when we return to the study of the Gospel of Luke here in the coming weeks and months.

But with that in mind, let's move into our second point, the character of wisdom, the character of wisdom. Again in verse 17, this is the beginning of that list, "first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy." It is important as we go through these next several points that we are thinking rightly about what this list is asking of us, so I wanted us to

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keep that in mind. There are several things that are true at the same time.

First, as a Christian, one who has been filled with the Holy Spirit, you need to know that everything that describes the character, the conduct, and the disposition of one who is walking in the wisdom that is from above, as a Christian, that is available to you. Not only is it available, but it should be the natural product of your life as you grow in sanctification. You should be seeing at least small growth in all of these areas in your life. But just like all sanctification, it doesn't just happen to us as we sit back and wait for it. That's the same thing with wisdom. It's something we have to work at, to work for.

So as we saw a couple of weeks ago, the Scripture commands us to "get wisdom," to search for it, to dig for it, to mine for it. What that looks like, then, is seeing what we see in this verse and aspiring for these things to become a description of us. We're to give effort in growing in these areas, and that will cause us to grow in our wisdom.

And as we grow in our wisdom, we're going to increasingly grow in these areas. So the two things are working together and driving each other so that we are growing in sanctification. So even though there is no real imperative here, there's no actual command in this passage, just keep in mind some of the basic principles of how you grow in sanctification as you think through how to apply this text to your life.

Okay, now you could easily take this entire list of qualities in verse 17, as some have, and place it all into the category of something like "the character of wisdom." And there would be nothing wrong with that, and pastors who have done that are just fine doing that. But there is some nuance to this list, and even though they can all easily fall under that broader category of character, there are reasons for splitting it up, splitting the list up, which we will look at as we go.

But for now, let's just look at these first four adjectives under this point of character, the character of wisdom. Notice that it says that the wisdom from above is "first pure," "first

pure," then it goes on. This isn't just a list of adjectives in a random order. Again, we're going to see that even more in just a bit. But there's a reason that "pure" is first. The word following it, the word "then" in this sentence that follows "pure," also helps us to see that "pure" is set apart from the rest of the list.

Purity is the way into this list. If you are not pure, then you will not be able to see any of these characteristics in your life. And this purity isn't necessarily what we would maybe normally think of it as. It's not necessarily in reference to salvation, those who have been made pure as we are, as our sins have been taken away and now find ourselves clothed in the imputed righteousness of Christ. This type of purity is absolutely necessary insofar as it relates to manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. That is true.

But what we're actually seeing here is the type of purity that's referenced in verse 27 of chapter 1, where it says, "Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself

unstained by the world." That type of purity, to have the wisdom that comes from above, you need to be free from the pollution that comes from below, the muddy thinking of the false wisdom of the world. You need to be putting that off, getting rid of that, filtering it out.

This is why those verses preceding this one were so important to help us repent of any type of wisdom, a false wisdom, that might be polluting our lives, polluting our minds, affecting how we think. This characteristic of purity means that the one with wisdom from above is not making their decisions with mixed emotions, mixed motivations. For them, it's about what will please God, what will bring him the most glory, with no tinge of the type of thinking that says, "Well, this isn't a direct sin. It might not be what's best, but it's not what's worst, either. And this is the way I also get something out of it that I kind of wanted anyway. God gets something. God gets a little something, I get a little something out of this."

No, purity means there is no selfish ambition, no bitter jealousy mixed in. It's in this that we see the truth in the

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statement repeated throughout the Bible, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." If you were here during Equipping Hour, this whole section is going to dovetail really nicely into what you were talking about.

It's the fear of the Lord that drives away all of the impure thinking that is tainted by earthly and natural motivations. Someone who truly fears the Lord is able to live and think with a clean and pure mind. Decisions are easy. Anxiety flees because there is one pure motivation that is not in conflict with any other desire or motivation. Just think about what is it that makes decisions difficult? What is it that fills you with stress and anxiety when you're trying to make a decision? Generally it has to do with competing motivations, competing desires within you.

But when your only desire is to bring glory to God because of a pure fear of the Lord, anxiety and worry just aren't there. And sure, there may be difficulties that arise because of the direction that you choose, difficulties in relationships, difficulties in other things going around. But because you fear

the Lord, you are able to handle those difficulties in the same way.

