

# Wisdom From Above

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, I'd love us to turn back together to James chapter 3 and the verse I want to focus on is James chapter 3 verse 17 where we read But the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable gentle open to reason sincere The letter of James and in fact the Bible as a whole talks a lot about wisdom It's a word that constantly comes up especially if you go back into the Old Testament you'll see it again and again in books like Psalms and Proverbs and Running right through to the New Testament and and in many ways especially in the letter of James This is a word and a concept that keeps appearing In fact, I think we could probably go to go so far to say that one of the biggest focuses in the Bible is on this whole topic of wisdom and And that actually ties in a lot with the era that the Bible was written in because during that period both during the days of the Old Testament and the new and to be wise was a key

Priority in life and that's why in those days in the secular society of the kind of Greco-Roman period the people who were at the top of that society were the philosophers the wise ones and in local communities The people who were most respected were the elders the older generation the ones who had the most life experience the ones who were seen to have the most wisdom and that's for that whole period Wisdom was one of the most prized attributes That you could attain to have Now today, it's kind of similar but also different because it's not entirely like that because it when you were young Or if you're still young and you're asked the question, what do you want to be when you grow up?

What did you say or what would you say? armor and mainly because I like tractors and Maybe pilot whatever it might be Did you ever answer that question by saying I want to be wise?

And yet we don't need to think for long to see that wisdom is Needed as urgently today as it ever has been and we can we can prove that we can prove that I can give you two Two ways that I hope prove that the first is that there are still so many areas of life Where the key to success or failure lies in the way you think and you see that whether you look in sport or in work or in school or in Relationships you see that that it will always Ultimately come down to your mindset And so the I don't know if many of your golf fans today, but the the open is on just now It's the final day today and there's like five or six people who are all Either tied for the lead or almost in the leaders like one shot between them So there's loads of people who could win today. They all have an equal level of skill the winner today will be the person

Who has the mindset that's needed to come first? And you see that in so many ways skills and abilities are important The thing that will make or break it is your attitude The way you think the priorities you set the choices that you make so in so many ways still today The key to success or failure is the way you think the other And as communities we still put a huge amount of energy into trying to teach people not to be stupid Now that may be something a little bit blunt, but I think it's true. It is true Whether it's at home or at school whether it's in regard to looking after our health driving Alcohol gambling finances environmental issues Whatever it may be a huge amount of energy is put in to trying to steer people away from making bad choices And all of that's just another way of saying that as a society as communities as families we desperately need people to be wise

[ 4 : 1 7 ] So throughout history right up to the present day wisdom is crucial for the well-being of humanity It's one of our greatest needs and that is one of the many things that makes the Bible so brilliant and so relevant Because it's constantly talking to us about wisdom In fact, we should never forget that a key part of what we do when we come together at church at the start of every new week a Key part of what we do is that we want to grow in our wisdom So in your weekly routine you might go for a walk or a run or a swim or a cycle in order to have a physical Workout and that's a very good thing to do and every time you do that a walk or a run or whatever You should be a little bit fitter Coming to church should be the place where you come for a wisdom workout after it You

should go home a little bit wiser Look like and that's the question that James 3 17 answers and The verse that we're looking at today comes in a wider context in the letter where James is drawing a contrast between the mindset of the culture around his readers and the mindset that God wants these people to have in other words there's a contrast between wisdom from around us and wisdom from Above and that's an incredibly important thing for us to think about and it's especially important for us to think about in terms of What we call our discipleship our growth as followers of Jesus who is influencing us who's shaping us who is discipling us Is it the influences around us? Are we being disciplined by the culture around us? Or are we listening to the wisdom that comes from God? wisdom from above and I think what we have to recognize and what I have to recognize in my own life is that I tend to gravitate towards listening to the things that are around me and so often Thinking attitudes our wisdom is being shaped by the influences around us whether it's in family school work culture whatever it may be and It affects so many things the clothes that we wear The food that we eat the way that we decorate our houses the things that we find funny the things that we find offensive The objects we value the things that we disregard all of these In all these ways to constantly changes and you see that in So many different ways so 15 years ago The government was telling everybody to buy a diesel car and there was loads of incentives to buy a diesel car And you could have next to no road tax if you bought a diesel car and buying a diesel car was the best thing that we could do to help the environment now everybody's saying don't buy diesel cars and lots of people want to ban diesel cars and That wisdom has changed now that might be right, but it might be wrong. I don't know Well, I was an engineer. I love engines diesel cars. I hope that anyway and The wisdom changes is the point that I'm making I'm getting sidetracked and Sim growing up if you want the healthy if you're a if you're addicted to fizzy juice like I am then the wise choice was To get diet coke or whatever Now they're saying well, that's actually not so good for you because the chemicals they used to make a sweet or maybe not that good for you Maybe you're better having full fat coke instead same with butter. You had all these disgusting fake butter things that you're supposed to take us in more healthy and Horrible And then they're saying actually well actually real butter is maybe better for you now Which is a relief because it's the only one that tastes nice When I was in school 15 years ago for a couple of years was a terrible idea to tie your shoelaces

