

The Nature of Genuine Wisdom

Epistle of James

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of James. James 3. We're going to be moving into a new section this morning, James 3:13-18. The title of the message this morning is "The Nature of Genuine Wisdom." The nature of genuine wisdom. It's the keyword in the passage. You will hear it four times or "wise" or "wisdom" as we read in a moment, and James is determined to help his readers evaluate themselves. Really there are two applications, the main application, he wants us to look at ourselves. He asks the question, "Who among you is wise and understanding?" It's as if he issues a challenge. "Who among you would say that you are wise and understanding? Let him show, let him prove it," literally, "in his life."

James, the more that I study him, the more amazed I get at just the style, the unique way that he presents the truth of God. You know, the Scriptures are all written by God. It's perfect. It's inspired, every word, but the Lord uses in his perfect wisdom and just the glory of the way that he has given of Scripture, he uses different men with different mindsets, different backgrounds, different ways of thinking even, to give us a perfect word, and you can see the personalities of the authors as you read them. You certainly can see James. He is not afraid of confrontation. He's much more confrontive than many of the other biblical writers. I mean, they all confront you but James is like, he charges the hill right away. Sometimes, you know, they circle around a little bit and then Paul, maybe he gives his evidence and lays things out and then he applies it. James just starts off and smacks you in the mouth and then he tells you, "Now here are the reasons why I just did that." And he wants this passage to do that for us.

"Who among you is wise and understanding? Who among you thinks that you are pretty wise, you're doing pretty well, you have a pretty good grasp of theology and doctrine, you have a pretty good handle on the faith?" He has in mind particularly those who would think in first that line of application is those of us who would be in leadership or who would aspire to leadership; who think we might be ready for leadership, to teach and to preach, to be an elder, to be a deacon. "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show," and he's going to say, "This is what real wisdom looks like." Those who think they ought to be but aren't yet, he says, "Look at yourselves."

I think the application applies in an especially forceful way to us in this church in that one of the things that as we have opportunities to share among one another, one of the things that I will hear people say and I say myself, "I'm so grateful that the Lord now has me, I was able to get exposed to more solid teaching in my Christian life than I had early on in my Christian life." And we talk about we're so grateful to be a part of a Reformed Baptist congregation, part of the Reformed faith. A deeper understanding of doctrine, truly looking at the Scriptures the way the Scriptures are intended to be looked at and that is something to be grateful for, it's not something to be discounted in any way, but there is a pitfall and that pitfall is spiritual pride; to think we know something when we really don't know it. James is basically saying, "It's easy to think you're doing better than you are." It comes intrinsic to fallen humanity. As Spurgeon said, pride is the first sin to rear its head in the nursery and it's the last sin to be put off before you put someone in the casket. Pride, the tendency to look upon ourselves, to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

He throws down the gauntlet. He issues the challenge, "If you think you're wise, then examine your life and see if you are wise." And we see here that his style throughout the book has been really more about convicting than instructing. I mean, he does both but like I said, the stylistic difference is Paul tends to instruct and instruct and instruct, and then to apply and convict. James, I mean, essentially what we're seeing, I mentioned last week when we were talking about the tongue, remember how he just lays us bare with the tongue. He says, first of all, look how destructive the power of the tongue is. Look how unable we are to tame the tongue, how impossible it is to tame it, and he just leaves us there because he wants us to feel the weight of our tongue. And you think about it, before that he basically started off saying in chapter 2 and a little bit in chapter 1 too, our problem is our works don't back up our faith like they should. He does that in a way, examine yourselves, and the motivation is, "Hey, you need to deal with this. There's a problem, your works." Then he goes to your words. Now what he's going to do is like layers of an onion, you know, you peel off one layer and there is another layer right below it. He says you've got a problem with this layer, your works; I think you have a problem with this layer, your words, which is really kind of the same layer in a way, just different part of the onion, I guess; but then he goes to attitudes. That's what he's going to talk about in these verses here. You think you're wise, look at your attitudes. Then in chapter 4 he's going to say, "Look at the purposes and desires of your heart," and it's like he keeps exposing the problem without really spending a lot of time on the solution because he is basically convinced that what we need is to see the problem with great clarity and great force because we don't see the problem.

