

VIII. The Way of Wisdom

January 13/15/16, 2020 James 3:13-18 OT: Pr. 2:6-15; Is. 32:16-17; Hos. 10:12
NT: Mt. 5:2-10; 11:28-30

Aim: To contrast humanly wisdom which is earthly, natural, and demonic and results in discord and vile practice, with true wisdom, which comes from above and yields a peaceful harvest of righteousness.

Doriani: Scripture does say that we face two paths for life. Jesus says there is a broad road that leads to destruction and a narrow road that leads to life. We can call Jesus ‘Lord’ truly or falsely. We can build our life on sand or on the rock, that is, on Christ (Mt. 7:13-27). James presents the same idea in different terms. He says there are two ways of life, two kinds of wisdom. One wisdom is from the earth, even the devil; the other is from heaven.

MacArthur: Both Scripture and ancient philosophers placed a premium on wisdom, which broadly defined, is not simply a matter of possessing factual knowledge but of properly and effectively applying truth to everyday life. Solomon wrote: ‘Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding’ (Pr. 4:7).... It was the Hebrews who clearly understood that true wisdom was not intellectual, but behavioral. Thus, the biggest fool was one who knew truth and failed to apply it. To the Jews, wisdom was skill in living righteously.

Hughes: Being wise does not mean we understand everything that is going on because of our superior knowledge, but that we do the right thing as life comes along.

Morgan: It comes as no surprise that wisdom plays an important role in James’ worldview. Remember, he presents it as the key to understanding life’s varied experiences (1:5).... Genuine wisdom is contrasted with spurious wisdom in this passage. The author highlights three truths about false wisdom and three truths about true wisdom. They can be distinguished by their characteristics, source, and results,

MacArthur: In 3:13-18, James offers wisdom as still another test of living faith. The kind of wisdom a person possesses will be revealed by the kind of life he lives (v. 13). Those who possess the wisdom of man, the wisdom from below, will demonstrate by their lives that they have no saving relationship to Jesus Christ and no desire to worship, serve, or obey Him (vv. 14-16). Those, on the other hand, who possess genuine saving faith will manifest the wisdom of God, the wisdom from above (vv. 17-18).

Moo: After the initial rhetorical question setting up the issue of wisdom (v. 13a), James calls on his readers to demonstrate the reality of their wisdom in humility and good works (v. 13b). This leads into the contrast between two kinds of wisdom that dominates the paragraph. The wrong kind is characterized by envy, selfishness, and disorder (vv. 14-16) – the opposite of peace. The right kind of wisdom, on the other hand, is above all ‘peace loving’ (the first specific ‘fruit of wisdom’ listed in v. 17). And James underscores this virtue with his concluding blessing on peacemakers (v. 18).

A. Test of Wisdom (James 3:13)

Doriani: James has prepared us for the idea that there are two ways of life, two kinds of wisdom. In chapter 1, he contrasts the person who ‘considers himself religious’ with the one who has a religion that is ‘pure and faultless’ (1:26-27). James has presented other choices. Will we treat

James – Lesson 8

poor believers with respect or not? Will we assist needy brothers, or will we *talk* about assisting them (2:1-26)? Will we tame our tongue, or will it be a destructive flame, an organ that blesses one moment and curses the next (3:1-12)? Of course, we do not simply *choose* pure religion.... We need the gospel...we need to be born from above by the word of truth (Jn. 3:3; James 1:18; 3:15). We cannot simply *choose* the way of wisdom. We are unable to choose the right path and follow it every time. A righteous life is a gift from God.

1. Question (3:13a)

¹³*Who is wise and understanding among you?*

a) *Who ... among you?*

Moo: Since James opens this section by asking, ‘Who is wise and understanding among you?’ he might be returning here to his rebuke of the leaders of the community that seems to be the focus of vv. 1-12. Indeed, some commentators...think that James has never left this focus, arguing that the entire discussion of the tongue has particular relevance to teachers.... However, we have argued that 3:1-12 is directed to the entire community; and we think it likely that 3:13-4:3 is also. Certainly, it would often be church leaders who prided themselves on a superior degree of wisdom and who were in a position to create significant disunity. But ordinary members of the congregation could create similar difficulties by opposing the leadership or engaging in bitter partisan fights for their own views.

MacArthur: Some interpreters believe the phrase ‘who among you’ refers only to the teachers, or would-be teachers, addressed in verse 1. But it seems more probable that, like the intervening section on the tongue (vv. 2-12), this section on wisdom (vv. 13-18) applies to everyone in the churches to whom James was writing, true believers and mere professed believers. James is seeking to identify who is truly skilled in the art of righteous living. ‘In what way are you wise?’ he is saying, in effect, ‘and in what way are you understanding? The answer will reveal not only your inner character but the spiritual condition of your soul.’

Morgan: ‘Who’ is the relative pronoun *tis*, used rhetorically here as in Luke 11:11....It is likely that James here in 3:13-18 continues to address especially the teachers from verse 1. They carried a grave responsibility, as the section previous to this one demonstrated, and they needed wisdom to know what to say and how to say it.

Hughes: The ambitions would-be teachers who had been devastating the church with their incendiary tongues were claiming to be superior in wisdom and understanding. They imagined those who disagreed to be mentally inferior. In their thinking, wisdom had to do with the mind, intellectual prowess.

Dorani: If we are wise, we show it by our good life over a span of years. Individual good deeds matter, but just now James has in mind our customs, our way of life, our lifestyle. He asks, ‘Who is wise and understanding among you?’ If someone claims to be, James says it should show in two ways: by a beautiful lifestyle and by deeds done in the gentleness of wisdom.

b) *Is Wise and Understanding?*

Moo: James asks people who think they have special understanding and insight into spiritual matters, in effect, to step forward so that he can analyze the legitimacy of their claim.... Many commentators think that this question has in view especially teachers (see v. 1). But neither ‘wise’ (*sophos*) nor ‘understanding’ (*epistēmon*) is regularly used as a title for the teacher....

James – Lesson 8

James has already emphasized that ‘wisdom’ is a quality that all believers should seek to attain (1:5). Moreover, even 3:1 was not really directed to teachers, but to those who would *become* teachers. We therefore think that James invites any of his readers who might pride themselves on their wisdom to consider seriously what he is about to say.

MacArthur: Although the two terms seem to be used synonymously here, ‘wise’ and ‘understanding’ carry a shade of difference in meaning. *Sophos* (‘wise’) is a general word, often used by the Greeks to designate speculative knowledge, theory, or philosophy. For the Jews... it carried the deeper meaning of careful application of knowledge to personal living. *Epistēmōn* (‘understanding’) appears only here in the New Testament and carries the idea of specialized knowledge, such as that of a highly skilled tradesman or professional.

Morgan: James brings two synonyms into play. ‘Wisdom’ is from the familiar *sophia*, a term that speaks of a general understanding of life’s principles: here it refers to the practical teacher. ‘Understanding’ is a more technical word used only here in the New Testament. It speaks of an expert, a skilled and scientific person. The two adjectives are found together nowhere else in the New Testament.

2. Answer (3:13bc)

By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

Moo: Those people who respond to James’s invitation in v. 13a quickly find themselves the object of searching and perhaps unwanted scrutiny. For James assesses these people’s claim to wisdom not in theological terms – how much doctrine do they know, how many Greek verbs can they parse – but in practical terms.

a) *Conduct (3:13b)*

By his good conduct let him show his works...

