

Are you a smart person? Did you find it pretty easy to get good grades in school? Did you go to college? Do you have a lot of information in your head about a lot of different subjects? Are you smarter than your parents? Or, do you think of yourself as “dumb?” Did you struggle to get even passing grades in school? Did you decide not to go to college because you felt you weren’t smart enough? Do you feel inferior to people who are smarter than you? Do you secretly envy people who know more things than you do?

Being smart is very important in our society today. Parents want their children to be smart so they can make lots of money and be successful. Teachers want their students to be smart, so the school can continue to get aid from the federal government. The government wants citizens to be smart so we can stay ahead of the Russians and the Chinese. Teens and children want to be smart, so their classmates don’t call them dumb. Everybody wants to be smart, and everyone tells us to get a good education.

God, of course, doesn’t care at all how smart a person is. The word smart isn’t even used once in the Bible. Some of the smartest people in the world, like Albert Einstein, might not be in heaven. But God talks at great length in the Bible about being wise. In Proverbs God tells us to *get wisdom, because wisdom is worth more than all the gold and silver in the world*. Another Proverb says *wisdom is supreme, though it costs you everything you have, get wisdom*. Solomon, who wrote those Proverbs, once asked God for wisdom. God told him he could have anything he wanted, and Solomon asked God to give him wisdom. God was so pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom instead of intelligence and money and riches and fame and victory over his enemies, that he not only gave him wisdom but also all those other things that he had not asked for. Today in our Second Lesson James is inviting all of us to “Get Wisdom.” He tells us what wisdom is and where you find wisdom and how wisdom shows itself in the lives of the wise. God grant that we all ask God for wisdom.

I feel the need to make a confession to all of you this morning. I am not wise. Now perhaps some of you are thinking, “Pastor, that’s not much of a confession, we already knew that about you.” But others might not be so convinced just yet, so let me prove it to you.

I am going to use Keith Mackey as my first example. In His past life, Keith used to fly commercial jets. If Keith would take me to Orlando, International Airport, and take me into the cockpit of a 747, and say, Ok. Pastor, let’s get this bird off the ground. I would look at him with a blank stare and say, I haven’t the foggiest idea on how to operate this plane. Here’s another one; Kim Mottl works as an accountant in Ocala. She is a girl who knows how to prepare taxes for large companies. She has done an audit on our church account. If I would have to sit at her desk in Ocala, and try to analyze the books of companies, I would be out of a job in less than an hour. Or what about Amy Hand. It’s her job to educate and care for young children. She taught a rough 5th grade class this past summer. Now she’s back to 1st grade this year. I don’t have a clue how she manages to do that day after day without losing her mind. Or take Fred Hainen. If he sat down with his violin, had an easel with some music on it, and handed me his violin, do you think I could make it sing like Fred does with the special music he plays to edify our worship services? No way. So there you have it. Based on this overabundance of evidence, I am definitely not wise.

And here’s why I say this. Wisdom is not what comes from having fancy degrees or from being able to memorize numerous facts. Rather, wisdom is this: Knowing what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and why you do it. I can know that I need to change the tires on my car, but if I don’t know when to do it, I am not wise. I can know that you need to calm down an unruly child, but if I don’t know how to do it or why they were upset in the first place, I am not wise. Wisdom is putting knowledge into practice. And based on this, I would think that none of us could truly be considered wise.

But this is only the tip of the iceberg. Because all this wisdom we have been talking about is of the earthly variety. What about the wisdom that comes from above, from heaven itself? This kind of wisdom, as James tells us, is peace-loving. It always wants to bring people together. It is considerate, understanding the shortcomings of others and seeing to their needs first. It is submissive, or more literally, ready to obey, willing to do what others ask of you. It is full of mercy, never wanting to give others what they ‘deserve.’ It is full of good fruit, bearing forth the deeds that God desires. It is impartial, never being prejudiced against anyone, even if they have done you wrong before. It is sincere, completely genuine as you look to do good for others.

