

June 14, 2026

**James 3:13-18**

Wisdom from Above

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think that one way or another, something from my own personal Bible reading, my morning devotions, has found its way into most of these sermons so far. I'll be reading something on a Tuesday through my regular plan, and I'll stumble onto something that clarifies some idea or some concept that I've been wrestling with.

This week it was Psalm 133. I want to read the whole thing for you; don't worry it's only three verses. This Psalm captures one of the main threads of this section in James.

Psalm 133:

**<sup>1</sup>Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!**

**<sup>2</sup>It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!**

**<sup>3</sup>It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.**

God's blessing is found in thriving Christian community. Life forevermore, eternal life, the blessing of God is found in that place where Christian brothers dwell together in unity.

The gospel is not an individualistic thing. Certainly, receiving the gospel is a deeply individual thing – you will be saved for your faith, or condemned for your sin – and yet, the gospel pulls you into something bigger than yourself. Christ is ransoming his bride. He is building his church.

Community matters. Life together as Christians matters. A wise life is a life that knows how to live in community well.

This is why James makes such a big deal about life together.

It's easy to misread James – or at least flatten James – if we read it through individualistic eyes. Everything from Chapter 2 through the end of the book is not about how you should live in the abstract, but how we should live as a church.

And this is why we stress meaningful church membership so much. This is why we do covenant church membership.

Normative New Testament Christianity is life in the local church. When James is talking about how we relate to others here, he's specifically talking about how we relate to others in the church, and specifically the church at which you are a covenant member. Certainly, you should be gentle and reasonable and impartial with everyone, but James is specifically talking about relating to one another as members at a particular local church.

If we want to understand what James is saying, particularly about life together, we need to hear him, not as 'how to do life with other people generally,' and not as 'how to do life in the mystical body of Christ universally,' but as 'how to do life together as a covenant local church' with *these* people.

I've been looking forward to this passage for a while.

This passage is the climax of the book. This is where everything comes together. Everything he's been saying so far builds up to this, and everything in the book after this flows out of it.

The title for the series – "Wisdom from above" – comes out of this passage.

The basic question that James has been answering is this: in the face of religious, social, economic, and political turmoil how do I live a good and godly life? Remember who James is writing to, the Jewish Christians in the dispersion.

How do I live a life that is both pleasing to God, and pleasant to me? Can that be done? Do I have to choose between a happy life and a holy life?

James' argument, with lots of different angles, has basically been to say that the life that is both pleasing to God and pleasant to you is a life of love for God, love for neighbor, and self-control. This is the life that he has called pure religion. Today he will call it wisdom from above.

And that's one of the big points that I've been trying to draw out from James. There really is a wisdom from above that God will give you. There really is a wise way to live. An objective, living according to reality. The Christian life isn't a life of subjective, "well, what do I feel is right," but God has given us objective wisdom to live by.

And that wisdom comes down from above. This isn't wisdom that we find deep inside ourselves. This isn't wisdom that we get from the world. This isn't wisdom that we get from human teachers. True wisdom is wisdom that comes down from above. Both in its origin – it comes from God and not man – but also in its *power*. True wisdom from above is the transforming power of the Holy Spirit working in you to transform you to delight to live according to God's objective, plainly revealed will.

But, I'm getting a bit ahead of myself.

In this passage James pulls together everything he's been saying so far about life together and lays out for us his big idea. And really, again, this is the big idea for the whole book.

Here's the big idea: *wisdom from above is godliness that comes from being born again, and looks like purity before God, peace toward one another, and contentment in life.*

### Transition and Set Up

Look at verse 13. This is James' summary statement on the last chapter and a half or so. **"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."**

A couple of quick points. Notice what true wisdom is and what it is not.

First, notice what true wisdom *is*. True wisdom is the practical result of faith.

He's pulling together everything that he's been talking about so far. Impartiality, faith that works, and merciful self-control of your tongue. This is the good conduct he's talking about.