Moo: The Greek is very awkward here, reading literally, ‘let him show on the basis of good conduct his works in the humility of wisdom.’ The ‘let him show’ challenge reminds us of James’s challenge in 2:18 to the ‘believer’ who thinks works and faith can be separated: ‘Show me your faith without deeds.’ Indeed, the test of true wisdom that James applies here picks up key ideas he touched on earlier in the letter: the importance of humility (1:21) and good works (2:14-26). ‘Good conduct,’ James insists, is the basis on which one can demonstrate wisdom... It is our acts of obedience to God, performed consistently day after day, that make up the ‘good conduct’ of the wise person.

MacArthur: ‘Let him show’ translates an aorist imperative, making the verb a command. ‘If you claim wisdom and understanding,’ he is saying, ‘show it first by your good behavior, your exemplary lifestyle.’ As with faith (2:17), wisdom and understanding that are not demonstrated in righteous, godly living are devoid of spiritual value. Second, and somewhat more specifically, James admonishes readers to show their wisdom and understanding by their good (implied) ‘deeds,’ by all the particular activities and endeavors they are involved in.

Morgan: Moreover, true, godly wisdom will be very apparent in its demonstration of good works and meekness. James’ language here is awkward as we try to translate it into English. But James’s point is nevertheless clear: true, godly wisdom fleshes itself out in consistent Christian behavior. ‘Conduct’ translates the Greek *anastrophē*; it denotes the behavior, the walk, the actions of a person. Paul used the word to summarize his entire life in Judaism (Gal. 1:13).

James – Lesson 8

Doriani: The Greek word *anastrophe*, best translated ‘way of life’ or ‘lifestyle’ is used here.... When Scripture bids us to imitate someone, it leads us to an exemplary life, not a law. It bids us look to a model of excellence, a hero. It is not so much a command as an invitation to a beautiful or excellent life.... What James calls ‘the wisdom that comes from heaven’ drives the excellent life. The wise demonstrate God’s wisdom daily. They inspire others by giving them a living model of righteousness that incarnates the will of God. Their lives become models of righteousness. They become our heroes in the faith as they reflect the character of Christ.

Hughes: But James, the practical theologian, knew better and brought them down to earth by informing them that real wisdom is demonstrated by two qualities: first by ‘good conduct’ (that is, a noble and beautiful life), and, second, by ‘his works in the meekness of wisdom’—a quality they were definitely lacking.

b) *Meekness (3:13c)*

...his works in the meekness of wisdom.

MacArthur: Third, believers are to demonstrate wisdom and understanding by an attitude of ‘gentleness.’ People who are wise in their own eyes are generally arrogant about it, which would be expected, because an elevated self-view is based on pride. As made clear in the following verse, selfish ambition is a common companion of arrogance. *Prautēs* (‘gentleness’) and its related adjective *praus* (gentle) carry the idea of tenderness and graciousness, and they can be accurately translated ‘meekness’ and ‘meek,’ respectively. But unlike those English words, the Greek terms do not connote weakness but rather strength under control. The adjective was often used of a wild horse that was broken and made useful to its owners. For believers, ‘gentleness’ is to be willingly under the sovereign control of God.... ‘Gentleness’ is a God-honored trait, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23).... ‘Gentleness’ or meekness is to characterize everyone in the kingdom of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, ‘Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth’ (Mt. 5:5).

Moo: Good works are to be done in a spirit of humility – a humility that itself is the product, or result, of wisdom.... James is clearly trying to say two things here: true wisdom produces good works and true wisdom produces humility. The results of false wisdom that James highlights in v. 14, envy and selfishness, are in clear contrast to this humility, suggesting that it is especially this quality that James is concerned to emphasize here. Humility, or ‘meekness’ (Gk. *praütēs*) was not usually prized by the Greeks. They thought it signaled a servility unworthy of a strong and confident person. But a different picture emerges in the NT. Jesus Himself claimed to be ‘meek’ (Mt. 11:29; cp. Mt. 21:5) and blessed those who were meek (Mt. 5:5). This Christian meekness, or humility, comes from understanding our position as sinful creatures in relationship to the glorious and majestic God.

Morgan: True wisdom, far from being aloof or abrasive or belligerent, will exhibit itself by a meek and gentle demeanor. ‘Meekness’ is the same word as in 1:21 – just as the one receiving the word should do so with humble gentleness, so should the teacher carry out his ministry.

Doriani: Wisdom is beautiful. It also manifests humility (NIV) or meekness (ESV) or gentleness (RSV). The translations vary because the Greek term used (*prautēs*) is not the usual word for humility. It connotes a spirit that shares elements of humility, gentleness, meekness.... In the kingdom, strength and gentleness go together.... The issue is not the *strength* of a personality, but its direction. The Bible says gentle people live a certain way: They are patient. They make

James – Lesson 8

peace. They are slow to take offense. They are long-suffering. They do not demand their way. Peace follows them wherever they go (3:18).

Hughes: This was a penetrating rebuke because in their frame of mind, meekness was an obvious sign of weakness. Meekness, of course, is not weakness at all. Israel's powerful ruler Moses was himself called 'very meek, much more than all people who were on the face of the earth' (Num. 12:3). In addition, Jesus said of Himself, 'I am gentle [meek] and lowly in heart' (Mt. 11:29). Meekness does not denote cowardice or any of its parallel characteristics such as spinelessness, timidity, or a 'peace at any cost' attitude. Neither does meekness suggest indecisiveness, wishy-washiness, a lack of confidence, shyness, or a withdrawn personality. Nor can it be reduced to wimpy niceness. Seeing what it is not, we must note that the popular rendering of 'meek' and 'gentle' are fairly accurate.

c) Summary

Moo: James's insistence that wisdom is to be tested by the kind of life one lives is in keeping with the idea of wisdom in the OT. Wisdom, we remember, begins with the fear of the Lord (Pr. 1:7), enables us to discern what is 'right and just' (Pr. 2:9), and leads us to 'walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous' (Pr. 2:20). In stark contrast to this biblical perspective were certain Greek ideas of wisdom, which prized intellectual ability and knowledge of divine secrets – sometimes to the detriment of the moral life.... James's...rebuke of false wisdom is not so much directed against a particular view of wisdom as against a failure of people to live out in the ways they should the implications of wisdom.

Hughes: James gives a penetrating moral test for any who think themselves to be wise—the test being not pride, but *gentleness, meekness, mildness* in dealing with others. The wise know that God is in control, and they know who they are as redeemed sinners. Thus, they can confidently meet their problems and their detractors with the gentle assurance that God will vindicate them. The meek/wise know how to do the right thing as they pass through the traffic of life.

Dorani: James says that anyone who is wise and understanding shows it by his good life, by deeds that reflect wisdom. The way of wisdom is the way of humility. True wisdom is gentle, meek, humble. If we walk the path of wisdom, we know that our wisdom is 'from above'—a gift of God (3:17). Humble faith, a faith that comes down from heaven, is the source of the wise life. Earlier, James said we are saved, reborn, by the implanted word (1:18, 21). Now he returns to the gift of God. The gifts of God are humility, wisdom, and self-control. These gifts allow us to resist evil within ourselves and in the world. Our progress is partial, yet by God's grace, progress is possible.

B. False Wisdom (James 3:14-16)

MacArthur: The wisdom that is of the world, that is based on man's own understanding, standards, and objectives, is false and ungodly. In false wisdom, man is supreme. False wisdom does not recognize God's sovereignty, God's will, or God's truth. In these three verses, James briefly discusses the motivation (v. 14), the characteristics (v. 15), and the results (v. 16) of false wisdom.

Hughes: Having established the moral shape of true wisdom, James goes on to describe the outworking, character, and results of pseudo-wisdom.

