

# **James: The Practical Christian**

## **The Wise and the Otherwise (Part 2)**

*James 3:17-18*

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### Scripture

Robert Fulghum wrote a book titled *All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Listen to what he wrote:

Most of what I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sand pile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life—learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.<sup>1</sup>

Fulghum has written a book of common sense wisdom. It is interesting reading, so far as it goes. However, in order to learn about the wisdom that comes from heaven, we need to go to God's word. So, with that in mind, let's read James 3:17-18:

**<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy**

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2003), 2.

**and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.** (James 3:17-18)

## **Introduction**

Some time ago I came across the following poem:

My dad gave me a 1 dollar bill,  
'Cause I'm his smartest son!  
And I swapped it for 2 shiny quarters,  
'Cause 2 is more than 1!

And then I took the quarters,  
And traded them to Lou,  
For 3 dimes (I guess he didn't know),  
That 3 is more than 2.

Just then along came old blind Bates,  
And just 'cause he can't see,  
He gave me 4 nickels for my 3 dimes,  
And 4 is more than 3.

And I took the nickels to Mr. Coombs,  
Down at the seed-feed store,  
And the fool gave me 5 pennies for them,  
And 5 is more than 4.

And then I went and showed my dad,  
And he got all red in the cheeks,  
And closed his eyes and shook his head,  
Too proud of me to speak!

Sometimes we are not as smart as we think we are. There is an old Persian proverb about wisdom that at first sounds more like a tongue twister than sound advice. But if you listen carefully, you'll hear its ring of truth:

He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not  
is a fool; shun him.

He who knows not, and knows that he knows not  
is a child; teach him.

He who knows, and knows not that he knows  
is asleep; wake him.

He who knows, and knows that he knows  
is wise; follow him.

All of these types of people can be found today. Now, of course, they don't wear badges or introduce themselves as fools.

No-one will walk up to you and say, "Hi, my name is Bob. I'm a fool." The last thing he wants you to know is that "he knows not that he knows not."

## Review

Last week we saw how rare and valuable this trait of wisdom is. We saw that when God told Solomon he could ask for anything in the world and it would be granted, Solomon responded by asking for wisdom. To have true wisdom is to have something very valuable.

We also saw that wisdom is primarily a lifestyle. That is, wisdom is shown primarily by the way you relate to people. It's a practical use of knowledge; it has more to do with your works than your words. It has to do with your lifestyle rather than your lips. It's something that you do; it's your character and your relationships, not your intelligence and your education.

When James says in verse 16 that a lack of wisdom causes "disorder," he is talking primarily about horizontal disorder—or problems with people. When I am unwise with my wife, it causes problems. When I am unwise with my children, it causes problems. When I am unwise with people at work, it causes problems. Every day of your life, whether you like it or not, you encounter people. And people are notorious for being hard to get along with. That's why we must learn how to relate wisely to others.

In James 3:18 we read, **“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”** James is making the point that what you sow in your relationships is what you will reap! And in every relationship you have, you are either sowing seeds of disorder, seeds of anger, seeds of mistrust, seeds of conflict—or seeds of **peace** that will result in **a harvest of righteousness**.

## Lesson

But how do you plant seeds of **peace** in your relationships? What does it really mean to show true wisdom at home? In the office? At work? At school? Or in your neighborhood? How can you know true wisdom when you see it? James answers that question in verses 3:17-18.

Here we find what some have called “God’s Wisdom Test.” This is a kind of personal exam by which you can see how wise or otherwise you really are in all your relationships. James lists 6 distinguishing marks of a wise person. Let’s see what they are.

### I. The Wise Person Is Pure (3:17)

First, the wise person is pure.

James says in verse 17: **“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure.”**

The word **“first”** means “first not only in order but also in importance.” So we’ll spend a little longer on this first mark.

The word **“pure”** literally means “without pollution or freedom from defilement.” It refers to being morally blameless. The truly wise person is a person of great integrity.

If you are wise, you will not compromise your integrity. That means you are not going to lie to me; you are not going to cheat me; you are not going to steal from me; you are not going to take advantage of me; you are not going to mislead me deliberately.

All relationships are built on trust, and when you lie to people, you will eventually lose their trust. And when you lose that

trust factor, you have just damaged that relationship. It is very difficult to rebuild a damaged relationship, and it takes a long time.

Dr. Leonard Keeler was the man who invented the lie detector. After interviewing over 25,000 people on the lie detector machine, he made a startling conclusion about the human race. It was very astute, and very probing. Do you know what his conclusion was? People lie! Well, surprise, surprise!

If you are wise, you will maintain your integrity by always speaking the truth—even when it hurts. Proverbs 10:9 (*NASB*) says, “He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.”

