

James 3:13-18
Wisdom from Hell vs. Wisdom from Heaven, Part 2
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Perhaps you remember from college or from reading at some point the parable of the Greek philosopher Aristotle's *Fish*. In that parable he reminded us that the very last way to discover what its like to be wet is to ask a fish, because a fish has no point of comparison. If you want to know what it's like to be wet, ask someone who's normally dry but who has experienced wet.

You know, on the surface that seems like a fairly simple parable, and yet it's really quite profound when you consider it, and in fact, it provides a sort of rich insight into our problems both as human beings as well as Christians. For example, you and I have no way of ourselves to properly evaluate the culture in which we live. That's because we're a part of it. Just as a fish is wet in part of the ocean and can't really evaluate wetness, you and I as part of our culture don't have the capacity to really evaluate it because it's part and parcel to who we are, it surrounds us. I have often prayed that God would allow me to live and think outside of my times. One way to accomplish that, by the way, C. S. Lewis suggested, was to read outside of our times. Because then the sort of fresh breezes of other ages come sweeping across our souls and allow us to compare where we are and our culture is with where cultures have been in the past.

We also have no certain way in ourselves to evaluate our own lives. Because we live our lives, we are surrounded by the atmosphere of our lives and cannot therefore compare them to what they ought to be. We also have no sure way within ourselves to evaluate our thinking because our thinking has permeated our mind from the beginning, and it's how we think, and to us it appears perfectly legitimate and fine because its how we've always thought. It's an expression of who we are. It is the ocean, if you will of wetness in which we live; and therefore, it's impossible to really evaluate it.

In the end, the only way to accurately evaluate ourselves is to measure ourselves against an objective standard; a standard outside of us. And there's only one true reliable standard and that is our all wise Creator. And He has revealed to us that standard against which we can legitimately measure ourselves in His own eternal Word. And the Bible says that the man and the woman who takes advantage of having access to God's standard, to God's thoughts, to God's

wisdom is himself or herself wise. And if you refuse to measure yourself against the standard of the wisdom of God, then God says you're a fool.

This is the message of James 3 beginning in 13. Let's turn there together; we continue our study in this great book. Those of you who are visiting with us, it's for many months now we have been studying this great letter, we find ourselves at the end of James 3. James was the half-brother of our Lord, raised in the home that He was raised in, probably the next oldest to Jesus, and he, only at the resurrection, after the resurrection came to embrace his half brother as all that He claimed to be. He became the leader of the Jerusalem church, and now that his church has been scattered because of a persecution that arose recorded for us in Acts 12, he writes this letter to these people who were at one time a part of his congregation with these very practical, profound instructions. Let me read it for you, you follow along beginning in James 3:13.

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, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Now James is here clearly addressing the issue of wisdom or specifically of two kinds of wisdom. One we will learn is the wisdom of heaven. The other in opposition to it is wisdom literally from hell itself. It is the expression of the mind of Satan, and it's rampant in the world in which we live. Last week we began to look at this paragraph, really in reality we began to look at the background of this paragraph, and we saw last week three important points that are absolutely essential to understand this paragraph or this text.

Let me briefly review those points with you that we discovered last week.

Number one: the categorical priority of wisdom, the categorical priority. Who among you is wise and understanding? Beneath James' questioning lies two huge presuppositions. One is that wisdom is desirable, that every Christian should want it. And secondly beneath that question lies the presupposition that wisdom is important. It's crucial, it's essential to the Christian life and

experience. Last week we examined in great detail the huge priority that both the Old Testament and the New Testament place on this quality of wisdom.

But that brings us to the second question or the second point, I should say, that we examined last time and that is: the biblical definition of wisdom. James uses the word there in verse 13, “wise”. That Greek word that’s translated wise there gets it’s meaning from its Old Testament Hebrew twin. Last week we learned that that Old Testament word for wisdom really consists of three essential elements. If you want to know what Godly wisdom is, if you want to know what God’s wisdom that you and I can possess is, it can be reduced to three essential elements.

