

May 10, 2026  
**James 1:19-21**  
Meekness and Wisdom  
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“What is a good life?” And “how can I live one?” These are the two questions that tend to haunt all our other questions. What is good and noble? What is true and beautiful? What is satisfying and pleasant? What is fun and exciting? Worth while and real? What is safe and secure? How do I do that? What does it take? Can you show me?

This is what wisdom aims to address. As creatures and Christians – those who have been created by God, and redeemed by Christ, what does it take to live a good and godly life? This is what James is addressing here in this book. He’s laying out for us a biblical vision of godly wisdom.

The last three weeks we’ve been looking at the theoretical side, today we will shift gears a bit and move into the practical side of wisdom.

So far, we’ve seen three foundations of godly wisdom, three things that we need to know to walk in godly wisdom. First, that God is in control, second, that God is good, and third, that we need to learn to value the things in our lives the way that God does – not more, not less.

This week and next, we’ll look at the practical foundations of wisdom. We’re going to see first, that we need to be doers of the Word and not hearers only, second, we need to beware of being blinded by our pride, and third, we need to grow in self-control.

This is godly wisdom according to James; God is in control, God is good, learn to value things rightly, be a doer of the Word, beware of pride, have self-control.

Now, it’s important to remember, that James isn’t speaking to people in a basically stable situation. He’s not saying, given personal stability, given a stable economy, and a stable culture, and a predictable future, here’s how you can live a good and godly life. Remember who he’s talking to. He addresses this letter to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. He has in mind primarily Christians that had to flee Jerusalem because of the persecution of the church.

These people had to flee to different cities and build a new life in a totally different cultural environment. Add to that, they are living between the Ascension of Christ, and the destruction of the Temple when Rome destroys the whole Jewish nation. This is a letter specifically meant to help Christians live wisely in the face of a bombed-out culture and a radically uncertain future.

Does this seem relevant to our present moment?

How will you be able to find a job given the economic and technological upheaval? How will you be able to marry and form a family given cultural and political upheaval? Will the future political regime be friendly to the church or hostile to the church? These are the same questions that James’ first audience had in mind too. Jobs, family, culture, this is not the first time that these things have been up in the air.

Godly wisdom is not a quaint curiosity that you can worry about when times are good. It is not a peacetime luxury. Godly wisdom is exactly the thing you need to give you a tender heart and a steel spine in order to build a life in this hurricane of a world.

Today, like I said, we’re going to get into the practical side of godly wisdom. And really, James will unpack all of it in these first three verses, then next week he’ll expand on it, and go a little bit deeper.

Let me give you the big idea, we’ll pray, then we’ll get to work on the text.

Here’s the big idea: Practical godly wisdom is *the commitment to be shaped by the Word of God coupled with humility and self-control.*

## Intro the Text

Now remember where we left off last week. The previous verse said that God **“brought us forth by the word of truth.”** He saved us by the Word. Through the preaching of the gospel, he called us out of darkness, and into light. I talked about that last week.

Then he immediately builds on that in today’s text. Look at verse 19, you’ve been saved through the Word, so **“be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger,”** then in 21, receive the Word with meekness. This passage then, and really through the end of the chapter, is what to do with that Word. You’ve been brought forth by the Word, now what do you do with it?

Verse 19 gives us our three main points. One, be quick to hear – be quick to receive and be transformed by the Word of God. Two, be slow to speak – keep an eye on your pride, don’t jump in ahead of true knowledge. And three, be slow to anger – keep an eye on your passions, cultivate self-control. One, hear and obey the Word; two, don’t be led astray by selfish pride; three, don’t be led astray by sinful passions.

Now, this is a really important verse for the book of James. There are some who will argue that this verse actually serves as the outline for the main body of James – that this isn’t just a helpful little phrase, but it’s actually the structure of the rest of the book. And, I think, one way or another they are right. Chapter two is about what it means to be quick to hear, chapter three is about what it means to be slow to speak, and chapter four is about what it means to be slow to anger.

