

James 3:13-18 | Casey Talley

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 May 2026

Preacher: Casey Talley

[0 : 00] Good morning. Good morning. All right. We are going to be in James chapter 3 today.! So you can go ahead and turn there. And as you're turning there, I will open us in prayer.

Lord, we just thank you for who you are. Thank you for your son. God, I ask that you would give me wisdom as I speak. Give all of us ears to hear your word.

Lord and God, that these would be your words and not mine. And that you would guide my words and my thoughts. And Lord, that your spirit would move today. And it's in Jesus' name I pray. Amen. All right. So James chapter 3. And we're going to be at the end, that last section, verses 13 through 18. I'm going to start with this. There's an ongoing argument that I've been having with my dad since I was a kid.

And it started with something like this. He would be leaving to go to the store. To get groceries. And he would ask me, do you want anything?

[1 : 02] Do you want me to pick anything up for you from the store? And I would say something like, yeah. Can you get me Dr. Pepper? Or can you get me Frosted Flakes? Or whatever it was. Right? And he would go to the store. And he would come back with the cheapest off-brand version of whatever it was that I had asked for.

And I would just look with disdain at the Aldi brand groceries sitting on the counter. And the argument was, he would say, you can't really tell the difference.

You're falling victim to the marketing. And I would say, yes, I absolutely can tell the difference between Dr. Pepper and Dr. Thunder. And Frosted Flakes and Frosty Flakes.

Which is just shameless. And that's the argument. And now, looking back as an adult, first of all, I can tell the difference. Absolutely.

They are not the same. Frosted Flakes are thinner and lighter. And Frosty Flakes are thicker and crunchier. It's not the same. But I will say, it's pretty inconsequential looking back on it.

[2 : 08] But there are times when the stakes are higher. When you don't want to be caught with the off-brand version of something. There's a guy that I see on YouTube every once in a while.

He posts videos where he will buy cheap Amazon parachutes and test them out. And so, he'll go and jump out of a plane with an Amazon parachute.

And every time, without fail, he pulls the string, the parachute comes out. And the ropes snap immediately. And the parachute is gone in a second. Now, I've seen multiple of these videos.

So, he's clearly cheating. He's got to be bringing an extra or something. But, the point is that when the stakes are high, the difference between what is authentic and what is counterfeit is everything. The difference between what is authentic and what is counterfeit is everything. And I bring this up. Some of you, if you're looking at your Bibles, probably already know. Because the title above this section, in most translations, says two kinds of wisdom.

[3 : 13] Two kinds of wisdom is what James is going to talk about. It's what we're going to look at today. I want to start with this, though, that I think there are two kinds of everything.

Or at least two kinds of every attribute or quality that we are called to as Christians. There are two kinds of love. There are two kinds of peace.

There are two kinds of joy. I think that's true for any attribute, any quality that you look at, that there are two kinds. And that may not be the language we're used to. I think the language that we're used to using seems to contradict this, which would be to say that you cannot have love apart from Christ.

You cannot have peace apart from Christ. You cannot have joy apart from Christ. You cannot have wisdom. And I think that's absolutely true. There's a reason we talk like this.

It's true. It's what God says in Jeremiah, specifically. My people have dug their own wells, broken wells that cannot hold water. And so that's one way of saying it.

[4 : 15] You have no water. Your wells cannot hold water. You have nothing apart from Christ. That's absolutely true. So I'm not going to contradict that. But I think there's another way to say it, and maybe what James is doing here, which is to say, actually, you can have love apart from Christ.

You can have peace. You can have joy. You can have wisdom. You can have all these things apart from Christ. But apart from Christ, these things will not sustain you.

Apart from Christ, your love will fall short. Apart from Christ, your peace will be temporary. Your joy will be insufficient. Your wisdom will be useless. Apart from Christ, these things are worthless. And I think this is the point that James makes. It's kind of what Jesus says to the woman at the well. Anyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. So two ways of saying it. You have no water, or you have water, and you can drink it. But if you drink this water, you will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never thirst. So two kinds of water, two kinds of everything.

[5 : 17] C.S. Lewis makes a similar point in *The Great Divorce*, which is one of my favorite books. And he's talking about love here. But these two characters, they're having a discussion about love.

And one of them says, but isn't love a good thing? And you can substitute love for wisdom here, since that's what we're going to be talking about. But isn't love a good thing?

And the other character responds, and he says, There is but one good, and that is God. Everything else is good when it turns to him, and bad when it turns from him.

There is one good, that is God. Everything else is good when it turns to him, and bad when it turns from him. So let's go ahead and we'll read our text and then get into it. Starting in verse 13.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

[6 : 18] Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

All right, so two kinds of wisdom that James describes. The first one we're going to call, it's the words he uses, wisdom from above, or some translations say wisdom from heaven. That will be our first kind of wisdom.

