

The Words and Works of the Wise

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- [0:00] But we're going to turn to our Bibles now, and if you're in need of a Bible, there's some Bibles at the sides, at the back, do avail yourself of one. We're going to be reading together in the New Testament in the letter of James. We've been studying this New Testament letter together, and today we're going to be reading the whole of chapter 3.
- James chapter 3, and if you have one of those visitor's Bibles, it's page 1012.
- But I'm going to preface it just by reading verse 12 of chapter 2, where James says to the Christian people in the churches, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.
- Now look down to verse 1 of chapter 3. Not many of you shall become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.
- For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, and also able to bridle his whole body.
- [1:27] If we put bits in the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also, though they're so large and are driven by strong winds, they're guided by a very small rudder, wherever the will of the pilot directs.
- Also, the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!
- And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.
- For every kind of beast and bird or reptile and sea creature can be tamed, and has been tamed by mankind. But no human being can tame the tongue.
- It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.
- [2:38] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening, both fresh and bitter water?
- Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. Who is wise and understanding among you?
- By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.
- This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder in every vile practice.
- But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.
- [4:03] And a harvest, a fruit of righteousness, is sown in peace by those who make peace.
- Amen. May God bless to us His Word. Well, please do open your Bibles with me to James and to the third chapter.

Amen. Now, James is very clear that all Christians and all churches will face trials of many kinds.

But for the true children of God who know their gracious Heavenly Father, that should be a cause, he says, of joy. Because through these trials, which God grants to us in love, He's perfecting our faith.

So that, as he says in chapter 1, verse 12, having proven true, we will receive the crown of life. Of course, as Hebrews chapter 12, verse 11, tells us very honestly, these kind of disciplines at the present time never seem happy, never pleasant, but painful, obviously.

[5 : 23] But he says it does yield in time the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who've been trained by them.

Very similar language, you'll notice, to verse 18 of chapter 3 here. But that training is not automatic. And the sad thing is that so often we don't allow trials to do their true work in us, but instead we're tempted by them to buckle under, to wander away from the truth in the Lord Jesus Christ, to wander back into the old ways of the world.

And we turn back from that wholehearted love to God and we try to be friends also with the world and the world's ways for an easier life so as not to suffer discomfort or opposition or too much challenge.

We try to be friends with God and the world, but of course, as Jesus says, you can't. And James says it just as bluntly in chapter 4. Friendship with the world is enmity with God.

And he calls it that being divided within yourself. Double-minded, he calls it, in chapter 1, verse 8, and again in chapter 4, verse 9. Even committing adultery with God.

[6 : 38] Very strong. And he says it's easy to deceive yourself. Pretend all's well. And that is what James is having to expose all through this letter.

There's lots of talk about faith, he says, but very little evidence of it. Chapter 2, he exposed very clearly, didn't he, that real faith is tangible.

It's visible or not in your actions and especially in your treatment of other people, especially Christian brothers and sisters. And now in chapter 3, he's telling us that it is also audible in our talk also to and about other people.

He picks up here on that test that he gave us in chapter 1, verse 26, where he says that an unbridled tongue reveals a deceived heart of worthless religion. The tongue is very revealing of the heart.

And alas, too often what it exposes is chapter 3, verse 14 here. Hearts full not of love for God and love for our brothers. Evidence of the family code of God the Father.

[7 : 48] But instead, you look, bitter jealousy. Selfish ambition. He's not talking here about the pub after an old firm match, is he? He's talking about the Christian church where people come and sing hymns to God.

Look at verse 9. Blessing our God and Father. And yet at the same time, under their breath, cursing people made in the image of God. Or maybe not just always under the breath, sometimes actually quite vocal.

And that is so destructive. Destructive to the relational harmony of any community, but especially the church of Jesus Christ. And the more we get into this letter, I'm afraid the clearer and the uglier the picture becomes.

Chapter 4 really does show a very sad picture of fighting, of quarreling among those inside the church. Angry words, murderous thoughts, people insisting on their own way.

