

**Wisdom From Above**  
**James 3:13-18**

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I began refereeing soccer when I was 14 years old. I began as a volunteer and got paid shortly thereafter. I started to move up in the referee ranks and had ambitions to go as high as I could, maybe even to the World Cup. As a young and upcoming referee, I worked with many experienced referees. As I worked more and higher level games, I worked with referees with much experience and wisdom. I found that I would typically run into two types of experienced referees. The first were the arrogant ones, the ones that seemed to be the know it all. They talked at you rather than talked with you. They carried themselves as the best and made sure everyone knew it. They wore a prideful uniform that was not attractive but arrogant and boastful. The second were the ones wise beyond their years; referees such as Bob Becher and Bob Linner, names that you probably would not recognize. However, you will recognize this one, Tommy Hunt. It was wise referees, such as these, that used their wisdom and knowledge of the game to be effective teachers of the game and to train and mold younger referees such as myself.

These experienced referees were wise. One set their wisdom from below while the others set their wisdom from above. I gained much wisdom as a referee which made me into a better official. What stuck out to me was referees who I learned the most from always saw themselves as the students and not the teachers. They were constantly learning from themselves and others. I remember one game. I was working with a high level referee that I had much respect for and who was instrumental in getting me involved with refereeing. We came off the match at half time where we usually discuss how the first half went and what to expect and look for the second half. The first thing that this experienced referee said to us was, “ok guys. What did I miss? What could I be doing differently and what could I be doing better?” We were both taken back as we didn’t expect that question. Here we were, new referees and he was a seasoned referee who had worked some of the most competitive matches in the South. He was always striving to be a student of the game. That approach has stuck with me and I carry it into every match that I officiate. Wise people use their wisdom not to make them better or smarter but to lift up those around them, to make those around them better.

In our text this morning James, the author, was writing his letters to churches that were often experiencing conflict. James seeks to impart wisdom to them as they navigate difficult times. He talks about two types of wisdom, wisdom from above and wisdom from below. Wisdom from above is a heavenly view that requires us to learn and trust in God and what God would teach us. Wisdom from below focuses on earthly priorities that often lead us astray. I believe we can distinctively separate the two approaches like this. Wisdom from below is found by striving to be wise while wisdom from above is not something you strive to be but something you strive to do.

James is very clear about this. Wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy, full of good fruit, impartial and sincere. Let us take a moment and be real practical here. What does this mean to us? Wisdom from above is pure. Pure in this context is from the word holy or meaning being set apart. We see this wisdom as holy because it

has its origins in God. We contrast this with earthly wisdom that is selfish ambitions because that wisdom is all about us, where pure and holy wisdom is about God. Godly wisdom is peaceable. I'll come back to this in a minute because this deals with conflict. Godly wisdom is gentle and accommodating. Wisdom teaches us that it is not always about being right. Sometimes it is more important to be loving than right. Wisdom requires us to often compromise. What difference does it make if we are willing to give a little, to understand the other side, to work to a solution that is a win-win? I would suggest that it makes all the difference.

Wisdom is full of mercy. Last Wednesday night our youth talked about mercy. Our working definition for mercy was this: Love in action. Godly wisdom requires us to understand how to receive mercy and then do likewise. Do we have a moldable heart that is ready to be shaped, broken and vulnerable to the things that breaks God's heart. If so, we have the opportunity to see the work of Christ before us. Wisdom is full of good fruits. What is being produced through your actions as you strive to do and not just be wise. Is good fruit being produced? Does that good fruit serve to glorify someone much greater than our own ambitions?

Finally, wisdom is impartial and sincere. How does our heart respond and react? Do we do so with bias or an open mind. Are our intentions heartfelt and pure or with selfish ambitions? We cannot hide our hearts response for long. It will come out into the light.

I mentioned a moment ago that Godly wisdom is peaceable. In this context, this word is meant to mean, not given to conflict. God's word is peaceable to everyone who accepts it. The churches that James wrote to were experiencing conflict. In this life we will experience and engage in conflict. As we navigate a difficult situation, how do we seek to de-escalate tensions and not add to the stress and strain of emotions? Peaceable wisdom in those stations requires listening. Wise people are quick to listen and slow to speak. Peaceable wisdom requires compromise. To achieve compromise requires a listening heart.

Maybe that is where we land today. Wisdom comes from above, a heavenly wisdom that far surpasses earthly desires and ambitions. This heavenly wisdom is not meant to rest in our minds but in our hearts. But our heart must be ready to receive the wisdom if we are to share that wisdom with others. Do you have a moldable heart?

Here in my hand I hold a rock. This rock symbolizes a heart that has been hardened by this earthly world. This heart can no longer receive love and mercy and that means it can no longer give love and mercy. Here is some clay. As you can see it is moldable and shapeable. This is meant to represent the heart that we are born with. Created in the image of God, we are made with a heart that is moldable, shapeable and porous. This heart is ready to receive God's love, mercy, and grace. This heart is ready to receive heavenly wisdom. But this heart is also susceptible to earthly wisdom. When we focus on things of this world and not of things above we will absorb them too. When we experience hurt and pain, our responses to those situations will be absorbed too.

We must continue to massage our heart and allow our heart to continue to be molded by heavenly things. If I was to let this clay sit here overnight, when I came back tomorrow morning, it would no longer be moldable. It would be firm and set. The longer it sits here the harder and drier it would get. We must continue to work our heart and allow it to be molded and shaped. To do this we must be open and be vulnerable enough to say Lord, break our heart for what breaks yours. It is here, in this vulnerable and risky place, that we can receive wisdom and move from

being to doing. May our hearts break for what breaks yours Lord. May we look upward to your wisdom and your calling. May that be enough. Amen.