Beloved, the fear of the Lord is the key to everything we're going to talk about in the rest of this passage. We are going to reference it continually. The fear of the Lord is the key that unlocks access to the wisdom from above. So if we want to talk about the wisdom from above, then we need to constantly be walking in the fear of the Lord, continually growing in and practicing following God and his Word with unmixed motives.

So "pure" is the first characteristic we see, and it is the essential one in order for us to begin to see the rest. Again, just like if you were to throw an ingredient that doesn't belong in a recipe, that affects the entire dish, and it in fact makes that dish into something other than what that dish was supposed to be, so, too, does the defilement of the world in our hearts make wisdom in our lives into something other than the wisdom from above.

Now, with that in mind, the next three adjectives that we see here as characteristics of the wisdom from above are grouped together by James, both grammatically and thematically:

"peaceable, considerate, submissive." The Greek of each of these words, that we can't see here, begins with the same letter, an epsilon, and that's a mnemonic device from James to aid in the ability to memorize. And these words are, then, also distinct from "full of mercy and good fruit," and those are nouns and not adjectives.

In addition to this, these words seem to be specifically set against the adjectives in verse 14, which describe false wisdom. In fact, it would be difficult to find three adjectives, especially those that begin with the same letter, that would be better suited for the purpose of showing something opposite of what we see in verse 14. Even in the translation, you can see that, the opposite nature of these adjectives. So, verse 14, you see "bitter, selfish, and arrogant." Verse 17 you see "peaceable, considerate, and submissive." They're set against each other.

So let's just quickly look at each of these characteristics. First, we have "peaceable." "Peaceable." This means one who tries to make peace, or as one lexicon just reads, "being conducive to harmonious relationships." "Being conducive to harmonious relationships." Walking in wisdom means that the relationships that you are in should be marked by peacefulness, no secret bitterness, no holding grudges, certainly no outward hostility.

This again stands in opposition to the disorder and turmoil that mark the mind of false wisdom. Proverbs 3:17, speaking of wisdom, says, "Her ways are pleasant ways and all her pathways are peace." This isn't in reference to the modern concept of being at peace with yourself, having some sort of inner peace, even though this would certainly result in some version of that. But it's actually directly in reference to your relationships with others. During times when conflict arises or where there are situations where a disagreement is getting out of hand because perspective is being lost, eternal perspective is being forgotten, the one with wisdom from above is the one who's constantly bringing down the temperature.

Again, this is what naturally happens with one who fears God because their mind is on heavenly things and not earthly things. So it always makes sense to them to try and help everyone to keep everything in a proper, eternal perspective. It's not because they're out of touch with reality or because they're just making light of something that is serious, though there are people who are like that, but it's actually because they are more in touch with ultimate reality.

The person who is peaceable, the one who is truly defined by that quality, will be able to have the next two qualities, also. These three qualities, they all kind of work together in a way where it would be weird to have one or two but not the other. You couldn't describe someone, "Well, they're peaceable and submissive, but they're not considerate."

And the next characteristic is "considerate," which could also be translated, again, as "gentle" even though it is a different word than the one that is translated as "gentleness" or "meekness" in verse 13. So it's maybe best not to translate it as "gentle." It could be; there are some similarities, there.

“Considerate,” though, is the opposite of “selfish” from verse 14. This means you think of others before yourself.

“Considerate” means that you are constantly trying to place yourself into the frame of mind of the other person in order that you might serve that person, in order to serve them better. Therefore, this is someone who doesn't get angry, doesn't get combative, not even under pressure.

Again, this makes sense with the one who is the peaceable God-fearer. When you are fearing God, you are trusting him to look out for your needs. You're trusting him to look out for your needs and to take care of you, and this frees you up to be his means of taking care of others and helping others.

Next, we have the word “submissive,” also translated as “open to reason.” “Open to reason” is maybe a more helpful translation for us. This is actually apparently an incredibly difficult word to translate. This word is used only here in the New Testament. The literal meaning is “easily persuaded,” which sounds awful. No one wants that. What do you mean “easily persuaded”?