James – Lesson 8

1. Characteristics of False Wisdom (3:14)

¹⁴*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.*

Moo: This verse is set in antithesis to James's challenge in v. 13b. If a person *harbors bitter envy and selfish ambition* in the heart, that person is, in effect, living a lie: claiming to be wise but conducting himself in a way that denies the claim. The reason that James can draw this conclusion is that *bitter envy and selfish ambition* are contrary to humility. If, then, humility marks the wise person, these negative qualities exclude a person from being considered wise.

a) *Bitter Jealousy (3:14a)*

¹⁴*But if you have bitter jealousy...in your hearts...*

MacArthur: Motivation is always determined in the 'heart.' That is where both unbelief and belief, sin and righteousness originate.... Of the several sinful motives behind human wisdom, James mentions only two here: the first is 'bitter jealousy.' *Pikros* ('bitter') has the basic meaning of pointed, sharp, prickly, or pungent, and James has just used it in that literal sense in relation to bitter water coming out of a fountain (v. 11). Here he uses it metaphorically, to describe the worst sort of 'jealousy,' that which is harsh, sharp, cutting, and destructive, having no concern for the feelings or welfare of those who are its objects.

Moo: The word translated 'envy' is an important and theologically significant word, *zēlos*. It has two basic senses: a neutral or even positive sense, 'zeal,' 'jealousy'; and a negative sense, 'envy.' The former meaning is seen in those many texts that describe God as 'jealous': demanding that His people serve Him alone, renouncing allegiance to any other god or 'idol.' This meaning, then, is applied to human beings who display a similar concern to protect God's people or institutions from any hint of compromise or defilement.... But this word can also take on a negative sense, referring to a self-oriented desire to possess things that are not really ours (see Acts 5:17; 13:45; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20). The qualification 'bitter' (*pikros*: used in v. 11 of water) makes clear that James has the bad kind of 'jealousy' in mind here. Particularly, as the context suggests, he is thinking of the kind of jealousy or envy that people display when other people challenge their own ideas and gain some hearing for them.

Morgan: Zeal (*zelon*) is a good thing but the danger is that it can be terribly misdirected. Apparently, the teachers in James' day were in particular danger of committing this error.... 'Bitterness' is *pikron*, and ties verse 14 to verse 11. The sins of the tongue reveal the animosity of the heart, and they can be most harmful. Wise, godly teachers will not fall into this trap.

Hughes: The hearts of the would-be wise were wrought with 'bitter jealousy,' or literally a *harsh zeal*. They could not stand to see others in possession of the position and influences they so desired. They experienced an inner frenzy at what they saw and set themselves to subvert it.

b) *Selfish Ambition (3:14b)*

...and selfish ambition in your hearts...

MacArthur: A second and closely related motive behind human wisdom is 'selfish ambition,' which is typically the motive on which bitter jealousy is based. 'Selfish ambition' translates the single Greek word *eritheia*, which connotes strife, contentiousness, and extreme selfishness. The term originally referred to spinning thread for hire, then more broadly to sewing for hire then more broadly still to any sort of work or undertaking that was done for personal gain. The idea

James – Lesson 8

of ‘ambition’ is implied here by the context. Understandably, the word became closely associated with those who sought high political office or other positions of influence and power. It was used of personal gratification and self-fulfillment at any cost, which are the ultimate goals of all fleshly endeavors. It has no room for others, much less genuine humility.

Morgan: Paul connected bitterness with ‘selfish ambition’ (*eritheian*) in his letters to the troubled Corinthian church (1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; cp. Gal. 5:20). The idea is that of a factious rivalry or party spirit. This kind of attitude relishes in the malicious, petty triumph of one group over another. A godly and meek spirit will never divide the body of Christ into factions.

Hughes: The wretched twin of this bitter jealousy in our text is *erithia*, ‘selfish ambition’—political ambition in the church. The same word is used by Paul in Philippians 1:17 where he describes rival brethren ‘who proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition [*erithia*], not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.’ This brought party splits to the church—vile little support groups that mutually envenomed one another in sustained attacks.

Moo: What makes this nuance of ‘envy’ particularly likely here is the word that it is paired with, ‘selfish ambition’ (*eritheia*). The word occurs only here in the NT but is sometimes related to a similar word that Paul used three times in conjunction with ‘jealousy,’ ‘strife’ (*eris*).... The only attested pre-NT occurrence of the word comes in Aristotle, who used it to describe the narrow partisan zeal of fanatical, greedy politicians in his own day. This meaning makes excellent sense here in James. Some who pride themselves on their wisdom and understanding are displaying a jealous, bitter partisanship that is the antithesis of the humility produced by true wisdom.

c) Arrogant (3:14c)

...do not boast...

MacArthur: A person whose motives are based on the world’s wisdom is inevitably ‘arrogant.’ *Katakauchaomai*, here translated ‘be arrogant,’ is a strengthened and intensified form of a verb that means to boast. In most of the pagan world of New Testament times, the word had a positive connotation. As today, boasting and self-glorying were the accepted and expected marks of a military or sports hero or anyone else who was highly successful in some field of endeavor. But the faithful Christian is ‘not’ to have such arrogance, which characterizes the absence of divine wisdom. When arrogance is the normal and unabashed attitude of a person, it demonstrates the absence of a saving relationship to God.

Moo: The word for ‘boast’ (*katakauchaomai*) is a compound form of a verb used especially often in Paul (*kauchaomai*). The simple form of this verb is also translated ‘boast’ – probably the best translation of a word that usually has a dual sense ‘take pride in’ and ‘put confidence in.’ ... The compound form of the verb that is used here usually has the sense of ‘boast over against’ something or somebody (see the other three NT occurrences, Rom. 11:18 [twice] and James 2:13). But James does not indicate any object for the verb here.... This object could be ‘truth’ (see NEB) or ‘wisdom’ (see TEV).... The latter is the better alternative, since James goes on to speak about false wisdom in v. 15.

Morgan: It seems that some people in this community of faith not only harbored bitterness and selfish ambition in their hearts, but to make matters worse, they actually boasted about it. ‘Boast’ is from the same word as in 2:13; it carries the idea of one exulting over a person who is not as prominent or as important.

James – Lesson 8

Hughes: And to top things off, they were boasting about it. James says, ‘do not boast and be false to the truth.’ In other words, stop claiming that your bitter envy and party spirit are a result of God’s wisdom.

d) Untruthful (3:14d)

...and be false to the truth.

Morgan: James informs them that when they do this they deny and lie against the truth that they ostensibly teach. ‘Lie’ or ‘deny’ is from *pseudomai*, from which we derive the prefix *pseudo-*. James drives home an important and needed lesson: by your conduct do not belie the truth that you teach.

Moo: 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 is and does. For wisdom must always be accompanied by humility.

MacArthur: A professed Christian who is proud, boasting, self-centered, loveless, and ‘arrogant’ is a fraud. To claim otherwise is to ‘lie against the truth,’ to utterly contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ and the clear teaching of all the New Testament... There is nothing more characteristic of fallen, unredeemed men than being dominated by self. James is therefore saying that, if a person claims to belong to God and to have the wisdom of God, but his life is motivated and characterized by selfish ambition and bitter jealousy, he is simply lying ‘against the truth.’ Whatever he might claim, he cannot be saved. He is living a lie.

Hughes: James’ insightful approach is still a sharp challenge to us today who presume to be wise in doing God’s work, but inwardly are driven by pride, so that our conversation is full of subtle gibes and witty ripostes aimed at those we envy.