And where do all of those things come from?

Impartiality is how we hold the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. True works flow out of true faith. And pure religion is bridling the tongue.

Wisdom from above is true faith that transforms you.

This is really important for you to see to make the whole book of James click together. James draws a straight line between wisdom – true wisdom, wisdom from above – and faith.

James isn't bouncing around between a few different unrelated ideas. He's not talking a little about faith over here, then a little about religion over there, then a little about wisdom over here. No, he's talking about the same basic thing from a few different angles. What does true faith look like? What does true wisdom look like? What does pure religion look like?

When he says, **"who is wise and understanding among you?"** He's saying, 'who has true faith among you?' And he's not the only one to use this kind of language. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:15 that the Scriptures are **"able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."**<sup>1</sup>

So, true wisdom is faith that leads to transformation.

But then also, note what true wisdom *isn't*. Wisdom isn't mere knowledge apart from godly character.

One of the dangers for thriving Christian community is the danger of over exalting mere knowledge. This is how people can gain more influence in the community through their knowledge than they can handle because of their character.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. 3:15.

James gives us two marks of true wisdom here. First, it results in good conduct. Second, it seasons you with meekness.

False wisdom can be seen in fruitlessness and pride. False wisdom is a vain piddling around with big ideas and being puffed up with knowledge.

And this is dangerous, because sometimes, someone's knowledge will be more profitable to others than it is to himself. If someone has true biblical or theological knowledge, and they share it with others, that knowledge might be really profitable, it might be really helpful to the one who hears in a way that it just isn't for the one who shares.

And because he's able to genuinely help others, he gets put in positions of influence, only to do more harm than good. Often this harm comes by simply leading others into a sterile or prideful pursuit of knowledge, but sometimes it comes by flaming out in some scandal or moral failure.

So, knowledge, and precision, and conviction, are not yet true wisdom – but they might be some day.

So, you don't want to make that guy a pastor, or even a small group leader, but you also don't want to crush him. Encourage the pursuit of truth, but don't give him influence until he's ready for it.

That's the basic transition into this passage: *true wisdom reveals itself in good conduct and meekness.*

### **Negative Description of True Wisdom**

In verses 14 through 16, James gives a negative description of true wisdom – what true wisdom is *not*.

Verse 14, **“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.”** Remember, this isn't a description about how to live in general. This is a description of life in covenant community. This is a description of life in the church.

Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are basically the opposite of meekness. Bitter jealousy resents others for having more influence in the community. And selfish ambition is a desire for more influence in the community simply for your own pride's sake.

There's a *godly* ambition that's a good thing – Paul says that if anyone desires the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Young men, if you see in yourself a desire to serve the church through the office of elder, that's a really good thing. But if it's just a desire to be seen and to be in charge, that's bad. Very bad. James calls it “earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.”

In that case James says, **“do not boast and be false to the truth.”** And notice that, he doesn't say, pack your bags and leave. He just says, if you find in yourself a desire to have influence in the church, but you also see it mixed with a lot of jealousy and selfish ambition, don't put yourself forward as a leader or teacher yet. Maybe someday the church will call on you, but for now, sit tight, repent, seek some discipleship, and wait.

And this applies to formal leaders like elders, but this also applies to areas of informal influence as well. It's good and godly to desire to influence the church for good in whatever capacity you can. But beware the draw of jealousy and selfish ambition.

Verse 15, **“This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”** I've said this before, but James is not a flowery communicator. He doesn't repeat himself just for the sake of it. And he isn't in the business of just kind of compounding adjectives for emphasis. He means something by each of these three terms.