But it's actually a good trait. It's actually a good trait because what the word is really going for is the idea of being willing, a willingness to yield to others. Are you willing to yield to others, to not be stubborn, to not be someone who is hard to convince, not be a pouter when you don't get your way. This doesn't mean being someone who has no backbone, someone who is wishy-washy and changes who they are based on who is around. It can't mean that based on some stuff we're going to look at in a bit. This is someone who is able to let reason and sound arguments and the truth prevail over their mind, someone who humbly and truly listens to and applies teaching and counsel and instruction, careful to listen, determined to truly understand.

But it also means that when it comes to matters of preference, this is someone who would rather lose out on having their own way than to try and force it. Again, this goes hand in hand with being considerate. So long as the truth and the glory of God are not at stake, they're not going to become angry or put off just because something isn't going the way that they want, just because something that seems best to them isn't happening.

This is someone who strives to have goodwill toward others and seeks mutual understanding rather than everyone else conforming to their own desires. They are inclined to accept instruction and even suggestions and conform to them willingly so far as they are aligned with true wisdom. And this type of person that we're talking about, the one represented by these characteristics, I mean, let's just face it, that can be difficult for a lot of us to really want to aspire to, especially for many men because at first glance, this type of person might seem to be, you know, kind of a pushover, even though, again, we're going to see that can't be the case.

But as we think about these things, we need to realize and remember that the ultimate example of wisdom and manhood is Jesus Christ, and we're reading a description of his character. This is who he is. This is how those who lived with him every day would have and in fact did describe him.

Moreover, this is how he taught his followers to be. If you remember a lot of the background stuff we talked about in James,

much of James seems to be heavily influenced by Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. Much of the book seems to be just building on and further explaining the Sermon on the Mount. Some commentators have even called James a mini-commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.

And it is there in this most famous section of teaching from our Lord, the Sermon on the Mount, that we read his heart for his people in the Beatitudes, where we are told many other things that also have connections to our passage, but here's a few of them. Listen how they line up with this. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," that means those who are not arrogant, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the lowly," or the humble or the meek, "for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God. He is the wisdom of God in human flesh, and this is how he instructs us. The one who is wise will also be the one who is blessed.

So this is the character of the wisdom from above. "It is first pure and then peaceable, considerate, submissive," or open to reason. And that takes us to our third point, the conduct of wisdom. The conduct of wisdom. So James now moves on to two more qualities which he distinguishes from the others by connecting them together with the Greek conjunction *kai*. They're also separate from the rest in that they are both nouns. Both of these words are also subordinated by the phrase "full of," meaning we are to understand the phrase to read something like "full of" mercy and "full of" good fruits.

So these two are set apart from the others. The wisdom from above is full of both of these things, which again, unlike the adjectives above, are actually seen in conduct, seen in the life, the way someone lives. Peaceable, considerate, submissive: They will look a certain way, and they will affect how you live and act, and they will lead to the conduct of mercy and fruit-bearing. But mercy and good fruits, those are measurable things. Those are things we see, not just things that someone is thinking.

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So it's a lifestyle of good conduct. Just like we saw with the true faith, true wisdom is recognizable by the kind of life that it produces. It makes itself known in the day-to-day living of the person who is wise. Again, it's a lifestyle, but it's evident that those who are characterized by what we just went over, they will live lives full of mercy, full of compassion.

Again, mercy is an action. You can't just feel merciful toward someone. That's not a thing. Being merciful means that you are doing acts of mercy. This means that you are treating others better than they deserve, that you are helping those in need, not just feeling bad for them, but actually doing something. The one who is wise treats with kindness those who treat him poorly. He treats with compassion the one who is in need. And he does this not because of any relationship or lack of relationship that he might have with that person, but because this is what true wisdom from above demands from him.

Why? Again, the fear of the Lord. It is impossible for one who is in the mindset of truly fearing the Lord to, in that same moment, fail to treat someone with the same mercy or compassion

that the Lord has treated them with and asks them to treat others with. The only way you can turn away from someone in need of mercy, to fail to show compassion on one who you should be compassionate to, the only way to do that is if you're not fearing the Lord properly in that moment.

