

Theme: Wise Humility

Text: James 3:13-18 (EHV)

¹³ Who among you is wise and intelligent? Let him by his good way of living show that he does things in wise humility. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie, contrary to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic. ¹⁶ In fact, where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and every bad practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then also peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who practice peace.

If someone described you as “wise and intelligent” that would be flattering; it would be an honor. If someone were to describe you as “humble,” would you take that as a high compliment and an honor as well? The Bible certainly describes it that way. In fact, our text actually connects these traits. James begins this section by not only reminding us that we show Godly wisdom by how we live our lives, but that this wisdom shows itself in “**humility.**” “**Who among you is wise and intelligent? Let him by his good way of living show that he does things in wise humility**” (v. 13).

By the way, these are all characteristics we should strive for, and display (“**show**” v. 13) in our lives, but they are traits that we should definitely let others tell us that we have. If we go around telling people “I’m intelligent!” “I’m wise!” you’ve pretty much revealed that you aren’t! And if you go around declaring to other people how humble you are, well, you’ve just revealed how humble you aren’t!

Wise Humility. Those two often don’t go hand in hand. Oftentimes those who think they are wise are anything but humble. However, James’ inspired words remind us that God calls us to live a life that displays both: “**Let him by his good way of living show that he does things in wise humility (v. 13b).** The word used here for “**humility**” in the Greek means, “*a quality of gentle friendliness, gentleness, meekness, considerateness*” (Friberg’s Greek Lexicon).

Godly behavior is not “in your face” but persuades with the humility of the heart. Think of someone you’ve known that displayed this **Wise Humility** in their life; a gentle friendly wisdom that just made you feel better every time you were around them and talked to them. I’ve been blessed to have family members, friends, teachers and pastors in my life who just lived and breathed this type of gentle, humble wisdom. I hope that you can think of a number of these types of people in your life as well—teachers, pastors, parents, fellow Christians. Think of how influential these people were and how impactful they were to your life.

How do you think you will impact and influence those around you—believer and unbeliever alike—if your conduct your life in gentle, **Wise Humility**? How much more encouraged will our fellow believers be, how much differently will the world around us look at us as Christians if our words and actions were filled with gentle, humble wisdom?

James goes on to remind us that this type of wisdom is truly “**wisdom that comes from above**” (v. 17), that is, wisdom from God Himself. Look at his words in the last two verses of our text (v. 17-18), “**But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then also peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.** ¹⁸ **And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who practice peace.**”

Contrast that with the wisdom that is not from above. A so-called “wisdom” that comes from our own sinful nature, our sinful “self.” It is not characterized by “**purity, peace, gentleness,**” or a willingness to listen to others and be “**reasonable.**” It is not “**full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.**” It certainly does not produce a “**harvest of righteousness**” (v. 17-18). Rather it is characterized by “**bitter envy**” and “**selfish ambition**” (v. 14). James reminds us, “**This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic.**”¹⁶ In fact, **where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and every bad practice.**” (v. 15-16).

Think of how frighteningly true those words are! Think of how many churches, marriages, families, friendships, careers, and even *souls* have been destroyed or at least irreparably damaged by “**bitter envy**” and “**selfish ambition.**” An attitude of, “I want what you have” (jealousy), and “I want to be first” (selfish ambition).

It is not a new problem either. Paul warned against these bad attitudes and behaviors several times in his letters to the early Christian churches (see **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**, and **Galatians 5:15**).

We’ve seen its effects in our own hearts, in our own lives, and in our own congregations. What is the answer, what is the cure?

It is the **Wise Humility** “**that comes from above**” (v. 17), not the wisdom of our sinful “self.” The devil can convince us of the lie that somehow because I thought it, because I want it, because I said it, or because I did it, it must be good and it must be true. How does the fact that it popped into our heads or came out of our mouths make something automatically good or true? That doesn’t even make sense! So we need to turn to a wisdom that’s not from “self” but “**from above**” (v. 17).

Remember, the “**wisdom that comes from above**” (v. 17) begins and ends with Jesus! Remember that “**the Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**” (1 Timothy 3:15). Jesus lived out God’s **Wise Humility** and proved who He was—the Son of God, the Savior, not just by His Words, but also by His actions. He displayed gentle, humble wisdom in everything He said and did; perfectly keeping God’s Holy Law in our place. He displayed perfect love by sacrificing Himself for our sins and the whole world’s by dying our death on the cross. He has given us a guaranteed entrance to the everlasting home of heaven itself, where we will know even as we are known.

How can we show this **Wise Humility** in our walk of faith? As individuals, in our families, it displays itself in how we do what’s truly best for our spouse, our children, our grandchildren. That begins with doing what’s best for them spiritually. Bringing them to hear God’s Word, sharing that Word with them, and displaying Christ’s love and wisdom in our lives. It also displays itself in putting their needs and interests ahead of our own. That’s the humility part. Paul reminds us in Philippians chapter 2, “**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves.**”⁴ **Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others**” (Philippians 2:3-4). **Wise Humility** also displays itself when we apologize when we’ve done wrong, and forgive others fully and freely when we’ve been wronged.

How about when it comes to our walk of faith within our congregation? We all have a great opportunity to put this Godly **Wise Humility**, this “**wisdom that comes from above**” (v. 17) into practice as we are essentially combining our two congregations. It is also a great challenge since there will no doubt be plenty of opportunities for us to allow our “**envy and selfish ambition**” (v. 16) to guide and direct our thoughts and interactions with each other as we navigate this time of transition. Remember what James says in our text, “**But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart...**”¹⁵ **This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is**

worldly, unspiritual, and demonic. ¹⁶ In fact, where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and every bad practice” (v. 14-16).

“Envy and selfish ambition” produce the “fruits” of **“disorder and every bad practice” (v. 16).** These are not the “fruits” we want to grow and produce in our lives, in our families, or our congregations. On the other hand, when we, with the Holy Spirit’s help, practice **Wise Humility** it will be a *blessing* to us and others. It is **“peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere” (v. 17).** It produces a **“harvest of righteousness...sown in peace by those who practice peace” (v. 18).** It will also bring glory to God and show others the gentle, humble wisdom and love of Jesus, their Savior. May the Lord fill us all, always with His **Wise Humility**. Amen.