He's comparing true wisdom and false wisdom by comparing the sources. True wisdom comes from above, from God, from the Holy Spirit. But false wisdom comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Another way that you can think of these is as wisdom that is centered on profit – the world; wisdom that is centered on pleasure – the flesh; and wisdom that is centered on pride – the devil. Earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

He lists these in an order of increasing corruption. For the first, there's a worldly wisdom that pursues good things – career, security, comfort – but in a way that is disconnected from their true meaning, in a way that

ignores God and his will for you as his creature. And not necessarily in an otherwise sinful way, just with no reference to God (which, to be clear, is sin itself).

What I mean is this: with earthly wisdom, he's not talking about the pursuit of career in order to get rich and famous and to sleep around and to make a big name for yourself. That's the other two kinds of so-called wisdom.

With earthly wisdom he's talking about the kind of wisdom that leads an otherwise good and respectable life. It's the wisdom that has a good career, is a present and faithful dad or mom, they have a more or less happy family, they are polite and kind neighbors, they don't have a bunch of dandelions in their lawn. Earthly wisdom is skill in pursuing good things but done in a way that ignores the source and giver of those good things, and the true meaning and purpose of those good things.

It pursues good things – career, family, security, even morality and respectability – but as ends in themselves, without reference to God.

Then unspiritual wisdom is where you get into the more explicit outward sins – this is your gluttony, your lust and sexual immorality, your drunkenness, even fits of anger, and greed. Unspiritual wisdom is “skill” in gratifying the desires of the flesh – it's basically a life committed to the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake.

The word here is really interesting. I won't go into it much, I'll have a footnote here<sup>2</sup> in the manuscript if you want to dig in a bit more, it's really interesting. But it can also be translated as sensual, or natural. It's a wisdom rooted in the sensual pursuit of basic fleshly instincts that are warped and out of proportion.

Then demonic wisdom is wisdom centered on pride – the desire to dominate others and be exalted over others.

Verse 16, **“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”**

When people are motivated by jealousy and selfish ambition they care more about their prestige and position than about godliness. So, little by little they drift into a double life. They care more about hiding their secret porn addiction than about rooting out lust in the bud. They care more about image than substance.

And this is contagious. Pride leads to a double life, and in leadership this produces a community of double living. Meekness leads to integrity, and in leadership this produces a community of integrity.

### **Wisdom From Above**

That's the negative, that's what wisdom from above isn't.

Next, James gets to what wisdom from above is. Verse 17, **“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”**

Two big ideas I need to hit in this verse. First, *where* this wisdom comes from. And second what this wisdom *looks* like. Both are important.

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<sup>2</sup> The word is ψυχικός, *psychikos*, which is related to the word that we get psyche from, and psychology. Translated literally it is 'soul.' The Latin equivalent is the word *anima* which is where we get “animation” and “animal.” The soul is the *animating* principle of a thing. Another way that this concept might be expressed is with the concept of “animal instincts.” This unspiritual (or soul-ish) wisdom is wisdom rooted in the unsanctified “animal” instincts of a person – pleasure, food, security, sleep, reproduction – urges that animate the flesh which the spirit subdues (by the power of The Spirit). Paul uses this contrast in a couple places in 1 Corinthians.

First Corinthians 2:14, **“The natural [soul-ish] person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”**

First Corinthians 15:44-45, **“<sup>44</sup>It is sown a natural [soul-ish] body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural [soul-ish] body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being [soul]’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”**

Ok, first, he calls this wisdom from above. This wisdom isn't found in the world. This wisdom isn't found in your flesh. And this wisdom certainly isn't found in pride and self-exaltation.

This is the wisdom that comes from God and that God alone gives. In other words, this is the wisdom of being born again. This is the wisdom of Christ come down to you, and the Holy Spirit sent into you.

The wisdom from above isn't just God's instruction for how to live better. The wisdom from above is the power of the Holy Spirit opening your eyes to see Jesus, to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. To see the holiness of God in Jesus and to realize the depth of your sin – to realize that my goodness, my virtue can never answer to the holiness of God. Even my good deeds are corrupted by my corrupt heart.