The one who has integrity is not afraid of being found out. Recently I read about a woman, apparently pregnant, who walked out of the grocery store. Suspicious, the assistant manager stopped her. She soon “gave birth” to a pound of butter, a chuck roast, a bottle of pancake syrup, two tubes of toothpaste, hair tonic, and several bars of candy!

But shoplifting is merely one thin slice of our society’s stale cake of dishonesty. Don’t forget our propensity to cheat on exams, take towels from hotel rooms, not work a full eight hours, tell half-truths or “little white lies,” which are really as black as hell. Not to mention our tendency to exaggerate statements in our own favor. We hedge on reports of losses covered by insurance companies. And dare I even mention those yearly IRS reports we sign as being the truth.

Did you know that ever since 1811, when someone who had defrauded the government anonymously sent \$5 to Washington, the US Treasury has operated a “Conscience Fund”? Since 1811 almost \$3.5 million has been received from guilt-ridden citizens.

The answer is a return to integrity! It will be a tough reversal for some, but, oh, how it’s needed today. And you who are parents must realize that there is no better place to be planting the seeds and cultivating the roots of integrity like the home. It’s the best laboratory of life God has ever designed. It’s there that a proper sense of values is caught. It’s there that hard work and the worth of

a dollar is learned. It is on that anvil that the esteem for truth and the cost of dishonesty are hammered out so that a life is shaped correctly down deep inside.

So, the wise person is pure.

## II. The Wise Person Is Peace-loving (3:17, 18)

Second, the wise person is peace-loving.

James says, **“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is . . . peace-loving.”**

To be **peace-loving** means more than simply not fighting back when wronged. This word carries with it the idea of one who is actively pursuing peace. This is the type person who, when he sees division and argument, always works to remove them. This person is always seeking answers and solutions to the many divisions and quarrels around him. Such a person wants to patch up quarrels rather than create them.

Of all the marks of true wisdom, James hits this one the hardest. He even reiterates this in verse 18: **“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”**

In other words, those who are **peacemakers** will reap a reward from God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers. . . .” And that’s the point here. If you are a peacemaker, your life will be blessed by God.

A. W. Pink wrote, “Few things more adorn and beautify a Christian profession than exercising and manifesting the spirit of peace.”

The wise person is not only one who is pure but who is also peace-loving!

## III. The Wise Person Is Considerate (3:17)

Third, the wise person is considerate.

James says, **“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is . . . considerate.”**

This same word is used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:1, along with meekness, to refer to the personality of Jesus Christ. There Paul writes, “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you” Do you want to know what it means to be **considerate**—look at the life of Jesus Christ.

This word translated “**considerate**” is a rich Greek word. It conveys the idea of being tolerant of others and gentle toward them. This person will not at all times declare and stand up for his rights. He knows how and when to give in. He willingly acquiesces for the good of all.

The man who is not **considerate** is the man who always stands up for the last tittle of his legal rights. But the one who is **considerate** knows that although he may be legally right to do something, that may also be completely un-Christian.

I emphasize this because we live in a day in which people are continually declaring their rights.

“These are my rights! You violate them and I’ll sue you.”

The person who is truly wise doesn’t do that. He is tolerant. Sometimes he just gives in for the sake of a higher law of love.

#### **IV. The Wise Person Is Submissive (3:17)**

Fourth, the wise person is submissive.

James says, “**But the wisdom that comes from heaven is . . . submissive.**”

This word “**submissive**” does not mean being wishy-washy. But it carries with it the idea of open-mindedness, respecting the opinion of others. It means being sincerely open to suggestions. Being someone who is teachable. Not obstinate or stubborn. This person is open to reason. One who allows discussion. You can work with such a person. Wise people can learn from anyone. They are not closed and defensive, but they are open and teachable.

Are you a **submissive** person? Are you reasonable? When you come up against a person who disagrees with you, do you



show them an open and teachable spirit? The wise person knows how to sincerely say, “I’ll think about that, I really will.”

Often, we are so sensitive to criticism, and to suggestions, that it is very difficult for us to learn anything. But wisdom is reasonable. It is willing to yield. Proverbs 12:15 says, “A fool thinks that he needs no advice; but a wise man listens to others.”

## V. The Wise Person Is Merciful (3:17)

Fifth, the wise person is merciful.

James says, **“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is . . . full of mercy and good fruit.”**

To be **“full of mercy and good fruit”** does not mean that you just sit around feeling sorry for others. It is an attitude of compassion toward the needy which shows itself in tangible action on their behalf.

Someone once said, “We can never say we have truly felt mercy toward a person until we have somehow tried to help him.”

