

Above and Below (II)

Brother James
Երկնային եւ Երկրաւոր

James 3:13-18

Last week we asked the question: **Who is wise and understanding among you?** (James 3:13a ESV)

If you claim to be wise, demonstrate your wisdom in the works that true wisdom produces.

Wisdom is the ability to discern what is good and the strength of character to act upon that knowledge.

It means having the right skills in dealing with whatever happens in life: **the capacity to live a life that ought to be lived.** James is not interested in whether one *knows about wisdom*. It is not what we know that makes us wise, **but what we are.** Thus the source is not our abilities; it is not our DNA. You can be a genius but not wise. The source is from God, from ABOVE. Wisdom from ABOVE.

Evidence that one has wisdom from above:

“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”
(James 3:13b ESV)

We studied last Sunday the words **good *kalos***, and **meekness *praotes***.

Today we will continue studying about **Wisdom**. James make sure we understand that this is wisdom from ABOVE. Wisdom from above is revealed, just like genuine faith is revealed and manifested.

James makes sure that we understand that there are also earthly vices that are not from God. They are destructive. Let us call them earthly wisdom.

A. Watch out for earthly wisdom, I would like to call them earthly garbage:

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... (James 3:14-15ESV)

Bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, boasting, denying the truth: in other words, a jealous and prideful person who just thinks about his/her ambition and has a false sense of truth. (Mr. or Mrs. ME, ME, ME)

We spoke about the virtue of meekness last week. The opposite of meekness is the prideful person. The person who is boasting, prideful is full of himself. That person cannot see anything, but himself. The Christian meekness (the one who controls his passions) involves a healthy understanding of our own unworthiness before God and a corresponding humility and lack of pride in our dealings with our fellow-men.¹

James deals with two other words that are also the opposite of meekness is **bitter jealousy** and **selfish ambition**.

The word jealousy (*zēlos*) can also have positive meaning. We should have zeal for the Lord's causes. We should have the zeal to do the right things. But as you see James condemns individuals who are motivated with evil desires. Please notice that Paul also condemns 'jealousy' or 'zeal' (Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20).

James is warning from boasting for the wrong reason. **do not boast and be false to the truth**: 'don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom'.²

Illustration:

Pride, how destructive is this vice. Listen to what C.S. Lewis said about pride:

"Pride is essentially competitive...Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking, there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest."³

Instagram/facebook pride

Let me finish about earthy wisdom. In the end, James gives three descriptions about this:

a) It is **earthly** vs. heavenly, which means transitory, weak and imperfect.⁴ Paul says that ‘the enemies of the cross of Christ’ have their minds ‘set on earthly things’.

b) it is **unspiritual vs. spiritual** where human feeling and human reason reign supreme.

c) it is **demonic**. This word occurs only here in the Greek Bible and may mean either that the wisdom is demonic in nature or, more probably, in origin.⁵

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (James 3:16b ESV)

James repeats these words **jealousy** and **selfish ambitions** to describe what will be the result. In fact, chapter four will deal more with this. But here in this verse he says it will bring disorder and vile practice. God is a God of order. Anytime you see fights, divisions, disorder and chaos, you will see how the devil is at work.

This is garbage from below.

B. Wisdom from ABOVE

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (James 3:17 ESV)

James describe us **wisdom from above**: seven adjectives. Or, more properly, he tells us what effects divine wisdom should produce – for almost all of these adjectives describe what wisdom does rather than what it is.⁶

-Pure: *Sourp* hagonos...

It carries the sense of having moral and spiritual integrity; wisdom which is free from any stain or blemish would be incapable of producing anything evil (cf. v. 16).

-Peaceable: someone who believes in having the right relationships. Many of us are all too willing to sacrifice purity for the sake of peace. First pure, if you need to live in right relationships with each other, the truth should come out to be peaceable. No inner peace in cover-up...

According to the Old Testament also, wisdom produces peace (Prov. 3:17) and Paul lists 'peace' as a fruit of the Spirit.

Why is wisdom *peaceable*? Because it is also *gentle* and *open to reason*.

-Gentle (considerate): We will not be quick to anger or harsh with others; instead we will show kindness and generosity.

To be *gentle* (*epieikēs*) is to be kind, willing to yield. With such an attitude, the believer, motivated and empowered by wisdom, will follow in the footsteps of his Lord, who also was characterized by 'meekness and gentleness'⁷

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— (2 Cor. 10:1).

-Open to reason (yielding, accommodating): Have you worked with people saying: my way or the highway? Nothing for reason, nothing for talking and learning.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Philipians 2:3-4

The person who is *open to reason* (*eupeithēs*) is one, literally, who is 'easily persuaded' – not in the sense of a weak, credulous gullibility, but in the sense of a willing deference to others when unalterable theological or moral principles are not involved. (Tyndale)

-Full of mercy and good fruits: The merciful person handles people with sensitivity and compassion. He/she understands when people suffer to make

stupid mistakes. He/she feels with them and offers them love, care and compassion.

James provides his own definition of 'mercy': it is that love for the neighbor that shows itself in action (2:8–13). It is not surprising, then, that James couples *mercy* so closely with *good fruits* – acts of mercy are those 'fruits' which genuine wisdom, like genuine faith, must produce. (Tyndale)

-Impartial and sincere: We already discussed about being impartial, no favoritism...

in the end:

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:18 ESV)

Harvest of righteousness in those who make peace.

Righteousness in James 1:20 meant that conduct which is pleasing to God, and this is the 'fruit' intended here also. It includes all the virtues listed in verse 17 and is the opposite of 'every vile practice' (v. 16). This righteousness cannot be produced in the context of man's anger (1:20); but it *can* grow and flourish in the atmosphere of peace. Those who create such an atmosphere are assured by their Lord of their reward: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God' (Matt. 5:9).⁸

Having a peacemaker's character is so important . It started pure and peaceable and ended with righteousness (right relationship with God and each other) which brought peace.

Godly Wisdom means having the right skill in dealing with whatever happens in life: **the capacity to live a life that ought to be lived.** James is not interested in whether one *knows about wisdom*. It is not what we know that makes us wise, **but what we are.** Thus the source is not our abilities; it is not our DNA. You can be a genius but not wise. The source is from God, from ABOVE.

Again, I will ask the question brother Jim asked: “**who is wise and understanding among you?**”

Or let me ask in different way: “What is the quality of your relationships? Are they characterized by meekness, gentleness, purity and peace? Is there evidence of peace, openness to reason, submissiveness, mercy, impartiality and sincerity?”

Ask for wisdom from above, and you will receive it.

Amen.

*Be Thou my Wisdom, Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

1. Tyndale Commentary about James.
2. ibid
3. C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Collier Books, 1952), 109.
4. See the contrast between ‘earthly’ and ‘heavenly’ bodies in 1 Cor. 15:40; cf. 2 Cor. 5:1)
5. Tyndale Commentary about James.
6. ibid
7. ibid
8. ibid