True wisdom sees the mercy of God in Jesus. True wisdom sees his mercy to send his Son to take my place. To live the life the law requires of me, to die the death the law threatens for my sin.

True wisdom begins with being born again. Jesus says, **“no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”**<sup>3</sup> True wisdom begins with regeneration. Until God opens your eyes by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will always think that your works can be enough. That if you just try your best you can find favor with God.

You will always think that your goodness, or your moral self-improvement can somehow answer to the holiness of God. But holy meekness, holy wisdom comes from being humbled by the holiness of God.

Wisdom from above sets aside my own righteousness and clings to Christ as my only righteousness before God.

This is the point that the Apostle Paul makes at the beginning of 1 Corinthians. Chapter 1, verses 28-30. **“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”**

Because of God – because God the Father has drawn you, because the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes – because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, wisdom from above, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Wisdom from above is that wisdom that God the Father gives you by sending the Holy Spirit to regenerate you and open your eyes to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Christ in you is wisdom from above.

That's *where* this wisdom comes from, not what does this wisdom *look* like?

Let's read verse 17 again, **“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”**

Here, James describes this holy wisdom in four couplets. Four pairs. Pure and peaceable, gentle and open to reason, mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. Each of these couplets describes one aspect of life in community from contrasting and complementary angles.

First, pure and peaceable. Purity has to do with our posture toward God, and peaceable has to do with our posture toward each other. Purity is the vertical relation, and peaceable is the horizontal relation.

Purity has two senses. Purity means not mixed, like oil and water, there's pure water or impure water. But purity also means clean, not stained, not soiled.

So, purity means living before God as individuals and as a community with an undivided heart, and not bogged down in unrepentant sin.

This means we aren't chasing after other gods. This means we care about doctrine. This means we care about the details of worship – God has told us how he wants us to worship him.

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<sup>3</sup> John 6:44

Purity means that we take sin seriously in ourselves and in the community. This doesn't mean we don't sin, we talked about that last week, we all stumble in many ways, but we deal with sin Christianly. We confess, we repent, we forgive, we fight, we grow.

Wisdom from above is first pure, then *peaceable*. Wisdom from above looks like being peaceable, being one who is for peace, one who is quick to make peace, one who is slow to fight and always hates to fight. You don't pick fights, and you go out of your way to accommodate others, you want to be flexible.

We'll see more about what it means to be peaceable as we move along. The rest of this verse unrolls what it means to be peaceable. The rest of this verse describes wisdom as right living toward the church, in that horizontal dimension.

To be peaceable is to be gentle and open to reason, to be merciful and full of good fruits, and to be impartial and sincere.

But before we do that, you need to notice the order that James sets up here, and he's explicit about the importance of this order. He says, **"first pure then peaceable."** Purity sets the boundaries, then peace lives within those boundaries. Purity, truth, godliness establish the boundaries, then within the boundaries of truth we pursue peace.

If we reverse the order, if we pursue peace first – getting along first, accommodation first, inclusion first, making people feel seen and loved first – and truth only within the boundaries of peace, we lose both. When peace comes before truth, we lose both. When getting along is more important than the truth, we lose both.

As Christians, you should want to be accommodating, you should want to be generous and gracious, and you should want to make room for other people to be included and accepted. You should. Within the firm boundaries of truth.

And I'm not talking about being rude, or unkind, or harsh to non-believers.

Matthew 5:44, **"Love your enemies."**

Second Timothy 2:24-25, **"the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness."**

First Peter 3:15-16, **"Always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."**

So, even for those who flatly reject the truth, and who flatly reject godliness, love, kindness, gentleness, and respect are still required of you.

And yet, love, kindness, gentleness, and respect are not defined by how you make people feel. Truth is exclusive. Truth has hard edges. Godliness is exclusive. Godliness offends people.

Compromising truth for the sake of peace is the fear of man and leads to chaos. Peace can only prosper on the foundation of truth.

