

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JAS. 3:13 Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

NOTES

The description of earthly wisdom is found in Jas. 3:13-15. This is the wisdom of "earthly" and "sensual" (physical). It is the wisdom that is focused on earthly things, such as what you wear or drive, and is the result of turning away from God. The result of turning away from God is that you are the enemy of God (4:4). The results of earthly wisdom (Jas. 3:14-15) James listed are: bitter envying and strife. Again, the emphasis on wisdom focused on the physical, not just bad beliefs but bad behavior. When we are led by our selfish desires...

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. This is the wisdom that is connected to truthfully teaching that is well with the 7th Testament command of fear of God being the foundation of wisdom (Prov. 1:7, 9:10). The wisdom of earthly wisdom (Jas. 3:13-15) James turned to discussing the wisdom from below. He did not give a list of beliefs, but showed how people behaved. Those who are self-absorbed and seeking to earthly wisdom. The word James used for "envying" will also be translated as "zeal" and was used by other writers in a positive sense for John 2:17. Fearful is also somewhat close to a negative sense (of 1 Cor. 13). What is focused on the selfish and inflation of God's holiness and love. It remains positive. What it is focused on is self, however, it might be focused on self, however, it might be...

The Wisdom of the Meek

Lesson Text: James 3:13-18

Related Scriptures: Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Corinthians 3:18-23;
1 Peter 3:8-12; James 4:1-10

TIME: between A.D. 40 and 48

PLACE: from Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

Lesson Exposition

MEEK WISDOM—Jas. 3:13

We sometimes think of wisdom as cerebral, but James described a wise person as someone whose life is good. No one can claim to be wise while acting sinfully. A wise person exhibits a life that draws others to Christ, as Peter explained in 1 Peter 3:15. James also linked wisdom with meekness. Wisdom is connected to humility, a teaching that fits well with the Old Testament concept of fear of God being the foundation for wisdom (Prov. 1:7; Ps. 111:10).

EARTHLY WISDOM—Jas. 3:14-16

The actions of earthly wisdom (Jas. 3:14). James turned to discussing the wisdom from below. He did not give a list of beliefs, but showed how people behaved. Those who are self-absorbed act according to earthly wisdom.

The word James used for "envying" could also be translated as "zeal" and was used by other writers in a positive sense (cf. John 2:17). Jealousy is also sometimes used in a positive sense (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). When zeal is focused on the pursuit and imitation of God's holiness and love, it remains positive. When it is focused on self, however, it morphs into envy and jealousy. When we feel

passionate about an issue, we should examine our hearts to see whether we have positive zeal or negative jealousy before we pursue it further.

Along with envy came strife and selfish ambition (Jas. 3:14). Selfishness often leads to conflict with others (4:1-3). Paul similarly warned against selfish ambition, urging believers not to seek leadership for power or to pursue personal goals with no thought to the needs of others (Rom. 2:8; Phil. 2:3). Selfish ambition has no place in the family of God.

The description of earthly wisdom (Jas. 3:15). This fake wisdom is "earthly" and "sensual" (physical). Do you spend more time focusing on earthly things, such as what you wear, or do you spend time focusing on heavenly things? Earthly wisdom is "devilish." The result of turning away from God is turning toward His enemy (cf. 4:4).

The results of earthly wisdom (Jas. 3:16). James linked envy and ambition to chaos and evil. Again, his explanation of wisdom focused on the practical over the intellectual. The focus is not just bad beliefs but bad behaviors. When we are led by our selfish desires, we hurt others.

GOD'S WISDOM—Jas. 3:17-18

James's statements concerning wisdom have obvious connections to two other sources: the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus. James defined wisdom using the same word that Jesus used in John 3:3 to describe being born again. Just as a person must be spiritually born again, true wisdom has a divine source.

To help his readers understand wisdom, James gave a list of characteristics of godly wisdom. He did not present these as behaviors that the community should follow to *achieve* wisdom, as if performing certain actions could summon it. Rather, acting in these ways is the result of a wise life that follows God's design.

First, godly wisdom is pure. By purity, James meant separation from cultural values that do not align with God's way, such as valuing the wealthy more highly than the poor (cf. Jas. 2:1-7).