We tend to overestimate our strengths and underestimate our weaknesses. You know, it's just intrinsic part of who we are and some of it is almost not so culpable. I mean, somebody would ask you, "How are you doing?" Don't you have to almost fight against saying, "Fine," quickly? "How are you?" You feel terrible but you say, "Fine." It just comes out, "I'm fine. I'm good. I'm okay." Now really I feel terrible, I think I need to go to the hospital. You know, you have to follow that up. It didn't come out first, usually. Or you go to the doctor and, "How are you today?" "I'm fine. I feel pretty good." I mean, sometimes you go to the doctor, this is obviously a checkup if you're going for this. "How

are you?" "I'm fine." And a lot of times you think you're fine and the doctor finds out you're not fine at all. He applies some tests and he see there is a problem that needs to be examined and maybe an x-ray and then a CAT scan or other tests, and suddenly you realize there is a real big problem I was completely unaware of. James basically is like doing that kind of medical work for the soul. He's looking at different parts of our lives and he's bringing to bear the tests, the spiritual x-ray, the spiritual CAT scan, and he's saying look at your true condition, the condition of your life, the condition of your words, the condition of your attitudes, the condition of your heart. Be humbled and then cry out to God and run to Christ. That's clearly the application. See how great your need is so that you run to Christ.

So he wants to convict us, and I said we tend to overestimate our abilities and so we would say and there are some of you, and me included, who we aspire to teach and so we tend to think we know more than we know. Others of you who may never want to teach but you may struggle with when you meet another believer and they are from another background, you immediately assume they are less than you because they are not Reformed in their soteriology or they have some spurious views about other issues. Now listen, I'm not saying that we are to have, the essentials of the Gospel are essentials and if someone doesn't believe the essentials of the Gospel that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he is fully man, fully God, that God is Triune, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners by offering his body and his life as a sacrifice, an atonement for sin, that he bore our wrath at Calvary on the cross and he took away all of the wrath that God had against all of the sins of everyone would ever believe, and he rose again from the dead on the third day, if they don't believe that Gospel, they are not a Christian but there are many people who believe that essential Gospel and yet they are wrong on other areas. In fact, we all are. Right? Truly speaking, we are all wrong about lots of things, we just don't realize the things that we are wrong about, otherwise we wouldn't be holding wrong positions.

That's why one of the things that I love about the Reformed faith is to me, if somebody asks, "What is Reformed theology?" I always start with, "Really the essence of Reformed theology is summed up in the words 'always reforming,' semper reformanda." Always reforming, that is, you are constantly bowing the knee to Scripture. You are trying to study the word of God and change your thinking accordingly. That's a lifelong process. That's what it means to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. But we can tend to look down on other people and so James comes to us and he says directly, "Who among you is wise and understanding? How do you think you're doing doctrinally?" Fine. Better than I used to be. James says, "Really? Let's examine that a little more carefully."

And there is a second application and that is not just for, he wants us to mainly look at ourselves and that's always the challenge when we come to the Scriptures, is not to be thinking about somebody else that needs to hear the message that we are hearing, right, think about what does God want me to do with it. But there is a second application of what he wants you and me to do with this and that is he wants us to learn how to test our own leaders or teachers in a right, humble way but an honest and forthright way. That is, we may be, when it comes to officer elections which we have coming up in a few weeks, you're going to have men presented before you for elder and deacon, and these are things

for that, and the guys are in place now. We all are held to a higher standard and we should certainly be pursuing the things James is talking about, true wisdom. But even like people you're going to look up to in your life and look to as mentors. Sometimes someone will look like they have wisdom, James says, but they don't really possess true wisdom, and a lot of times it can be very difficult to tell the difference. James is giving us the clue to how to do that in our own hearts and to help us as we look for leaders. Remember, it's basically going to come down to what Jesus said, "You know them by their fruits." That's what he says in Matthew 7. How do you recognize a false prophet from a true prophet? You know them by their fruits. You know them by their life. So we'll see that's exactly what he's saying here.

Jack shared something with the elders one time that is interesting to show how our overemphasis, we overestimate our abilities even when we don't think we do. We think we are more humble than we are, which is part of our pride. He said there was a study, a massive study done where people were asked to rate themselves with three possibilities: are you below average, average, or above average. Ninety percent of the people said they were above average. That's impossible.

Well, let's read James 3:13 through 18.

