

The unfolding of your words gives light.

Faith That Works

An Exposition of the Book of James

¹³Who among you is wise and understanding^a? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom^b. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy^c and selfish ambition in your heart^d, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth^e. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above^f, but is earthly, natural, demonic^g. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing^h. ¹⁷But the wisdom from

^a **3:13 Who among you is wise and understanding.** We should not forget the beginning of this chapter. James is likely continuing the thought he started regarding those who wish to be in leadership or teaching positions. The concepts of wisdom and understanding take us back to the book of Proverbs.

^b **3:13 Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.** Once again James challenges the reader to give outward proof of an invisible spiritual quality. James first said, "Show me faith." Now he says, "Show me wisdom." Proverbs 15:33 says, "The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility." When you look at the Bible's qualifications for leaders (Deuteronomy 1:13, 15; 1 Timothy 3), more are character-related rather than ability-related. All of the wisdom qualities listed in this passage are woven throughout the Bible's Book of Wisdom, Proverbs.

^c **3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy.** Note that James is using the same word for "bitter" he used of a bad spring in verse 11. Envy destroys relationships because it starts with the premise that you are more important than the person you envy. Proverbs says the opposite of envy is a tranquil heart. Notice that the opposite of envy (passion here) is a tranquil heart:

A tranquil heart is life to the body, but passion is rotteness to the bones. Proverbs 14:30

^d **3:14 and selfish ambition in your heart.** As James pointed out earlier, the source of outward evil is the human heart. Selfish leaders do much harm.

A worthless person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers; Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil, who spreads strife... There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers. Proverbs 6:12-14, 16-19

^e **3:14 do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.** This statement continues the thought about the hypocrisy of using the tongue to praise God and curse men. The source of these behaviors is not God's wisdom.

Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding. Proverbs 23:23

^f **3:15 this wisdom is not that which comes down from above.** Again, there are two kinds of wisdom.

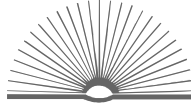
^g **3:15 but is earthly, natural, demonic.** The "lords of the Gentiles" certainly lead, but their wisdom does not have its source in Truth. Even demons have wisdom. They also have faith. So we learn that there is more than one kind of wisdom like there is more than one kind of faith.

^h **3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.** James pulls out these two common traits of bad leaders again as in verse 14 to describe the chaos that results.

James 3.13-18
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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above^a is first pure^b, then peaceable^c, gentle^d, reasonable^e, full of mercy^f and good fruits^g, unwavering^h, without hypocrisyⁱ. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness^j is sown in peace^k by those who make peace^{a,b}

^a **3:17 But the wisdom from above.** Compare this list with the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-24.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:22-24

Notice the recurring theme in James. Everything good comes from above. Everything evil is “earthly, natural and demonic.”

^b **3:17 is first pure.** If those who follow you were to describe your leadership with a word, what would be “first”?

Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, but pleasant words are pure. Proverbs 15:26

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

^c **3:17 then peaceable.** This does not mean wise people never have confrontations but that their goal is to restore instead of win.

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy. Proverbs 12:20

^d **3:17 gentle.** Very few people regret exercising gentleness.

She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy. Proverbs 31:20

Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5

^e **3:17 reasonable.**

Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching; Proverbs 1:8

^f **3:17 full of mercy.**

He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor. Proverbs 14:21

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Matthew 5:7

^g **3:17 and good fruits.**

My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield better than choicest silver. Proverbs 8:19

^h **3:17 unwavering.**

To show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress. Proverbs 28:21

ⁱ **3:17 without hypocrisy.**

Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, or desire his delicacies; for as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, “Eat and drink!” but his heart is not with you. You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, and waste your compliments. Proverbs 23:6-8

^j **3:18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness.** The end a wise leader has in mind is God's end. The rewards of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness are far greater than the power and wealth available to the kings of this world.

The wicked earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness gets a true reward. Proverbs 11:18

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Matthew 5:6

^k **3:18 is sown in peace.** Leaders reap what they sow.

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Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy. Proverbs 12:20

^a 3:18 **by those who make peace.** Compare what Proverbs says of wisdom with what Jesus said about his people:

Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. Proverbs 3:17

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9

^b 3:13-18 James is giving further qualifications for leaders or teachers here and a pattern of wisdom for everyone else. Notice the connection between the abusive speech of the previous verses (3:9-10) and the anger of the following verses (4:1-2). The connection is wisdom from above. God's kind of wisdom is more than common sense. It comes down from above and changes those it touches in visible ways.

Do you aspire to lead others? Then you need God's kind of wisdom. Here are two facts about wisdom none dare go without.

1. You cannot rightly relate to God in the absence of biblical human relationships. This is why the local church is such a vital part of your relationship with God.
2. You cannot produce biblical human relationships in the flesh. God's kind of wisdom is not something you learn academically nor can you become a better spouse or parent by reading a book.

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