2. Source of False Wisdom (3:15)

¹⁵*This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

a) Not Heavenly (3:15a)

¹⁵*This is not the wisdom that comes down from above...*

Moo: Such people as those he has described in v. 14 do possess ‘wisdom’ -- but it is not biblical wisdom. *Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven.* The quotation marks around ‘wisdom’ in the NIV effectively convey the idea that one can only speak of the self-oriented learning of these people who claim to be ‘wise’ as a phantom wisdom – a false representation of the real thing... The NIV ‘from heaven’ (see also TEV) is a legitimate paraphrase for the Greek, which is literally, ‘from above.’ James has used the same word in 1:17 to identify the realm from which all good gifts come. This is God’s realm, who delights to give his children what they ask for – especially wisdom (see 1:5). True wisdom comes not (or, at least, not only) through intellectual effort or study; it is the gift of God (Pr. 2:6).

MacArthur: Here James briefly presents three of the most distinct and basic characteristics of false, ungodly wisdom, which ‘is not that which comes down from’ God by revelation and the Spirit. The three great enemies of the believer are the world, the flesh, and the devil, which correspond to the three characteristics of false wisdom that James mentions here. It is ‘earthly’ (of the world), ‘natural’ (of the flesh), and ‘demonic’ (of the devil).

James – Lesson 8

Morgan: James warns that such ‘wisdom’ derives not from heaven (God) but from below (earthly sources). This counterfeit wisdom has three characteristics.

Moo: But the ‘wisdom’ that people who are selfish and partisan have has just the opposite nature and origin. It is *earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.*

Hughes: In verse 15 James gives the diabolical bloodline of pseudo-wisdom.... There is an ascending order of negative strength here: ‘earthly’—‘unspiritual’—‘demonic.’

b) *Earthly (3:15b)*

...*but is earthly...*

MacArthur: First, such wisdom is ‘earthly,’ in that it is limited to the present, material world of time and space. By definition, it is restricted to things that men can theorize, discover, and accomplish by himself. It has no place for God or the things of God. It has no place for spiritual truth or illumination. It is a closed system, a circumscribed box, as it were, of man’s own making and choosing under satanic prompting.

Morgan: First, its viewpoint is of this world. ‘Earth’ is from *epi* and *gē*, literally, ‘upon the earth.’ It does not have a heavenly point of view.

Moo: The word ‘earthly’ has as its opposite ‘heaven’ (see esp. Jn. 3:12; 1 Cor. 15:40; 2 Cor. 5:1; Phil. 2:10). The word does not always have a negative connotation, sometimes simply denoting that which is typical of, and belongs to, the earthly sphere (e.g., Jn. 3:12; 1 Cor. 15:40; 2 Cor. 5:1; Phil. 2:10). But when used in the sense of thinking or behavior, ‘earthly’ has a negative nuance, suggesting a narrow perspective that fails to consider God’s realm and will (cp. Phil. 3:19): ‘earthbound’ is a good rendering.

Hughes: This pseudo-wisdom is ‘earthly’—the world is its source and boundary.

c) *Unspiritual (3:15c)*

...*unspiritual...*

Morgan: Second, it is ‘sensual,’ or soulish (*psychikos*) as opposed to spiritual; ... [it] suggest a condition that is devoid of the Spirit of God. It looks more like unregenerate human nature than regenerate.

Moo: The second word James uses to describe this false wisdom can also have a neutral sense. It is the Greek word *psychikos*, an adjective derived from the Greek word for ‘soul.’ Greek writers used the word to contrast bodily functions and appetites with the life of the inner person.... But the word always has a negative sense in the NT, in all five of its occurrences being placed in explicit opposition to ‘spirit’ or ‘spiritual’ (see also 1 Cor. 2:14; 15:44, 46; Jude 19). It has to do with that part of man where human feeling and human reason reign supreme. This consistent contrast between ‘soulish’ and ‘spiritual’ justifies the NIV rendering ‘unspiritual.’

Hughes: Further, this wisdom from below is ‘unspiritual’ (*pseuchike*), natural as opposed to spiritual. Paul’s use of the same word in 1 Corinthians 2:14 clarifies this idea: ‘But a natural [*pseuchikos*] man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised’ (NASB). Thus, we see that ‘unspiritual’ or ‘natural’ describes a wisdom that comes from the mind of depraved fallen humanity and is hopelessly flawed.

James – Lesson 8

MacArthur: Second, false wisdom is ‘natural,’ sensual, fleshly. It relates only to the fallen, unredeemed man, who is wholly corrupted by the Fall and separated from God.... All of their feelings, desires, appetites, standards, and impulses are grounded in a humanistic view of the world, and of man, who understandably becomes the measure of all things.

d) *Demonic (3:15c)*

...*demonic*.

Moo: James has arranged his three descriptions of false wisdom in ascending order of strength: ‘earthbound,’ ‘unspiritual,’ and, climactically, ‘demonic.’ This latter word (Gk. *daimoniōdēs*, lit. ‘pertaining to demons’) occurs only here in the Bible. It may mean that the wisdom is demonic either in nature or, more probably, in origin. For such a nuance would make a neat opposition with what James has said earlier in the verse. The false wisdom that some in the community are boasting about is not ‘from above’; it is ‘from the demons.’

Morgan: Third, and even worse, this kind of bogus wisdom is ‘demonic’ (*daimoniōdēs*). This is an adjective found only here in the New Testament, and the indictment is quite serious. Demons are real personalities, just as the devil or Satan himself.... James seems to suggest that, in some cases at least, the fruit of these teachers’ tongues resembled demons more than God. James will tell the community in 4:7 to ‘resist the devil,’ and nowhere else are he and his minions more active than in using the tongue to tear down and mislead. Worldly ‘wisdom’ will destroy a church, a family, or a society in its attempt to exert its own will. And the source of such wisdom is hell itself.

MacArthur: Third, false wisdom is ‘demonic.’ Although it is human, earthbound, and fleshly, its root source is Satan himself, working through his ‘demonic’ fallen angels, who rebelled with him against God in ages past. Satan has always promised wisdom to those he tempts, asserting that God’s Word should be doubted and his own accepted, which was the essence of his temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden.... Thus, was born the lie that man can be his own god. To the world’s philosophers, religion in general and biblical Christianity specifically are relics of a superstitious, prescientific age that relied on fantasy to explain what had not yet been discovered by man’s own efforts.

Hughes: Last, and lowest, this wisdom is ‘demonic.’ This wisdom that produces ‘bitter jealousy,’ ‘selfish ambition,’ and proud boasting is radically evil, for it is authored by the devil.

e) *Summary*

Moo: In sum, then, this false wisdom, which does not lead to good works and humility (v. 13), is characterized by ‘the world, the flesh, and the devil.’ In each of these ways, it is the direct antithesis of ‘the wisdom that comes from above’ – heavenly in nature, spiritual in essence, and divine in origin.

Hughes: The truth is clear—proud, ambitious, fighting ‘wisdom’ comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil. We must never let anyone convince us that such conduct is ‘common sense,’ or that if we don’t learn ‘to give as good as we get’ we will never succeed in life, or that meekness is ‘unmanly’ (or ‘unwomanly’), or that the wise must always have the last word. Such wisdom is from below and can only take us down, down, down, down!

3. Results of False Wisdom (3:16)

¹⁶*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

James – Lesson 8

Morgan: Verse 16 calls attention to the results of this spurious wisdom.

Hughes: James concludes his discussion of false witness by summing up its unhappy results.

a) *Jealousy and Selfish Ambition (3:16a)*

¹⁶*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist...*

Morgan: ‘For’ ties this verse to the preceding one and justifies the severe condemnation of this ‘wisdom.’ It is accompanied by disastrous social results. Both ‘bitterness’ and ‘selfish ambition’ are used in verse 14 of those who claim to have wisdom.