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you might grant us wisdom. We are so thankful that you promised even in this letter in the first chapter that when we lack wisdom we are to ask you for it and we know that you will give it to us because you are faithful. We ask you to give us wisdom even today as we consider how to look at our own hearts and our own lives. Search us and know us, try us, Lord, know our thoughts, see if there be any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wisdom. What is the nature of true wisdom? James understands that his readers, remember he's writing to Jewish believers in the first century who are scattered throughout the Mediterranean world, he understands that they have challenges. They are immersed in the culture of the world as we are today. They have the pressures of the world system and worldly values around them messing up the way they think about things like what is true wisdom. I mean, for the believers to whom he wrote, they especially had the temptation of thinking in terms of Greek wisdom, the way that

predominated the Greco-Roman world in which they were living. You know, such a high esteem for wisdom but the Greek view of wisdom was a sense of knowledge, knowledge for knowledge sake, and certainly the Greeks prided themselves on wisdom. Even everyone else who knew about Greek thought, tended to nod, "Yeah, they are the ones. They lead the way in wisdom." I mean, Rome may be the military and governmental capital of the world but Athens is the intellectual, philosophical, scientific, mathematic capital of the world. Every discipline. All roads in that way lead to Athens, to Greece.

So the Greeks loved wisdom and they certainly made great accomplishments. As I mentioned, I mean, you just go through the father of modern science, Thales, Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, Plato, Aristotle, on and on and on, Pythagoras, mathematicians, Archimedes. We could just go on and on and on. There was such great learning in Athens but knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom, and biblically we see this in the Old Testament and James draws heavily on his Jewish mindset and particularly wisdom literature, Proverbs and other Jewish wisdom literature. Wisdom biblically begins with the fear of God. That's what radically differentiates the world's wisdom from God's wisdom, and we see in this passage that really as a preliminary observation, we are not in the outline yet, this is a preliminary observation, that this text says there are two types of wisdom. There are two kinds of wisdom, two sources of wisdom. There is the wisdom from above and there is the wisdom from below. When he says in verse 15, "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic." There is the contrast right there for you. In verse 17 he brings up again, "the wisdom from above." You see, we want the wisdom from above, that is, the wisdom from heaven, the wisdom that comes from God.

There is another kind of wisdom that is, he says in verse 15, "earthly, natural, demonic," three different adjectives to describe this other kind of wisdom. Earthly, it's from the earth, literally upon the earth is the Greek word. Natural, that second word, I'm reading the NASB, the New American Standard. Other translations say unspiritual. And those hit an aspect of this word. It's actually the word "natural" is from the Greek noun *psuche*, which means soul. *Psyche*, we transliterate that. It's the word for soul. So it is soulish, earthly, soulish. And the *psuche* and the biblical idea of soul going back to Genesis, is that which man shares in common with the animals. The breath of life, Genesis 1:30, it talks about the breath of life and the *psuche* of the animals and the *psuche* of man, the soul of man. This is the part, the immaterial part of man that we have in common with the animals. There is a spiritual part of that same man, the immaterial part. There are two parts of man: the immaterial part and the material part. The immaterial part of man has some part, has a sub part of that that is in common with the animals, and that's what he's talking about here. This is the word he uses. In fact, this word is used a number of places in the New Testament to contrast spiritual. That's why I think the ESV and the NIV chose "unspiritual." For instance, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, this word *psuche*, the adjective form of that word, occurs when it says the natural man does not understand the things of God. The NASB says the natural man, just like it does here, that is, the man that just has a soul just like the animals but not what God intends for us to have. He doesn't have a spiritual renewed heart. So he's saying that this kind of wisdom is earthly, it's soulish, and its

demonic, demon like. Interesting, you look at that and you see the world, the flesh, and the devil right there in those three adjectives. This wisdom is like this.

Now, he tells us this because he's saying, "Look, it's easy to mistake. This wisdom will masquerade itself as the wisdom from above. That's why I'm having to go through this. If it was obvious, I wouldn't have to tell you this. I'm telling you because it's easy for the wisdom from below to masquerade itself as the wisdom from above." What does that mean? It means when someone knows theology, knows doctrine, they have a lot of understanding of maybe even complex doctrines, they are able to articulate to you arguments and convince you of accurate things, but they don't have wisdom. How do you know? Because wisdom in the Old Testament and the New, two things: it starts with the fear of God and, secondly, wisdom is knowledge in practice. Knowledge applied to life. It's not knowledge for knowledge sake. That's the worldly wisdom. That's a Greek mindset, just to know and the joy of knowing. In fact, it's interesting when you read the account of Paul in Acts 17 when he goes to Athens, he begins preaching about the resurrection and there Luke records that people come up to him and they say, "Hey, we want to hear you on this. We want to schedule a lecture," essentially, I'm paraphrasing. Essentially they say, "We would like to schedule a lecture with you on this. You are giving us these new ideas we have not heard before." And Luke comments in chapter 17 of Acts, verse 21, the people there at the Areopagus like to do nothing but listen to all the latest new ideas that were out there. You see, knowledge for knowledge sake. "We just want to hear about it. We don't want to do it." Biblical wisdom is that which is evident in your life.