In the New Testament this word is used to describe not only the attitude of compassion a wise person should have toward someone who is suffering unfairly, but also to those who are suffering because of some evil that even they may have caused!

Showing mercy is giving people what they need, not what they deserve. It’s seeing people in misery, and responding in a positive way to that misery. It’s simply acting toward others the way God acts toward us. God doesn’t give us what we deserve. If he gave us what we deserve, none of us would even be here today. No, God gives us what we need, not what we deserve. And God says, “I want you to be that way toward others.” To treat people with compassion and mercy. When somebody stumbles, you don’t judge them, but you encourage them.

## VI. The Wise Person Is Impartial and Sincere (3:17)

And sixth, the wise person is impartial and sincere.

James says, **“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is . . . impartial and sincere.”**

The words **“impartial and sincere”** imply the idea of being undivided or unwavering. It’s the idea of being consistent. It doesn’t take one position here and another over there. These words suggest a person with fixed principles. He will never violate those principles, regardless of the situation. He does not follow the principle of our day, “When in Rome do as the Romans do.” No, when in Rome he acts the same way as he does when he’s at home. He is without hypocrisy.

The Greek word for “hypocrisy” comes from a term that was used to describe a Greek actor that played two parts. In the Greek theater an actor would sometimes play many parts in the same play. At one time he would come out with a happy mask, hold it in front of his face and say his lines. Then he would run off to the side, grab a sad mask and deliver his sad lines. He would play two parts. He was called a *hupocrites*, which simply means that he wore a mask. He pretended; he faked it; he was not genuine; he was not sincere.

There is a whole lot of phoniness in relationships today. And in a world where isolation and loneliness are now epidemic that’s a very serious problem. You see, many of us have learned that survival is easier when we hide our true selves from others. We feel safer when we can put up a mask that says, “I’m tough,” or, “I’m in control,” or, “I’m okay,” or, “I’m holy.” The trouble is that as we continue to hide behind our masks we become lonely and isolated because we have created a distance between ourselves and those whose love and acceptance we really need.

Some of you need to come out of hiding today. You need to put down your mask and risk relating to others openly and honestly—without hypocrisy. I’ll be the first to admit that’s not easy—in fact it can be very scary. But James tells us that it is the way of wisdom. It’s the only really satisfying way to live. It’s the only path to authentic, meaningful relationships in life.

## Conclusion

How then do you get this wisdom? I know that many of you truly want it, but you're not quite sure where to find it. Let me leave you with two ways the Bible says you can gain true wisdom.

First, go to your knees. Pray. Ask God for wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it shall be given to him."

Second, you must go to the word. In Psalm 119:98-100 the Psalmist writes, "Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts."

And when you go to the written word you will find there the living word—Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul tells us that he is the only one in whom is found the wisdom and the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24).

True wisdom is not something you obtain through hard study. True wisdom is a gift. Notice in verse 17a that James describes wisdom as that which **"comes down from heaven."** You see, true wisdom is a gift that is received from God. And the Bible teaches that the source of true wisdom can only be found in Jesus Christ.

In Colossians 2:3 Paul tells us that "in Jesus Christ lies hidden all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge." So I point you to Jesus Christ so that you might have true wisdom. And I assure you on the authority of God's word that if you come to know him in a personal and vital way, and if you will begin to spend time with him by his Spirit and through his word, and with others who truly know and walk with him—you too will be wise. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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## **PRAYER:**

Some of you listening today have come to realize your need to know Christ in a personal way. You need wisdom. And now you know that the kind of wisdom you really need can only be found by knowing Christ. Deep in your soul you realize that you don't really know Christ personally. And you want that. Listen very carefully. Just like wisdom, eternal life with God is a gift. You cannot ever do enough good deeds to earn it. You must simply receive it by coming before God and saying to him, "Lord God, I admit to you that I am a sinner. And I need your forgiveness for my sin. I need your power and wisdom in my life. I thank you for sending Christ to die for my sin and be raised from the dead so I could be declared forgiven. As best I know I now turn from my sin and place my trust in Jesus Christ alone to save me from sin's penalty and power. I now resolve by your grace and power to live my life in submission to him as my new Lord and King."

Oh God, grant to all of us wisdom that we might live the kind of life and have the kind of impact on those around us that will bring glory and honor to your name.

## **CHARGE:**

The Psalmist tells us that the fear or the reverence of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10)! To obtain knowledge, you must look around; but to obtain wisdom, you must look up in reverence. My challenge to you today is to look up into the face of Jesus Christ and draw near to him through his Word so that you might receive the gift of true wisdom and be numbered among the very few in every generation who are genuinely wise. As you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.