So you didn't tie your shoelaces. You just tuck them in at the side like this was incredibly uncomfortable Totally impractical, but it looked cool and that was all that mattered And so no one tied their shoelaces Now I think the wisdom around us teaches the philosophy at school That says whatever you do and no matter what the weather is do not wear a chest By the wisdom around us and that wisdom around us is not always bad. It can often be very helpful We do believe in common grace. There is a lot around us that is wise and good But what I want to highlight today is that wisdom from above Is always better And so that's our title we want to think about the wisdom That comes from above And as we do that all I'm going to do is I'm just going to go through the verse We're going to unpack each step that this verse teaches about and then at the end We'll just draw a few points for us to reflect on

[ 9 : 03 ] So let's go through this verse together bit by bit wisdom from above is first pure Now that word is used there for pure and as many of you may know the New Testament Was written in Greek and so we're always working with a translation And it can often be helpful to think a little bit about what the words meant in the original context That word basically means to be morally upright, to be free from corruption, free from any blemishes The words even used in the context, in other parts of the Bible in the context of virginity And it's all pointing us to the idea of having a mindset that is not corrupt That it's not mixed, it's not tainted, it's not murky Instead it's pure, good, upright And that raises such an important point that we need to think about We must remember that in biblical times wisdom was one of the most powerful social commodities

That you could have in a society in a very powerful way Wisdom was hugely influential, God is so aware of that And therefore he expects a wisdom that's pure, that's always good And if you think about it, the more influential something is going to be, the purer it needs to be And you see that especially when you raise your children You think of the things that can have a huge influence on them Whether it's the stuff that they watch or the music they listen to The more tainted that is with sin and things that are twisted and evil and damaging The more harm it's going to do Whereas the more pure it is, not that it'll ever be perfectly pure But the more pure it is, the more comfortable you are with it, influencing it, your children If your influence is full of mess then it's just going to spread

that mess further And as we think about that and as we apply that to our lives There's a couple of things that we need to think about

When we think about our wisdom being pure, first of all it's telling us that Our thinking and our attitudes shouldn't be shoddy In other words, we don't want to make stupid choices And we don't want to jump to inaccurate conclusions in any aspect of our lives And we don't want to foster unhelpful, unhealthy attitudes Whether that's to ourselves or to others or to our circumstances So when it speaks of it wisdom being pure, it's just reminding us Well, we don't want there to be a whole pile of mess in our thoughts But there's another aspect to it, we're careful, that we don't use our intellectual abilities And our mental strength to do things that are actually harmful and damaging and evil And that's something that can so easily happen We can be one step ahead of other people and we can use that to manipulate circumstances To use people to hurt them and to gain things for ourselves

Wisdom from above never does that Wisdom from above combines an intellect that's capable and competent Along with motivations that are good and pure And that is such an important thing for us to maintain It's a way of thinking that is neither substandard nor manipulative Wisdom from above is pure Then we're told that wisdom from above is peaceable The original word there is the word ironikos We get the word ironik, it's not a word we use very often but it is an English word That just conveys the idea of bringing peace That we want to remove conflict, it can actually even mean removing worry And all of this is actually the language of relationship When we think about peace, it's always in the context of relations Whether it's between individuals, groups, communities or nations And wisdom from above cultivates and maintains peace

This applies in two directions It applies outwardly towards others And this is such an important lesson because so often in life we can think that conflict is a good idea And so attitudes that we can so easily have like resentment, unforgiveness, anger, impatience, suspicion So often we can think that they're a good idea If someone hurts us, our instinctive response is conflict And so often the wisdom around us thinks that that's a good idea If someone hurt you, get them back, if someone let you down, don't forgive them If someone is doing something you're not sure of, think the worst, be suspicious That's how we so often think that's how the world around us thinks It's not the way that wisdom from above thinks It's the wisdom from above approaches situations of tension and disappointment and fear And says, how can I cultivate peace?

