

**Men to Men Ministry**  
**Lesson Fifteen in the Letter of James**  
**Two types of Wisdom**

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# 15

## Introduction

Gentlemen, two of the most difficult things in the world are to argue without passion and to argue without hurt. To take a stand with vigor and personal involvement is not caring about the outcome or the circumstances, arguing for argument sake is simply folly. Further, to make arguments with passion without wounding someone who disagrees is also difficult. It is hard to be utterly convinced of your beliefs without being bitter to those who would disagree.

To this point the scripture for this lesson reaches up and grabs us by our opinions and our arguments.

## Summary of James 3:13-18

James 3:13-18 delves into the nature of true wisdom and the stark contrast between heavenly wisdom and earthly unspiritual wisdom.

### Verses 13-14: True Wisdom Displayed in Humility

**Humility and Good Conduct:** True wisdom is evidenced by humility and good deeds.

James begins by posing a rhetorical question, asking who among his readers is wise and understanding. He asserts that such a person should demonstrate their wisdom through good conduct and deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. He warns against harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition in the heart, which contradicts true wisdom and leads to disorder and evil practices.

### Verses 15-16: Characteristics of Earthly Wisdom

**The Dangers of Earthly Wisdom:** Earthly wisdom is characterized by envy, selfish ambition, and disorder.

James describes the nature of wisdom that is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. This kind of wisdom is rooted in envy and selfish ambition, leading to disorder and every evil practice. Earthly wisdom promotes self-centeredness and chaos, and its outcomes are negative and destructive.

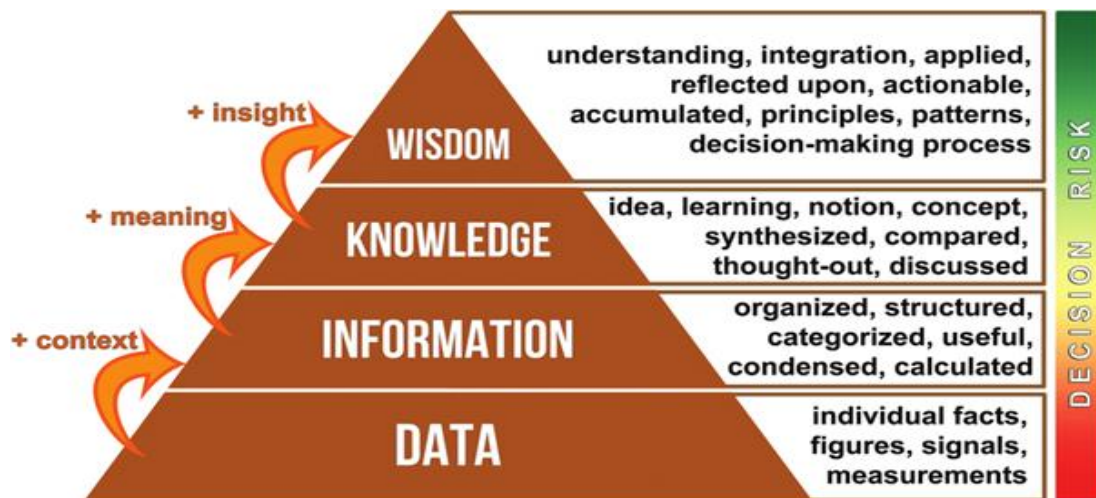
## Verses 17-18: Characteristics of Heavenly Wisdom

**The Benefits of Heavenly Wisdom:** Heavenly wisdom leads to peace, righteousness, and positive outcomes.

In contrast, James details the attributes of wisdom that comes from heaven. Heavenly wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. This wisdom fosters peace and righteousness, and those who practice it reap a harvest of righteousness.

## DIKW – Data, Information, Knowledge, Wisdom

Before we can look at our scripture we must understand some of the terms used. A well documented hierarchy for decision making is found in the DIKW pyramid. It demonstrates the levels of understanding and decision making. This decision making pyramid is the same for both worldly and heavenly.



The base layer is data. All the millions of various facts, memories, jokes, pain, ALL jumbled up into an overwhelming wave of stuff. These are individual facts, figures, signals and measurements come at us at the speed of sound and light. The data layer is about accumulation of stuff. The first time I went to Geometry in High School it was just way over my head. Thousands of proofs, angles, processes, equations, pages upon pages of stuff. For me at that time it simply did not make sense. The subject was simply too random. It was the teacher that had to help me understand the context of all this data.