MacArthur: Reiterating the two motives behind false wisdom, namely ‘jealousy and selfish ambition,’ James says that where ever they ‘exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.’ Both ‘disorder’ and ‘every evil thing’ are obviously broad terms that cover a multitude of specific bad results, which there is no need to delineate in detail. But they certainly include anger; bitterness; resentment; lawsuit; divorce; racial, ethnic, social, and economic divisions; and a host of other personal and social disorders. They also include the absence of love, intimacy, trust, fellowship, and harmony.

Moo: The earthbound, unspiritual, and even demonic character of this wisdom is evident from the effects it has in the life of the church. In order to make this point, James reiterates the two character traits displayed in the lives of those who are (wrongly) claiming to be ‘wise’ (v. 14); *envy and selfish ambition.*

b) *Disorder (3:16b)*

...there will be disorder...

MacArthur: *Akatastasia* (‘disorder’) has the basic meaning of instability, and hence came to be used of a state of confusion, disturbance, disarray, or tumult, sometimes even rebellion or anarchy.... James has already made clear that ‘disorder’ does not characterize God’s people, but rather the ‘double-minded man, unstable [*akatastasia*]’ (1:8) and the unredeemed tongue, which ‘is a restless [*akatastasia*] evil and full of deadly poison. (3:8). Because ‘God is not a God of confusion but of peace’ (1 Cor. 14:33), biblical wisdom, on the other hand, brings harmony, unity, and love. All the conflicts, crimes, battles, and wars of the world are evidence of the devastation caused by human wisdom.

Morgan: James has used the word ‘confusion’ (*akatastasia*) twice already: in 1:8 and 3:8 to describe an unstable man and a restless tongue. Here, the noun points to the restlessness, disorder, and chaos produced in the assembly by worldly wisdom. God cannot be the author of such ‘wisdom’ that destroys the fellowship of the body.

Moo: When people hold such attitudes, the result can only be *disorder and every evil practice.* The Greek word translated ‘disorder’ (*akatastasia*) is another form of a word that James has used in 1:8 and 3:8 to describe the ‘double-minded’ person and the ‘double-speaking’ tongue. These words are rendered, respectively, ‘unstable’ and ‘restless’ in the NIV. The noun that James uses connotes a restless, unsettled state.... Envy and selfish ambition among the leaders have a tremendous potential to damage the unity and order of the church as a whole. When those who are being looked to for direction and wise counsel act on the basis of a personal agenda or in a spirit of ‘one-upmanship’ toward one another, great damage to the church ensues.

James – Lesson 8

c) *Vile Practice (3:16c)*

...and every vile practice.

MacArthur: ‘Every evil thing’ is the broadest possible category of the bad results produced by human wisdom. In its better sense, *phaulos* (‘evil’) means worthless; in its worst, it means vile and contemptible.... *Pragma* (‘thing’), from which we get the English *pragmatic*, is variously rendered ‘work,’ ‘deed,’ ‘event,’ ‘occurrence,’ ‘affair,’ and such. The idea is that absolutely *nothing* of any ultimate good results from human wisdom.

Morgan: ‘Evil’ or ‘vile’ translates *phaulon*, an adjective marking the moral character of a person or activity. It is used in John 3:20 and Titus 2:8 of worthless, empty activity. James is concerned for the unity of the body, and where unruly tongues and worldly wisdom reign the result will be selfishness, confusion, and the like.

Moo: In addition to ‘disorder,’ this damage takes the form of ‘every evil practice.’ The word ‘every’ (Gk. *pan*) might here have the nuance ‘every kind of.’ ... The wrong kind of wisdom brings about just about every kind of evil practice that one could name.

Doriani: Consider how ‘earthly wisdom’ produces ‘disorder and every evil practice.’ First, even pagans living in James’ day knew envy is an ulcer, a gnawing sorrow people suffer because someone has something they do not. The envious think their identity and worth derive from their status or possessions. As long as someone else has what they think they deserve, they are miserable. Envious thoughts lead to a host of evils: boasting, quarreling, grasping, criticism of rivals. Envy leads us to rejoice rather than grieve at the sorrows of others. It prevents us from loving them. Ambition and envy breed restlessness. But godly wisdom brings peace and righteousness.

d) *Summary*

Doriani: James calls the way of life marked by envy and ambition a kind of ‘wisdom’ because envy and ambition do have a certain logic to them, even if they are ultimately unspiritual or demonic. The logic runs this way: I have to look out for my interests. If I don’t, no one else will. I must get what I deserve. I see my peers from school. I see the people who were hired with me. Some have surpassed me, even though they have no more skills and work no more than I do. I deserve more ... I deserve what they have and I’m going to get it.

Doriani: The Bible never praises selfish ambition, but to be accurate, we must say the Bible praises what we might call aspirations. For examples, we should aspire to a quiet and productive life (1 Th. 4:11). We should aspire to please the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9)... So, it is fine to have goals or aspirations. We may have goals for the development of our gifts, for our family, for the lost, or for growth in wisdom or righteousness. God pleases those who have a passion for social justice. Everyone who is energetic, everyone with a taste for life has ambitions. The Lord simply wants them to be godly, not worldly.

Hughes: James’ message is simple: there is no place in the church for pride, jealousy, or selfish ambition. Anyone who says pseudo-wisdom is okay is an unwitting messenger of the devil. We must allow now place for harshness, criticism, or clever comments masquerading as ‘wisdom.’

C. True Wisdom (James 3:17-18)

MacArthur: Verses 17-18 of James 3, which focus on God's divine wisdom from above, are a refreshing and welcome contrast to the verses just preceding. Following the same basic pattern as that for false wisdom, James here gives the motivation (v. 17a), the characteristics (v. 17b), and the results (v. 18) of godly wisdom.

1. Source of True Wisdom (3:17a)

¹⁷*But the wisdom from above...*

Morgan: The strong adversative 'but' (*de*) marks James' transition to discuss the sources, characteristics, and result of true wisdom... Unlike the spurious wisdom just depicted, true wisdom comes from 'above' (*anōthen*), or from God. Actually, James does not use a verb here but writes about 'the from above wisdom (*sophia*).'

Moo: James has told us what the 'wisdom that comes from above [NIV *heaven*]' is not (v. 15); now he tells us what it is. Or, more accurately, he lets us know what the *wisdom that comes from heaven* does. For James quite clearly continues to operate with the biblical understanding of wisdom as a basic, God-given orientation that has profound practical effects on the way a person lives. Like true faith (2:14-26), true wisdom is identified by the quality of life that it produces.

MacArthur: 'The wisdom from above,' refers, of course, to God's own divine wisdom, which He graciously bestows on those who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Old Testament equated wisdom with loving God (Pr. 9:10). The New Testament links saving faith and godly wisdom. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, 'Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock' (Mt. 7:24)... There can be no 'wisdom from above' apart from a saving relationship to Jesus Christ, who is Himself 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:24; cp. v. 30; Col. 2:3).

2. Characteristics of True Wisdom (3:17bcde)

Morgan: James enumerates seven characteristics (or eight, depending on how we count them) of this true wisdom from God that is so needed in the community of faith.

Hughes: James had apparently given much thought to the arrangement of the remaining six characteristics of wisdom [after 'is first pure'], because he has artfully order them so that in The Greek the first four began with the *e* sound and the last two with a pleasant *a* sound. Also, the last two have an almost metrical rhyming. He wanted his hearers to remember this wisdom.

Doriani: This verse shows that James expects wisdom to produce results. The phrase 'good fruit' makes us think of external deeds, but most of the verse describes character traits.