He says covetousness, envy, selfishness, pride, all of this, all of this, less than two decades since Jesus knelt and washed the dirty feet of His disciples in the upper room.

[9:03] And the next day walked up the hill of Golgotha and died on the cross for His people's sins. It seems astonishing, doesn't it?

And it's very easy to look down on churches like that that could be like that. until we ask the question, well, I wonder why this has been preserved in our Bibles.

Because we need it, obviously. Just this very week, I've heard of a church meeting expressing precisely those kind of attitudes. Now this is a necessary, it's a very challenging chapter that reminds us all, and especially those who have leadership roles of any kind in the church or who crave such a role, reminding us that what the church of Jesus Christ needs in terms of wisdom in its life and its leadership is not words of cleverness, but the witness of true character.

Not mastery of words, says James, but the meekness of wisdom. And especially in those in leadership and those whom it wants or seeks for leadership.

It's a very salutary chapter of this for Christian leaders, especially because here's the thing, the disease in these churches, and which clearly the Holy Spirit knew and knows will be endemic in churches until the end, hence this letter's inclusion in our Bibles, the disease is largely spread by the leaders through the nature of their ministry and their so-called mission.

[10:45] Now, of course, we get the leaders that we admire and we desire, don't we? We tend to project our own ambitions and our own admiration.

Think about politics. Politicians will project, won't they, the image that they think people will vote for, whether it's charisma in the media or fiscal prudence, well, most likely fiscal imprudence, manifesto promises and all the rest of it.

And we're very skeptical, rightly, aren't we, of all of that? But let's not be naive. We live and breathe the same air. And so the church does tend to get leaders who represent the kind of things that Christian people admire and aspire to, or at least think they should.

We like to think, don't we, that we are unstained by the world's ways, by the world's values and treasures, that we know how to make wise choices about the qualities and the characteristics of real wisdom to be expressed in things like church leadership.

But what kind of wisdom do we really value? What are we really promoting? What are we really pursuing? Is it divine wisdom exhibiting true heavenly character that does lead to the real fruit of righteousness that James speaks of here?

[12:09] or could it be that we could be entirely deceived much of the time so that what we cherish is in fact the very opposite?

Nothing but earthly! Nothing but earthly and unspiritual thinking, which James says is in fact hellish in character. It's demonic in origin. Those are harsh words you may think, but that's James' language.

And it's a very real challenge. So we need to ask, don't we, the question that he is posing. What do we seek to promote and to pursue in the Christian life of our churches and in the Christian leadership in them?

And what must we avoid if we want our leadership and our life to be marked by the words and the works of the truly wise? Well, it's the second part of that that James addresses first here in verses 1 to 12 if you look where the message is very clear indeed and he puts it negatively.

Don't covet and pursue gifted status. There's real harm, James warns, in highly valuing giftedness and cleverness that loves power and that seeks position.

[13:25] Produces leaders who love to speak and be heard by others but it results in churches that are characterized by continual fights just like the world. And that proud wisdom, he says in verse 15, is not divine.

It's earthly thinking. It's unspiritual thinking. Indeed, he says, do you see, it's demonic. It's hellish and it will lead only to hell.

Look at verse 1. The sudden exhortation there dominates the whole chapter but it's very stark, isn't it? It's surprising. Especially when James has repeatedly been telling his readers that they need to be hearers and doers of God's word.

That's the whole message of chapter 2. He's constantly turning them to take God's commands and his word far more seriously. He reminded them in chapter 1, didn't he? Verse 18, that we came to birth, new birth, by the word of truth.

That we go on growing in the only way possible. Chapter 1, verse 21, by receiving with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your soul. So surely, the teaching of the word must be top priority.

[14:32] Well, yes, but, the problem is not that they're slow to speak. The problem is they're far too keen to be speaking. But in entirely the wrong way.