So full of mercy and also full of good fruit. We know that term. That's just a general term we use for good works that are being produced, that are coming up from us, fruit rather than obedient actions because the idea is that it's the natural product of wisdom. The one who is walking in wisdom will be producing good fruit. I don't want to go into much more detail with these because again, these two things are things that we're a little bit more familiar with.

But just notice again that it says the true wisdom is "full" of mercy, "full" of good fruit. These are not just things that are happening every once in a while in the life of a believer to make them feel good about themselves. Again, it's not "that time I was merciful." This is the mark. Walking in wisdom means a life that is filled with these things. They're

the actions by which you are primarily known. They're how you are described by others. When people are asked about us, about how we live, they should be able to say of us, "His life is full of mercy and good fruit." So are our lives to be marked by acts of mercy and good fruit. As we walk in the wisdom from above, that's going to be the description of our lives.

Fourth point, point number 4, the disposition of wisdom. Look again at the last two adjectives of verse 17: "without doubting," "without hypocrisy." And I know, again, that we can easily just say that these are more characteristics. And you'd be right. As you're trying to put this verse into practice and praying through it, you don't have to separate it all up like I've done.

But again, James really does divide them into these groups. There are definite connections between them, and it is worth noting. So the disposition of wisdom, disposition refers to a person's inherent quality of mind or character, and I think that works well for what we're about to look at with these two words, to distinguish them from the concept of characteristics just a

bit. Even though “without doubting and without hypocrisy” takes up four words for us, it is just two concepts. It is just two words in the Greek.

And these are, again, words that are different. They're separated from the others in that they are, once again, adjectives, moving from nouns back to adjectives, but they both also begin with the alpha privative. So that's like adding the prefix “un” to the beginning of a word to refer to something that's notable because of its absence, like earlier, when we said “unblemished.” It's the quality of not having something, not being blemished. That's what's going on, here, two words that mean essentially “not possessing doubting,” “not possessing hypocrisy.”

The first word that we see translated as “without doubting,” here in our text, again, is another unique word only used here in the New Testament; and all the commentators pointed out that we really actually don't have a word in the English language that corresponds to it perfectly. Some translations use the word “impartial,” here, because it can kind of mean that in

a certain way, and because they are trying to connect it with what James has said previously. But "without doubting" is a better translation, here, and probably the best understanding of the word as I was studying it. And the best translation that some of the better lexicons point to would be the way the NAS translates it, as "unwavering," "unwavering." And that makes a lot of sense contextually why James would use that because it is the opposite word of the word he uses for "double-minded."

So "without doubting" or being unwavering is pointing to a person of conviction. And this is why that understanding from the characteristics above, about one with wisdom being someone who is open to reason, submissive, open to being persuaded, why it's not the same as being a spineless people-pleaser. Open to reason is being willing to be persuaded and submissive to others when it comes to matters of preference or when you're being counseled by others whom God has placed around you or over you. It's not just being stubborn about things going your way.

But being a person of conviction doesn't go against any of that. It means that when you have come to understand what is

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right, what is true, what is pleasing to God, what lines up in conformity to his Word, you stick with the decision that you know to be right, even when you're pressed or made uncomfortable because of it.

Because once again, it goes hand in hand with the fear of God. So both those qualities go hand in hand with the fear of God: being open to reason and being unwavering. The one who fears God is open to reason and counsel because they are humble and know that they are not God and that God uses others, and this is his means of doing this, to speak into and shape our lives.

And also the one who fears God desires to please him above all else, so they will not back down from decisions that have been made in accordance with the wisdom of God. They won't be pressured by people in a fear-of-man type way into backing down. And these things go hand in hand. This is a man of conviction. But here's the point: But not his own conviction about what is right, the conviction about what God has revealed to be true and right. This type of conviction.

Finally, wisdom is without hypocrisy. It is sincere. In keeping with the idea of purity, the wise person is pure not only in their motivation, but in their stated motivation. The person living in the wisdom from above is unwilling to play-act, or pretend in order to bring about some desired action or reaction. They're not trying to manipulate. They do their best to be clear about what they are trying to do and why. They act the same way toward everyone.