Some clarification is in order. So, in the Bible, the command to “hear” is almost never just a call to listen attentively. It’s a call to hear and do, to listen and obey. James makes this explicit in verse 22, but we see this in Deuteronomy 6, **“hear O Israel: the Lord your God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”** Jesus, in Matthew 7, **“everyone then who hears these words of mind and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”** Or Hebrews 4, quoting Psalm 95, **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”** In other words, if you hear, don’t forget to actually do.

Then what is James chapter 2 about? Well, the first half is about fulfilling the royal law by loving your neighbor, and the second half is about faith that works. Be quick to hear.

Then chapter three starts with a warning that **“not many of you should become teachers,”** then gets into the difficulty and importance of taming the tongue, controlling how you speak. Be slow to speak.

Then chapter four begins this way, **“what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”** Rein in your passions. Be slow to anger.

This is the basic map of practical wisdom for James. Be quick to listen. Be ready and eager to hear the Word of God, and not just to hear it, nod along, and give approval, but to actually do what it says.

Be slow to speak. Beware of the pride and sense of self-importance that basically assumes that your own opinion must be correct for the simple reason that you are the one who has it.

And be slow to anger. Beware of the lack of self-control that lets your passions run loose. Beware the reactive way of living that just indulges every inner tug.

## Verse 19: Quick to Hear

Let’s dig in to these a little bit. What does it mean to be quick to hear? Why is that important for wisdom? Basically, it just means that you look at God’s Word with a Psalm 119:105 mentality.

Psalm 119:105, **“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** The Bible isn’t just a helpful book to consult, but it’s the lamp that does two things: it helps me see the world around me, and it helps me see the path in front of me. What is true of this world? What should I be doing in my life?

This is what it means to be quick to hear. The Bible isn't just a book you consult occasionally and as one among many useful opinions, but it is the lamp that illuminates everything. It's the light that sheds light on everything else.

Let me give you six obstacles to watch out for when it comes to being quick to hear. Here are six things that make it difficult to be quick to hear. The first three are more relevant to the Christian, who in principle is committed to the Word, and the last three are more relevant to the non-Christian that isn't. They're all relevant to all of us, but they will be more relevant to the different groups.

The first is simply *ignorance*. You just don't know what the Bible says. You may be perfectly committed to believe and do, but you just don't know it.

The second is *distraction*. You hear the word, you understand it, but then you need to run off and do something else. Or you're just trying to learn everything all at once. For whatever reason, you hear and hear and hear, but you just never actually do. You simply don't focus and follow through.

The third obstacle is *familiarity*. Being overly familiar with the text. Familiarity is not just knowing the Bible well, familiarity is being numb to conviction because you've so frequently ignored conviction. Familiarity is what happens when you've been convicted by some concept, some passage so many times that you forget that you're actually not obeying it. The Word confronts you on some issue and you mistake conviction for repentance. You mistake conviction for actual life change. You hear some passage come up in a sermon and you go, "ah yes, a classic. What a good passage. Convicts me every time. One of my favorites. Yes, pray without ceasing." But you haven't prayed in months.

Ignorance, distraction, familiarity.

Then next, *pride*. Here, these last three are more relevant to the non-Christian, but certainly Christians can trip up over these too. The fourth obstacle is pride. A simple refusal to even hear the Word. "I just don't care what God says about this topic."

Then the fifth obstacle is *prejudice*. Here, you may well be willing to listen, but you won't believe what God says unless the Bible agrees with what you already believe. You already decided that the culture is basically right about sex and dating, so you won't hear what the Bible says about the sinfulness of premarital sex. Or you've already decided that the culture is basically right about spanking children, so you won't hear what the Bible has to say about it. You explain it away, or you just twist the passage until it says what you want it to say.

This one can be so tricky. Because there are difficult texts, texts and ideas that are far from simple. Texts that require complex concepts and ideas to explain. But not everything is complex. Not everything needs nuance.

It is wrong to treat complex issues like they are simple.

And it is just as wrong to treat simple issues like they are some complex mystery. Some things really are plain.