So someone may have a lot of knowledge, Bible knowledge, doctrinal knowledge, theological knowledge, able to argue a point of view in really impressive ways, teach, preach, but the issue is, is it evident in their life? That's what James is saying and this is the distinction that he's making. So that preliminary observation, there are two types of wisdom, two sources, and it's easy to mistake one for the other. Now, here's the theme of today's message: how to recognize false wisdom. Now, next time, two weeks from today, I'm not preaching here, I'll be out of town next week, but in two weeks I'm going, how to recognize true wisdom, because he does both. But we are going to look at how to recognize false wisdom.

He basically says, "I want you to look at yourself, examine yourself, and the first thing we are going to look for, do we find evidence of the bad stuff?" It's like a PET scan. You know, a PET scan is something that you have when you might have cancer and if stuff shows up, like it makes it a certain, I don't know, I haven't seen them, I have heard about them, it shows up if there is cancer there. They scan you and like there's a different reading on the thing and so it just tells you what's bad. You want it clear. This is kind of like the PET scan. He's going to say, "Let's see if we have these things in our life. Is this predominant in us? And if it is, repent and certainly stop thinking so highly of ourselves." Okay?

So the theme is how to recognize false wisdom. There are two points, two main points, and then there is application, so there is three technically. The first point: how do you

recognize false wisdom, the first point is by its inward essence. The inward essence of false wisdom. The first point, the inward essence. He says, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart," that's the problem. If you have that in your heart, then you need to stop being arrogant and lying against the truth. So do we have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in our heart. That's when he goes on in verse 15 to say, "Look, if that's what you have in your heart, the wisdom is not that which comes down from above but is earthly, natural, demonic. You can know that this is the mark of earthly, natural, demonic wisdom: bitter jealousy and selfish ambition." Then he comes back to it. Look how he repeats that in verse 16, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist," do you see that? He wants us to really think about this issue of jealousy and selfish ambition. Its inward essence is marked by those two realities: jealousy and selfish ambition.

The word "jealousy" here, some translations say "envy; bitter envy; bitter jealousy." Both good translations for the word. The word in Greek actually comes from a word which means "to boil." The verb to boil, to seethe, to be hot. It pictures sort of an inward motion, an activity that motivates and moves someone. The emphasis is on the impetus that this emotion creates. It creates movement. Often this word, it's actually the word is z-e-l-o-n, we transliterate in the English word from that as a letter for letter rendering of an English word, zeal, comes from this word, zelon. Zeal, that is, zeal can be a good thing, can't it? It's that sense of fervency and action and zeal for the right thing is a good thing. That's exactly what God commended in the Old Testament in the life of Aaron's son who stopped a plague by going and killing some people that were committing fornication and adultery right there almost out in the open, Phinehas, and God said, "His zeal is commended." I mean, he stopped a plague by being zealous for the Lord and his glory, and he brought an end to it and it was zeal for God.

So this kind of jealousy for God and God says, "I am jealous." He's jealous for his own glory. He is moved with an urgency for all his creation to honor him appropriately and jealousy with God is always good. It's right. There is a kind of jealousy that is right. There is a kind of jealousy that is right and if you're a man and you are married and you're not somewhat jealous for your wife, then you are not being faithful as a husband. You should be jealous for her affection to be yours and not to be shared. The other way around, a woman toward her husband. That's a good zeal in jealousy, right?

So there is a possibility of that but he's talking about, the word "bitter" clues us in on, he is talking about another kind of jealousy that is completely self-focused. It's not a God-honoring jealousy, it's a self-exalting jealousy. It's a person who is jealous and boiling and seething and motivated for their own glory. There is an emotional going out of the person after a goal. That's the idea and the goal is self-focused, self-advancing. So he's saying if someone claims to be wise and they appear to be wise and you are looking at yourself and you're realizing, "Look at how much jealousy I have," then he says, "You need to stop thinking so highly of yourself. What are your attitudes?"