We're going to talk about that one later. We're going to start with the other. The second, I'm going to call it wisdom from the enemy. Wisdom from the enemy, that's what we're going to look at first. The reason I call it wisdom from the enemy, there is a man named Thomas Akempis.

He lived in the 1400s and he wrote this book called *The Imitation of Christ*. And in this book, you've probably heard this, he said that the Christian has three enemies.

[7 : 23] There are three enemies of the Christian. The world, the flesh, and the devil. And he didn't invent this. He was kind of the first one to put it into words, but it's true if you look at Scripture.

These are the three enemies that Scripture describes for the Christian. The world, the flesh, and the devil. And I think this is a coincidence, but James does allude to all three of these enemies in his description of this other kind of wisdom.

So that's going to be our outline as we look at this other kind of wisdom, the three enemies of the Christian, the world, the flesh, and the devil. So we'll start with the world.

Point number one, the wisdom of the enemy is earthly. That's what James says, verse 15, such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly.

The world is our enemy. That's a hard truth. I think especially today, that's not a truth that people like. I watched this movie recently about the main character was a Catholic priest, and the antagonist was another Catholic priest.

[8 : 26] And the viewpoint of the antagonist was the world is our enemy. The viewpoint of the protagonist was, no, we should love the world, as though those two things are opposites, as though those two things cannot coincide.

It is true that we should love the world as God loves the world. It is also true that the world is our enemy. James will say later in chapter 4, just a few verses later, friendship with the world is enmity with God.

1 John 2, do not love the world or the things in the world. John 15, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

That's Jesus. Romans 12, we're called not to be conformed to the world. 1 John 5, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

In 2 Timothy, Paul says that Demas has left him because he loved the world. I think that's true of everyone who leaves the faith. He loved the world.

[9 : 30] Colossians 2 warns us against human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world. John 7, Jesus says again, the world hates me because I testify that its works are evil.

The world hates me because I testify that its works are evil. 1 Corinthians 3, the wisdom of this world is folly before God. 1 Corinthians 3, the wisdom of this world is folly before God.

So a few questions here. Is my wisdom compatible with the wisdom of the world? Does the world agree with the way I live my life? How to be a good husband?

How to be a good friend? Fill in the blank. Does the world agree? Or maybe the better question is, can I listen to the wisdom of this world and nod my head in agreement? If that's the case, there might be something wrong with my wisdom.

Or maybe I have the wrong kind of wisdom. Right? The lifestyle, the values, the identity of the Christian should be entirely defined by Christ and Christ alone.

[10 : 33] The world has nothing to say. I think that's something that we, especially as American Christians, need to remind ourselves of. Right? That you have two options.

The wisdom of God or the wisdom of the enemy or the world. Right? Only two options. There is no middle ground. Jesus says, whoever is not with me or for me is against me.

And the world is not for Christ. Christ. I think a lot of people have a different translation of Deuteronomy chapter 6. And the words of Fox News shall be on your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your children.

And talk of them when you sit in your house. No. And the words that I command you today shall be on your heart. And you shall teach them diligently to your children. And shall talk about them when you sit in your house.

And when you walk by the way. And when you lie down. And when you rise. Right? The word of God is the only source of wisdom that the Christian needs. The world has nothing to contribute.

[11 : 34] In Isaiah 8 chapter 19. It says, when they say to you, consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter. Should not a people consult their God?

Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? Am I consulting the dead on behalf of the living? Should we consult the spiritually dead on behalf of those who the Holy Spirit has made alive?

No. Number two. The flesh. The wisdom of the enemy is selfish. Galatians 5.

The desires of the flesh are against the spirit. Romans 8. The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God. 1 Peter 2. Fleshly passions wage war against your soul.

Colossians 3. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you. Romans 7. Nothing good dwells in me. That is, in my flesh. Nothing good dwells in my flesh.

[12 : 37] Galatians 6. The one who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption. Romans 13. Make no provision for the flesh.

Galatians 5. Have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. And then 1 John 2. The desires of the flesh are not from the Father. The flesh is our enemy.

We were talking just a few minutes ago at Sunday school about the end of Judges, where it says, in those days there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

It doesn't say everyone did horrific, crazy things, which is true if you've read Judges. It's horrifying. It says everyone did what was right in his own eyes. That's our problem, is that our flesh is naturally opposed to God.

Right? And if we are to do what is right in our own eyes, then we are going to live in opposition to God and his word. Verse 14. James says, if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

[13 : 45] Right? And we kind of need the context of 13. Do not boast about it. About what? He says, who is wise and understanding among you? Right? And then he says, but if you have envy and selfish ambition, don't boast about it.

Don't deny the truth. In other words, he's saying, if you are selfish, don't put your hand up. Right? Who is wise and understanding among you? If you have envy and selfish ambition, keep your hand down.

Right? If my wisdom is a tool to elevate myself, then it is not the wisdom of God. It's interesting. Selfish ambition, I kind of went out of order here.