As I go through all this, I can only come to one conclusion: I am not wise. According to this, I am a real dummy. How about you? Do you truly love peace, or do you often prefer to hang on to those things that have hurt you? Are you considerate, or do you find yourself quickly noticing the weaknesses of others and not even thinking of how you could help? Are you submissive, always willing to do what is asked of you? Or is your first thought,

'How can I get out of this?' rather than, 'What can I do to help?' Are you full of mercy, willing to forgive the sins of others, or do you find your heart wishing for a bit of revenge first? Are you full of fruit, displaying an overabundance of love in the things you say and do or is your basket of deeds woefully bare? Are you impartial with everyone you meet, or do you treat some people better than others? And even when you do what is good and right in God's sight, does it come from a willing spirit or is it squeezed out of a stubborn heart?

It's this last point that truly reveals the folly of our ways. It's always important to know, from God's perspective, what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. But it's the why that really gets at the heart of the matter. All this wisdom is to be carried out in humility, with no ego, with no self-interest whatsoever. It's a mindset that fully embraces what we heard Jesus say before, **"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."** But our hearts can't stop thinking about ourselves. The wisdom of this world is: "It's all about me." James says this "wisdom" is from the devil. It's sin, and the middle letter of sin is "I." It leads to evil things, like *bitter envy*. Envy is anger at the good fortune of others who are smarter or richer or better looking or have a better house than me. Envy leads to a bitter life. A close cousin of envy is *selfish ambition*. God wants us to be ambitious. But he wants us to be ambitious in serving him and serving our neighbor. *Selfish ambition* is working hard – for me. We just want to be the lord of our lives, not some lowly servant. This is what brings about such disorder in our lives. The wisdom of our wicked hearts is not heavenly, but earthly. If this is not a recipe for eternal disaster, then I don't know what is. What fools we are.

So how do we change this? How can we stop being so foolish? How can we gain wisdom and understanding so that our souls will not be destroyed in hell? We look up. We look to where this wisdom comes from. We look to the pure dwelling place of God and see his Son descending for us. For in him we see the essence of humility; in him we see not a trace of envy or ambition. Instead we see a servant of the highest order, pure beyond belief, living the wisdom that only he could have. For all his days Jesus was peace-loving, longing to bring people back to God. He was considerate, helping the weak with healing and care. He was submissive, willing to obey his Father, no matter how much it cost him. He was full of mercy, not giving the world what it deserved for its sin. He was full of good fruit, doing all that his Father desired and more. He was impartial, never favoring one over the other but reaching out even to the lowest of the low. And he was sincere, genuinely loving each and every person he ever came across, no matter what they did to him.

Christ was pure to make us pure. Your Savior was holy to make you holy. For his righteous life was lived in our place, the credit placed on our account. Your heavenly report card has straight A's, the test of your wisdom has a perfect score. Yet this servant didn't stop there. No, he took our failures and nailed them to himself. He took all our envy and ambition and put it on his heart. He took all our folly and laid it upon his head. For all this he endured the pangs of hell. For all this he suffered a torturous death. Though he had done nothing wrong, he humbly gave himself. By this sacrifice you are forgiven, you are pure. You are now worthy enough to dwell in heaven above, for you have been made wise unto salvation.

So think of what this now makes you. You are now among the wisest people that have ever lived. You have been given the greatest wisdom that could ever be offered, coming down from the one who knows everything. So what else is there for us to do, but to live in our heavenly wisdom? What need do I have for envy? The King of kings is my Savior, there is absolutely nothing that I lack. What reason would I find for ambition? The Lord of lords has made me his treasure, so there is nothing higher I could ever want to achieve. How could I ever desire again for the harvest of this earth? Through Christ I now get to bring forth righteousness to everyone around me. What greater joy in life could I find than to serve like this?

My dear friends, let us live wisely through Jesus. What has God called you to do? Do it for your neighbor. What has God granted you to be? Be it for your neighbor. What has God blessed you to have? Have it for your neighbor. Be the one who loves to bring peace. Be the one who tends to the needs of others. Be the one who is willing to do whatever is asked. Be the one who is eager to forgive. Be the one who treats everyone with the same outpouring of love. Be the one who sincerely cares. This is true wisdom, this is true greatness, this is real glory, because this is what Christ has done for us, and what he, through faith, will now do through us. This is your wisdom from above. So live wisely in Christ. Amen.