Here’s a definition: element number one, fearing God. True biblical wisdom expresses itself in a spirit of awe and reverence and respect for God. It acknowledges who God is and then lives the life in response to that knowledge. To fear God, by the way, is not simply to say, “Yeah I believe in God. I believe that He made me.” That’s not fearing God. To fear God means to recognize who He is and then to live in light of that. You say you believe in God and then to live as if you were an atheist, to live ignoring God is not to fear God. So, wisdom, true biblical wisdom consists in fearing God.

Second basic element of wisdom is: understanding God’s ways. In the Old Testament, the way, the Hebrew word for way is a word for a well-worn path. It’s the rut that’s left in the road by a wagon wheel as it rolls over the same territory again and again. And so, it came to speak of predictable patterns of behavior, habits if you will or habits of character. You and I have ways, paths that we go down again and again. They’re the patterns of behavior in our lives. Well God Himself has predictable patterns of behavior. We call them His attributes. And the wise person not only fears God, but he seeks to understand God as He’s revealed Himself in the word of God, to understand His predictable patterns of behavior. This is how God is. This is what He does. This is what He’s like.

A third basic element of wisdom, biblical wisdom: not only do you fear God, not only do you seek to understand God and His ways. And this third one is crucial. This rounds out true biblical wisdom. To have true biblical wisdom is: to have the practical skill to apply God’s ways and God’s words to life. You see it’s not enough just to fill your head your brain with information about God. Or to even say, yes, I fear God. There must be the effort of the whole person to take the word of God and the ways of God and apply them to how you live. Without that it’s not biblical wisdom at all. You see biblical wisdom then, when you look at fearing God, understanding the ways of God and then having the practical skill to apply what you know about

God and what He wants to your life, biblical wisdom is nothing more than having a genuine relationship with the true God. It is true spirituality. In the end, biblical wisdom is nothing more than being a true Christian. And without biblical wisdom, you're not a Christian at all.

So, that raises the third point that we looked at last time and that is: how, the practical acquisition of wisdom, the practical acquisition of wisdom. Well, first and foremost we acquire God's wisdom through a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 1:24, "to those who are called, Christ becomes the wisdom of God." You know the Bible is clear that you don't get on the path to wisdom until you come in faith to Christ. If you have never come to the place in your life where you have left your own path, left your own ways and all that you want to do and you have willingly submitted yourself to become a genuine follower of Jesus Christ as your Lord, your Master, your Savior; then the Bible says you are a fool and you have no wisdom at all. That's where true biblical wisdom begins; in a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But it doesn't stop there. We also can acquire Godly wisdom, the Bible says, through a thorough knowledge of God's Word. There was a passage I wanted to take you to last time but didn't in the interest of time, I want you to go there this morning. Proverbs 2, here in Proverbs 2 Solomon reminds us of this reality. That you and I gain God's wisdom; we begin to think like God; we begin to understand how it is that God acts and how we're to live in light of that from the word of God. That's how we learn God's wisdom. It's contained right here in these pages and Solomon makes that clear starting in 2:1.

My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver and search for her as hidden treasures; Then [Stop there. Did you notice the first four verses were the "if" statement and the "then" statement comes in verse 5? If all of those things are true, then verse 5,] you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *He is* a shield to those who walk uprightly."

Notice what Solomon says, you want to find God's wisdom? You search for it. You cry out for it, but where do you look? Where do you search? Notice verse 1: "in words and in commandments." In verse 6, the Lord gives wisdom, ultimately it comes from Him, but the wisdom He gives comes from His mouth. In other words, it's what He reveals in His Word.

Where do you get God's wisdom? You get it from His words. Out of His mouth, from His commandments, that's how God gives us wisdom. He doesn't zap us with some, you know, spiritual wand. We get the wisdom of God from the mind of God as it's revealed in the Word of God. And you'll never find it any where else.

So, we get it through a saving knowledge of Christ, we get it through a thorough knowledge of God's word; thirdly, we get it through the influence of wise companions. In other words, from the influence of others who are permeated by and influenced by the Word of God. Proverbs 13:20 says, "he who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." You hang around people who have the wisdom of God, who understand what God wants and His ways, who seek to apply His truth to their lives and it rubs off. You hang around those who don't, and you will only become more foolish.

