

A. The Question & Answer (13)

Q: “Who is _____ and _____ among you?” (13a)

A: “Let them show it by their _____ . . .” (13b)

B. _____ Wisdom (14-16)

Source: “not from _____, earthly, _____, _____”

Character: 1) “bitter _____”

2) “_____ ambition”

Result: 1) “_____”

2) “every _____ practice”

C. _____ Wisdom (17-18)

Source: “_____”

Character: 1) “_____”

2) “_____”

3) “_____”

4) “_____”

5) “full of _____ and good _____”

6) “_____”

7) “_____”

Result: “_____”

Homework

- **Read James 4:1-12.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 8: Submitting to God" (pp 79-88).**
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
 1. What causes the fights and quarrels within you and in your relationships?
 2. What does James say is one reason why God may not grant a request?
 3. What does it mean to have "friendship with the world" (verse 4)?
 4. What are some ways you can stand against the devil?
 5. What promise is given to those who draw near to God?
 6. Over what does James say you are to lament and mourn?
 7. What does Max's story on page 84 tell you about the importance of actively resisting the devil?
 8. What are some areas in your life where you need God's peace?
 9. How can you use the strategy of "throwing the fearful thoughts away in the trash can"?
 10. Why do you think believers often try to go it alone instead of relying on God?
 11. What are some areas of your life that you find difficult to turn over to God's control? Why?
 12. What steps can you take today to draw nearer to God?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** How do your actions demonstrate that you are living in complete submission to God?

Introduction

1. James MacArthur asks, “Who is the wisest person you know? Explain what you see in that person’s life that shows wisdom.” (MacArthur, *James*, 59)
2. “What, in your opinion, is the secret to gaining wisdom?” (MacArthur, *James*, 59)
3. Let’s see what James says about the two sources of wisdom, their character, and their results.
4. **Read James 3:13-18.**
5. We may wonder how this passage (Jm 3:13-18) is connected with the one preceding it (Jm 3:1-12) which addresses the use of the tongue.
 - a. In context, we saw that Jm 3:1-12 was addressed to “teachers” (Gk., *didaskalos* 3:1-2).
 - b. Scot McKnight says, “The speech patterns that most concerned James, speech that like a spark sets the messianic community on fire with destructive forces, are about envy ambition, and boasting (3:14-16). The rhetoric of 3:1-12 implicitly, then, also was leading James toward the exhortation to the moral virtues one finds in 3:17-18. These arguments lead us to conclude that 3:13-18 demonstrates that all of 3:1-12 was directed toward the teachers in the messianic community” (Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 298).

A. The Question & Answer (13)

1. **Q: “Who is wise and understanding among you?” (13a)**
 - a. “wise” (Gk., *sophia*) - “To the Jews, wisdom meant skill in living righteously” (MacArthur, 60). “To the Jews, wisdom meant skill in living righteously” (MacArthur, 60).
 - b. “understanding” (Gk., *epistemo – hapax legomenon*) – “a specialist or professional who could skillfully apply his expertise to practical situations” (MacArthur, 60).
 - c. This word pair is used in the Old Testament to describe those who are wise, sages (Hb., *hacam*).
 - 1) Moses commanded the Israelites, “Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes and I will set them over you” (Dt 1:13).
 - 2) “God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore” (1 Kgs 4:29).
 - d. James is not trying to identify these persons but to describe them.
2. **A: “Let them show it by their good life . . .” (13b)**
 - a. We all want to be “wise and understanding,” but the source of our wisdom is clearly revealed as the wisdom seed that we plant brings forth a harvest in the deeds of our lives (13).
 - b. “show” (Gk., *deieksato*) means “to manifest, exhibit, reveal.”
 - c. “good life” (Gk., *kales anastrophes*) – This refers to a routine, habitual pattern of life.
 - 1) James has already implied that a good life is marked by compassion for the poor (cf., Jm 1:9-11, 26-27; 2:2-4) and by control of the tongue (cf., Jm 1:19-21, 3:1-12).
 - 2) “deeds” (Gk., *erga*) – As with faith, it is not our saying that we have wisdom and understanding that matters but the wise and understanding actions that result from our use of it.
 - 3) The deeds of a good life are done “in the humility that comes from wisdom” (Gk., *en prauteti sophias*)
 - a) *praus* = “humble, gentle, meek”
 - b) “Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Nu 12:3)
 - d) Warren Wiersbe says, “Meekness is the right use of power, and wisdom is the right use of knowledge. They go together. The truly wise person will show in his daily life . . . that he is a child of God. Attitude and action go together” (Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, 117).
 - e) McKnight writes, “The implication of this evidence is that humility or gentleness is non-retaliation in the face of criticism. Wise teachers are non-retaliatory, and teachers know full well the temptation to respond with harshness. Wisdom, then for James has to do with both a grasp of God’s will and a life that conforms to that will . . .” (McKnight, 302).
 - d. James has revealed the kind of wisdom that Christian teachers should exhibit, but he knows in this fallen world that there are two kinds of wisdom with different characters and results. He explores both earthly wisdom (vv. 14-16) and heavenly wisdom (vv. 17-18).