There is a compassion that does nothing but comfort people in their condemnation.

And there is a rigidness that just might save their soul.

**"First pure, then peaceable."**

The rest of this verse expands on what being peaceable looks like within the boundaries of purity. Next, we see *gentle and open to reason*. And these two go together as well.

A decent way you could paraphrase these would be "you don't force your opinions on others, and you are open to their opinions."

Gentle in this sense means that you don't boss people around and you don't make everyone else think and talk and act just like you do. You make room for them to do their own thing. Again, within the boundaries of purity.

Then, on the other hand, you're open to reason. If someone comes and talks to you and offers you some advice or some challenge to some idea you're excited about, or some practice you're excited about, you're open to their input. You don't necessarily change your mind just because they tell you to, but you're open. You hear them out. You weigh it. You consider it. Maybe you change your ways, maybe you stick to what you were doing. But you're open to their input.

Being peaceable is being gentle and open to reason – you don't force yourself on others, and you are open to input from others.

Next is '*full of mercy and good fruits*.' Basically, this addresses how we relate to each other in our various weaknesses. Mercy addresses how we relate to each other in our sins. We're not critical or harsh, we're not proud or dismissive, we're not condemning or rude. We take the log out of our eye before we address the speck in theirs.

And good fruits addresses how we relate to each other in our needs. We talked about this a few weeks ago with sacrificial love for neighbor.

I'll put the benevolence fund in front of you again. One way that we can very tangibly walk in this kind of wisdom is by setting up a monthly donation to the benevolence fund. This is one very tangible way that you can be full of good fruit toward your brothers and sisters in their material needs in this church.

But this could also include other needs. The meal trains when people have babies or are in the hospital is one way. Simply spending time with someone when they're going through a hard time, that's another way. Good fruits is simply a reference to the way that true faith bubbles up as practical love in the life of believers for one another.

Then last, '*impartial and sincere*.' Both of these carry the idea of being single not double. *Impartial* means that you don't judge with a double standard. If your buddy says something silly, or needs a rebuke, you should be the first one to call him out. If your rival, or someone that you don't get along with very well says something really wise or good, you should be the first one to praise him. Don't give your friends a pass, and don't be extra critical to the people you don't get along as well. Be single in your judgment.

Then *sincere* means don't live a double life. Be who you say you are. There shouldn't be a different you for your family, and a different you for your church. There shouldn't be a different you for your work and for your buddies. There should be only one you.

These both speak to integrity. You have integrity in your judgment, and integrity in your life.

This is the basic portrait of godly wisdom, James will add one more detail in the next verse, but for now this is it. Did you notice how much of that was just repeating what he's said already? We've talked about impartiality, we've talked about mercy, we've talked about good fruits, we've talked about pure religion and love for neighbor. This is the high-point of this book. This is James' big idea.

Godly wisdom, wisdom from above, is first pure, first concerned about faithfulness to God, first concerned about truth and the pursuit of holiness, then, and earnestly then, peaceable. Godly wisdom is serious about gentleness and openness in community – mercy and generosity in community – and integrity in community.

### **Contentment**

Then, in the last verse, James adds one more aspect to godly wisdom, again, something we've seen before.

He's touched on the godward dimension, he's detailed the others-facing dimension, then last, he touches on the inward dimension. Godly wisdom is marked by purity toward God, peaceableness toward others, and *contentment* within, or peace within.

Verse 18, **"And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."**

There are three things I need to mention in this verse. “What,” “how,” and “who.”

The “what” is the harvest of righteousness. He describes the seed by the result.

Here he’s just saying that a product, or the end result of righteousness, both in your life and in the community, is sown a certain way.

This verse is basically the mirror image of verse 16. Verse 16 and 18 show the end results of worldly wisdom on the one hand, and godly wisdom on the other.

Verse 16 says, **“Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”**

Jealousy and selfish ambition produce a harvest of disorder and every vile practice. But wisdom sown in peace, produces a harvest of righteousness – order, and every honorable practice.

