

James 3:13-18
Wisdom from Hell vs. Wisdom from Heaven, Part 3
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We turn again to James 3, the ancient words that come to us from the pen of the half-brother of the Lord Jesus and the man who ended up as the head of the Jerusalem church, who now writes to those who had been scattered from his church across that area of the world because of persecution.

In the early 1980's New York University professor Daniel Yankolovich created a huge stir with his book entitled *New Rules: Searching for Self-fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down*. In the book he documented a massive shift in social values that occurred in the 1970's. Many of us lived through those years. The old rules, Yankolovich says, stressed duty to others, especially to your own family. Under the old rules if you were selfish and got caught being selfish, you were embarrassed, even as a non-Christian. But not any more, people now live for what he calls the duty to self ethic. This ethic teaches that our primary responsibility is for self-fulfillment for our own needs and for our own personal interests. Yankolovich's surveys show that a frightening 83% of Americans had bought into these new rules either in whole or in part.

It was sometimes sometime later that James Hunter used the same questionnaire that Yankolovich had used, and he surveyed students and faculty in sixteen leading evangelical colleges and seminaries. Listen to what Hunter writes, his conclusions from the survey that he conducted.

“The percentage of evangelical students agreeing with these statements far exceeded the corresponding percentage of the general population. Self-fulfillment is no longer a natural bi-product of a life committed to higher ideals but rather is a goal, pursued rationally and with calculation as an end in itself. The quest for emotional, psychological, and social maturity therefore becomes normative. Self-expression and self-realization compete for self-sacrifice as the guiding life ethic.”

This is what the world lives for; to be self-absorbed, to be fulfilling self in some way. The new ethic is the duty to self. That may be the mindset of the culture, and in fact it is, it permeates our

culture, but in the paragraph that we've been studying, James deals an absolute death blow to that kind of thinking for Christians. Let me read this paragraph again to you, James 3:13 through the end of the chapter. You follow along as I read them. He writes,

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. ... 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.

In this paragraph it's obvious that James is discussing two kinds of wisdom; two conflicting, opposing sets of wisdom. Let me remind you of the path that we've taken over the last few weeks, briefly remind you of the points we've discovered in this passage. First of all, we saw the priority of Godly wisdom. Even in the question itself, "who among you is wise and understanding?" is implied that this is important and that to his Christian readers the issue of wisdom would have been a priority, it would have been important in their lives.

Secondly, we saw the definition of Godly wisdom. What is this wisdom that is from God? Biblical wisdom we discovered consists of three essential elements. First of all, fearing God, secondly, understanding God's ways that is what God is like and how He acts toward us, and thirdly, applying God's ways and God's words to our own lives. That's biblical wisdom.

Thirdly, we looked together at the acquisition of Godly wisdom. How is it that you and I can gain this kind of wisdom from God? We discovered that there are four ways the Bible teaches us.

Number one, first and foremost through a saving knowledge of Christ who as Paul says, "has become to us the wisdom of God." Wisdom begins the day you bow your knee to Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we discovered we acquire wisdom through a thorough knowledge of God's Word. Wisdom is imparted through this book. This is God's wisdom revealed to us and only as we understand and grasp the truth of this book do we gain the mind of Christ; do we gain the wisdom of God.

Thirdly, we acquire Godly wisdom through the influence of wise companions. He who is a companion of the wise will be wise the proverb says.

And fourthly, we discovered we receive Godly wisdom through prayer. If any man lacks wisdom, James himself says in chapter 1, let him ask of God. We receive God's wisdom in those ways.

Fourthly we saw in weeks past, last week actually, the test for God's wisdom. How can you be sure that you have God's wisdom? The end of verse 13 puts it this way, "let him show," if you think you're wise and understanding, "let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." There are three tests in that brief half-verse.

First of all, there's the test of "wise deeds", "let him show Godly wisdom in his deeds, or by his wise actions."

The second test is: a "consistent life". Those obedient actions, James says, will be sustained as good behavior it's better translated as a way of life. There won't be just sporadic acts of wisdom but there will be a life characterized by, consistently characterized by this kind of act.