The second layer comes from seeing the context and organizing all the thousand points of Geometry and place them into some order. All the data that was provided me was in the context of size, measure, angles, and formulas. On top of the data layer is a layer of evaluation to turn all these data points into some sort of order. Without order it is just junk. It is just too much. We call this ordering process conversion to logical information. We categorize it into buckets in some sort of order. It is organized, structured, categorized,

useful, condensed, and calculated. It is data in context. I was aware of a formula. But I had not assimilated it into my study until I had a meaning a reason for using it.

This third layer is knowledge. Knowledge is when we have taken all the data, organized and now applied. As the teacher explained one particular formula, light went off. You mean there are formulas I can use to do things. That is great. I can take the Pythagorean Theory and put it into context of my life. Therefore, I can determine length of the long side of a right triangle by calculating the sum of the squares of the two sides. I can spout off great understandings of Geometry. I can go on to Trigonometry.

The last layer is wisdom. It is understanding all the data that has been collected and prioritized, I know the implications and implementations. I am proficient in my knowledge. I have the book learning. But it is all up in the brain. I need more insight into the application.

It takes all the knowledge and adds personal insights. It becomes actionable within the specific context of the situation.

Anyone can make a decision to do something when in any of layers, but there is a risk associated with each. The higher on the pyramid the more effective and has less risk of failure.

From the previous section where we tried to understand the problems and issues with our words, this passage encourages believers to seek and practice the wisdom that comes from God, which is in stark contrast to the self-centered wisdom of the world. **A key to the right talk is the right thought.** The tongue is contained in a cage of teeth and lips, but it still escapes. It is not intelligence that keeps the lock on that cage; it is wisdom—a wisdom that is characterized by humility, grace, and peace.

Up to this point, James had been focusing on human deeds and their sources within the heart. In this section, while retaining that focus on deeds, he introduced insights on the sources of good and evil from which various deeds emanate. The two chief categories of reference in this entire passage are a **friend of God** and a **friend of the world**. Anticipated in the declaration that the evil of the tongue is ignited by the evil of hell (3:6), the chief question to be posed to James's hearers was, **Which wisdom is guiding you, the heavenly (v. 17) or the hellish (v. 15) variety?** This third part of the body of James's epistle alerted them to their interpersonal warring, to the peaceable wisdom among them, and to the source for correcting their warring desires.

Wisdom was an important thing for Jewish people. They realized that it was not enough to have knowledge; wisdom was necessary to be able to use that knowledge correctly. All of us know people who are very intelligent, perhaps almost geniuses, and yet who seemingly are unable to carry out the simplest tasks of life. They can run the biggest projects but they cannot manage their own lives! "The beginning of wisdom is this: **Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight**" (Prov. 4:7, ESV).

## Scripture for this session

### James 3:13-18 NASB

**13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.**

**14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.**

**15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.**

**16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**

**17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.**

**18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

James continued to exhort the people in the assembly who wanted to be teachers of the Word (James 3:1). But we must include all those who would give advice, those who would display any gift of the spirit in the church. It is not enough simply to stand before the people and say words; you must have something to say. This is where spiritual wisdom comes in. **Knowledge enables us to take things apart, but wisdom enables us to put things together and relate God's truth to daily life.** All of us have heard preachers and teachers who say many good things, but who somehow miss the heart of God's message and fail to relate truth to everyday life. It is this kind of "knowledge without wisdom" that James is writing about. He is contrasting true wisdom and false wisdom in a number of different aspects.

## Heaven-Sent Wisdom

The object described as "open to reason" in James 3:17 is not people, but wisdom. Wisdom is the issue here in the surrounding context (James 3:13–18). And it is not just any wisdom, but "the wisdom that comes down from above" (vv. 15, 17). It must be noted here this wisdom has its origins in heaven and then it is taught it must be done as if the teaching is but an echo of God.

In typical James's fashion, it's a wisdom that shows itself by its works, not simply by its claims (v. 13).

Notice how James speaks not of the extraordinary and outstanding nature of God's wisdom, but of "the meekness of wisdom" (v. 13). This kind of wisdom is **moral**, not merely intellectual. It's about **how you learn, not simply what you know**. It affects how you get along with others, not just what you can teach them. To be without this wisdom is not simply to be ignorant, but to be "earthly, unspiritual, [and] demonic" (v. 15). Its absence (and counterfeit) is marked by "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" (vv. 14, 16).