That’s the “what,” then the “how.”

Here, James gives us the inward disposition of this wisdom from above. Verse 17 is what wisdom from above *looks like*, here in verse 18 James tells us what this wisdom from above *feels like* on the inside.

Righteousness is sown in *peace*.

This is the meekness of wisdom, this is contentment. This is the disposition that “counts it all joy” when you face trials of various kinds. This is the inner disposition that says, “God is good, God is wise, God is in control, God is happy. Whatever God gives or takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Peace, this inward contentment, is one of the consistent marks of godly wisdom in the Bible.

Isaiah 26:3, **“<sup>3</sup>You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”**

Galatians 5:22-23, **“<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”**

First Timothy 6:6, **“<sup>6</sup>But godliness with contentment is great gain.”**

Again, this is why this wisdom from above is not just learning how to do life better. Wisdom from above flows out of an inward transformation. You don’t get inner contentment from being pure and peaceable. You live pure and peaceable because you’ve already been given inner contentment.

Contentment flows out of a clean conscience and trust in God’s providence. Contentment flows out of forgiveness for your sins, and a wholehearted reliance on the goodness and power of God.

Romans 5:8, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Peace in your heart comes from peace with God.

Purity and peaceableness flows out of contentment. Contentment flows out of justification. And justification flows out of the veins of Christ.

Godly wisdom looks like purity before God, peaceableness toward man, and contentment within.<sup>4</sup>

That’s the “what,” a harvest of righteousness; the “how,” sown in peace; then last, the “who,” those who make peace. ‘Those who make peace’ are simply those who walk in the wisdom from above.

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<sup>4</sup> This is one of the common frameworks that the Bible uses for godliness. There’s a Godward dimension, there’s a one-another dimension, and there’s an inward dimension.

We’ve seen this already in James 1:26-27. Pure religion bridles the tongue (self-control, the inward dimension). Pure religion visits widows and orphans (the one-another dimension). And pure religion is unstained from the world (purity, the Godward dimension).

Titus 2:11-12, **“<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup>training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled [inward], upright [or fair, just, one-another], and godly lives in the present age.”**

Micah 6:8, **“<sup>8</sup>He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice [one-another], and to love kindness [this is the word for God’s steadfast love, Godward], and to walk humbly [inward] with your God?”**

This is James' big idea. And really this is his big idea for the whole book. A good and godly life requires thriving godly community in the local church. Jealousy and selfish ambition destroy local churches. Worldly wisdom, fleshly wisdom, demonic wisdom destroys local churches. But **"a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."**

Righteousness and life flourish when men and women are born again through Christ – the wisdom of God come down from heaven. This new birth, this inward wisdom from above builds up the church through purity, peaceableness, and contentment.

### Application

Ok, for application. I have three points that come from this text. I'll be somewhat brief with each.

The first is this; *you must be born again*. Have I said that yet?

You do not find the wisdom from above by looking inside yourself.

And there's a tension here, a tension that's meant to humble you. You cannot be saved unless you come to Christ. And you will not come to Christ unless he draws you.

The same Christ who says, "no one comes to me unless the Father draws him," also says, "to whoever asks, it will be given. Whoever seeks will find. Whoever knocks, the door will be opened to him." So, ask, seek, knock. Find Christ and find true wisdom. You must be born again.

The second application is this; younger believers, whether you're younger in years, or just young in the faith, *focus on growing in character before growing in influence*.

True and good and fruitful and godly wisdom is seen first and foremost in godly character, not just having true things to say about God and theology.

Again, if you find in yourself a desire to build up the church, if you find in yourself a desire to influence the church for good, to be a leader in the church in some fashion, that's a good thing, but godly leadership is more than mere knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Focus on character before influence.