[14:15] How can I cultivate peace in this situation? And that is such a good question to always ask ourselves When we're going to work this week or by the time you go back to school And there's tension and difficulty to think How can I do a little bit to cultivate peace in this situation?

So it's a really helpful lesson for us thinking in terms of outward relations But it also gives us a crucial lesson as we look inwardly Because for so many of us, the most disappointing and frustrating and irritating person that we know is ourselves So often when it comes to our self-confidence, our sense of identity, our sense of achievement Our dreams, our ambitions, so often we look inside ourselves We feel frustrated We feel that we've not turned out the way that we thought we would We feel that we keep making the same mistakes And we think that everybody else is better We look at ourselves and we are not at peace Wisdom from above is telling us that it doesn't need to be that way It doesn't need to be that way And actually the whole gospel is grounded in the fact that in God's eyes you are worth saving

And that he has such good and wonderful purposes and plans for you And that's such an important thing that the Bible always begins And the gospel always begins with a fundamentally positive message That God wants you, God made you, God loves you And even though so much has gone wrong because of sin, that has not changed And God wants to save you And yes, that means turning away from sin and it means that a lot needs to change in our lives As we turn away from a life that was in rebellion against God and we start following him And that will often mean denying ourselves And the Bible repeatedly tells us to deny ourselves It never tells us to hate ourselves A mindset that's shaped by wisdom from above is peaceable It's also gentle It's another fascinating word that conveys the idea of being courteous, reasonable, fair, unreasonable and intolerant And there's no doubt many times when Christians have fallen into that trap But that's a betrayal of the wisdom that God is revealing to us Wisdom from above is not like that The mindset that God wants us to have is one that is gentle and courteous Even towards the people that we disagree with And so when we interact with people who think differently, whether it's people who aren't believers And who are skeptical about everything that we hold dear in terms of our relationship with Jesus In

terms of what the Bible says Or even if it's in terms of relationships with other Christians who think differently And who've come to different conclusions on certain topics Whenever we interact with them The people we interact with need to be able to walk away from us Knowing that we may not agree with them But we do not dislike them And instead they should see that even though we do disagree We do so in a way that's full of respect It's courteous, it's tolerant And this is raising such an important point that's becoming more and more relevant in the society that we live in today There is an awful lot of emphasis on tolerance in terms of our society But as we think about that, it's so important to remember that tolerance assumes disagreement Tolerance assumes disagreement If people agree and have the same opinion on everything There is no need for tolerance because you just have agreement The whole point of tolerance is that people don't agree But they remain kind They continue to be on the assumption that people don't agree And that's why it's a fundamentally biblical principle And there's a very, very strong heritage Particularly in the Scottish Reformed Church A lot of people probably won't believe this or don't realize this But if you go back 150 years or more to some of the leading theologians in Scotland They will place a huge emphasis on the importance of tolerance On remaining respectful even to people we completely disagree with Another way of looking at this is simply to recognize that Christians should never, ever, ever be persecutors

[18:54] Christians should never, ever, ever be persecutors Christians will and have been and currently are persecuted And that's going to happen But we should never, ever, ever be the ones persecuting the others And that's a wonderful reminder that we don't need to be afraid or hostile or anxious about people who think differently from us Always remember, always remember that no matter how much people might doubt the Bible Or question the Gospel or reject Christianity They are not going to undo the resurrection You cannot undo the resurrection Jesus has risen And that is never, ever going to change Wisdom from above therefore is not aggressive Not intolerant, not rude Wisdom from above is gentle It's also open to reason Again that's another really interesting word It means to be easily persuaded To be compliant

It's so important for us to think about when we talk about wisdom Because when we think about wisdom We think that that means that a wise person knows what to say And a wise person knows what to do And other people should be ready to hear what the wise person has got to say And that's maybe true at times But here James is reminding us that one of the great habits of wisdom Is knowing that you need to listen And experience proves this so too I think nine times out of ten in my life when I have done something stupid It's when my mouth is open and my ears are closed And we fall into that trap again and again Wisdom from above listens It recognizes that we humans We do not know it all It's reminding us that when we say I don't know in a circumstance That's not a sign of foolishness It's a sign of wisdom And I think this word also is teaching us that wisdom from above Is characterised by our readiness to take our time