And the third test for God's wisdom that we saw was: if it's real biblical wisdom, it will at the same time express itself in the "gentleness" that comes from true wisdom. What is, what does it mean to be gentle? What does that word mean?

Well, we've discovered there are two aspects to the word; one has to do with God and the other has to do with people around us. Gentleness shows itself toward God in a calm acceptance of our circumstances of its providence in our lives as from God, for our good, and we absolutely refuse to complain about those circumstances or to argue with God.

Toward man, gentleness expresses itself in a humble, gracious spirit even when wronged. What both of those aspects of gentleness have in common is a control over your spirit. In one case, it's a control that freely submits yourself to God's wisdom and God's will even if you don't understand or you disagree. And on the other hand, it's a self-control that allows you to be gentle and gracious even when you're being attacked, even when you're being hurt by others. If you're truly living in God's wisdom, the test is: you will be gentle in those two senses.

Now, last time we ended our study by beginning to examine a fifth point that flows out of this passage. In verses 14 - 16, James gives us an analysis of hell's wisdom, an analysis not of God's wisdom but of this counterfeit wisdom. James' point in verses 14 - 16 is that some people think they really fear God, they think they really understand God's ways, they think they are applying God's truth to their lives, when in fact they have embraced a counterfeit wisdom that originates not from heaven but from hell itself. Now what exactly is this counterfeit wisdom?

We defined it this way last time; it is every thought, every attitude, every word, every act that is contrary to God's revealed wisdom in His Word. Everything that finds itself contrary to God's revealed wisdom. On the one hand, it's God's wisdom revealed in the Scripture for us. On the other hand, is everything else in all the various forms and expressions of human wisdom that stand in opposition to God's wisdom. Understand though, when we talk about human wisdom it's not like there's one thing that you can define as human wisdom. Instead, human wisdom is like a chameleon that seems to change itself to match its circumstances. You can see it everywhere in various contexts and looking like various things. It is everything in the end, that is opposed to God.

For example, human wisdom drives the secular culture around us. It can be found easily in the prevailing mindset of our day with its orgiastic pursuit of self-fulfillment and self-absorption. That's human wisdom. That fulfillment of self or duty to self ethic that Yankolovich was talking about, that's an expression of human wisdom, and it permeates the culture around us. But it also can even take on, human wisdom can even take on, countless spiritual forms. It can be found even in the church. It can be wrapped in the cloak of piety. It can disguise itself in religious language and it can defend itself with arguments from the Bible, let me say that again. It can defend itself with arguments from the Bible.

But here is the key, listen carefully. Regardless of how many forms and manifestations human wisdom may take, whether it's secular or spiritual, whether it is absolute self-absorption in self-pursuit or cloaked in the garb of religiosity, human wisdom looks the same at its core. And so what James is going to help us to do is understand the core issues behind all the manifestations and all the forms that human wisdom may take because he wants us to be able to recognize it. So, he provides us, here in verses 14 - 16, with an analysis of hell's wisdom in whatever form it takes. These things are always true of hell's wisdom, of that wisdom that is in opposition to God's wisdom.

Now let me just track you through this, give you a brief outline of his analysis here. In verse 14 he's going to describe for us the chief characteristics of hell's wisdom. In verse 15 he describes its origin or its source and then in verse 16 he identifies the results that it always produces in whatever form it takes. So, let's look first in verse 14 at the chief characteristics of hell's wisdom. Verse 14, "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."

You see whatever form human wisdom takes, it always has two dominant characteristics in the human heart. Two characteristic motives always lie behind any wisdom that stands opposed to God's revealed wisdom. So, you can always recognize it this way, whether it's wearing a religious robe, or whether it's wearing the secular mindset of the culture. It'll always be characterized by these two chief characteristics.