Moo: James's description of the qualities produced by wisdom from heaven also resembles another NT text, Paul's delineation of the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:22-23). To be sure, verbal resemblance between the two lists is minimal; but humility, peaceableness, and upright behavior are the focus in both texts. In a general sense, what Paul claims that the Spirit produces, James claims true wisdom produces.... Probably...the similarities between the lists is quite indirect. The OT and Jewish writings provide a general profile of the character of the godly person. James, following OT and Jewish antecedents, attributes these qualities to the presence and power of wisdom; Paul, developing more fully the implications of the new covenant fulfillment, attributes them to the Spirit.

James – Lesson 8

a) *Pure* (3:17b)

...is first pure...

Morgan: The wisdom that God gives is ‘first pure,’ first in the sense of priority or rank. A key attribute of God that He desires us to remember is that He is holy, and that is the root word used here (*hagios*). It means that God and His wisdom are free from fault, without deficiency, and devoid of anything sinful.

Moo: The first, and preeminent, attribute that wisdom produces is purity. The word *pure* (*hagnos*) connotes innocence and moral blamelessness.

MacArthur: *Hagnos* (‘pure’) carries the idea of being free from contamination or defilement and was used by the ancient Greeks of a cleansing ceremony whereby a worshiper was made pure and worthy enough to approach the gods. On the temple of Aesculapius in Epidaurus is the following inscription: ‘He who would enter the divine temple must be pure [*hagnos*].’ Even the pagans realized that deity should only be approached with a pure heart.... *Hagnos* comes from the same root as *hagios*, which is usually translated ‘holy.’ It is not a stretch, therefore, to say that ‘pure’ wisdom is holy wisdom. Coming ‘from above,’ that is, from God, it could not be otherwise. The sixth Beatitude is, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Mt. 5:8).

Doriani: Purity is an innocence and moral blamelessness that embraces all other traits. The pure are separate from the world (1:27).

Hughes: It is pure in the sense of being undefiled—morally pure. This purity comes when one has been cleansed by Christ’s blood, who is Himself pure (the very same word is used of Christ in 1 Jn. 3:3), has received Christ’s purity, and as a result is leading a morally pure life. Those who are pure have put aside sensuality, pride, covetousness, which lie at the root of earthly wisdom. But even more, this person’s heart is pure in its unmixed devotion to God. James will repeat this idea later in 4:8.... Get rid of your mixed motives, your double-mindedness; be committed and pure in your devotion. This carries the idea of being pure in one’s focus to God, concentrating on serving Him. So, we see that the purity that characterizes a life full of heavenly wisdom is utterly dynamic. It involves *moral* purity before God and *devotional* purity in one’s focus on Him.... James’ opening declaration that ‘the wisdom from above is first pure’ teaches that all who possess it are to make perfect purity in one’s moral and devotional life a primary goal. The Christian who wants to live in wisdom can ask no better question regarding his thoughts, words, actions, and devotion than, ‘Am I pure?’

b) *Peaceable* (3:17c)

...then peaceable, gentle, open to reason...

Moo: The seven qualities that follow [*pure*] in the list are specific dimensions of this overall purity. James has arranged them in three groups. The first three words all begin with the same letter and have similar endings as well: *eirēnikē* (‘peace-loving’), *epiekēs* (‘considerate’), *eupeithēs* (‘submissive’).... We are probably justified in thinking that James has carefully brought together the first three qualities to make a general overall point. For the believer who is characterized by these three traits – *peace-loving*, *considerate*, *submissive* – is the exact opposite of the envious, selfish, and ambition person who is driven by demonic wisdom.

Doriani: The next three terms—‘peace-loving,’ ‘considerate,’ and ‘submissive’—are linked by alliteration (in Greek, each word begins with the same vowel and each has a similar ending). But

James – Lesson 8

the three also stand together by their contrast with the strife, selfish ambition, and boasting that mark worldly wisdom.... Taken together, these three Christian virtues characterize a church marked by peace and cooperation rather than strife and competition.

(1) Peaceable

MacArthur: The connecting adverb of time *epeita* ('then') is the basis for taking 'pure' to be a motive for godly wisdom rather than a characteristic, of which James proceeds to give a list of some seven. First, this wisdom is 'peaceable.' Again, James reflects the Beatitudes, this time the seventh: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God' (Mt. 5:9). The truly wise don't perpetrate conflict by their selfishness but produce peace by their humility (cp. Phil. 2:1-4).

Morgan: God's wisdom loves peace and spreads it everywhere it operates. The Greek adjective is *eirēnikē*, from the familiar noun for peace, *eirēnē*. Here and in Hebrews 12:11 are the only instances of this adjective in the New Testament.

Dorani: 'Peace-loving' (NIV) or 'peaceable' (ESV; Greek, *eirēnikē*) contrasts with the social discord caused by envy and ambition (3:14) and the fights caused by uncontrolled desires (4:1-2). True wisdom leads to peace (Pr. 3:17).

Moo: 'Peace loving' (also REB; NLT) is a fair English rendering of *eirēnikē*, usually rendered 'peaceable' (the only other NT occurrence is Heb. 12:11). The connection between peace and wisdom is not new; the OT makes the same point (Pr. 3:17).

Hughes: The next of wisdom's characteristics, which our translation renders as 'peaceable,' is literally 'peaceful.' This does not suggest, as some may hear it, an attitude of peace by abdication.... James is not recommending a peace that depends on walking away from conflict. Rather, he is commending a peaceful spirit. The hearts of those with such peace have met Christ, who is Himself their peace (Eph. 2:14). They have the peace He gives, which is totally unlike the peace the world gives (Jn. 14:27). Their spiritual war is over, they are at peace with God, and they have a deep sense of well-being—*shalom*.

(2) Gentle

MacArthur: Second, godly wisdom is 'gentle.' *Epiekēs* ('gentle') has no satisfactory equivalent in English, but it carries the ideas of equitable, seemly, fitting, fair, moderate, forbearing, courteous, and considerate. A 'gentle' person is humbly patient, submits to dishonor and abuse, mistreatment, and persecution, knowing that 'blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth,' and 'blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Mt. 5:5, 10).

Morgan: 'Gentle' is from *epieikēs*, an old adjective meaning fair, reasonable, equitable.... No English word satisfactorily renders it. It appears three other times in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; 1 Pe. 2:18). English versions employ a variety of terms: 'considerate' (NIV, NEB); 'forbearing' (Moffatt); 'courteous' (Weymouth). However it is translated, it is a descriptive word describing greatness of character.

Dorani: 'Considerate' (NIV) or 'gentle' (ESV; Greek *epiekēs*) also contrasts with the disorder caused by worldly wisdom. It means 'reasonable,' 'fair-minded,' 'gentle.' The considerate are willing to yield, not quick to demand. They are forbearing and slow to fight (Titus 3:2). Since

James – Lesson 8

this is a trait of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 10:1), all disciples, including church overseers, must be gentle (1 Tim. 3:3; 1 Pe. 2:18).

Moo: The next two traits are probably subordinate to the first: it is the person who is *considerate* and *submissive* who will be *peace loving*. ‘Considerate’ (*epieikēs*) indicates a willingness to yield to others and a corresponding unwillingness to exact strict claims.

Hughes: The wisdom from above also makes one ‘gentle.’ The great linguist Archbishop Trenchard said there is no word in English or Latin to adequately translate this word. Nevertheless, the idea is fairly clear. It describes the kind of person who though wronged and possessing the ‘right’ not to bend nevertheless forgoes his rights.... Heavenly wisdom is ‘gentle,’ or as the *Jerusalem Bible* has it, ‘kindly.’ The honest personal application of this is humbling, to say the least. But if we are to be wise, we must take this to heart.