Again, this is the obvious way that one who fears God will be. The reason that people are hypocritical is because they are afraid to be seen in a certain way by a certain person, and they want one person to think a certain way about them and maybe another person to think something else about them. These are things that are never true for the one who fears God because, once again, this person is only concerned with pleasing the God who already knows the motivations of their hearts, who already knows who they truly are. Hypocrisy makes no sense to that person. They're sincere. They actually mean what they say. They don't just say what they're supposed to say and hope they can live up to it.

So here in verse 17 we've seen the character, conduct, and disposition of the wisdom that comes from above, what it looks like in the mind and life of the wise. It's all of these things flowing out of the one who is pure and undefiled by the world and its false system of wisdom, one who is so engrossed and immersed in the Word of God, in the ways of God, with the pure motivation of the fear of the Lord, that they will walk in a wisdom that is peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits without wavering and sincerely, growing in all of these things at the same time.

And as we pursue the wisdom from above, each individually, but also as a church in unity, it will lead to the picture, this precious picture that we see in verse 18, and our final point: the picture of wisdom. So look again at verse 18: "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

It is interesting that the subject seems to change here, it seems to change here, as wisdom isn't addressed in this verse; and yet the connecting conjunction indicates that this verse is

still continuing the same line of thought. But there is a shift, here, from the description of wisdom to the final product of wisdom, which is the fruit of or “harvest of” in some translations, righteousness, the harvest of righteousness coming out of a place of peace by those who are intentionally working to make peace.

It says “the fruit” or “harvest of righteousness.” So again, this is not referring to positional righteousness. It's not referring to our justified standing before God. This is talking about righteous living, righteous actions. Righteousness, here, just means lives being lived in obedient conformity to the Word of God. In other words, the exact thing that the church is supposed to be producing: mature and maturing faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's a harvest of righteousness.

And this is in stark contrast to the disorder in every evil and worthless practice that's produced by the wisdom of the world in verse 16. You have disorder in every evil and worthless practice, on one hand, and a harvest of righteousness on the

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other. So the picture here is that the fruit of righteousness is only produced when it is sown in the soil of peace by those who are peacemakers. Those who possess the wisdom from above are summed up, here, as those who make peace.

Again because this is the logical product of the one who fears God and is marked by everything we saw in verse 17. All selfish ambition and jealousy and arrogance that lies at the root of strife and disunity, all of that is totally extinguished in the one who fears God. And now peaceable, considerate, submissive people who are sincere, who are people of conviction, full of mercy and good fruit, as they live their lives this way, the ground that we walk on around them becomes the soil of peace.

The church will be a place of peace and unity, no backbiting, no one with their own agendas, no one trying to follow God in a way that allows them to still pursue their own desires at the same time. The more people like this that we have just living and existing in our church, the more that it will become a culture of real peace. And that is the only soil that a

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harvest of righteousness can come from, the only way we produce the mature disciples of Christ, the ones that we exist as a church to produce. A church's harvest of righteousness will grow in conjunction with the premium that it has placed on true peace within the church.

This is real peace, too, meaning real unity, not that fake peace that we often settle for, where we do things just to make people happy. True wisdom does not pursue some form of peace at the expense of wisdom's essential characteristics. It's easy to have a false peace when you waver and aren't a principled person of conviction. You can just cave to the view of whoever you are around to make it easy for you. It's easy to have a false peace when you aren't sincere, when you just tell people what you know they want to hear in order to avoid an unpleasant conversation. It's easy to have a false peace if you just avoid the people whom it is hardest for you to be considerate and or submissive toward.

No, we need a true peace, a true peace anchored in truth and fear of God, not false peace anchored in the fear of man.

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The absence of conflict, the absence of consternation, isn't necessarily true peace. True peace is unity around the truth. The reward of the church that is walking in wisdom together is a church that knows true peace. The church that is made up of people who are suspicious of one another rather than submissive toward one another will not be the fertile soil necessary to produce the harvest of righteousness that is required of us as a church.