A fourth way that we acquire Godly wisdom is: through prayer. Ephesians 1:17, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation." Pray. James 1:5, "If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." And we saw it even in Proverbs 2, If you're seeking wisdom; yes, go to the words of God. Go to the commands of God, listen to the things that come from the mouth of God as they're revealed here, but then lift up your voice, cry out to God to give you understanding as you go through that process. So, prayer is a crucial part of this as well.

Now those points that we looked at last week were somewhat introductory, and it's with that background, that today I want us to begin to carefully examine the passage itself. Turn with me to James 3, and let's look again at this passage together. Like Old Testament wisdom literature this short paragraph is condensed wisdom. There is so much more here than a cursory reading of these verses can uncover or unpack. I have spent now, probably close to thirty-five, forty hours studying these short verses, this one paragraph, and I'm telling you, I don't think I've plumbed the depths that are here yet. But it's my goal this morning to try to express a little of what I've learned, and we'll continue our study of this paragraph next week and perhaps the following week as well.

You see it takes much time and thought to mine the riches that are in this paragraph. You would expect that, wouldn't you in a paragraph about wisdom; that it wouldn't be something that you could just run your eyes over words on the page and gain all that's there? It's certainly true. A crucial question that we need to begin with as we look at this passage is: to whom is James directing these verses? Some would say that he's directing them to the teachers; mentioned back

up in verse 1. He's saying teachers, those who claim to be teachers and have a spiritual wisdom and understanding; that's who he's addressing. But I think it's much more likely that just like the section on the tongue that we have just come through, the use of our tongue the words that come out of our mouths. That was addressed to all of us as well as to the teachers. I think it's probably best to see this section as addressed to all the church as well.

And he begins the paragraph with a simple rhetorical question. "Who among you is wise and understanding?" James says alright I want all of you in the congregation to whom I'm writing who think you have a special insight into spiritual matters to stand up, and let me give you a test. I want you to carefully evaluate the reality of your claim. Do you think you have the wisdom that comes from God? Do you claim to fear God, to understand His ways and to apply His ways and His works to your life? Then I want you to listen up. You know there's a disturbing implication beneath this paragraph. James is telling us here that it is relatively easy to deceive yourself into thinking that you are living by God's wisdom and yet in reality be pursuing a wisdom that's of the world that is unspiritual, and even, he'll say later, from hell itself. He says I want you to examine yourself and the wisdom that you think you have, the understanding of spiritual matters you think you have, the maturity in Christ you think you have.

You see there is a true biblical wisdom that comes down to us from God as it's revealed in this Word. The Bible claims that it is the revelation of the wisdom of God. Now that really goes without proof, but I want to prove it to you because of the day in which we live. Increasingly, people deny the Bible either makes that claim or deny that it's trustworthy. Let me turn with you back to Psalm 19, Psalm 19. I just want you to see that there is no doubt but what the Bible makes this claim. Psalm 19, a Psalm of David, and in the first six verses. David talks about the works of God in creation. God's manifold wisdom in creating the world, and then he turns in verse 7 to God's wisdom revealed in the Word of God. And he uses a series of six synonyms for God's Word and out of each of those synonyms he describes it with a quality or a characteristic, and then he explains how it functions, how it works; follow along, verse 7.

The law of the LORD [There's our first synonym for the Bible] "is perfect, blameless, restoring the ... ["nefesh", the entire person; The testimony of the LORD is sure, [it's certain] making wise the simple. [In other words, here it claims, the Bible itself claims through the pen of David and ultimately the Holy Spirit that it will give wisdom to us. It is God's wisdom to us.] Verse 8, The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; [They bring consummate joy to us.] The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. [God's

Word will remove the blinders from your spiritual eyes and allow you to see the wisdom of God.] The fear of the LORD is clean, and it endures forever; [It isn't s tied to first century; God's Word is eternally settled in heaven. Not one jot or one tittle, Jesus says not the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet and not the smallest little crook of a letter of the Hebrew alphabet will pass away until all has been fulfilled.] And verse 9 says, The judgments of the LORD are [Literally truth, they're truth] and they are all together righteous. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than the honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. [And there's nothing that you desire that's more precious than this.]