He couples with it selfish ambition. These two English words, selfish ambition, translate a word which has the idea of this idea of mercenary self-interest, partisanship. It was actually a word that was used commonly speaking of the kind of attitudes that people would have in political maneuvering trying to get to the top, something we see evident today, don't we, in our world. People that are motivated by self-interest. You can see that they are not so much concerned about the truth or righteousness, they are concerned about their position, their place, "Am I where I want to be?" This is exactly that word and so most of the translations translate it "selfish ambition."

So the idea of jealousy and this mercenary desire to protect one's position, to protect one's honor, to protect one's turf, if that is in your heart, you're not wise. You may appear to be wise, you may have your theological ducks in a row, you may be able to win the argument, but according to the Lord Jesus Christ, you are not wise, you are knowledgeable, and as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:1, knowledge puffs up. Knowledge without wisdom, that's the danger.

I read a post this week. I don't usually, actually I only read posts when somebody tells me because I don't get online and do the Facebook stuff and all that. I don't know if this was on Facebook or Instagram or whatever. I know enough to know it to be dangerous. These are the various things that are out there, right? So anyway, Patti tells me about a post by Melissa's dad, John Street, this week. Some of you may have seen it. He said this, listen to this, "If we had more men in seminary studying God's word for greater sanctification than for mere scholarship," did you get that? "If we had more men in seminary studying God's word for greater sanctification than for mere scholarship, we'd have less pastoral failure in the churches. Biblical scholarship is only good if it leads to greater holiness." And he ended with, "Pray for the godliness of men in seminary." And that's exactly what we should do, especially those that we know. We should be praying for them because there is the danger that knowledge will puff up. If you learn and you don't apply, there is a pride, a spiritual pride that comes and many have fallen through that.

One of my favorite quotes, I remember reading some years ago, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a great Scottish pastor in the early 1800s, a wonderful preacher, a man used so mightily in such a short ministry. He died at age 30 and it was said his impact was so great that, this is how I heard it, Robert Murray M'Cheyne died at age 30 and all Scotland mourned because of the man of God he was. He wrote a letter to a young man from his church who had gone off to study at the university to prepare for ministry and he said in that letter, "I know that you will attend, you need to work hard, and I know that you will attend to the Latin and the Greek and the Hebrew, but do not forget the culture of the inner man, I mean of the heart, how diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp, every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember, you are God's sword, his instrument, I trust, a chosen vessel onto him to bear his name. In great measure according to the purity and perfection of the instrument will be the success. It is not great talents," listen to this, "it is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. The holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God." What a wonderful description of true biblical wisdom. We learn so that we might obey. We learn so that we might love

and love is expressed in obedience. We don't learn so that we might fill our minds and win arguments or gain position, we learn so that we might love and obey.

So he says the inward essence of false wisdom is this jealousy and selfish ambition. There is not the holiness happening. It is you see knowledge but you see it with a person who is jockeying and protecting turf; who is easily offended at every slight because you see what's most important to them is their own personal reputation. That's not like Jesus, and he says this is earthly, natural and demonic. Isn't this what you would expect when you look at people of the world? And you see it only in certain circumstances. You see it when the person is offended. I mean, it's easy to be nice when everybody is being nice to you, isn't it? I mean, some people have trouble with that but they are really in big trouble. I mean, if you can't be nice when other people are being nice to you, you've got major issues, but the reality is you have major issues if you can't be nice when somebody else is not being nice to you because you are not walking in the Spirit. Right? We are to be like Jesus. So you see wisdom as Jesus said actually in Matthew 11, wisdom is seen in her deeds. You don't see it in the knowledge. You don't see it in the argument. You see it in the life.

There is another sense that we can look at this and I think it helps to see what this idea of jealousy and selfish ambition are about in the inward essence. So he's saying that the attitudinal movements of the heart are concerned about self. Like I said, if you're concerned about self, you recognize every slight because you are about self more than you are about Christ or about the other person. That's there and another way of looking at that is the flipside of that is seen in the very beginning when he says in verse 13, what's the opposite of jealousy and selfish ambition? Look at verse 13, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." The key word is the word "gentleness" there. Let him show by his good behavior, that is, his good manner of life. So he's saying how do you know how you're doing? Look at your manner of life. Are you wise? I can't know unless I look at my manner of life. I can see what I know, I know this and I know this and I know that. No, what is my manner of life, is what James is saying. And how do you know that? Well, you need to ask people around you too. Sometimes we think we're doing better than we are. In fact, that happens often when we can be counseling a couple or something and you ask one person how they are doing in this area, say a certain area, and they will score themselves, "I think I'm doing, you know, an 8 out of 10." Very rarely people say 10. You know you've got a problem generally if someone says a 10, right? Eight. Seven. And then sometimes part of what really helps a marriage is you say to the wife or the husband, whichever way you are doing it. You know, who did you ask first? You ask the other person, "How do you think they are doing in this area?" And they say, "Well, a 2." Eight versus a two. That's a big gap, right? So it's something to work on. There is a self-deception going on.