(3) Reasonable

Moo: Although the NIV translates the third word in this opening triad with *submissive*, the Greek word is not from the word-group that is normally rendered ‘submissive’ in the NT (*hypotag-*). The word (*eupeithēs*; its only NT occurrence) means, literally, ‘easily persuaded.’ What is meant is not a weak, credulous gullibility, but a willing deference to others when unalterable theological or moral principles are not involved.

Dorani: ‘Submissive’ (NIV) is ordinarily translated ‘open to reason’ (ESV, RSV; Greek *eupeithēs*). It also means ‘easily persuaded’ or ‘compliant.’ The submissive person is docile, ready to obey, and willing to get along with others. He or she is willing to defer to others where appropriate.

Morgan: ‘Easily entreated’ could be translated ‘reasonable.’ It occurs only here in the New Testament and speaks of a conciliatory nature – one that is open to reason. This quality, unlike the world’s point of view, is not self-seeking and is ready to yield to others (Phil. 2:3).

MacArthur: Third, godly wisdom is ‘reasonable,’ willing to yield without rancor or disputing. It is teachable, compliant, and not stubborn. It was used of a man who willingly submitted to military discipline, accepting and complying with whatever was demanded of him and of a person who faithfully observes legal and moral standards. This quality reflects the first Beatitude, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt. 5:3).

Hughes: The ESV’s rendering of the fourth characteristic as ‘open to reason’ implicitly indicates a willingness to submit to persuasion or to be open to reason.

c) Practical (3:17d)

...full of mercy and good fruits...

Moo: James sets off the middle two character traits (‘mercy’ and ‘good fruit’) but subordinating them to the word ‘full of’.

(1) Mercy

MacArthur: Fourth, godly wisdom is ‘full of mercy,’ again very clearly corresponding to a Beatitude: ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy’ (Mt. 5:7). The believer who is ‘full of mercy’ evidences his saving faith and transformed life not only by forgiving those who have wronged him but by reaching out to help them in whatever ways are needed, like the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37).

James – Lesson 8

Morgan: The concept of being ‘full of mercy’ suggests one who is more than willing to help and minister to others. The same benevolence that God bestowed on us should be transferred to others. As God did for us, this kind of character is willing to ‘get its hands dirty’ in ministering to those in need.

Moo: In the second group of virtues, James now notes that wisdom from heaven is also *full of mercy and good fruit*. Jesus frequently highlighted mercy (*eleos*) as a key indicator of the godly person (Mt. 5:7; 18:21-35; 23:23; Lk. 10:37). James provides his own definition of ‘mercy’: love for the neighbor that shows itself in action (2:8-13).

Hughes: Next, the wise are characterized as ‘full of mercy and good fruits.’ ... Mercy, in Biblical theology, is not just a compassion that results in pity and sympathy. It is *compassion in action*.

Doriani: ‘Full of mercy and good fruit’ (NIV; ESV, ‘good fruits’) signifies that spiritual virtues produce results. Mercy is the general term for acts of undeserved kindness. Jesus both showed mercy (Mt. 9:27; 15:22; Mk. 5:19; Lk. 18:38) and commanded mercy (Mt. 18:33; 23:23; Lk. 10:37). Like Jesus, James stressed the need to show mercy (2:13-16).

(2) Good Fruits

MacArthur: Fifth, godly wisdom is ‘full of...good fruits,’ which refers to every sort of good work or deed. He demonstrates his genuine faith by his authentic good works (James 2:14-20). A believer is known for doing good and for exemplifying the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). In all of this, he reflects his ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’ (Mt. 5:6).

Morgan: ‘Good fruit’ speaks of the good works that a righteous person will exhibit (Mt. 7:17-20). The fruit discloses the root; the tree will bear fruit in keeping with its nature.

Doriani: ‘Good fruit,’ in turn, is the consequence of these deeds of mercy.

Moo: It is not surprising, then, that James couples *mercy* so closely with *good fruit* – acts of mercy are those ‘fruits’ that genuine wisdom, like genuine faith, must produce.

Hughes: James, the unrelenting moral theologian, ties wisdom (seemingly cerebral and esoteric) to action. Thus, we may teach the Bible and be viewed by everyone as fountains of wisdom, refreshing those around with pithy sayings and sage advice. But if we are not full of mercy and good words, we are not wise! How radical and countercultural this is.

d) Plain-Dealing (3:17e)

...*impartial and sincere*.

Moo: Alliteration is again used to group the last two words, each beginning with an ‘a’ sound. Moreover, the two have an almost rhyming, metrical similarity: *adiakritos* (‘impartial’), *anypokritos* (‘sincere’).

(1) Impartial

MacArthur: Sixth, godly wisdom is ‘unwavering.’ *Adiakritos* (‘unwavering’) is used only here in the New Testament and literally means not to be parted or divided, hence without uncertainty, indecision, inconsistency, vacillation, or doubtfulness. The word was therefore sometimes used to indicate impartiality, treating everyone equally without favoritism, an important spiritual quality that James has already emphasized (2:1-3).

James – Lesson 8

Morgan: ‘Impartial’ (*adiakritos*) occurs only here in the New Testament and refers to one who shows no favoritism. In this context it seems to mean that godly wisdom is consistent; it does not waver between convictions depending on the circumstance. It is the opposite of the duplicitous nature of the tongue in verse 9-12. A person of true wisdom is not shifty, turning to catch the prevailing winds that blow at the time.

Moo: One must decide first on the meaning of the...word *adiakritos* (used only here in the NT). The *a-* at the beginning of the word functions like our prefix *un-* in English, negating the quality that follows. The word *diakritos* comes from a verb that means ‘doubt/waver’ or ‘make a distinction.’ So, in this context *adiakritos* might mean ‘undoubting,’ in the sense of ‘simple’ or ‘straightforward’ (REB); or ‘not making distinctions’ ‘impartial’ (NIV; cp. KJV; NRSV; TEV). Each of these meanings can find some support from James’s teaching elsewhere. James has stressed the incompatibility of Christianity and partiality (2:1-4) and mentions mercy in that context, as he does here. But he uses the verb *diakrinō* to mean ‘be undivided’ in 1:6 and 2:4; and one of James’s central pleas is for ‘undivided’ loyalty to God – not least in this general context (see ‘double-minded’ in 4:7).

Dorani: There is uncertainty about the best translation of the next term. Leading scholars and some translators believe the word translated ‘impartial’ in the NIV and ESV is better translated ‘unwavering’ (NASB) or ‘undoubting’ (RSV). The disagreement has two sources. First, the Greek term *adiakritos* appears only here in the New Testament, so we have little data to go on. Second, the common verb *diakrinō*, which is the root of our word, can mean either ‘doubt, waver’ or ‘make a distinction.’ Complicating matters, *diakrinō* appears twice in James, where it means ‘doubt’ the first time (1:6) and seems to mean ‘make a [false] distinction’ the second (2:4). Given that the letter ‘a’ at the beginning of *adiakritos* functions like ‘un’ in English, we must decide if *adiakritos* means impartial or unwavering. It seems that James means unwavering. First, James commends unswerving loyalty to God later in this section of the epistle (4:7-8). Second, unwavering makes a better pair with the next term, ‘sincere.’

Hughes: The sixth characteristic of true wisdom is that it is ‘impartial’ or steady. It does not vacillate, taking one position in one circumstance and another in a different situation. It operates on consistent principle.... Consistency—being ‘impartial’—is a hallmark of wisdom from Heaven.