Now listen, we live in a culture that is a post-modern culture and post-modern culture rejects the claim that there is absolute truth. They reject the claim that if there is absolute truth, we can know it. And so, they come to the Bible with that same mindset. There is today what's called in in theological circles, a new hermeneutic. Hermeneutic is simply a system of principles for interpreting the Bible. This new hermeneutic is called the hermeneutic of humility. And essentially. It says this, "Well, you know I'm too humble, I mean, who am I to say what the Bible means? What you think it means, and what I think it means may both be true, or neither be true. Somebody else may have it right. I'm much too humble to say, this is what God says." And yet that is not at all how the Scripture speaks. They are sure; they are settled; they are certain; they are eternal; they are truth. The propositional sentences of the Scripture are truth.

Listen, if you choose in your pride to sit in judgment on the Bible's claims and to reject its clear claims to the absolute moral truth, that's fine, you can choose to reject it those claims, and then you one day, some day can stand before a Holy God and try to explain to Him why you thought it was intellectually naïve to embrace His revealed Word. But don't even think about going down the path and claiming that it doesn't claim to be absolute moral truth.

So, just as there is a wisdom from heaven, James wants us to know at the same there co-exists in our world, a wisdom from hell, and here's the heart of the problem. Both of those two distinct wisdoms on the surface appear to be wise. But one edifies and the other destroys, one is a gift from God, and the other is a trap from Satan. So how can you know if you're living according to God's wisdom or hell's wisdom, the world's wisdom is another reference the New Testament makes to it.

Well, James immediately gives us a test by which we can discern which wisdom it is we live by. Verse 13, look at the fourth point that flows from this passage. Number four: the principle test for God's wisdom; the principle test for God's wisdom. The second half of verse 13, "Let him show" [whoever thinks he's wise and understanding] "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."

Now this is a very difficult sentence, both in English as you can see it's a bit confusing and in Greek as well. But let's see if we can make some sense of it. Start with the main verb. The Greek verb or excuse me the Greek word translated "show" means to prove or to provide evidence of something. So, James is saying that a person can show or prove or provide evidence that he is living by God's wisdom, look at verse 13, by his deeds. Show or provide evidence or prove your wisdom by your wise deeds. This is pretty simple to understand. True biblical wisdom evidences itself in specific acts that reflect God's wisdom. If you're wise you are going to make daily choices to do certain things that reveal or reflect that wisdom. That's what he's saying. But, true biblical wisdom doesn't just show itself in occasional sort of isolated acts.

Notice he adds, let him show Godly wisdom in his deeds, by his good behavior. A better way to translate that phrase "good behavior" is by his way of life. In other words, here's what he's saying. You are living by God's wisdom if you're biblically wise actions are a consistent sustained way of life. In other words, it's not just an occasional act of wisdom, you know like a clock that's right twice, a broken clock that's right twice a day. You're not just occasionally displaying God's wisdom. Instead, it is a pattern of life. It is a way of life for you to act in accordance with God's wisdom. To put it another way, your life will be characterized by obedience to the Word of God. "Characterized by" is the key expression.

Listen to the great commentator on James, Robert Johnstone, he says,

We have here again what may be described as the central thought of this letter. That where religion has real saving hold of a heart and mind it cannot from its nature but powerfully influence the outward life.

In other words, listen he saying: if you've been really changed on the inside, then it's going to express itself in how you act; and that the more a Christian has of true wisdom and spiritual knowledge, the more manifestly will his life at all points be governed by his faith. John Blanchard puts it this way, pretty directly. "The trouble with some Christians is that they seem to be suffering from spiritual measles. They're sanctified in spots. Their lives are a

disappointing mixture of the occasionally marvelous and the often mediocre. And, in a Christian, this is disappointing because it shows a lack of wisdom which at the end of the day means a lack of obedience. But external acts, as important as they are, are not enough, that doesn't necessarily mean that you're following God's wisdom. You can be externally obedient to the Scripture and still not be living according to God's wisdom.