It's easy to deceive ourselves. This is what James is aware of and this is why he's hammering this so hard, but the opposite of jealousy and selfish ambition is meekness. Actually, I wish they had translated it with the word "meekness." It's a better word, in my view, than gentleness here. The good behavior, his deeds "in the gentleness of wisdom"

should be "in the meekness of wisdom." Meekness is a word we don't use a lot and that's why I actually like it better because we can then define it biblically, and the word "meek" is a very rich word. It doesn't mean, you know, weak and sort of mealymouthed. It means something much richer than that.

The word "meekness" pictures an inward attitude of heart that manifests itself in an outward way. Now you see, the word "gentleness" is attempting to describe the outside part of meekness. Do you see that? Gentleness is what you get when you touch a meek person. When you offend a meek person, they are gentle. You see, on the outside it's gentleness but what's going on is the inside of this word really is about the inner mindset that then results itself in outward gentleness, and the inner mindset defined by Spiros Zodhiates in the "Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament" says this, he says, "Meekness is not in a man's outward behavior only, nor in his relations to his fellow man. Meekness, rather, is an inwrought grace of the soul and the expressions of it are primarily toward God." Listen to this, "It is the attitude of the spirit where we accept God's dealings with us as good and do not dispute or resist." It's the attitude of the soul toward God that we accept whatever he brings to us as good and we don't dispute or resist. It's the opposite of mumbling and grumbling and complaining.

Whatever God brings. When it's a bad thing, the meek person doesn't bow up and get angry and say, "Why did this happen?" The meek person says, "Wait a minute, the Lord is doing something here. He has a right to do whatever he wants to do in my life. I'm his slave. I'm here for him. He lays out my path, not me. So Lord, you are giving me this challenge right now. Praise your name." It's the idea that says, "This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it." He's the one making the day. I don't get to make the day. Meekness is that and what he's saying is it's the meekness of wisdom, it's the meekness that flows from true wisdom. Wisdom expresses itself first in meekness. When you really understand who God is and you really understand doctrine and you really apply it to your heart, what it's going to look like is meekness and that's going to translate into a whole bunch of other wonderful things.

When you really see, if you really believe God is sovereign, let's look at that. We are Reformed, most of us, I mean, many of us are on the journey. It took me a long time, I'm always very patient with people who have lots of questions about Reformed theology and the doctrines of grace because it took me three and a half years as a seminary student to accept unconditional election. I mean, I was hardheaded. I was studying all the time. Full-time study and it took me three and a half years. I mean, that's probably like a 30 year or 40 year for the average person. I hadn't thought about how long that is. That's actually pretty discouraging. So anyway, pray for me. But one of the key tenets of the Reformed theology is the absolute sovereignty of God and the Bible clearly teaches this. He is sovereign over every molecule in the universe. As Spurgeon said, he said, "Stand by a window and you see the dust particles falling as you look in the sunlight coming through the window. You see dust particles and ponder this," he says, "that every particle falls exactly where the Father intends it." That's what the Bible teaches.

Now, what does it look like to have that knowledge turn into wisdom? This means that whatever happens to me in the next moment is exactly what God intends to happen and that my response to it will show whether I really believe that or not, whether I am really walking in wisdom. So then the person who is truly wise sees the slight that comes and hurts from someone and they receive it from God first. They may have to really reprove the person. The person may be completely wrong and need to be rebuked but there is a different attitude when it is no longer about selfish ambition and jealousy and my position, it's about God and his glory. I am his servant. I am his slave. "Lord, you have an opportunity for me to minister to this brother or sister. You call me to be like Jesus who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Do you see that grasping that Jesus didn't do? That's jealousy and selfish ambition. "Though he was God, he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but he emptied himself, took upon himself the form of the servant, was made in the likeness of men, and became a servant all the way to death, the point of death, even the death of the cross." Paul says right before he goes into that, he says, "Have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." This is what a true Christian aspires to.