The last obstacle is *stubbornness*. Now, the difference between prejudice and stubbornness is that prejudice ties you up in knots to convince yourself that the Bible doesn't say what it plainly says. But stubbornness sees what the Bible says but just isn't going to do it. Prejudice is a form of self-deception, but stubbornness is just high-handed rebellion. I'm just not going to do that.

Be quick to hear. Don't be ignorant of the Word. Make a point to learn what the Bible actually says. Beware of distraction, beware of familiarity. Don't be too proud to hear God's Word. Beware the subtle self-deception of prejudice. Don't be too stubborn to obey. Be quick to hear.

### **Slow to Speak**

Next, be slow to speak.

James isn't just giving some advice for conversational etiquette. That is good conversational etiquette advice, let the other people have some breathing room, but James is making a much bigger point. Again, he

expands on this in chapter three. He says, don't be in a hurry or overly eager to put yourself forward as a teacher of God's Word, and it's really really important to learn to control your tongue.

He's saying that one of the most dangerous obstacles to actually hearing and doing God's Word is a kind of intellectual overconfidence that shuts the door on real growth and real transformation. Young Christian, it is ok to not come to an iron conviction on some topic the first time you hear about it. In fact, I recommend it. Give it some time.

Our problem is that we often underestimate what we don't know, we overestimate what we do know, we overestimate the certainty of what we know, and we overestimate the importance of our own voice.

Often, it's not just that we don't know some relevant information, but that we don't know what we don't know. The problem isn't just that we only have 2% of the relevant information, the bigger problem is that we think we have all the information we could need.

This is why James says be *slow* to speak. He's not saying *don't* speak, just like he doesn't say, *never be* angry. But he says be slow to speak. And this isn't just on Bible and theology topics. This is about wisdom in general. Wisdom begins with a quickness to hear whatever the Bible has to say on any given topic, but then is slow to open its mouth and declare how it is.

Wisdom is quick to hear what God has to say, and then in humility recognizes the liabilities of your own limitations. There is a temptation to want to come to quick judgements and quick convictions as soon as you hear about some issue. But that is almost always a bad idea.

Take your time to come to clear and firm judgments, and having come to them, embrace them with deep conviction. It's the guy who quickly embraces some position that then quickly embraces a different position whenever he hears the next argument, and a third position when he hears another argument, then back to the first when he hears a different argument.

Be quick to hear and then slow to speak – have the humility to recognize your limitations.

Ok, here are four situations in which you should be slow to speak.

First, be slow to *teach*. Again, James hits this in chapter three. Paul says that pastors shouldn't be recent converts, not just because it will be bad for the church, but it will be bad for the brother himself. You do not want to put yourself in the position where you have to proclaim and defend doctrinal positions that you have not yet solidified for yourself – or have solidified on too quickly. Christian, take the time to learn what it means to be a Christian before you try to teach others how to be a Christian.

Second, be slow to *argue*. Again, we could be talking about doctrine and Bible issues, or work issues, or family stuff or just friends hanging out stuff. Be slow to argue. Be slow to say, "you're wrong and here's why."

This flows out of humility. For one, there's always the chance that I'm just not understanding you. We might not even really disagree. We might actually agree, but just use different words to get there. "What are you trying to say? Where do we actually disagree?"

And second, there's always the chance that I'm just wrong. "Wait, I've never heard that argument before, could you say it again? Could you word that differently, I didn't quite get that argument?" Your main goal should not be to be right but to get to the truth.

You have no better friend in the world than the person who is *willing* to tell you that you are wrong and is *able* to show you that you are wrong. That person is your best friend.

Now, it's entirely possible that you really do disagree and you really are right, in that case, argue. Fight the fight. Be *his* best friend. We're not talking relativism, we're just talking humility. Before you put the gloves on make sure you actually disagree. You'll be more effective and more charitable if you took the time to understand the other guy's position in the first place. Be slow to argue.

Third, be slow to *rebuke*. This flows out of both humility and mercy. In humility, again there's just the chance that you're wrong. Maybe this is just a preference thing. Maybe it's not God's righteousness that's offended but just my ego, or my preferences.