Because true spirituality, listen carefully, true spirituality is not simply measured by what you do, the Pharisees did. It's also measured by what's in your heart." Notice verse 13 again, let him show Godly wisdom in his actions, and those obedient actions will be sustained as a way of life; and if it's the real thing, it will be at the same time expressed in the gentleness that comes with true wisdom. Here James turns inward to look at the heart. According to James, biblical wisdom has two primary heart qualities associated with it. Verse 13, gentleness and down in verse 16 which we'll get to in the next week or two, purity.

So, gentleness will be in your heart if you are living by God's wisdom if you're living in true obedience to the Scripture. There'll be gentleness. Now what is this gentleness? Well it's a very difficult word. It translates a Greek word that frankly is almost impossible to translate with one English word. Depending on the version of the Scriptures you have, it's translated either as gentleness or meekness or humility. The first time we really encounter this quality is in Moses. In Numbers 12:3, we're told that "Moses possessed this quality more than any other living man." And then when we come to the New Testament, in Matthew 11:29, we're told that Jesus was characterized by this quality. And moreover, in Matthew 5:5 in the Beatitudes as He begins the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that His true followers will be characterized by this attitude, by this quality.

So, what is it? Well, when you look at this quality, it manifests itself in two different ways. It manifests itself toward God, and it also manifests itself toward other people. And you have to use a slightly different word really to capture its meaning if you're talking about its manifestation toward God versus its manifestation toward people. Let's start with how it manifests itself toward God.

If you have this gentleness toward God, it expresses itself as a calm acceptance of your circumstances as from Him for your good, and you refuse to complain or whine about those circumstances. It is an acknowledgment that God is God and a submission to His will in your life. James is going to come back to this later, and we'll deal with this more in detail as we get to the end toward the end of the book, the end of chapter 4. But what I want you to see here is that

the real attitude that this virtue is describing when it's referenced toward God, you can translate it submission or meekness. It's a mindset that gladly and freely and willingly bows to the sovereign purpose in your life. It's a mindset that says, God You are God and You know what's best, and I willingly accept what You bring. Douglas Moo in his commentary writes,

This virtue comes from understanding our position as sinful creatures in relationship to the glorious and majestic God. It recognizes how unable we are in and of ourselves to chart our own course in the world. This virtue flows out of the conviction that God is sovereign over everything that happens in life and that He is at the same time both wise and good.

And when you believe that about God, then you can accept your circumstances without complaining and arguing.

Let me see if I can flesh this out for you a little bit. I think the clearest exposition of this word as it references itself to God is found back in Psalm 131. Turn there for a moment with me, Psalm 131. It's a short little Psalm that has great wisdom in it. David here speaks of this quality of meekness or submission to God. Here's how he describes it, Psalm 131:1,

O LORD my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Nor in things too difficult [or too marvelous] for me. [And then he gives an image that paints the picture of it.] Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD, from this time forth and forever."

Just as a newly weaned child has utter confidence in as he leans upon his mother's breast, has utter confidence in and dependence on his mother; that is to be the disposition and attitude we're to have toward God in life. Here's great king David, mighty man and warrior, musician, and he submits himself freely. It says my attitude toward You God is like that of a newly weaned child. I simply acknowledge You, I meekly submit myself to Your will and purpose, and I trust You for whatever You bring.