Their motives: James says do an inventory of your motives, and you can quickly discover whether you are living by God's wisdom or a counterfeit wisdom. The key in verse 14 is the phrase, "if you are" and it's the present tense, if you are having in your heart. He says look at your heart. Is your heart consistently manifesting these qualities, these negative qualities? He says ransack your heart, and see if you are consistently motivated either by bitter jealousy or by selfish ambition. If you discover that these monsters rule in your heart then you're not living by God's wisdom regardless of what it may appear to others. Regardless of how religious you are or how much Bible knowledge you know or how pious you may appear to others. If you find these motives living and breathing and ruling in your heart, then you're not living by God's wisdom. It's interesting, these two vices, here in verse 14, often come together in the New Testament. You find them in the same verse in 1 Corinthians 3:3 and 2 Corinthians 12:20 and Galatians 5:20, they're often related and intertwined, and we'll see why as we go along.

So, let's look at these two chief characteristics, these two motives that always accompany every form of human wisdom. Look first at bitter jealousy, bitter jealousy. The word translated "jealousy" is the Greek word from which our English word "zeal" comes. At its most basic level the word "zeal" refers to "energy, to heat, to enthusiasm for a cause". Now, in the New Testament this zeal can be good, this energy, this heat for a cause can be good if the cause is good and the motive is right. We see it in the life of Christ in John 2:17; we're told that when Christ cleansed the temple it was zeal, heat for God's cause that motivated Him. But zeal can be, and frankly most often in the New Testament is used, to speak of an evil motive: a kind of heat that isn't for the right cause or that isn't motivated by the right things, but instead is entirely self-oriented.

We know this is how James intends this word because of the word he adds to it: bitter, bitter jealousy. “Bitter” is used in the Greek text to describe “sour”, “bitter tasting fruit of a wild vine” in the Septuagint. So, it came to describe a person who is sour, bitter, harsh. In this sense, this bitter or harsh zeal is an intense emotion that is selfishly directed at another person or as it’s translated here, “jealousy”. One lexicon defines it this way, it denotes “the kind of zeal which does not try to help others but rather to harm them.” Here’s the key: “the predominate concern being personal advancement.” Another person writes: it is a fierce desire to promote one’s own opinion to the exclusion of those of others. To be jealous is to feel resentment against someone else because you see that person in competition with you, and you resent their success or their advantages or something else about them. Jealousy is a terrible, terrible thing.

The story has often been told, perhaps you’ve heard of it, of two men who lived in a certain city. One of them was jealous and the other was covetous. The ruler of the city sent for these two men and explained to them that he wanted to grant each of them one wish. But there was one caveat. The one who chose first would get exactly what he asked for, and the other man would get twice of whatever it was the first man had asked for. And then the king told the jealous man that his was the first choice.

Now, this immediately, of course, threw the jealous man into a quandary. What to ask for because he knew that whatever he asked for, however great, however wonderful, that his companion was going to get twice as much. And so, he thought for a while, considered it, and after careful consideration he asked this, that one of his eyes be put out. Because he couldn’t tolerate the thought that his companion would have an advantage over him, and so he came up with a plan the only thing he could think of that would allow him in the end to be better off than his companion.

That’s how jealousy thinks. It is an ugly, ugly sin. And yet we’re all tempted to this sin. We’re all tempted to resent others for their success, for their gifts, for their position, etc. In fact, if you’re breathing this morning, and I trust all of you are, then you are tempted by this sin, to be jealous of others. This jealousy, or this bitter resentment, can express itself in dozens of ways in all of our lives.

It can express itself in the family: sibling rivalry is nothing but an expression of jealousy.

Parents who have been divorced: fighting for the affection of their children; there are so many different ways this can express itself in the family.

It can express itself at work: fighting for that promotion, resenting those who get it.

It can express itself at school: resenting others for the opportunities that they receive.

It can even express itself, and I know this will come as a shock to you, at church.

Consider a couple of very practical expressions of how this manifests itself. Let's turn first to the New Testament and see it there. Turn to 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 3; Paul here rebukes the Corinthians which seem to have needed to be a sport for Paul because there was so many things to rebuke in this church, 1 Corinthians 3:1.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able for you are still fleshly....”