We face difficulty remaining on God's path if we try to conform to the world. A focus on purity keeps us grounded in the truths of God's Word and reminds us that His ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9). Drawing close to Him will often mean separation from the values of the world around us.

Second, godly wisdom is peaceable. James emphasized caring for others and being part of a group of believers to live out godly wisdom. Peacemakers stood in contrast to jealous and selfishly ambitious people (Jas. 3:14-16).

Third, godly wisdom is gentle. Those who act kindly generate peace in their relationships. Do you treat the people around you with compassion? If not, ask God to help you.

Fourth, godly wisdom is "easy to be intreated" and willing to listen. Wise people are willing to listen to others and receive correction when appropriate.

Fifth, godly wisdom is full of mercy. Wise people imitate their Father by re-

sponding with gracious love and provision whenever possible.

Sixth, godly wisdom is full of good fruit, a metaphor for maturity and abundance.

Two last terms are listed in James 3:17; both have negative prefixes in Greek, like "un" in English. The wise person does not judge with partiality and does not act hypocritically.

James summed up his wisdom ethics with an overarching quality: peacemaking (vs. 18). Peacemakers produce justice or righteousness in all parts of their lives. James viewed wisdom as necessary for a peaceful, communal life, in which cooperation, rather than conflicts, characterize the community.

—Allyson Presswood Nance

QUESTIONS

1. How did James describe a wise person?
2. Besides knowledge, what did James indicate wisdom is connected to?
3. What distinguishes between positive "zeal" and negative "envying"?
4. What marks selfish ambition?
5. What does James's description of wisdom focus on?
6. What two obvious sources do James's comments about wisdom have connections with?
7. Are the characteristics James presented the way to achieve wisdom or the result of wisdom?
8. What does James's declaration that wisdom is "peaceable" reveal?
9. What does "easy to be intreated" mean?
10. How did James sum up his description of wise ethics?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. True wisdom is meek rather than pretentious (Jas. 3:13).
2. We should shun jealousy and seek contentment (Jas. 3:14; cf. 1 Tim. 6:6-10).
3. Much that the world considers wise is sinful and even demonic. We should be careful when following popular figures (Jas. 3:15).
4. Self-centeredness leads to chaos and every kind of sin. Wisdom, conversely, serves others (Jas. 3:16; cf. Phil. 2:3-4).
5. True wisdom is marked by holy actions and a willingness to learn (Jas. 3:17).
6. Being a peacemaker fosters righteousness (vs. 18).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does wisdom lead to humility?
2. Is it wrong to have any kind of ambition?
3. Do you harbor envy or selfish ambition in any area of your life?
4. Who do your coworkers and neighbors consider wise?
5. Why does the world sometimes consider sinful attitudes wise?
6. Hypothetically, should we expect the wisest Christian alive to be famous? Why or why not?
7. How can we identify if someone has true wisdom?
8. How long does it take for the fruit of righteousness to develop?
9. Think of a contentious situation or person in your life. How can you be a peacemaker in that context?

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13).

In a world that often equates wisdom with intellectual prowess, academic achievements, or worldly success, James present a strikingly different perspective. True wisdom is not merely what one knows but also how one lives. It is demonstrated not through boastful words but through good conduct and meekness.

Those truly endowed with godly wisdom will demonstrate it through their behavior, choices, and interactions with others. As Jesus taught, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). The life of a wise person testifies to the transforming power of divine wisdom.

Earlier, James exhorted his readers to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22). This emphasis on action underscores the practical nature of true wisdom. It is not enough to merely possess knowledge; we must also apply wisdom.

Heavenly wisdom stands in sharp contrast to earthly wisdom. The wisdom from above produces peace, gentleness, and mercy. This highlights the transforming power of godly wisdom in the life of a believer.

Do our actions demonstrate this godly wisdom? Are we known for a meek spirit or for arrogance and self-promotion? True wisdom must be evidenced in how we live. James provides a powerful reminder to us that true wisdom is a gift from above meant to glorify God and serve others.

—Gene Kissinger