But then, in mercy, if this is a small thing, or a rare thing, maybe you can just in mercy forgive without confrontation. How many times have you sinned against others, and they've just forgiven you? Now, if there's an ongoing sin, or a big sin, you should say something. But being slow to rebuke gives them the chance to confess and repent on their own.

Then fourth, be slow to *justify* yourself when rebuked. Someone calls you out for your sin, and maybe you're not even convinced it is sin, be slow to justify yourself, slow to defend yourself and explain.

Maybe you are in the right, maybe your words or actions were totally justified, or maybe it is just a preference thing. But before you leap to defend your honor, slow down. Maybe you are in the wrong, and you just don't see it yet. Maybe there's something you need to learn here. In the end maybe you did in fact do nothing wrong, great, it's much better to receive the rebuke humbly, and consider it than just reject it outright on the front end.

Every rebuke, even the ones that don't ultimately land, are opportunities to humble yourself before the Lord, and ask him to shed the light of his Word on your life.

Be slow to teach, be slow to argue, be slow to rebuke, be slow to justify yourself.

### **Slow to Anger**

Ok, third, be slow to anger. Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Here James brings in the danger of the passions, and the need for self-control.

Wisdom consists in living by the Word of God, and James gives us two primary ways that we get knocked off track. We can either get ourselves in trouble by speaking too quickly, letting our own pride carry us ahead of real knowledge, or we can be compelled by our passions to do things contrary to the Word.

He says, hear the Word, and watch out for pride and passion, build up humility and self-control.

And James isn't the first one to point out these two dangers in the life of wisdom. He's just repeating what Solomon said about it a thousand years before. Proverbs 17:27, "**whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.**" Slow to speak, slow to anger. Beware of pride, beware of passions.

Ok, here I need to define passions. 'Passion' in the sense that I'm using it here, and the sense that the New Testament uses it is not the same thing as the modern sense of passion.

I'm getting the word from James 4:1-2. "**What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.**"

Paul uses the word too, several times, one is in Galatians 5:24, "**those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**"

Now, the Biblical sense of 'passions' and the modern sense are pretty different. We're not talking about your passion for baseball, or your passion for craft coffee, or even your passion for missions, or your passion for your line of work. Those are fine, there's nothing wrong with that.

You could define a passion in the Biblical sense as a *compulsive desire*. It's more than just a desire, it's a desire that has been in some sense activated into an inward compulsion. James uses anger as the main example of a passion. "I want something, or I want to get even, I'm offended or hurt." So, in anger, you just blow up on the guy.

A passion is basically the opposite of self-control. I don't think it's an accident that Paul lists self-control last in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 and then rolls into a comment on passions in the next verse.

Under normal circumstances you need to exercise your will to go from doing nothing to doing something. Under a passion, you need to exercise your will to keep doing nothing and avoid doing something sinful. If you just turn off your will, you'll lash out, or act out your lust, or act out your fear.

Anger can be a passion. Lust, and fear are others. Gluttony would be on the list. Greed can be a passion as well.

A passion is basically an activated desire that tries to put you on autopilot to do something sinful. Whenever you look back on something and go, “ah, I knew better, why did I do that?” Likely that was a fit of passion.

Now, to be clear, that doesn’t excuse the sin. We are fully culpable for our passions. That’s the whole point of self-control.

The challenge with passions is that they really are compulsions from within. This is why self-control and self-denial are so interrelated. Self-control is basically an issue of how much spiritual pain-tolerance you have. A passion is like the dog pulling against the spiky pinch collar, except you are both the dog getting pinched and the guy holding the leash.

This is why indulgence really does have a certain cathartic venting feeling. There’s a spiritual pain that gets released, a spiritual pinch that gets resolved. But self-control and self-denial builds up a higher pain tolerance

Self-control trains the dog to stop pulling. Venting and self-indulgence (while it feels good in the moment) trains the dog to pull harder. If you just pull harder, you’ll get to the release.

The more we indulge passions the stronger they get. So, be slow to anger, control your passions or your passions will control you, and whatever the result is, it certainly will not be godly wisdom.