Now don't misunderstand this text, it's sometimes been mis-taught that this sort of is a separate category of Christians who live all their lives as if they were unregenerate and pagans. That's not what Paul is saying, he's saying to the Corinthians in this issue that I'm addressing you're acting fleshly. And he says this to them, verse 3,

... For since there is jealousy [There's our word] and strife [Which is what always results from jealousy] among you, (you are) are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not *mere* men? [Who is (who is)] ... Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. [You see, jealousy can express itself even in the life of the church.]

In 2 Corinthians 12, you see this again, again in the Corinthian church where it seems to have been a pandemic. Second Corinthians 12:20, Paul says, "I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish ..." [In other words, you're not going to be doing what I've taught you and if that happens then I'm going to be found by you to be not what you wish. In other words, you're not going to like it if I come and these things are still happening.] "that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances;"

Folks those are all words for what was going on in the church. Unfortunately, many of us have had the opportunity to witness these same kinds of things first hand at some of the churches we've attended in the past. And we are not exempt from them here at our church as well. D Edmond Hiebert in his commentary writes,

“Religious zeal for God and truth is a commendable attitude, but the subtleties of sinful human nature can readily pervert it into bitter antagonism against those who do not express their adherence to God and His truth in the same way we do.”

So, how does jealousy often express itself in the church? What do we need to be on the lookout for? Let me give you just a few examples and these are just a few.

Jealousy can express itself in terms of leadership; lining up as the Corinthians were doing here in 1 Corinthians 3, lining up with your allegiance to certain men who are in leadership and gaining that sort of party spirit. I am of Paul and I am of Apollos. He's the one that speaks for me, I like the way he teaches it. I like what he says, I don't agree with so and so about this; becomes jealousy, demonstrating itself in the church.

It can demonstrate itself in doctrine. Now let me say folks, you know that I believe very strongly in being accurate and clear with doctrine and standing up for what the Bible teaches but there, I'm not talking now about this central issue of our faith, not talking about those that we need to lay down as a church as the doctrinal standard for I'm for our church. I'm talking about all of those other minute doctrinal issues that can easily become a cause of jealousy and strife in the church, when we resent and look down on those who don't hold exactly our position.

We can develop jealousy in the areas of issues of conscience: We begin to evaluate others by our own standards and convictions. Everything from music to dress, and you can fill in the blank because there's an endless list of these. We can become jealous and exercise that resentment in the issue of status and power. We resent the success or position of others in the church. Well, I don't understand why he got that position, I'm much better qualified. Well, who does she think she is? It can demonstrate itself in the issue of gifts. Constantly sizing others up who serve in similar roles and deciding that you are superior or resenting those whose gifts are obviously superior to your own, instead of reminding yourself that the Holy Spirit places each of us in the body as He chooses.

Jealousy is an ugly thing that demonstrates itself in a variety of ways, and folks let me tell you, in this word there is a serious warning. Because Galatians 5:20 tells us that those who practice this sin, that is who consistently are known by the sin of jealousy are not Christians and will not be in heaven. Instead this is part of the work of the flesh. And those, Paul says who practice these things will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. But if you're a Christian and you struggle with jealousy, what should you do?

Well, we've been studying on Sunday night the wonderful doctrine of sanctification; that our responsibility is to renew our minds with the Scripture to immerse ourselves in the Scriptures and allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds and then to put off that old sinful practice and to put on the opposite virtue. We must all work to put off the sin of jealousy and to put on the corresponding virtue.

So, what is the corresponding virtue of jealousy? The Scripture tells us very clearly, it's love. First Corinthians 13:4 says, "Love is not jealous." If you really love someone, if you're really concerned about them then you're excited for them when God works in their lives and gives them those opportunities and allows them to have a place of responsibility in the church. Love them.