The way to receive meekly, that is, humbly and penitently, the life-giving word, is, he says in chapter 1, verse 16, to be quick to hear and do, but slow to speak and slow to anger.

But they, it seems, were the opposite of that. And I think we have to admit by nature, we all are, aren't we? Slow to listen, slow to learn, very quick to think that we know it all and we should be influencing others.

But as James says, back in chapter 1, verse 26, that is not a sign of wisdom and Christian maturity, but of immaturity. If someone does not bridle his tongue, he says, he deceives his heart and his so-called mature faith, as he thinks, what does James say?

It's worthless. What we all need, he says, is a lot more patient listening to what God's word is really saying to us and a lot less proud lecturing of what we think God's word is saying to others.

[15:45] But that is what James sees in these churches was not happening. Look at verse 5 here in chapter 3. Tongues boasting about great things.

But look at verse 14. That kind of boasting comes from proud hearts full of attitudes that are the very antithesis of the gospel of Christ who humbles all by his grace.

So it's utterly false to the truth. He's saying that it's inconsistent with real Christian faith. Now that pride that thinks it knows best is an endemic disease, isn't it, in the human heart?

But if those who are leading and teaching others are spreading that virus and making it worse, well that really is utterly disastrous for the church. Those who are supposed to be administering the cure of souls are actually becoming carriers of the disease.

It's like the doctors, the surgeons, in a hospital carrying pathogenic bacteria on their dirty hands and spreading it around everywhere. But that's what was happening in these churches.

[16:54] And that's why James says in verse 1 so starkly, not many of you should become teachers, my brothers. And he gives two reasons. The first is, he says, we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Well remember, as we read in verse 12 of chapter 2, he's reminded us that we're all going to be judged by God's standard. And Jesus himself in Matthew 12 verse 36 says, everyone will give an account for every careless word that we speak.

That's quite a thought, isn't it? Why should teachers be judged more strictly? Well, just because they bear great responsibility, don't they, for Christ's precious sheep?

If you lead a group teaching others, you have potential, haven't you, for great good in leading others, in growth, in understanding. But your influence could also do harm, couldn't it?

If your heart was full of the bitter jealousy, the selfish ambition that verse 14 here describes, do you think that won't spread in your words, in your teaching? Of course it will.

[18:07] As Hebrews 12 puts it, a root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble and by it, many become defiled. And alas, that happens very often in Christian churches.

It's happened in this church in the past. It's happening today in churches that I know. And the more people you have influence over, the greater the weight of responsibility and therefore the greater accountability to God.

And that means we need to be very realistic, don't we? Very realistic about ourselves. And that's the second reason James says that few should pursue such leadership. Look at verse 2. We all stumble in many ways and especially, he says in words.

If anyone doesn't stumble in what he says, he's a perfect man able to bridle his whole body. We all stumble, especially in what comes out of our mouths.

And since God will judge our words and especially, says James, the words of those who teach, we should think very carefully about pursuing such roles in the church that covet that status of teacher.

[19:16] Now, don't misunderstand. He's not saying not any should become teachers. Nor is he saying you have to be perfect in order to do so. That word perfect doesn't mean sinless or flawless.

It's just what James says he wants for everybody in their faith in chapter 1, verse 4, that it should be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. It's the maturity of tried and tested faith.

It's what we read in chapter 2, verse 22, of Abraham when his faith was perfected, completed by his works, when he trusted Isaac completely into God's hands. He's not saying you have to be perfect, but what he is saying is that cleverness and giftedness in speaking are not enough of a qualification for leadership and that there is real harm indeed in making it the chief qualification because, as Jesus says, what comes out of the mouth proceeds not from the intellect alone, not just from knowledge and learning, but where?

It proceeds from the heart and that defiles a person. Unless someone's heart is right and their whole life is bridled, that is, controlled by the Spirit of God, walking in mature faith, quick to hear God's Word to them, meekly receiving the Word of God themselves, well, what will come out of their mouth won't share that nurturing, maturing teaching, will it?

