

James 3:13-18

I. Demonstrate Godly wisdom with good works (13)

A. Who among you is wise and understanding? (13a)

This is a rhetorical question, not an actual question. The meaning is "whoever is wise and understanding" and the purpose is setting up for the next proposition - connecting this wisdom and understanding with the works it should produce

"wise/wisdom" is an important term in James – it refers to putting understanding into practice in appropriate and successful ways

"understanding" also refers to more than just being knowledgeable, but also effectively exercising the knowledge with insight and success

B. Let him prove/demonstrate his works (13b)

This echoes the earlier section where James emphasized that true faith is demonstrated by good works (2:14-26)

In this section, James teaches that true wisdom is also demonstrated by good works – specifically in lifestyle and in attitude

1. From his good lifestyle

This term refers to habitual/typical behavior, not just temporary deeds, but long-term conduct

2. And in humility of wisdom

The connotation of this word is gentleness of attitude and behavior that comes from not being self-centered/focused

It does not mean being a pushover or milquetoast

II. Do not have worldly wisdom and actions, but Godly wisdom and actions (14-18)

In these following propositions, James will elaborate the lifestyle and attitude spoken of in v. 13b, first by what it is NOT, and then by what it IS

A. Neg: Human wisdom (14-16)

1. Not by worldly, human wisdom, which results in evil, selfish actions (14-15)

a Do not give in to base and sinful attitudes toward others (14)

1) If you have resentful jealousy and selfishness in your heart (14a)

"resentful jealousy" is a feeling of resentment against someone else, shown in a bitter and hateful attitude toward them

"selfishness" has the connotation of rivalry and selfish ambition over against someone

2) Do not act on these base and sinful attitudes (14b-c)

a) Do not boast over another (14b)

This term has the connotation not just of boasting, but of boasting at the expense of someone else, to look down upon someone and/or put down someone in order to raise yourself by comparison

b) And do not lie against the truth (14c)

Of course, in one sense, every lie is against the truth. So why does James use this phrase? It may be to emphasize that every lie is not on its own, but is always in relation to an objective standard, which ultimately rests on THE eternal standard of God Himself. So, a lie is not just a misspeaking, but it is always against something, often with the same arrogant despising attitude mentioned in the preceding proposition

- b Explanatory Reason: This is not Godly, but demonic (15)
 - 1) Neg: This is not the wisdom that has come down from above (15a)
 - This is contrasted with the kind of wisdom that comes from God
 - James counselled his readers to ask God for wisdom in 1:5
 - And he says that every good gift comes down from above in 1:17
 - In v. 17 we are told about the true wisdom that comes down from God
 - This selfish sinful attitude breaks the “royal law” of loving one’s neighbor mentioned in 2:8
 - 2) Pos: Rather, this kind of ‘wisdom’ is earthly, unspiritual and demonic (15b)
 - “earthly” as opposed to heavenly, and has the connotation of weakness and human limitation as opposed to the infinite wisdom of God
 - “unspiritual” is natural as opposed to supernatural, and also has the connotation of human limitation and weakness in contrast to that which is under the control of God’s Spirit
 - “demonic” goes further than just contrasting human weakness with God’s perfection, but it clearly states that this kind of wisdom, not only is not from God, but it is ultimately from the devil – because the devil is the father of lies and selfishness and spite
- 2. Reason: These sinful attitudes always result in evil actions (16)
 - a For where there is resentful jealousy and selfishness, (16a)
 - These are the same terms used in 14a
 - b There is rebellion and everything that is evil (16b)
 - James makes an inevitable connection between the sinful, selfish attitude and the evil actions that almost automatically come from them
 - “rebellion” is opposition to authority that shows itself in unruliness and violence, like a mob riot
 - “everything that is evil” is a generic term for any matter/event, modified by a generic term for all that is morally base, bad, and evil

B. Pos: Godly wisdom (17-18)

1. Characteristics and results of Godly wisdom (17)

a The wisdom from above is first pure/holy (17a)

The connotation of this term is being without any moral defect or shortcoming

b [The wisdom from above is] next peaceful (17b)

There are two possible connotations of this term:

First, is an emphasis on producing and preserving relational harmony – making and keeping peace

Second, is an emphasis on freedom from anxiety – inner peace

c [The wisdom from above is] gracious (17c)

The connotation of this term is not insisting on one's rights, but being courteous and forbearing – gracious to others, without implying weakness or gullibility

d [The wisdom from above is] reasonable (17d)

The connotation of this term is being open to reason and willingness to comply with what is persuasive

e [The wisdom from above is] full of mercy and good fruit (17e)

It is characterized by mercy/compassion, and produces good results

f [The wisdom from above is] unprejudiced/impartial (17f)

The connotation of this term is freedom from judgmental and divisive attitude, and prejudice

g [The wisdom from above is] genuine/unpretentious (17g)

The connotation of this term is freedom from hypocrisy, pretense or show

It is genuine and sincere – what you see is what you get

2. The result of righteousness is sown in peace by those doing/making peace (18)

“result of righteousness is literally “fruit of righteousness” cf. Phil. 1:11, Heb. 12:11

Doing what is right results from “being sown” – activities and attitudes that produce righteousness
James states that these activities are done in or by peace, and they are done by or to those who are making peace and/or doing peaceful things

“peace” has the same connotations as above