Well, jealousy is one chief characteristic of human wisdom, of hellish wisdom. But there's a second characteristic that's always there when there's hellish wisdom at play in our hearts. Not only is there jealousy, but we're told back in James 3:14 there is selfish ambition. Now this Greek word has a fascinating history. Originally it described a day laborer, like someone here in our city who waits on the corner, on the street corner waiting for someone to come by and give them a job for that day, a day laborer; someone who worked for hire. Later it came to describe someone who worked for hire entirely for his own self-interest. And eventually it came to describe a mercenary, somebody who had no concern for his employer whatsoever but was just in it for the money, just in it for total self-interest. Aristotle used it to speak of politicians who've schemed to get what they wanted, and what they wanted was completely in their own self-interest.

So, by the time of the New Testament this word simply referred to proud self-interest; someone who aggressively promotes himself and his own views, someone who jockeys for position and who is happy when people line up behind them and he gains a following. We would describe people like this today as having a personal agenda as acting in their own self-interest. They aren't concerned about others; they're only concerned about themselves. They often will build

themselves up by tearing down others and climbing as it were on their backs to elevate themselves.

In the church this sin of selfish ambition is usually clothed in pious rhetoric about concern for the truth or concern for the health for the church; it happened in Philippi. Turn back to Philippians for a moment. You remember we discovered when we studied this great letter that in 1:17 there were some connected to where Paul was imprisoned. In 1:17, there were those there near Paul where he was imprisoned in Rome who were proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives thinking to cause Paul distress in his imprisonment. But it was also happening in Philippi, look at chapter 2. Chapter 2:3, he tells the Philippians listen, I want you to be united and

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. [Selfishness, by the way, translates our word, that's translated in James as "selfish ambition".] but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. [In fact, have the attitude that Christ Himself had, who was willing to give up His rights, willing to give up His position for us.]

By the way Paul doesn't tell us here what the issue in Philippi was or who was on what side because it really doesn't matter. The Philippians he's confronting may have even right in their cause, but that's not the issue. The problem was spirit with which they were pursuing their cause. It was self-oriented, it was to promote themselves, and Paul says don't do it. Listen this sin of selfish ambition is at the heart of all rebellion against God. Romans 2:8 says that it is the characteristic of those who are perishing. Galatians 5 says it's one of the works of the flesh. This sin of selfish ambition was part of the very first sin in the universe, it was at the heart of Satan's rebellion. It's a very serious sin. And James 3:14 tells us that this sin of selfish ambition is often accompanied by jealousy and by arrogance. And often people who are guilty of selfish ambition don't even recognize it; they're self-deceived. This sin is so insidious, isn't it?

I was reminded of that in my own heart just last week. Last week as you know I was in Louisville for a conference. Louisville is the home of Southern Seminary which is the flagship seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention. And one night after one of the sessions there was a special reception at Dr. Mohler's home, who is the president of Southern Seminary. Some of you are familiar with him. And because of my past association with John MacArthur I found myself invited. And for the first few minutes I'm happy to tell you my thoughts were fairly

Christian. You know, I wondered why I had been included in this in such an august group that was assembling and thought, you know, it's very gracious of someone to have thought to ask me to come, that's very gracious.

But from there I have to tell you selfish ambition raised its head, and my thoughts went downhill from there. I suddenly found myself thinking ugly thoughts about using this occasion for self-promotion. It wasn't long those thoughts came through my mind, until I was reminded of something I'd been studying. Ironically earlier that day I had been studying this very passage in preparation for this message, and as these thoughts began to come into my mind like a thrust of a sword the Spirit rebuked me with these words, "if there is selfish ambition in your heart."

Listen folks, we are all tempted by these sins. We must examine our hearts. Are we always talking about ourselves? Are we always the hero of our stories? Are we always trying to make ourselves look good to others? Do we tear others down in order to build ourselves up? Are we consistently motivated by jealousy and by self-interest? If so, James has some council for us. Notice what he says at the end of verse 14. We could translate it like this. "Don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom." Don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. Douglas Moo the commentator on the book of James puts it this way,

To boast about wisdom when one is displaying jealousy and selfish ambition is in effect to give the lie to the truth about what wisdom really is and wisdom does.