## Discernment of wisdom

Scripture simply states that you will know them (Christians) by their fruits. In the examination of the teachings of a fool's wisdom is the results of rivalry, drama, and disorder. Conversely you can know the real thing by its results as seen in (vv 17). James

gives us a sevenfold description of “the wisdom from above”. These are purity, peace, gentleness, open to reason, full of mercy, the aforementioned good fruits, and impartial.

**17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

Some of these words are difficult to understand as they are translated from the Greek.

***Wisdom from above is pure***

It is wisdom for wisdom’s sake. There are no extra add ins. Pure wisdom, as mentioned in James 3:17, free from any moral defilement or corruption; it is clean and sincere.

***Wisdom from above Peace-loving:***

It promotes peace and harmony, rather than discord. The goal is not to stir the pot or to encourage disagreement and anger.

***Wisdom from above is gentle.***

It shows respect and understanding for others. If a student is falling behind or expressing frustration with a concept, you don’t just continue on in the hopes that they will catch up someday. No one left behind.

***Wisdom from above is open to reason***

Of all the characteristics of Wisdom from above this one is often most difficult to understand and even harder to do. Willing to yield or submit to others when appropriate; it is open to reason. There will be times when the student will teach the teacher. The teacher must teach with open ears toward others. As soon as you begin to grasp what “open to reason” means, you also begin to see why it matters. It matters because the alternative is a kind of closed-minded stubbornness that not only makes us dumber but also destroys our relationships.

***Wisdom from above is full of mercy and good fruit***

It is compassionate and results in good deeds.

***Wisdom from above is impartial***

Fair and just, without prejudice or favoritism.

***Wisdom from above is sincere***

Genuine and honest, without hypocrisy.

In essence, pure wisdom is a reflection of God's character and is meant to guide individuals in living righteously and fostering healthy, harmonious relationships with others. It's about embodying virtues that lead to a peaceful and just life.

Being ignorant and inexperienced is not the problem. We all start out this way — both as children and as adults beginning new seasons (like getting married, having our first

child, or starting a new career). The problem is being unwilling to yield, hard to be entreated, and not open to reason. It's a stagnating, suicidal state of mind, like a dry garden shielding itself from the rain.

None of us is self-sufficient. By God's design, we need other people's input in order to grow into wise, fruitful people. Being open to reason allows us to receive the life-giving, character-shaping counsel that we require. More than that, by God's design we also need companionship. And being unreasonable is a good way to end up alone (Proverbs 25:24). "Because we're not God, our way is not always best, and we are probably wrong about a lot."

This virtue is vital in our current climate of polarization. Rarely have humans been bombarded by so much information. Algorithms have made it easy to live in echo chambers, where our opinions are constantly reinforced, and our opponents seem less and less worth yielding to or even listening to. But more information doesn't mean more wisdom, and greater confidence doesn't guarantee greater accuracy.

### Regaining Reason

If we're going to grow in these traits of wisdom, if we're going to seek wisdom in all our relationships in the church. If we really want to be all that we can be, then we're going to have to not just accept, but love this very simple reality: we are not God. And because we're not God, our way is not always best, and we are probably wrong about a lot. We need to be okay with that. Only God has perfect wisdom; the rest of us have room to grow. So, we can begin by asking God for the kind of humility that can say, "I'm sorry," or, "Let's try it your way this time."

This means cultivating a willingness to hear both sides of an issue before forming an opinion. "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him" (Proverbs 18:17). In my own case, I was a firm Arminian until I listened to John Piper's sermons on Romans 8–9. I was a King James Only-ist until I heard James White cross-examine the men I was reading. And I was convinced that "essentially literal" was the only right way to do Bible translation until I read Mark Strauss and Dave Brunn.

Most of us should talk less and read more — or to quote James, "be quick to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19). Some claims are self-evident ("I just know that kidnapping is wrong!"). Other claims are not ("I just know this vaccine works/doesn't work"). So, ask yourself, "Do I have a right to be this dogmatic on this issue, given my level of knowledge?"

As we interact with our brothers and sisters in the church we must always seek this pure wisdom. We must ask questions of ourselves first, like "When's the last time I received criticism without getting defensive?" "Do I solicit constructive feedback in hopes of finding ways to improve?" "Can I articulate my opponent's position fairly?" But also ask yourself relational questions, like "How big of a deal is it to pick the family movie in my house?" "How easily do I yield to my wife's persuasions on trivial matters even when I have

a different preference?” “How often do I say yes when my toddler asks for a ride on my back when I would rather sit and read?”