So that's the inward attitude that we should have. Selfish ambition and jealousy are the opposite of that, and when we see those things, we can know as we saw, the attitude, the wisdom that we are walking in, even though we may have a lot of doctrine, I mean, think about this, demons. We said it's earthly, natural, demonic. Demons are smart. Their theology is fairly sound. I mean, I can't really speak to it with great expertise because the Bible doesn't tell us a lot, but basically they recognized Jesus. When you read through the Gospels, they recognized Jesus when he becomes. "Son of the Most High, what do you have to do with us?" They don't wonder, no, they know who he is, and as James says, the demons also believe and tremble. They believe in a way, the doctrine they believe, but they don't believe it in a wisdom way. It's not in their life. They are not submitted to it.

So he says if there is, or these inward attitudes are in our lives, we need to watch out. We need to repent. We need to stop thinking we are farther along than we are. Repent, humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and work on our life by his grace. That's the inward essence of false wisdom. The second point, though, how do we recognize false wisdom? First of all, by its inward essence. Secondly, we recognize false wisdom by its outward evidence. By its outward evidence. You see here in verse 16b, the second part of verse 16, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist," he tells us what's going to happen, "there is disorder and every evil thing." This is now the outside. He was talking about the inward attitudes, now he's talking about the outside. What happens when someone has these things in their heart, jealousy and selfish ambition, you're going to experience and you're going to see around them disorder and every evil thing.

Now, let's look at what those words mean. The word "disorder," it's actually a word which we saw earlier in the passage on the tongue. The word "restless" in verse 8, when we saw no one can tame the tongue, it is a restless evil. The same root word as we have here, for there is disorder. The word "disorder," it can be translated "confusion; upheaval; insurrection; conflict." And it pictures a person who doesn't have self-control who is continually in conflict. Because of the jealousy and the selfish ambition, they keep

running into conflict. Conflict. Conflict. Conflict. Somebody told me about a sign they saw in one of the stores, you know, the clever sign places and stuff. One sign said, you know, the only common denominator in all of your dysfunctional relationships is you. Look around at your relationships. Is there conflict, conflict, conflict, conflict? If there is, James says then you are not living out wisdom.

Conflict is the outward evidence that must flow from this inward attitude that's not meek but is jealous and selfishly ambitious. He says it's not just this sense of disorder, he says every evil thing; that when you look more closely at the person, at our life, when we think we are doing well, when we look carefully at different areas. I know that one of the things that has happened to me, I was talking to somebody this week who said the same thing, as I started teaching on the tongue, I started to realize, I shared last week, how like three times the week before I could right then think of three times I really blew it with my tongue. It's just like so clear I've got to keep working on this area. I thought I was doing better than I was. That's what the word of God does. Every time we come to the word of God, it's supposed to be like that. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active." Now what does it mean, it is living and active? It is "sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to dividing joints and marrow, soul and spirit," and here's the key part, "is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart." God's word comes in and lays us bare.

Now, it's a wonderful thing for the believer. It's wonderful to be convicted and to be shown, "I have a problem with my tongue." It's even a wonderful thing to see, "I have a problem with selfish ambition and jealousy." I think James is writing to people that he has called them over and over brothers. He's not saying that everyone he's writing to is definitely a Christian. No, when you see a lot of bad fruit, bad fruit, you need to examine yourself. You need to see if you're a believer. But basically he's saying these things are temptations for every genuine Christian and the true believer, though, when he is confronted, is going to pursue holiness, and really the whole Christian life is God getting a little deeper into the onion. He is sanctifying us little by little, day by day, and how does he do that? He exposes the ugliness and he teaches us to run to Jesus and to apply what we know to our life. That's the plan and there is an element of regular painfulness about it. It's the only way. No pain, no gain in the Christian life. If you want a pain free life, then don't follow Christ. He said, "If you would be My disciple, you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Me." It's about seeing our sin and dying at the foot of the cross again and again and again.

You know, you think about this, he says disorder, every evil thing, every vile practice, the ESV says. The word there is "pragma," we get our word "pragmatism" from it. It means "practice." It doesn't just mean a one time thing or a deed, it means a practice. So if we allow these things to stay in our lives, if we don't let God clean us out, if we let bitterness go untended, we are not going to stay where we are, we are going to develop vile practices so he says run from it. Bad, evil, worthless, is the meaning of the word "evil." Just everything about it is bad. And you can see again here that we talked about, remember the inward, selfish ambition and jealousy is what false wisdom looks like on the inside, and then I said it's the opposite, selfish ambition, the opposite he talks about is

meekness, right? There is the same thing happening here. There is an outward evidence, he says, is this disorder, conflict, every evil thing, and the opposite he talks about real clearly too and the opposite that should be there is peaceableness.