So, here in verse 19, James is saying, what you need to do, Christian, the path to godly wisdom, looks like first, hearing, believing, and obeying the Word of God. Second, recognizing your limitations and walking in humility, not pride. And third, recognizing the danger of undisciplined passions, and the need for self-control.

#### Verse 20

Ok, then look at verse 20, James drills down a bit into that third point. He says, **“for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”**

There’s basically three ways that James might mean this. First, that the anger of man doesn’t display the righteousness of God. I think that’s true, but somewhat beside the point of what James is talking about.

Then second, he might mean that the anger of man doesn’t “accomplish the righteousness of God.” Meaning that you shouldn’t just run around like God’s vigilantly taking vengeance on your enemies. Kind of like what Paul says in Romans 12, vengeance belongs to God, so don’t avenge yourself, leave it to God. Again, that’s true, but again beside the point at issue.

I think the best way to read this is more or less like, “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God desires in his people.” Basically, James is saying, I think, that the way to live a godly and righteous life is not by turning off your brain and just reacting to stuff. That doesn’t produce the righteousness that God desires. The path of godly wisdom is not the path of learning how to affirm and indulge your passions and desires, trying to find the real you in the mess of your contradictory impulses.

Godly wisdom is the path of Bible-directed self-control. The righteousness of God is produced by humility and self-denial receiving the Word of God.

James says this explicitly at the end of chapter three, right before he starts talking about the passions. He says, in 3:17 and 18, **“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”**

Notice that harvest language. A harvest of righteousness. This is the kind of wisdom that produces the righteousness of God. Peaceable, gentle, open to reason. That’s the opposite of a turn your brain off and react mentality. Do you want to see a harvest of righteousness in your life? Cultivate self-control, be slow to anger.

#### Verse 21

Ok, then last, verse 21, **“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”**

Notice the contrast with James 3:17, wisdom from above is pure and peaceable, so put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness.

Here, he's buttoning up what he's said by repeating the main idea. Put away sin and pride and passion and all the rest, and receive the word, be quick to hear. He's essentially doubling down on what he said in 19 and 20.

I want to stress one thing in this verse. Notice the character of this Christian wisdom. Godly wisdom is a life of repentance and faith. Christian wisdom is a life of turning from sin and receiving Christ and his Word.

Godly living, Godly wisdom is not a life of striving after a self-sufficient autonomy – it's not about mastering a few first principles and being able to move on from the Word. It's not about mastering a few techniques, and then setting aside the Word.

Godly wisdom is top to bottom, beginning to end a life of receiving the Word of God. A life of bringing your open and empty hands again and again to Jesus and receiving from him whatever he has for you.

Christian, put away filthiness, put away wickedness. Christian, you are not beyond repentance. Godly wisdom brings itself daily into the light of God's Word, and asks again, **“search me O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”**<sup>1</sup>

Christian wisdom is a life of faith. A life of receiving with meekness the Word of God. Of again saying, “teach me what's true, show me what's good, make me know the way I should go.”

When you grow in godly wisdom you don't move beyond the cross, but closer to the cross. When you grow in godly wisdom you get more and more acquainted with the cross. Growing in godly wisdom looks like more quickly, more readily, more easily carrying your sin to the cross, laying your sin down at the foot of the cross, and saying Jesus forgive me, Jesus heal me, Jesus restore me, Jesus lead me, Jesus teach me, Jesus help me.

This is how the Word of God is able to save your soul. The Word shows you your sin and it shows you your savior. This is the Word of life. The Word that gave you life, the Word that is giving you life, and the Word that will give you life. Be quick to hear.

### **Doctrine: Humility**

The doctrine we need to reflect on a bit today is the doctrine of Christian humility, or Christian meekness. Humility is extremely important in the book of James. Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger – that's a decent description of humility. Receive the Word with meekness.

Then, again with James' description of wisdom from chapter 3, wisdom is peaceable, gentle, open to reason, impartial and sincere, and he even contrasts this in the verse before with jealousy and selfish ambition.