The third application point then is simply *pursue growth in godly wisdom*. Wisdom from above comes from the Holy Spirit renewing you, and it comes *through* your pursuit of godly wisdom. This is Paul in Philippians

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<sup>5</sup> When I think of godly influence, and growing in leadership, or helping others become godly leaders, I think through five components that need to be in place. Think of these like a pyramid, each one resting on the previous. This is just my framework, so do with this what you will. The first is character, then consistency, contentment, content, and competence.

Character we've touched on, this is just basic godliness, this is where leadership begins, and this is where leadership collapses. Character needs to come first. Then consistency. And certainly, consistency in character, but beyond that, consistency in life. You need to know what direction you are going before you try to lead anyone else. Then contentment. If you are leading out of a place of anxious striving, if you are trying to lead to fill some hole in your heart, or to prove something to yourself, or to finally feel peace, your discontent will be contagious. That gnawing emptiness will be contagious. Godly leadership, godly ambition flows out of contentment in Christ and leads people to contentment in Christ. Anxious leadership makes the people you lead anxious.

Character, consistency, contentment, then content. A leader needs to have something to say. This is bible knowledge, theological knowledge, or outside the church, this is business knowledge, strategy, expertise. Eventually a leader has to have something to say. Certainly, character, consistency, and contentment by themselves can be a good example and extremely beneficial in a community. But this is why elders need to be able to teach and to contradict false teaching. There needs to be content. Then fifth, competence. This is skill in communicating the content. Content knows what to say, competence knows how to say it in a way that is clear, concise, and compelling. Or again, outside church leadership, content has a vision for a good product, competence is the skill to produce it, market it, and turn a profit. If you start with content, without the foundation of character, eventually this leads to either a hollow intellectualism, or moral failure. And if you start with competence, without content, you end up with a lot of production value papering over an ear tickling that's just saying whatever people want to hear.

Character, consistency, contentment, content, competence. Focus on character before influence.

2:12-13, **“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”**

This portrait of godly wisdom is not just a statement of fact about what the Holy Spirit is doing in you – it certainly is that – but it is also the path of wisdom that you are called to walk.

Think through this passage, and pick one thing to work on.

One danger would be to come away from this with seven areas to work on. And because you’re trying to fix everything you end up not really growing in anything.

I’d encourage you to focus on one. What is one thing from this passage that you can focus on and be praying about this week?

Do you need to grow in purity? Is there a doctrinal issue that you need to address? Is there a sin in your life that you need to get serious about? Is there a discipline you need to grow in? Daily prayer, regular Bible reading, family worship?

Do you need to grow in peaceableness? Are you gentle? Reasonable? Merciful? Generous? Impartial? Sincere?

Or contentment? Is your conscience at peace before God? Do you know his forgiveness? Do you trust God’s wisdom and goodness in the situation he has you in right now? Are you content in this season? Or is your heart stuck in some past season? Or is your heart running ahead to some future season?

What is one area that you can focus on and be praying about this week?

Those are the three application points for today.

You must be born again. Grow in character before influence. Pursue godly wisdom. There should be something in there for everyone.

### **Lord’s Supper**

We will be observing the Lord’s Supper this morning. The Lord’s Supper is the gospel made visible for us. It’s the wisdom of God made visible for us.

The answer to your problems – the misery in your life, the sorrow in your life, the sin and guilt in your life, even the death at the end of your life – the answer to these problems is not found within, and it’s not found in the world. The solution to your problems, the wisdom you need, is found in the man Jesus Christ, light from light, true God from true God, come down from heaven, who lived a perfect life under the law, and who died a sinner’s death to satisfy the law for sinners.

This is what the Supper holds out to you. It offers you Jesus’ broken body and his shed blood as the wisdom of God for you. It offers you the Spirit of Christ in you, to nourish you, and transform you, to renew you, and strengthen you for godly wisdom.

So, Christian, take and eat. Receive the body and blood of Christ. Receive the wisdom of God for you.