It will do the opposite. And it won't just defile them, it will defile many others also. And that's the point that James makes in these illustrations that follow, a bit in a horse's mouth, very small thing, but it controls the whole direction of the path.

[21:08] The ship's rudder, even in strong winds, directs the whole course of a huge vessel controlling it. Well, just so the tongue is the teaching organ of the church, it will drive the whole direction of the body of Christ.

And therein, he says, lies very great danger. The tongue is small, verse 5, yes, but it boasts of great things. And it can do disproportionately great things. It can and it does control life.

But alas, how often for ill, like a tiny spark igniting a devastating forest fire, verse 6, well, the tongue is a fire.

A world of unrighteousness, says James. And he says, it's set among our members, staining the whole body. It's within us, as one scholar puts it, as the enemy agent within God's rightful kingdom, a ready tool at the disposal of God's enemy.

Isn't that true? The tongue is the outlet for all that is anti-God, that is anti-righteousness. And James says, it's fire, do you see, comes directly from hell itself.

[22:32] And something so tiny, he says, has the capacity to set off a disastrous blaze of destruction. Well, we know that, don't we? Even an inadvertent word can sometimes cause a huge damage, can't it?

It can destroy a relationship, or can damage a relation that we can take years and years and years to recover. How much more damage, not by an inadvertent, but by a purposeful word that's spoken in anger and jealousy and pride from selfish ambition.

And verse 7, James says, the tongue is the hardest thing on this earth to tame. Every creature has been tamed, he says, but not, verse 8, the tongue.

It's a restless evil. Why can't the tongue be tamed by mankind, by any human being? Because the human heart can't tame itself.

And that's the fount, isn't it, of the evil that the tongue exposes.

[23:40] The deep desire within us that conceives, remember James spoke like that in chapter 1, that conceives evil and gives birth to sin. That's the well, isn't it, of the deadly poison that he says here in verse 8, comes out of the mouth of the tongue and, as Jesus says, defiles us and will also defile others.

The wrong kind of people in positions of leadership and influence teaching others will be utterly poisonous to the whole church, is what James is saying, because they are poisonous.

And what they spread is poison and not health. Verse 11, you don't get fresh water from a bitter, brackish spring. I don't know why the ESV says salt there, it's a different word, it's the same word that James uses in verse 14, translated bitter.

Don't be deceived, he's saying. He's saying the same thing as Jesus is saying in Matthew chapter 7, beware of false prophets, beware of wolves dressed up as sheep, it's by their fruit you'll know them.

Well look around, says James. There's jealousy, there's pride, there's quarrels, there's fights, there's careless talk, there's worse, there's callous treatment of others. Does that come from a fount of truth and light?

[24:58] Is that evidence of the streams of living water flowing out of those who are filled with the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ? Of course not. I remember years ago hearing our former minister Sinclair Ferguson speaking at a conference at a Christian conference saying that we need to evaluate theologies, we need to evaluate spiritual movements that arrive in their church not just by their beliefs and their theology but by what they produce.

By the fruit. Is it sweet or is it sour in what it produces in the church and in the Christian community? Well indeed, Jesus says, a tree is known by its fruit.

And so James says here in verse 12, you don't get olives from a fig tree, you don't get figs from a grapevine any more than you get fresh water from a salt pond. And again, James is just highlighting the pathology that he keeps going back to all through this letter which is the dividedness of hearts that are wandering away from the truth that are seeking to two-time the Lord with affection and love also for this world.

Trying to serve God and mammon which Jesus says himself you can never do. Friendship with the world says James makes you enemies of God. And what he's saying here is that that divided loyalty in the heart is revealed so often by our words.

Look at the sheer incongruity and the hypocrisy of verse 9. With the same tongue we come to church we sing hymns of praise to the Lord and we make prayers to the Father and yet we curse people.