But a church filled with those who are eagerly desiring and seeking after the wisdom of God, those who serve him through the pure motivation of a clean fear of God, they will be those who live lives that cannot help but to bring about peace and to strengthen the bond of unity in the church. A church of peacemakers, sowing in a church that has been made into this hyper-nutrient soil of unity around the truth will produce a great harvest of righteousness, maturing and mature followers of our Lord Jesus Christ who are each striving for the wisdom that is from above.

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So brothers and sisters, this is the picture of true wisdom. This is the character and lifestyle of true wisdom. This is what it should look like in our lives and in the life of our church. And I know as we've gone through this, and as you think through these things as they arise out of Scripture before us, I know that just as this resonates in my heart and creates a longing within me for wisdom, I know it's there in you, also.

Most likely over these last couple of weeks, you've seen, as I have, an unfortunate, disturbing amount of worldly pollution, wherever it might be from, that has defiled the pure fear of God that we know ought to be our driving motivation. As a Christian, you're looking at the wisdom from above and the wisdom that is not from above and saying, "That wisdom that's not from above, I want nothing to do with that, want nothing to do with that. But this wisdom in verse 17, I long for that, long for it. I long for this picture in verse 18 to be me and my church."

Maybe you're even a little frustrated as you examine closely the motivations of your heart, the character that

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identifies you, the evidence from your life; and you've seen maybe some areas of growth in these areas, some evidence of wisdom from above, but not as it should be.

The great news for us all, beloved: The reason those desires are there, the reason that little growth is there, the reason why, when you examine a passage like this, your heart cries out, "I want that; that's what I want," the reason this is the case is because you have been saved by the God who bestows wisdom. Indeed, you have been reconciled to the One who is wisdom; reconciled through the Savior, who is the personification of wisdom; indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is the teacher and tutor of wisdom indwelling you and enlightening your eyes so that you can read and understand and be instructed in the very Word of God, which is the explanation to us of wisdom.

And our merciful God, who is our example for mercy toward others, shows us his great mercy in that he sees us here in our weakness, longing for something that we don't have perfectly and sickened by our own flesh that still draws us to that which is

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worthless. He sees us, and he says in this very same letter, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

And now that we have this understanding of what wisdom looks like, we're going to have an idea of what this looks like as God answers our prayer and gives it to us. We know better, now, just what it is we're truly asking for, what it is we're supposed to be looking for. Primarily, we're asking him to make us fear God alone. "Do whatever you need to in my life, Lord, to make me fear God and no one else."

So he's going to make us pure in our devotion to him by exposing worldly defilements in us that need to be stripped off. He's going to make us peaceable, exposing turmoil and factitious attitudes in our lives so that we might grow and become those who are conducive to harmonious relationships. He's going to bring in opportunities for us to grow in becoming more considerate and less selfish, bringing in those people into our lives who we have been maybe avoiding because we're not considerate.

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He's going to surround us with counsel from other Christians, for some of you maybe your parents, from leaders in the church that expose in us areas of stubbornness and which test us and help us to become more open to reason, becoming those people who are humble and willing to yield. He's going to give us opportunities, more and more opportunities to display mercy, produce good fruit. He's going to place in our lives trials and other difficult circumstances that will test our conviction and help us to become unwavering. He's going to expose areas of hypocrisy in order that we might grow in our sincerity.

And as we grow, beloved, even as it is each of us individually growing, we will together reap the reward of becoming a church of peacemakers, creating the culture of peace that will produce that harvest of righteousness. It's the reason why we are here. Ask him, beloved. Ask him today, ask him this week, ask him constantly. Ask him for wisdom. Ask him with a pure heart, sincere heart, and he will generously give it. Let's do that together now.

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Father, how kind you are, how merciful you are to explain these wonderful things to us, to so clearly and carefully describe wisdom from above and the wisdom that's not from above, so that we can make an accurate diagnosis in our lives and know exactly what it is that we are pursuing and longing for and asking for.

Our Lord, would you help each of us to not neglect constantly asking that you would do this in our lives, that you would make us wise. Help us to continually see, please continue to expose in our lives all of those characteristics of false wisdom and to grow in us the wisdom that is from above. Lord, we long to be a church that produces a harvest of righteousness, convictional, humble followers of Jesus Christ, a harvest that is sown in a church of peace by those whose ambition it is to make peace, that that would be the description of our church. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.