Now let's go back to James 3. That's how this gentleness manifests itself toward God; but what about toward others? You see it also, this virtue that toward God expresses itself in submission and meekness, toward man expresses itself in a humble, gracious, gentle spirit even when wronged. Think about it for a moment, if you really believe God is in charge including those

people that wrong you and irritate you then you can treat them with graciousness and gentleness because you know that even their response to you is under the control of God Himself, and that's what this means. You see it filled out in the New Testament. Let me give you just a couple of passages to consider. In Galatians 6:1 we're told that we are to restore those who sin in this spirit of gentleness, graciousness, humility. Turn with me to Ephesians 4 and here Paul gives more complete commands about this virtue, this quality. Ephesians 4:1, he says,

... [As a] prisoner of the Lord, [I] implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called, [And I want you to walk or live day to day] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

You see the, the atmosphere in which this word occurs? It's one of gentleness and graciousness, concern for others. A few pages over in Colossians 3:12 Paul pictures it this way. He says,

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, of kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

You see the atmosphere in which this word occurs. But not just toward believers are we to manifest this attitude. In Titus 3, Paul reminds us in verse 1,

Remind them, He says to Titus, remind your people there in Crete to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign [literally to blaspheme] no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

If this virtue is a part of you; if you're living by God's wisdom, this virtue is a part of you. And if it's a part of you then toward God, you submit yourself willingly and gladly acknowledging His goodness and His providence in your life, accepting the circumstances that come and toward others you're gentle, and you're gracious, and you're kind.

Let me ask you, does gentleness and meekness, do those words describe you? What about the circumstances you find yourself in right now, I don't know what they are, but whatever

difficulties you face right now. Do you have that spirit of David saying I'm essentially like a weaned child? I trust You God; I know You mean what's best. I put myself in Your hands to do whatever You think is right and best. Or are you whining and complaining, chafing under the purposes of God in your life? How do you respond to others? How do the people that know you best, your family, friends that know you best, how do they think of you? Do they think of you as a gentle, gracious, humble person in your interaction with them?

Listen James isn't concerned with how much you know. We're in a Bible Church, we love to study the Word of God, we know a lot, you've accumulated a lot of knowledge. But James doesn't care. He's unmoved by that. He wants to know what's going on in your heart. He says if you're really living by God's wisdom, if you truly fear God, if you truly understand His ways, if you're really trying to apply His word to your life, then you will be characterized by gentleness by submission to the will and purpose of God and gentleness and graciousness with others. And by the way this will be there. We learn in Galatians 5 that this quality is part of the fruit of the Spirit. So, if you're a believer, then you have the Spirit, and if you have the Spirit then the Spirit is to some measure or another producing this fruit in your life, and if it's not there, then it may very well mean that you're not in Christ at all. You see it's crucial that we try fully to examine ourselves because there is a counterfeit wisdom.

And that brings us to the fifth point that I want us to see and we're just going to take a glance at it today. We'll look at it in more detail next week. Number five, James wants us to understand a clinical description of hell's wisdom, a clinical description of hell's wisdom. In verses 14 - 16 he says, let me tell you about the other kind of wisdom. You see his point in these verses is that some people think they fear God, some people think they understand His ways, they think they're applying God's ways and words in their lives when they have in fact embraced a wisdom from hell. Paul talks a lot about this, but Paul isn't the first.

If you were to go back to the Old Testament you would find passages like Psalm 1:1. "Blessed is the righteous man", and let me tell you about the righteous man the psalmist says, "he doesn't walk in the council or advice of the wicked". He doesn't take the advice of the wicked. He's not walking in accordance with how they say he should walk. Proverbs 21:30, "there is no wisdom and no understanding and no council against the Lord." But turn to 1 Corinthians for a moment, let me just let you see this other wisdom that exists. First Corinthians 1:20,

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its

wisdom did not *come to* know God; God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached [of Christ] to save those who believe.

What's he saying here? He's saying listen folks, there're two kinds of wisdom there's God's wisdom and then there's this other counterfeit wisdom. It's the wisdom of the world. First Corinthians 2:6,

“... we [don't] ... speak [the] wisdom ... that's ... of this age nor of the rulers of this age, but we speak God's *wisdom*....” [Verse 7.]

Verse 13, ... [the things which] we ... speak; not in words taught by human wisdom, but those taught by the Spirit....” 3:19, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.”