[26:37] made in the image of God. It may be under our breath most of the time but not all of the time. Sad to say terrible things are sometimes said aren't they at church meetings and to people's faces and written to people or written about people the very pious veneer but poison in the words.

And words says James can be full of deadly poison and the more deadly the poison of course the less that you need to maim and to destroy. Think of the damage that can be done by a single accusation or even an insinuation about someone.

Can ruin somebody's life can't it? It can cause people to take their own life. And today our victim culture gives such power doesn't it to destroy a career to destroy a future so so easily especially with our web of social media which should really be called anti-social media.

Our victim culture is a vicious culture destroys people and if it comes into the church it can destroy churches. It is destroying churches.

And that's why says James not many of you should be teachers. The stakes are so very high because God cares so greatly for his people and for his church.

[28:11] Read what Paul says the apostle in chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians about the great responsibility that there is upon those to build God's church. All our work will be judged by God he says.

The day will disclose whether we've been building with gold and silver and precious stones or just with nothing but straw. And he says that those who trifle with God's church like that will suffer loss.

And he goes on to say that those who destroy God's temple his church he will destroy. And that's a terrible warning to anybody who thinks that they're on God's side but in fact are stirring up divisions and fighting in Christ's church.

Be very, very careful. The Lord Jesus loves and cherishes his precious bride. He will not see his bride mistreated lightly by anyone no matter how gifted or how clever they are with their words.

And likewise James warns here. And very often the truth is that those who crave the status of leadership roles they do have divided hearts.

[29:23] They're driven by wrong motives of pride and desire for prominence not from hearts that are truly humble before God. And Jesus says what comes out of your mouth proceeds from your heart.

heart. And if that's true then what you're spreading won't be health will it? It'll be disease because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

James is just echoing what he heard the Lord Jesus saying. And remember Jesus warned repeatedly didn't he about the destructive power of even orthodox teaching when it comes from proud hearts that love to be seen love to be heard.

But where 11 of the Pharisees and the Sadducees he said why their teaching was orthodox well it's not just what you teach but it's what you are when you teach that matters because what you are will also affect people or infect people in a host of ways maybe unseen for a long time as well as much more visible and the more people that you have responsibility for the greater the influence will be for good or for great harm.

I could take you to churches today where the legacy of underlying godly ministry still is enriching fellowships two generations on.

[30:53] But I'm afraid I can also take you to churches where the legacy of undoubtedly gifted ministry is still blighting churches decades on.

The tongue is a very small organ but it can give influence can't it to a very big ego. You don't need to teach heresy. You can be as sound as a pound but the attitudes that you convey, the values that you display, that you cherish, they will have a very great effect.

And that will be true of any Bible teacher in any setting but especially of any church pastor. And so we need to be asking, don't we, is he a proud preacher shouting the truth at others?

Or is he himself a humble listener sharing that same truth with others? And you see that's what James then homes in on in verses 13 to 18 when having warned us don't covet, don't pursue gifted status, he says instead do cherish and do promote godly service.

there's real health, he says, in highly valuing godliness and character. The godliness and character that loves people and that seeks peace.

[32 : 19] Because that produces leaders who love to serve and help others and it results in churches that are characterized by continual fruit unlike the world. That penitent wisdom is divine, he says, verse 15.

It comes from heaven and it leads to heaven. because it reflects the true humility of Christ who of course is the wisdom of God incarnate. If not many are to be teachers who lead others by teaching God's word, and that is how the church is led, the church is not led by man's word, but by God's word.

That's why the who teaches it is so important. But if not many are to be teachers, then what sort of leaders are we to seek and promote and listen to?

Well, James says those who show themselves to be people who themselves are receiving with meekness the implanted word, which is bearing fruit visibly in what James here calls the meekness of wisdom.

That's evidence of someone who is wise and understanding, who can help others grow in wisdom and spiritual health and not lead them to wander off into spiritual harm. That won't be the one who's boasting proudly of great things, but it's someone who James says will have a track record of conduct that shows that their faith is true and living.