(2) Sincere

MacArthur: Seventh, and finally, godly wisdom is ‘without hypocrisy.’ ‘Hypocrisy’ is one of the sins Jesus condemned most, four times in just the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5). He repeatedly excoriated the scribes, Pharisees, and other Jewish leaders for their gross hypocrisy and insincerity.

Morgan: ‘Without hypocrisy’ or ‘sincere’ closes out this telling description of true wisdom. It refers to being straightforward and is used to qualify love in Romans 12:9 and 1 Corinthians 6:6).

Moo: The idea of being undivided in loyalty fits well with the next word, ‘sincere’ (*anypokritos*). This word has the literal sense ‘not playing a part.’ The person characterized by wisdom from heaven will be stable, trustworthy, transparent – the kind of person consistently displaying the virtues of wisdom and on whom one can rely for advice and counsel.

James – Lesson 8

Doriani: ‘Sincere’ [is] literally ‘not hypocritical’ (Greek, *anypokritos*). James’s virtues form clusters. The opening trio ‘peace-loving, considerate, and submissive’ all point to a unified church, and the final pair indicates a whole-hearted faith, a faith without wavering or hypocrisy.

Hughes: Finally, wisdom from above is ‘sincere,’ or literally *without hypocrisy*.... Those full of wisdom from above never play-act. What you see is what you get. No masks—no feigned sincerity—no pretense. How refreshing this is in a world full of off-stage actors who believe a little hypocrisy is part of the essential wisdom of life. Christian wisdom demands and demonstrates the sincerity of Christ.

3. Results of True Wisdom (3:18)

¹⁸*And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Morgan: Verse 16 describes the evil results of worldly, spurious wisdom; now in verse 18, we see the results of true, godly wisdom.

a) Translation

Moo: As the capstone to his portrait of two contrasting ‘wisdoms,’ James returns to emphasize what seems to be his key concern in all this: the peace that genuine (as opposed to fraudulent) wisdom can bring to the community.... The verse fits into its context a bit awkwardly and has a simple proverbial style, both of which suggest that James may here be quoting a saying current in the early church.... Most translation like the NIV, understand the verse as a statement about what peacemakers produce: *Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness* (see also NASB, REB, TEV). But it is also possible to take the verse as a promise about what peacemakers will receive for their efforts; see the NRSV: ‘And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.’ The latter rendering has a stronger grammatical basis and is supported by a large number of commentators. But the former translation, with its references to the great benefits that peacemakers produce, fits the context better; note especially what would then be a perfect contrast with the manifold evil practices that are the result of demonic wisdom (v. 16). So, we slightly lean toward the NIV interpretation.

MacArthur: This sentence is difficult to translate from the Greek, which literally reads something like: ‘And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.’ In the NASB, the words ‘seed whose’ have been added, since it is not ‘fruit’ itself that is ‘sown,’ but rather ‘the seed’ of the fruit. ‘Seed’ represents godly wisdom, ‘whose fruit is righteousness.’

Morgan: The structure of this sentence leaves room for a wide variety of possibilities and the English translations reflect that fact. One concern is how to render the genitive ‘of righteousness.’ Is it appositional: ‘the fruit which *is* righteousness’? Or is it subjective: ‘the fruit which righteous living produces’? Either way, James sums up the substance of all that he has been saying.

b) Meaning

MacArthur: In any case, the basic idea is clear. There is an inexorable causal relationship between godly wisdom, genuine ‘righteousness,’ and ‘peace.’ Godly wisdom produces a continuing cycle of righteousness, which is planted and harvested in a peaceful, harmonious relationship between God and His faithful people and between those people themselves.

Morgan: He has spoken of good works and peace, of a living faith and not a dead creed. However we take the genitive phrase, righteousness is directly related to peace. This comes as

James – Lesson 8

no surprise as James writes to a congregation divided over rank, status, and wealth. ‘Sown in peace’ contains the present passive indicative of *speirō*, ‘to sow.’ The point of the grammar here is significant: one’s life should consist of habitually sowing the seed of peace. Those who love peace innately sow peace everywhere they go. And nowhere is this peacemaking wisdom needed more than in the body of Christ.

Doriani: The effects of these traits of wisdom is peace and righteousness for the family of God. If earthly wisdom brings strife, the wise man brings unity and peace. In the next passage (4:1-2), James sketches the sorrow that quarrels, uncontrolled passions, covetousness, and fights begin in the Christian community. But first, he says righteousness flourishes when God’s people seek peace.

Hughes: Having given the seven characteristics of heavenly wisdom, James now reaches for a fitting summary and appropriates what most believe to be a popular proverb of the day: ‘And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.’ The sense is: ‘peacemakers produce, in the atmosphere of peace they create, the harvest (fruit) of righteousness.’ Righteousness cannot be produced in the climate of bitterness and selfish ambition fostered by wisdom from below. Righteousness can only grow in a climate of peace.

Moo: What is this *harvest of righteousness* that peacemakers sow? A literal rendering is ‘fruit of righteousness,’ and this can mean either: 1) ‘the fruit that righteousness produces’ (*dikaiosynēs* as a genitive of source); or 2) ‘the fruit that is righteousness’ (*dikaiosynēs*) as an epexegetic genitive). The phrase is quite common in the LXX, where it almost always means the latter. And this rendering makes good sense in this context, since James has not prepared us for the idea of ‘righteousness’ as a status or relationship that might lead to a godly life.... *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 v. 17 and is the opposite, as we have suggested, of ‘every evil practice’ (v. 16). This righteousness cannot be produced in the context of human 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’ (Mt. 5:9).

[DSB Note: cp. Is. 32:16-17 & Hos. 10:12.]

c) Application

Doriani: James is clear. We must show wisdom, be gentle, and avoid selfish ambition. We should shun envy because it devours our souls. Still...how can we free ourselves from envy? Many people hate their propensity to envy. They struggle to break free of it but cannot. We cannot stop envy simply by commanding ourselves to cease and desist. Envy can get a strange grip on the soul. Biblical truth can help break that grip. Envy and ambition are logical consequences of godlessness. If there is no God, then we should care for ourselves by grasping whatever we can, however we can. We should expect unbelievers to envy and to strive against others. But if believers struggle with envy and godless ambition, it is because we fail to see our status as beloved children of God. Faith begets a wisdom and a gentleness that let us say: ‘God has given me the talents I have, whether great or small. He has given me my place in life, whether prominent or obscure. Whatever my lot, I know God will bless me and I can serve Him faithfully.’ These thoughts, born of faith, create peace. They liberate the godly aspiration that is free of envy. They give us peace and they sow peace in our community. They show that we are living in the light of the wisdom from above.

James – Lesson 8

Morgan: Teachers reveal by their tongues what kind of wisdom they profess. Self-appointed teachers, not called by God, will probably not be bothered very much if what they teach is not exhibited in their own lives. Their selfish motives may lead them to cause factions and disorder. Genuine Christian teachers, however, called by God and filled with His Spirit, though not perfect, will be most concerned about truth and their example (good life and deeds, v. 13). They will sow in peace and produce a harvest of practical righteousness in men's and women's lives by means of their consistent teaching and example.

MacArthur: As James continually emphasizes, the person who professes to be a Christian must prove it by his works, his daily living. If he is a true believer, he will possess his Lord's own wisdom, and that wisdom will manifest itself in righteous, selfless, and peaceful living. He has the revelation of God's wisdom in Scripture and the teacher and interpreter of God's wisdom in the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Hughes: This is a call to reject the decaying skeletons of earthly wisdom.... The bones and grinning skulls of such 'false' wisdom are clumped everywhere along the shores of modern culture, and among them are the remains of many believers and their churches.

For next time: Read James 4:1-10.