Now what's he talking about here? What exactly does this human wisdom, this worldly wisdom, this counterfeit wisdom look like? Very important that you get this. It is not a particular set of propositions. There is God's wisdom and then there is worldly wisdom. It is every thought, every attitude, every word, every act that is contrary to God. There is on the one hand God's wisdom revealed in His words, and there is on the other hand everything that contradicts God's revealed wisdom. That is worldly wisdom or human wisdom. It's every thought that raises itself against the knowledge of God. Listen folks, when it comes to wisdom, there are not many paths that lead to God. There's only one. That means if you stand in the middle of the opportunities paths you can take there are 360 degrees or 360 paths you can take, 359 of those will lead you away from God, and only one of those paths will take you to God and His wisdom.

In Romans 12:2 Paul says something fascinating. He says don't be conformed to this world. What he what he literally says is: don't allow the world to push you into its mold, into its mindset. Did you know that our age has a mindset? It has a set of values by which it lives, and we as believers are supposed to avoid that mindset. This week at the conference in Louisville, Al Mohler, the president of the Southern Seminary and a great theologian of our time, gave a very insightful list of the mindset of our culture. In closing let me just give it to you. Here's worldly wisdom in our day. Here's the mindset of our age. Here's what you ought to avoid like the plague. Here's how our culture expresses itself, the mindset of our age.

Number one: self-fulfillment, self-fulfillment, it's all about me. Life is a quest, and the self is the project. Whatever fulfills me, that's what matters.

Number two: self-sufficiency, every individual possesses what is necessary for meaning and happiness. I just need to look within to find the answers. The answers are there, I just need somebody to draw them out. Nobody outside really can help me. I can help myself. That's where self-help comes from.

Number 3: self-definition, most Americans now believe that they have the ability to define themselves. They can define what it means to be human, what it means to be male, what it means to be female. We claim the right to define marriage any way we want, to define gender any way we want, to find authority, sexuality and everything else; we can define it. We can give it definition; we can decide that this is what it really means.

Fourthly is: self-absorption. Self-absorption, we'll do what ever it takes to become what we need to be. Even people who divorce are beginning to say they're divorcing because I'm just not free to be me. I've got to become me.

Self-transcendence, this one's very popular. This is an obsession with creating one's own designer spirituality. More and more I'm encountering people who just pick and choose from various spirituality's and kind of construct their own deal and that's what's that's what's good for them. That's their truth. That's their spiritual life. They've just sort of, you know cafeteria style chosen from different faiths and put together their own little deal.

Fifth: self-enhancement, the idea that we can extend our lives indefinitely by propping up this and taking out that and, you know, whatever.

Sixth: and then there's self-security. We have an obsession with health and safety. With physical health, with financial health; we're going to protect ourselves. Folks that is the mindset of our age and if you add to that mix, evolution and a moral relativism that says, "There is no moral absolute, it's all relative to your situation." And the post-modern rejection of absolute truth and you have a picture of today's wisdom or the human wisdom that dominates our world. And you know all of that on the surface seems so wise, doesn't it? You read about it when you're standing in Barnes & Noble and some latest best seller, and it seems so wise. Why is that? It's because like Aristotle's parable, when you live in water you don't know you're all wet. You can live in foolishness and not know that it's stupid. God says that if you swallow the

wisdom of the world, if you're following the mindset of this age you are a fool. So how do you get on the right path? Proverbs 1:7, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and destruction."

Where do you begin? I began with it this morning, you begin at Christ. You begin following God's wisdom by finding His wisdom in His Son. By giving up yourself and your way and saying I'm going to be His disciple, His follower.

Let's pray together.

Father thank You for Your truth, for Your wisdom that You have revealed to us.

I pray that for us who know You, through Your Son, who are followers of Your Son, who fear You, who are understanding Your ways as You've revealed them, and who are applying Your truth to our lives, Father help us to be serious about this. Help us to search for Your wisdom in Your Word, to lift up our voice in prayer, to hang around those who are wise.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who have never come to really bow their will to Your Son's will. Lord, I pray that this morning they would begin the path to wisdom. Help them to see that right now as You see them that they are foolish because they have refused to embrace Your wisdom as revealed in Your Son. May this be the morning they turn from their own way to follow Him.

We pray it for His glory and in His name, Amen.