In other words, you can't harbor jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart and really be wise or living in wisdom from God's perspective. And that's because these two sins are always the chief characteristics of hell's wisdom in whatever form it takes. It's always about self and promoting self and accommodating self.

Now verse 15 introduces us, it takes us beyond the chief characteristics and introduces us to the origin or source of hell's wisdom. Notice verse 15: This wisdom is not that which comes down from above.... Of course, he's reminding us of 1:17 where's he says, every good gift comes down from above, that is from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

He says, listen, if your life if your heart is characterized by jealousy and selfish ambition, then the wisdom you're living in is not the wisdom from above. It may be a form of earthly wisdom. There may be some cloak of wisdom to it. As Paul says in Romans 1, professing themselves to

be what? wise, they become fools. It may look wise from somebody's perspective, but it's not from heaven. It's not from God. So, the natural question is: if it's not heaven's wisdom, if it's not from God, it's not from above. What is the source of this wisdom?

Well, James answers in three adjectives. He says in verse 15, "... [It's] not that which comes down from above, but is earthly...." That is, it belongs to the earth, it has no connection to heaven whatsoever and it is natural, literally soulish. This word is usually contrasted with that which is spiritual. It's not spiritual it's merely human. But here's the scary part, it's not even ultimately human, he says it is demonic. The ultimate source or origin of all wisdom that stands opposed to God's wisdom is from demons. If you could trace all forms of counterfeit wisdom back to their source it would be Satan himself. I mean after all, where do you think jealousy and selfish ambition first appeared? The very first time these sins were practiced they were practiced by Satan. The very first time they showed up in the universe, they were found in the heart of the covering cherub. Satan himself fell from the position that God had exalted him to.

You know what James is saying here? He's saying if you embrace spiritual ideas, beliefs about truth, views of the world - world views that run contrary to God's wisdom as revealed in His Word you have bought the lie. You are believing satanic wisdom and from God's perspective you are a fool. Or if you're a believer and you embrace the truth of the Bible, but you find jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, you are not truly practicing God's wisdom. Instead, you are practicing a wisdom that is earthly of the earth that is natural as opposed to spiritual and that is ultimately demonic.

So, in his analysis of hell's wisdom, James has shown us the chief characteristics of hell's wisdom, the origin or source of it. In verse 16 he describes it by its results, the results of hell's wisdom. "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing." Notice that hell's wisdom produces two results.

First of all: "disorder", this Greek word literally means, "not put in place or out of order". It refers to two different kinds of unrest. It refers to a kind of social unrest, like rioting disturbances due to mob action. In this sense, it's talking about disruption in the church. In other words, listen carefully; people who struggle with jealousy and selfish ambition will eventually produce disputes and factions in the church. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 12:20 and in Galatians 5:20, Paul uses the plural form of selfish ambition, and in both cases, it's translated disputes. This is where selfish ambition always leads. People who want to promote themselves

find themselves in conflict with others, and it produces fights. We'll learn more about that when we get to chapter 4.

But the word disorder was also used of political unrest, of revolution, of insurrection against authority. In secular Greek this word could even be translated as "anarchy". Listen, God has established a variety of authorities in our lives. His word of course, government and its officers, leaders in the church, bosses, parents and others; we have all kinds of authorities in all of our lives. If we live by hell's wisdom than rather than submitting willfully to God and to the authorities He's put in our lives, we will reject that authority. It may be overt rejection, rebellion, outright rebellion against that authority or it might be more subtle. You know like the kid, I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside. Disorder, rebellion, rejection of authority: you see without the work of God's grace in our hearts, we will be driven by our jealousy and selfish ambition. That will lead to disputes and rebellion against the authorities God has placed in our lives; disorder.

Well, there's a second result that hell's wisdom always produces: Notice the end of verse 16, "every evil thing". The word "evil" here is not the common Greek word for evil in the New Testament. It's a word that means "vile, corrupt, depraved". You know, pride and self-interest seem so innocent and innocuous don't they. I mean everybody has that in their hearts. So, what does it really matter, I can tolerate those things. After all it's not murder, it's not adultery. Scripture says these sins are not harmless peccadilloes, instead they give energy to and they express themselves in every kind of sin; every evil thing. You know as I thought about verses 14 - 16, I was reminded of the fact that there was a time when these verses described every one of us.