Christian wisdom and Christian humility always go hand in hand. There is no godly wisdom without true humility, and true humility cannot grow without godly wisdom. Where wisdom rises, humility prospers. Where humility lags, godly wisdom shrinks.

Here's how you can define Christian humility. Christian humility is first, a reverent *lowliness* before God, second, a merciful *gentleness* towards others, and third, a frank *honesty* towards yourself. Lowliness before God, gentleness towards others, and honesty towards yourself.

Thomas Watson, one of my favorite English Puritan pastors and theologians has a really helpful discussion of Christian meekness in his book on the Beatitudes, commenting on Matthew 5:5, **“blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”**

I want to just give you the highlights of his take on humility, I think it's relevant to our passage today. In classic Puritan fashion it has lots of parts and sub parts, but I'll just give you the highlights.

He divides meekness into meekness towards God and towards man. Under meekness towards God, he says it consists in two parts, 1) submission to God's will, and 2) flexibility to God's Word.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 139:23-24

For submission to God's will, he basically means what I've been saying the last few weeks about trusting God's providence. He is God, I am not. God knows what's best. If he gives me pleasant times, blessed be the name of the Lord. If he gives me dark and tragic times, blessed be the name of the Lord. This is meekness.

Second, flexibility to God's Word. Now, you are the flexible one here, not God's Word. That's important. The Word bends and shapes you, you don't bend and shape the Word. Very important. Watson says that the meek person "does not quarrel with the instructions of the Word, but with the corruptions of his heart."<sup>2</sup>

Meekness towards God then is trusting in God's providence, and being quick to hear and be shaped by his Word.

Watson then moves on to meekness towards man, and it's really interesting where he goes with this.

Under meekness towards man, Watson says, "Meekness is a grace whereby we are enabled by the Spirit of God to moderate our passions."<sup>3</sup> Fascinating. Meekness towards others is a grace where we are given self-control to not be led by our bellies into all kinds of chaos, death, and destruction.

He breaks out meekness towards others into three parts. He says it consists first of bearing injuries. Meekness looks like getting insulted, hurt, offended, slighted, sinned against, and not immediately blowing up at someone, or harboring malice on your heart, or taking revenge, or talking evil about them behind their back.

This is why meekness requires *merciful* gentleness towards others. It's really easy to be gentle and patient with people who are kind, considerate, and convenient for you. But meekness shows up when you can be gentle with someone who genuinely wrongs you.

Meekness towards others looks like not just bearing injuries, but also meekness looks like *forgiving* injuries. It's not just that you don't blow up or retaliate, but you actually forgive those who wrong you. Watson says that meekness requires that forgiveness will be three things. Meekness requires that forgiveness will be real, that it will be full, and that it will be often. Again, it's easy to say you forgive someone, but meekness really lets go of the offense, and doesn't hold on to it. It's easy to kind of forgive someone, but meekness forgives the whole sin, and all the various sins. And it's easy to forgive someone once, but meekness forgives the same person over and over and over, often for the same sin – just like God forgives you over and over and over for the same sin.

Then third, not only does meekness forgive injury, but meekness repays good for evil. Your husband makes some tone-deaf sarcastic comment, make his favorite dinner. Your wife disrespects you in front of the kids, pick up some flowers for her. Your coworker takes all the credit for your group project, pay for his lunch. Your mother-in-law makes some snippy comment about how you keep the house, ask her advice on something she excels in.

Watson says this, "grace [diminishes] the passion and melts the heart into compassion." In stead of boiling in rage, meekness lets you have compassion on the one who wronged you. This is mercy at its full-noon brightness. Meekness says "I have sinned against God and he has done nothing but shower me with gifts of kindness, I can show his grace by doing the same to those who sin against me."

Next, Watson gives a list of several reasons why Christians should be meek, I just want to note one of them. He says, Christians should be meek because "meekness [demonstrates] a noble and excellent spirit."<sup>4</sup> He argues this is the case because meekness is essentially self-control over the passions. Meekness is a refusal to lash out at the world, and be driven around, tossed by the waves of life. Passion is essentially a reactive way to live life, always just reacting to what is thrown at you. But meekness is a position of controlled and deliberate action (not reaction) that is submissive to the will of God and directed by the Word of God seasoned with love and gentleness towards others.