To think, to reason things through To weigh up options, to come to considered responses To the situations that we face We need to just take our time And I'm talking to myself more than any of you Because I'm so quick to jump to conclusions in situations I think added to that This idea of wisdom being open to reason Is reminding us that our thinking constantly needs to be honed And challenged and sharpened And that's why I really like the way the ESV has translated this word By saying, using the phrase open to reason Because it's immediately so important to remember that That the path of Christianity The path of discipleship following Jesus Is not one where you start following Jesus And then you just block your ears And close your mind And never change the way you think at all That is absolutely not what being a disciple involves Being a disciple involves the opposite It involves constantly listening, constantly learning Constantly growing in our understanding That's the pathway that God wants us to step onto

He wants to fill our minds with the wisdom That only he can give A narrow, closed mind is not a sign of biblical wisdom Instead, the New Testament constantly speaks about our minds being renewed Growing and developing in the way that we think Biblical wisdom is open to reason It's also full of mercy and good fruits So this is kind of a two-part bit Because the full of applies to mercy And it applies to good fruits And the key thing I want to highlight here Is that those two parts, one is an inward disposition The other is outward action One's inward, one's outward And that's the pattern you'll always see again and again When the Bible talks about wisdom It affects us inwardly, it shapes how we live outwardly And that ties in so much with what James has been teaching in his letter We didn't read from chapter two But in that chapter, he talks about How in their congregation

people were starting to show partiality

In terms of the economic status of the individuals in the congregation So they had this situation where a rich guy would come in Wearing a gold ring and fine clothing and they would say Oh, you sit in the good seat, let's talk to you here And it's interesting that here, in this passage that I've got on the screen Verses one to five of chapter two James talks about their actions, what they're saying You'll pay attention to the person And you'll say to them, sit here And you'll say to the poor man, go over there And so he's talking about their actions And he's also talking about how that's arising from their thinking And so the two things always go hand in hand And so wisdom from above combines this mindset of compassion Along with action that actually makes a difference And James goes on to give a very sharp rebuke in chapter two Where he says, if your brother or sister is poorly clothed And lacking in daily food And you say to them, go in peace, be warm, be filled

[ 24 : 04 ] But don't actually do anything What good is that? Biblical wisdom has to have that inward disposition of mercy and compassion And it has to manifest itself in outward good fruits I want you to imagine two Christians to try and illustrate this point One of them spends most of their time reading books Listening to sermons and lectures And loves going online to Twitter and whatever else And forums and to get stuck into all the big theological debates of the day And this person's really good issues, that's one person The other person is not really an expert in any of that Doesn't find it very easy to read books Not a very strong or confident debater at all But they love to visit people who are lonely They love to think about how they can help people in their church family In their community who are struggling They're always looking for ways to show kindness to people in the church And in their neighborhood

Which one is wiser? Wisdom from above is full of mercy and good fruits Nearly there, two bits left Wisdom from above is impartial That's again tying in so much with what James is saying It's speaking about having to be free from prejudice And it speaks of having integrity, stability, consistency And that was the problem in the community that James was writing to They were judging people, categorizing people And showing a kind of prejudice towards those who are from a poorer background Wisdom from above never does that It's impartial It sees beyond the outward appearances And I think this is where we can maybe draw a bigger contrast We're drawing the contrast between wisdom from around us And wisdom from above us Now, maybe I'm stitching it a wee bit here, but I hope it's still helpful to do that When we think about life, so often we are concerned about the stuff around us We are so anxious to put on a good impression around us Whether it's the way that we look Whether it's what we achieve in our careers Whether it's how we present ourselves, what they see There's this kind of display around us And it's the same as through other people We see people who are wealthy or who are successful or who are important And we want them to notice us We want to have some kind of impression towards them So all the time we are kind of putting stuff around us And all the time we are interacting with people on the basis of what's around them It's all shaped by what's around us The amazing thing about God is that his perspective comes from above us And so if we've got a whole pile of stuff around us, he sees right past it Because he sees us from above And I think that's teaching us two crucial lessons It's reminding us that behind all the stuff that we think is impressive in other people's lives There's still just a person And it helps us to see that behind all the mess and mistakes That we find off-putting in other people's lives They are still a person Worst in from above is impartial And last of all, worst in from above is sincere Now, this is another Greek word that you know Even though you don't realize that you know, you do know this word The word, I'll write it out, it's in two parts There's no dash, but I'm just adding it to help you An-hypocrates Now, an is like the English un And, well, you know that word Hypocrates That's what wisdom looks like That's translated sincere, but I think it's maybe more helpful to actually think in terms of just that original word that's used I might know that the Greek word, hypocrites, is actually the word for an actor Which is emphasizing the fact that it's somebody who's pretending to be something