Or to put it in the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, "all of us like sheep had gone astray, each one of us had turned to his own what? way. We were only out for ourselves, we were promoting self interest. We were pursuing what we wanted, self-advancement, self-fulfillment, self-promotion. That's where worldly wisdom will always take you. Thank God Isaiah doesn't leave us there, the second half of the verse says, "but the Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Christ."

You see believer, instead of treating us like the rebels that we are and taking our lives the very first time that we rebelled against Him and self-interests rather than interests in God, in grace God let us live and allowed us to enjoy the good gifts of life that come from Him. And He showed His love to us in such a profound way that He sent His Son to die on the cross, and in

that death, not only did He deal with the need for our forgiveness for these terrible sins, that was the heart of the atonement, the death of Christ, but He also gave us an amazing example of how to shed these sins in the interest of others.

Turn back to Philippians 2, I read it before but I want you to see it in this context. Philippians 2, believer here's what we are to do, verse 3 Philippians 2.

Do nothing from ... [self ambition ... selfish ambition] or empty conceit,"
[There's what you put off, so what are you to put on?] "... with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. [By the way this isn't a woe is me, Eeyore sort of attitude. You know, nobody loves me, everybody hates me, think I'll go eat some worms. You know that's not what he's talking about here, humility is not thinking poorly of yourself. Humility is not thinking of yourself at all. It's thinking about others. Verse 4,] do not merely look out for your own personal interest, but also for the interests of others. [Focus on others. And if you have trouble seeing what that looks like in real life, think about Christ. Verse 5,] Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus....

Think about what Christ did. He laid aside everything that was to His own advantage and He became a slave to us all. Even in ultimately becoming obedient to the point of death, and not just any death, the death of a common criminal on the cross. Why? Because He was more concerned about us than Himself. Here's the example to follow.

If you're here this morning, and you have to admit honestly that you're not a believer, that your life is controlled by, your heart is dominated by jealousy and selfish ambition. You live for self-fulfillment, you live to promote yourself, and you only show interest in others as it will promote you as it will make you look good. I plead with you this morning, based on the grace of God. You see that's where we all were. There's nobody in this room that wasn't described like that. And we still struggle with this sin, but here's the difference: we've experienced God's grace.

And I urge you this morning if you are willing to turn from the anarchy of your heart, if you're willing to leave your own way, pursuing your own self-fulfillment, if you're willing to turn from what you know to be sin and to bow at the feet of Jesus Christ as it were and acknowledge Him as not only your Savior, but your Lord, the Person to whom you will give account the rest of your life and in eternity, the One for whom you will now live instead of yourself. If you're willing to do that, to embrace Him in faith, then God makes an amazing promise. He will pardon

your rebellion, He will adopt you as His own child, and He will treat you as if you were as righteous as His Own Son because He will credit to your account Jesus' perfect life. That's the grace of God, and I trust even today you will receive that amazing gift at the feet of Christ.

Let's pray together.

Father, we confess that even as believers, we are too much influenced by the wisdom that is from hell itself. Lord, as we hear these characteristics, we see jealousy and selfish ambition in our own hearts. Father, help us, by Your grace, to put those things off and to put on love and humility and care for others in their place. Help us to learn from Your Word and from the example of Your Son what that looks like.

Father, I pray as well for those here this morning perhaps who have been here many times before who look to everyone else that they're living by heaven's wisdom, but in reality, their hearts are dominated by hellish wisdom, by self-interest and self-promotion, and everything else pertaining to self. Lord, I pray that just as You have done for us for so many of us here that today would be the day that those who aren't in Christ would turn from their own way to fall at the feet of Christ in humble submission crying out for Your forgiveness, for Your grace, for You to change their hearts. Lord, I pray that You would accomplish this for the glory of Your Son who provided such an amazing example.

We pray it in His name, Amen.