Watson says here, "A meek man is a valorous man. He gets a victory over himself... Strength of passion argues weakness of judgment, but the meek man who is able to conquer his fury, is the most [powerful] and

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, Banner of Truth, 110.

<sup>3</sup> Watson, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Watson, 121.

victorious... To yield to one's passion is easy. It is swimming along with the tide of corrupt nature, but to turn against nature, to resist passion, to 'overcome evil with good,' this is like a Christian. This is that spiritual chivalry and fortitude of mind that deserves the trophies of victory and the garland of praise."<sup>5</sup>

You should cultivate meekness because this is the victory over the sinful flesh that shows the power of the work of Christ in you.

Last, Watson addresses how to grow in meekness. First, he says, "often look upon the meekness of Christ."<sup>6</sup> Christ is the great example of meekness. If you would know what meekness looks like, study Christ. He knows how to use authority, and how to set it aside. He knows how to offer a stinging rebuke, and how to overlook an offense. He knows how to submit to the will of God, and not lash out at the sin of man. Christ is the model of humility and meekness. His example will teach you, and his Spirit will shape you.

Second, Watson says, "pray earnestly that God will meeken your spirit." I didn't even know that meeken was a word, but there you go. Ask God to give you meekness, ask him to meeken you. It's really that simple.

Again, meekness and wisdom really do run hand in hand. Just like James said earlier. If you lack wisdom, ask, and God, who gives generously to all without reproach, will give it to you. If you lack meekness, if you lack humility, ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given you.

There is no wisdom apart from humility, and no pride apart from folly.

James 3:13, **"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."**

### Application

Let me give you a couple of really practical application steps from all this. What are some practical ways to cultivate humility and grow in self-control? How can I actually become a little slower to speak and a little slower to anger?

One helpful and simple way for both is simply to practice on the small stuff. Practice being slow to speak in the small things, and practice self-denial in the small things.

The next time you're talking with someone, and they say something that you know isn't true. They're not lying, they're not misleading anyone, they just have their facts wrong about something. Don't correct them. Let it slide.

Now, I'm not talking about someone being wrong about the important things, I'm just talking about the little conversational data points that someone just gets wrong. "So and so moved away last year." No, it was two years ago, just let it slide.

Along the same vein, the next time you disagree with someone, don't try to argue your point, just try to understand theirs. Not as a rule for forever, but just as an exercise to grow in intellectual humility, as an exercise of being a little slower to speak. Don't argue your side, just ask about theirs and understand theirs.

Grow in being slow to speak by practicing with the small stuff.

And with the passions, with self-indulgence and self-control, it's the same idea. Grow in self-control by practicing on the small stuff.

I think we struggle with self-control, and self-denial in the big sin issues – anger, lust, fear, greed, pride – because we tend to live the rest of our lives with a basic ethic of self-indulgence. If I want something, and it's not inherently sinful, why not indulge? We struggle with self-denial because we don't practice it very much.

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<sup>5</sup> Watson, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 126.

So, again, start with the small stuff. Build up your self-denial muscles. When someone brings dessert into the office, don't take one every time. Not as a universal rule forever. There's nothing wrong with desserts, but just as an exercise occasionally.

Or with anger, when someone teases you, don't hit them with a comeback, just let them get the upper hand every so often.

Or don't watch TV for a week. Or stay off YouTube for a week. Just to practice boredom. Just to practice self-denial. Read a book. Watch the grass grow.

Just practice saying no to your little desires just to remind your desires who is in charge.

The passions thrive on self-indulgence, and meekness lives by self-denial.

### **Conclusion**

Ok, let's wrap all this up. Godly wisdom is a life of receiving the Word with meekness, a life of repentance and faith. It's a life of bringing your sin to the foot of the cross, and listening to Jesus in his Word to give you direction and order in life. Godly wisdom is a life of growing little by little in humility, in being slow to speak, and little by little in self-control, being slow to anger. **"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."**