- The devil hates joy in God.
- The devil hates tenderhearted compassion.
- The devil hates us to be kind to suffering people.
- The devil hates sweet affection for our families.
- The devil hates it when husbands and wives are tenderhearted and kind and forgiving to each other (Ephesians 4:32).
- The devil hates wonder and admiration at the beauty of nature.
- The devil hates all the fruit of the Holy Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).
- He hates them all. And when we give him place in our hearts at night, going to bed with anger, the jaws called anger consume, over time, all those precious affections.

## Conclusion - Longing for Wisdom

In the midst of a broken world and a depraved generation, we long for such wisdom. And while wisdom works from the inside out, from the heart to the hands and life, it is preeminently wisdom from above (James 3:17). It is wisdom that comes down from heaven, changes our hearts, and then issues forth in a “harvest of righteousness.” It is good and right for us to long to embody such wisdom in our own lives.

In Christ, we aspire to unimpeachable purity and abounding mercy. We endeavor for our steady reasonableness to be made known to all. We ask for God’s grace to demonstrate unwavering obedience to him in every area, and gracious courtesy to others as often as we can. And we eagerly seek peace when possible. The recurring mark of heavenly wisdom is its desire for peace, for wholeness, for fellowship and communion.

## Wisdom from on High and Among Us

As we long for such wisdom to fall upon us, Advent reminds us that Wisdom dwelt among us. For Jesus of Nazareth is the ultimate human embodiment of wisdom from on high.

Was anyone ever as pure and holy as he? Zeal for his Father’s house consumed him; it animated his entire life. He was perfectly obedient, even as he grew in wisdom and stature.

“Jesus of Nazareth is the ultimate human embodiment of wisdom from on high.”

Was anyone ever as gentle and meek as he? He rightly stewarded almighty power and authority for the good of his people, remaining ever mindful of our frame. His gentleness with burdened sinners was legendary. The weary and heavy laden found rest in his meekness. For all of his zeal and purity, he did not despise the weak and lowly.

Was anyone ever as full of mercy? How often was he moved with compassion to care for his people and meet their needs? Like a father with his children, like a hen with her chicks, like a shepherd with straying sheep — his mercy not only filled him, but overflowed and watered the souls of the weak.

Was anyone ever as impartial and sincere? He abhorred every form of hypocrisy. There was no play-acting with him, but he moved among the poor and the rich, the powerful and the powerless with sincerity and truth. Widows and revolutionaries, prostitutes and Pharisees, tax collectors and priests — all were welcome, provided they stooped to come through the door of humble repentance.

Jesus is the Wisdom from Above, the Wisdom from on High, and he came as our Prince of Peace and Wonderful Counselor, sowing and reaping a harvest of righteousness in a land of deep darkness. Christ has come. Christ will come again.

*Listen my brothers. Why are you talking this way? Who do you think you are as you spew out all your wisdom and understanding? Are you doing so to be set into a hierarchy of the learned and the wise? Is it to be called teacher, or pastor, or professor? Is it to build up your own reputation of being a little more intelligent or knowledgeable than all others? I want to tell you that it is not about more education, or an achievement of more head knowledge or even more letters behind your name. Because, this bitter and arrogant wisdom is very different from real wisdom. Here is what is needed know, right now and to do instead: Know this: It is the way you live, not the way you pour out great platitudes. It is life over talk. It is purity in motive. A motive that comes from above. Mean-spirited ambition is not wisdom. Boasting you are wise is not wisdom. Twisting the truth to prove your point is not wisdom. Quoting a great writer to sound wise is not wisdom. Whenever you are trying to show yourself better than others or even putting a plan in place to get ahead of others, all your efforts will disintegrate into disagreement and end up in anger aimed the other. Real wisdom, genuine wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life. This holy life is exemplified by getting along with each other. God's wisdom is gentle and reasonable. It goes the extra mile and to go beyond what is expected. It is going beyond the requirements of the law. It is making allowances for error. It is to temper justice with mercy. God's wisdom overflows with grace and mercy. This genuine wisdom is consistent, not hot one day and cold the next. This wisdom exhibits hospitality and reasonableness. It is not saying one thing to one person and something different to another. True wisdom develops a healthy, robust community. A community that lives Godly standards and great results. Results that only come if you do the hard work of acceptance, giving dignity, showing honor, and simply getting along. Genuine wisdom is more than just knowledge—it's about the purity of motives, the way we treat others, and how we live our lives. True wisdom goes beyond mere words and is demonstrated through actions filled with grace, mercy, and consistency. It's inspiring to think about how these principles can lead to a robust, harmonious community.*