[33 : 47] Those words good, good conduct in verse 13, it means beauty, it means worth. That's the meekness of true wisdom, it's beautiful to God, it's often despised in the world.

In the culture of James' day, meekness actually appeared on a list of moral faults. It's not the way that the careers officer will tell you, or a recruiting agency will tell you to buff your CV, will it, to get a job today.

It's all about putting yourself forward, isn't it? Telling you how wonderful you are, impressing in the interview, why I'm the best person for the job, or why I'm certainly better than him or her, or Z or Zim, I suppose, these days, whoever it is.

But how utterly different from the world's wisdom is this true wisdom that James says is to characterize Christ's church. No, don't look for those who talk the talk, however impressive their talk is, look for those who walk the walk.

Not the person quick to demonstrate their giftedness, but the one who demonstrates quietly and consistently their godliness. madness. It always astonishes me today that almost all employers only ask for a reference after somebody has already secured the job, and the only reason you get the reference is just to prove that what they've said about their previous employment was actually true.

[35 : 09] The reference serves no other purpose at all. It is utter madness. The most important thing in any job interview is to know what somebody has been like before. The absolutely best predictor of future performance and future behavior is past behavior.

And that's true in the church, just as it is in the world. Pronounced giftedness may dazzle people, but can equally lead to disaster, can't it? Proven godliness, a much, much more solid foundation, conduct that's known for its beauty, for its worth, the meekness of true wisdom.

Now, notice meekness is not at all. Weakness, meekness is the opposite of weakness, it's real strength. Humility means someone's not insecure, they don't need to prove themselves all the time.

The proud person is the insecure person. And so, verse 14, they do have a heart driven by bitter jealousy, by selfish ambition, but that is a sign of a divided heart, somebody who's proud, who's not humbled by the true grace of God in Christ.

Proving itself. And as James says there, proving false to the truth. He mentions this jealousy, this selfish ambition twice, do you see? Verse 14 and verse 16, so it must be a big problem.

[36 : 35] And we know it's a big problem. We know the insecurity of the proud heart. It's not a rarity in the church, is it? It's not a rarity among those who covet a role in Christian ministry of some kind.

The person who needs constant affirmation, can't take any criticism, who holds a great grudge where anybody does dare to criticize, who covets the position of others, so denigrates others consistently in order to puff themselves up and make themselves look better.

A man like that in the church will be somebody who constantly criticizes the preachers, especially the younger ones, who thinks he knows better, he knows more, thinks he should be heard much more.

And if he feels that's not happening, well, what he'll do is seek to gain influence by seeking some sort of influence over a group of admirers. He'll flatter them, he'll feed his own teaching to them, he'll puff them up, and they will become like him.

And the result, verse 16 here, says there'll be every kind of disorder and vile practice, the fruit of carping and criticism, fights over doctrine, futile controversies.

[37 : 49] All the things, by the way, the apostle Paul repeatedly warns Timothy and Titus to flee from in their letters. Well, perhaps you've met people like that.

A woman who is like that, her pride may manifest in a desperate need to be needed and noticed. She'll be constantly doing so much for people so they realize how desperately needed she is.

But if it's not recognized and not repeatedly acknowledged enough, she'll go off in the huff and nurse a grudge and say to herself or maybe even say to others, I've done so much for you, you don't recognize it, you don't appreciate it.

But the truth is, you see, you're not actually doing it for them, are you? You're doing it for you. Not for praise of God, but for the praise of others, just like the Pharisees in chapter 6 of Matthew's gospel.

All you've done to them actually is exhaust them and make them feel they're constantly in your debt, constantly having to feed your ego, otherwise you'll go off in a huff. Read C.S.

[38 : 56] Lewis' description of Mrs. Fidget in his book *The Four Loves* for a perfect and an amusing description of that attitude. But you see, James says the way of true wisdom in the Christian church, the kind of leadership that will sow God's word so as to produce what he calls a harvest of righteousness in verse 18, is the antithesis of that self-centered and jealous and ambitious natural way.