Somebody who is pretending to be something that really they're not And that kind of behavior has plagued the church for centuries People who have put on an outward show they've pretended to be something that they're not I don't know if I spelled that wrong, but anyway, never mind And it's such an easy mindset to slip into Do you think I just want to give a good outward impression?

[ 28 : 39 ] I want to set a narrative for how people will view me And I'm going to compartmentalize my life So I'll behave one way in this situation and one way another How often that happens where we are one thing in church and a different thing at home Or at work or among our friends And it can

so easily seem like a good idea And it can especially seem like that for younger people Because, you know, you feel the pressure Well, you think in church, well, I know what people expect of me in church So I will behave in that way at church But I also know that at school people are not going to like me behaving that way So I'm going to be different then And it's so easy to slip into that trap It's so easy to think that it's a good idea It's never a good idea It's never wise And it can be the real danger comes when it extends into adulthood When you're young, you're under pressure and are following Jesus And, well, maybe you have a prominent place in the church And then it's like they live a double life And people see them in another context where their behavior is so far from being Christ-like

That it does so much damage And it's so, so important that we recognize the danger of this This is why it's the constant warning that Jesus gave Jesus never, ever, ever asked us to be faultless and perfect and to know it all But he did say, don't be a hypocrite He always emphasized that And the crucial thing that we have to remember for that is that there is one key step That we need to take if we are going to avoid being hypocrites We've got to be willing to acknowledge our mistakes Because we all make mistakes We all do stupid things We all stuff up in our lives And the only way we can be sincere and genuine is when we're ready to say, look, I did that And I'm so sorry for it But actually, I'm also so thankful that that's what Jesus has come to fix And we can be honest and open The wise person is not the one who never gets anything wrong The wise person is the one who's willing to admit it when they do

So that's our verse And run out of time But we've got a couple of things just to say as we finished Worthing from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere I'm going to give you five, ten second points to think about as we close Number one, we crave all of these things in our own lives And we crave them in the people around us We want these things in our politicians, in our bosses, in our parents, in our colleagues, in our friends, in our neighbors We want all of them to have this kind of mindset We crave these things Secondly, these are things that we lack, we all lack That's why we crave them because they're missing in our lives and in the lives of people around us And this biblical emphasis on wisdom is on the one hand very inspiring But it's also penetrating because it diagnoses the human condition And sin, theologians will say, will talk about how sin has had a noetic effect Noetic effect, that's a very fancy, noetic Noetic, I don't really write that word very often so I don't know how to spell it Noetic, simply means sin has stuffed up the way we think It's talking about that, noetic, it's talking about the effect that sin has had on our thinking And all of this is exposed in the reality of where sin has left us So we lack all these things Number three, all of these things we see so perfectly in Jesus He is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason Ready to listen to you, he's full of mercy and good fruits Impartial and the most without hypocrisy person who has ever set fruit That's what makes him so beautiful, so glorious The Holy Spirit is cultivating in us as we follow Jesus

This is part of sanctification And that's what we read from Romans 12 at the very beginning That we are being transformed by the renewal of our minds And as you follow Jesus, whether you start following him today or continue following him As you go into this new week, the Holy Spirit, he is cultivating in us this mindset of wisdom And we can keep coming back to this verse to pray that this wisdom would grow in our minds So these are things we crave, they're things we lack, they're things we see perfectly in Jesus They're things that the Holy Spirit cultivates in us And the last thing I want to say is that this whole sermon has been cultivating wisdom from above With wisdom around us, wisdom around us, verses wisdom from above Which one of these has influenced you more over the past few months?

[ 33 : 41 ] And which one do you want to influence you in the week ahead? Thank you