Look there at verse 17 and 18, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable." Then look at verse 18, "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." He's saying that the person who has true godly wisdom, who is truly wise. He said, "Who is wise among you? Who is understanding? The person who walks around making peace. That's a wise man," James says. That's the person to follow. That's the person that we need to be, a person who is bringing the shalom of God, the blessedness of peace, absence of conflict, but not just absence of conflict, the fullness that comes from restoration and wholeness.

This is what we are to be about and wisdom is applying that. I mean, if we really know and we believe what we say we believe, if you really believe in the atonement, if you really believe in all of the doctrines of the faith, then how can you not be at peace with every other believer? I mean, even if they are in sin, you're not harboring ill will or bad attitudes or wanting to hurt them. You may confront them but it's in love. You are blessing them because you are just applying the Gospel. What is the Gospel? Jesus has forgiven me for everything. Look at that great debt he has forgiven me. How can I harbor against you a small debt that you owe to me? It's just living out the Gospel. It is knowledge applied to life. That's what we are called to, not just to know, as James said, his whole letter is about don't be merely hearers of the word but be doers.

So he says false wisdom is seen in its inward essence, it is seen in its outward evidence, and he basically, the application he gives two imperatives in this passage and I think the first that he would say as we look at our failings in this area and if you realize if you look at your life and you say, "I thought I was doing pretty well and I thought I was ready for this position or that whatever. I feel like I need to be... And now I look at my life and if I really start examining it, I see that there is conflict all around me. My attitudes are bad." The first application is there in verse 14, "do not be arrogant." Don't continue boasting, and this word "boasting" can be in a good way, you boast in Christ, you boast in the Lord. In fact, he uses it in chapter 2, mercy boasts against judgment. The same word. But he's saying don't boast. What is he saying? Don't think you are wise and understanding. Don't say you are wise and understanding if your life is a mess and your heart is a mess because if you do, you are lying against the truth. You're saying the Gospel is a lie if you say you are the essence of the Christian life and your life is a shambles. That's why James says it forcefully, "Stop being arrogant and lying. Stop thinking you're something when you're not." "Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think but so as to have sound judgment," Paul says in Romans 12.

But the second thing, the other imperative that he gives that would apply to us as we look at our lives and we see the areas that are a mess, is that first thing he says in verse 13 after he asks the question, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior." What he wants us to do is stop saying we are more than we are and get to work. Let him show. Let him prove. Let him exhibit, literally, display. Start working to

put on display not for other people, for the Lord. Put on display the works that the deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. Pursue wisdom for meekness and start looking to work out that meekness in your life. So don't despair. Run to Christ. You have a glorious Savior who has died for your sins of selfish ambition and jealousy. He has paid for that and he is meek, and where I am not meek, Jesus is meek.

So go to him and say, "Lord, live your life through me," and then try to work out, like we are going to work on this next time because the positive side of it, he gives us some real practical steps of how to take meekness and put it into your life. And God's word is wonderful. It cuts. It hurts but he never afflicts us willingly, Lamentation 3 says. He only afflicts us as much as necessary. It's like a doctor performing a procedure to heal you. He must cut you if he is going to heal you. He must hurt you if he is going to really help and heal you. And the Lord cuts and wherever he cuts, his sword is two-edged. He cuts and he digs out so that he can fill with grace and love in his glory because of Jesus. May God help us pursue holiness and true wisdom for his glory.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask you to continue, Lord, to deal with the issues in our hearts that you are beginning to point out this morning, that you would continue to help us, Lord, not let the seed be stolen away by the evil one, not to receive it in a shallow way but, Lord, help us to receive it deep into our hearts. Grant us true poverty of spirit. Thank you that your way is always to make us poor before you make us rich; to take us down before you lead us up; to break us before you rebuild us. Lord, don't stop short of digging out all that you need to dig out and help us this week, help each person, Lord, to all apply our hearts with a fervency and an urgency to allow you to continue exposing the problems in our lives. Show us the ugliness, unmask it, and Lord, let it drive us to Jesus. Let us say with Paul, "Who can deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus." Lord, make us more like him. May your kingdom come in areas of our lives where your kingdom has not been evident. May your will be done in ways that manifest your holiness and may people around us see the difference so that we can point them to you for from you, and through you, and to you are all things. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.