And James says plainly in verse 15, that way is demonic. And it will lead only to horrible relational disorder, vile goings on, verse 16, revealing not the fruit of the spirit, but revealing instead the footprints of Satan.

And if, friends, if a church is characterized by disorder like that, then James says it's a sign that its whole attitude to leadership is wrong, it's poisoned. There's a culture of envy, of rivalry, of pride, breeding competitiveness, particularly among men.

It's a culture that denies, he says, the very heart of the faith in Jesus Christ, the servant king who calls all of us to follow him, his way. And it's just the same in any university, CU, in any mission, in any Christian group.

Well, I'm standing up here in front of you as a Christian leader. I'm feeling very much in James' cross here, I was very exposed, and so I should be. And every other pastor, every other leader within our fellowship, whatever that role may be, we all need to receive this word, don't we, with meekness.

- [40 : 42] And by the way, it's not just a problem for leaders and not just them who are in the cross here. It's very often the even bigger problem is those who are not in Christian leadership, who feel passed over maybe, and who resent it, and who are bitter and jealous in their hearts.

For those who are in leadership roles that they covet, easy to resent that, isn't it? Easy to feel you know better. You could do better. And easy then to just criticize others, spread discontent, seek to undermine those whose leadership that you do resent.

Very easy, isn't it, in a church to think that, I'm against what they're doing. I don't like that we're doing this. I don't like that we're doing that. I'm upset about this thing. I'm upset about that, or whatever it might be.

And very often what that really comes down to is pride in the heart that I have not been consulted about this. Why have I not been consulted?

Because I know so much better. It's what we naturally think, isn't it? I always think I know better. But look at verse 15.

- [41 : 54] That attitude is not the wisdom from above. It's not mature godly wisdom of real Christian people. It's the opposite. Look at where James says that comes from.

I don't think James could get away with saying that in a church meeting today, could he? There'd be a complaint immediately. He's upsetting people. He's offending people. That's abusive behavior, James. I'm not even going to say the word.

But could there be demonic behavior in your growth group? then release the word in your Bible study group or in your thoughts, in your heart right here and now.

James says we need to be careful. Don't harbor jealous ambition, envy in your hearts. Don't crave status. Don't abuse it proudly if you have it.

Don't grudge it bitterly if you don't have it. Now if you want to display mature Christian character, he says pursue godly service humbly, meekly, peacefully.

- [43 : 10] That's the real wisdom of Christ from above and that is what bears real fruit. Verse 18, lasting fruit, a harvest of righteousness that's sown in peace by those who are quiet peacemakers.

pursue humble godly service, he says, all of us and let's promote those who manifest that kind of spirit into Christian leadership in the church because they are ones who can be trusted to teach God's people the right things, the right way.

That is what Paul means, by the way, when in Timothy and Titus, he says that church leaders, overseers, presbyters, must be able to teach. It is not giftedness he is talking about there.

Many people totally misunderstand him to be saying that. The context in 1 Timothy and Titus and especially in 2 Timothy 2 verse 24 where he uses that term makes it absolutely clear it is godliness of character that makes someone somebody that other people can learn from because they can look up to them at their life and therefore they can listen to what comes from their lips.

He says that person is not quarrelsome but kind not harsh but patient and gentle. That's the person you can learn from isn't it?

- [44 : 32] Of course there are gifts of teaching that God bestows upon his church. Ephesians 4 is very clear on that but the way that we are to discern these as the church is not to look for the charismata, the gifting, the competence but to look at their character.

Not to look at the gift but look for their godliness. So what kind of things in someone's character produce the harvest, literally the fruit of righteousness that Christ wants in his church?

Well, look at verse 17. It's the pure heart, not the proud one in a leader, without dividedness, without self-interest.

It's a peaceable one, not a pugilistic one. Somebody who is eager for harmony, who doesn't love conflict, who's gentle, that is kind, not harsh, not provocative.