Selfish ambition is not listed as a symptom of ungodly wisdom. Ungodly wisdom is given as a symptom of selfish ambition. Right? So in other words, he's not saying, if you have worldly, demonic wisdom, then you will be selfish.

He's saying, if you have selfish ambition and envy, then you have ungodly, demonic, worldly wisdom. It's the other way around. Right? Selfish ambition is at the root of ungodly wisdom.

[14 : 51] Right? And actually, you could argue that selfish ambition is at the root of all sin. Right? We see that in the garden, the original sin. The serpent says to Eve, eat this fruit and you will be like God. Right?

Sin entered the world through the elevation of man. Selfish ambition is at the root of all sin. And it's our desire to elevate ourselves that is at the heart of every struggle that we face as Christians. Matt Chandler says, almost all the conflict in your life is predicated on your belief that the world's about you. Right? And that's true. The reason I get angry in traffic, which is a big one for me, is because the world's about me.

How dare they? Right? The reason there's conflict in my friendships, in my marriage, at work, because the world's about me. How dare they say that about me? How dare they not give me the honor I'm due?

And he says, the more the world is about you, the more angry and tired you'll be. And the more it's not about you, the more free you are. Right?

[15 : 56] Our freedom, or let me back up, our enslavement to sin came through the elevation of man. The elevation of self. Our freedom comes through the humility that is found in Christ.

That only he can do it. Right? That's the gospel. So, enemy number three, the devil. The wisdom of the enemy is demonic. This one will be short, but that's what he says.

He says it's demonic. And he doesn't give it as a separate, this isn't a separate list of possibilities for your wisdom. These are all grouped together. If your wisdom is earthly, it is demonic.

They come together. Right? Ephesians 6, 12. The problem of ungodly wisdom is not something that a self-help book can fix.

It's a spiritual problem. And it requires a spiritual solution. The only answer is Christ. Okay, so we'll move on to wisdom from above.

[17 : 07] What should our wisdom look like? What does it look like to have wisdom that is from God? A few points here. Number one, wisdom from above is evident.

Wisdom from above is evident. Verse 13, who is wise and understanding among you, let them show it by their good deed. Or, sorry, by their good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom.

Right? Let them show it. Wisdom from above is evident. It's interesting. I was looking as I was studying this passage. We don't really get a definition for wisdom anywhere in Scripture.

There's no definition. I think verse 17 here is actually the closest we get. But really, it's not even a definition. It's just a description of what wisdom looks like. And that's what we find everywhere else. Right?

We get descriptions of what it looks like because wisdom ultimately doesn't need to be defined by words. It's defined by actions. Right? So let's just, let's read verse 17 and compare ourselves to it.

[18 : 09] But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.

If my wisdom is from above, then it will be reflected in the way that I live. All right, point number two, wisdom from above is humble. He says, let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom.

Wisdom from above is humble. Right? And we've already touched on this, but selfish ambition has no place in the Christian's life. Philippians 2, you all know this verse.

Sin entered the world through the elevation of man.

And sin was defeated through the humiliation of God. And that's what we're called to emulate. Christ and his humiliation. Right? The gospel is the ultimate defeat of the pride of man.

[19 : 33] If you have wisdom from above, there is no room for selfish ambition. Wisdom from above brings humility because wisdom from above can only come from Christ.

And through Christ. There's Ephesians 2, 8, and 9. By grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves is the gift of God. Not by works, so that no one may boast.

I always brush past the end. So that no one may boast. And I kind of read it as, by the way, no bragging. Don't brag about it. You didn't do it. Right? But it's more, he says, so that, like the reason why.

The gospel can only work this way. By grace through faith. Because if I could do it myself. If I could boast about it. My pride has not been defeated. It's only by grace through faith that our pride is defeated.

And we can imitate Christ in humility. The wisdom from above is humble. And then our last point. Wisdom from above is free.

[20 : 39] Chapter 1 of James, verse 5. Wisdom from above is free.

Right? It's just like every other attribute or quality that we as Christians are called to possess. The Christian life is not a starting point by grace through faith and then the rest of it you do on your own. Right? The gospel is not ultimately the finish line. And then I work the rest out myself. The gospel is the starting line. And really the whole race. Everything is by grace through faith.

Every part of my life. And that includes wisdom. It's by grace through faith. It can only come through Christ. It can only come as a gift. Right? Wisdom is given freely to all who ask.

All right. If the musicians want to come up. I almost said magicians. If the musicians want to come up and I'll go ahead and pray and we'll close. All right.

[21 : 52] Dear Lord, thank you for today. Thank you for your son, God. Just ask that you would give us wisdom, Lord. God, you've promised that you will and we trust you and we believe you, Lord.

So give us wisdom and help us to be wise. God, protect us from our enemies. Protect us from this world. From our flesh. From the devil. Lord, watch over us and make us wise.

It's in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.