Of course, courage is needed in any Christian service. Yes, a Christian leader must be willing to fight, but to fight the good fight, Paul says to Timothy, not the wrong fight, the bad fight.

[45 : 38] Don't crave controversy. Don't quarrel about words. Don't do things that produce envy and dissension and slander and constant friction among people. Avoid quarreling.

Avoid foolish controversies. Read it in the pastorals again and again and again. That's not the good fight. Pastoral leadership is the very opposite of political leadership, which is all about jockeying for position, self-assertion, influencing, however, by fair or foul means.

No, that is the way of the pagan rulers of the world, said Jesus to his disciples. Not so, not so with you. Verse 17 again, it's the reasonable person, says James.

Not the reckless person, not someone who's stubborn, unwilling ever to yield. It's someone who takes advice, who values advice. Not someone who always knows best and says, it's my way or the highway.

People in Christian ministry sometimes can develop a persecution complex. They think, well, I'm God's man, it's me. I'm like Athanasius, contra mundum, against the world.

[46 : 48] And that being fruitful, being faithful means standing alone, never taking advice, no matter what anybody else says. No, no, no, says James. Real wisdom is open to reason. And look, it's merciful.

It's not macho. Producing good fruits of mercy. Not the bitter fruits of hard and harsh battering of people with the truth.

You know, especially men and especially young men can confuse soundness in doctrine with harshness, can't they?

And speak to people in very unfeeling ways, very cruelly at times, in the name of speaking the truth about sin. Remember the Lord Jesus. He was always merciful in his truthfulness as well as truthful in his mercy.

The wisdom from above and the true leader you want will be filled with the same mercy that he knows that he needs and has needed and has experienced multiple times over and over from the God of all grace and mercy.

[48 : 00] It would be like the old priest in the old order that Hebrews 5 says can deal gently with the wayward because he himself is beset with weaknesses. So, real godly wisdom in all leadership in the Christian church.

Look at verse 17 again. It's impartial. It's not double-minded or partisan. It's utterly sincere. It's not at all sham or phony.

It shows the same rich grace and mercy to all with that distinction even to their opponents.

It's just the real true solid humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it? It comes from hearts that are touched by that mercy and grace in Christ.

And are wholeheartedly demonstrating that grace to all unselfishly in that real godly service. That's what our Lord cherishes, not giftedness, not status, but godliness and service.

[49 : 18] And that's what the church needs always, isn't it? So, if you're not a leader in some capacity in the church, James says don't crave it.

Don't covet and pursue status. Rather, be an eager learner, quick to hear, quick to receive meekly God's word of life, to hear it and to do it.

And if you are a leader, and dozens and dozens of you are leaders in different ways, then make it your aim not to display your giftedness, but your godliness, meekly humbly and peaceably.

That's the way, James says, to a real harvest of righteousness. And that's the only way for us to have a church that's characterized by continual fruitfulness, shaped not by the ways of this world, but by the word, the word of God, the implanted word that is able to save our souls.

A searching word, but one for all of us. Amen. Let's pray together. The tongue is a restless evil full of deadly poison.

[50 : 39] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the image of God. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Lord, forgive us that so often we do speak so wrongly, so damagingly to ourselves, to others. We confess that of ourselves we can't tame our tongues because we can't cleanse our own hearts.

And yet how we thank you, Lord, that you can, that you give us more grace when we do humble ourselves before you. you.

So help us, Lord, to be humble in your presence, to receive your word, yes, of rebuke, but also of restoration, which you promise to all who will swallow our pride in penitence and will draw near to you.

Deliver us, we pray, from bitter jealousy, from selfish ambition, and by your spirit, Lord, will you fill us with purity and gentleness and mercy and the desire for peace, the things that will bring forth a harvest of true righteousness, both among us, but also through us, as people who are being shaped by and who are showing forth the meekness of wisdom, the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[52 : 23] For we ask it in his name. Amen.