B. Earthly Wisdom (14-16)

1. Source: “not from heaven, earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (15).

- a. “does not come down from heaven” (Gk., *ouk estin . . . anothen*)
 - 1) The word “heaven” does not appear in the Greek text directly but is implied.
 - 2) “from above” (Gk., *anothen*) – This points to the source of true wisdom as heaven, God.
 - 3) Remember Jm 1:17 – “Every good and perfect gift is from above (Gk., *anothen*), coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights . . .”
- b. “earthly” (Gk., *epigeios*) – This word is used to contrast earthly and heavenly things. Jesus said, “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” (Jn 3:12)
- c. “unspiritual” (Gk., *psychike* – “human, natural, fleshly) – Paul uses this word to describe a person devoid of God’s Spirit (cf., 1 Cor 2:14, 15:44,46). It is used by Paul as a contrast to a person who is spiritual (Gk., *pneumatikos*) or Spirit filled.
- d. “demonic” (Gk., *daimoniodes*) – Earthly wisdom comes from the lower world, the dominion of Satan and his followers. Again, this is a strong contrast demonstrating that this so-called wisdom is not from above—from God.

2. Character:

- a. “bitter envy” (14)
 - 1) The word “envy” (Gk., *zelon*) is the source of our word “zeal.”
 - 2) Zeal appropriately directed and controlled can be good, but in this case it is not.
 - 3) James identifies it as “bitter” (Gk., *pikron*) – It is good for nothing like a salty spring.
 - 4) Earthly wisdom says that we must have the same or more than others. It is jealousy gone wild!
- b. “selfish ambition” (Gk., *eritheian en te kardia*) (14) – The word “ambition” (Gk., *eritheian*) was used to describe those who sought political office only for what they could get out of it.
 - 1) Earthly wisdom says that we deserve to be number one at any cost.
 - 2) Sophie Laws defines this term as “unscrupulous determination to gain one’s own ends” (Sophie Laws, *The Epistle of James*, 160).
- c. The presence of earthly wisdom and its hidden agenda of “bitter envy and selfish ambition” is soon revealed in the life of the teacher by the actions of boasting and denial of the truth. (14)
 - 1) What is in the heart is soon revealed in the actions.
 - 2) We deny the truth of the gospel when our actions go counter to its teachings. We must practice what we preach!
 - 3) Remember that the misuse of the tongue is described as being set on “fire by hell (Gk., *Gehenna*)” (Jm 3:6).
- d. McKnight concludes, “the divisiveness of the teachers who misuse the tongue for zeal and ambition destroys the fabric of God’s messianic community, and that can only come from that which is not God.”
- e. The earthly wisdom seed of “bitter envy and selfish ambition” when full-grown bears fruit in the community of faith as “disorder and every evil practice” (16)

3. Result:

- a. “disorder” (Gk., *akatastasia*) (16) – “confusion, disharmony, antagonism, instability.”
- b. “every evil practice” (Gk., *pan phaulon pragma*) (16) – This is a phrase describing a Pandora’s box of worthless, petty, evil actions toward others and ourselves.
 - 1) Unjust treatment of the poor and misuse of the tongue to hurt others are examples of this “evil” that James has already addressed.
 - 2) However, this phrase should remain general. Bitter envy and selfish ambition loosen morals to the point that anything is permissible as long as the leader maintains control and dominance.

C. Heavenly Wisdom (17-18)

1. Source: “heaven” (17).

- a. Now we come to the good news of real, true, godly “wisdom that comes from heaven” (Gk., *anothen sophia*).
- b. Flashback to Jm 1:17-18 – “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”

- c. God's heavenly wisdom comes to us through the Bible and the Holy Spirit.
- 1) Jesus is God's word come to us in flesh, full of God's Spirit. **Read Lk 4:18-21.**
 - 2) Jesus has sent God's Spirit of wisdom to us in the Holy Spirit. **Read Jn 16:12-15.**
2. **Character:** A rhetorical reflection on the seven-fold (i.e., perfect, complete) nature of heavenly wisdom.
- a. "**pure**" (Gk., *hagnos*) (17) – "to be morally blameless in motives and actions; like a perfect sacrifice or a pure virgin or sinless person." Purity can only come from our relationship with Christ.
 - b. "**peace-loving**" (Gk., *epeita eirenike*) (17) – This is not passive but active living in right relationship with God, self, others, and the world. This is the *shalom* kind of peace, wholeness.
 - c. "**considerate**" (Gk., *epieikes*) (17) – "gentle, kind, willing to yield, not legalistic, open to reason, seeking to correct injustices;" The act of judgment delivered with moderation, clemency, and leniency. Remember Jm 2:13b – "Mercy triumphs over judgment."
 - d. "**submissive**" (Gk., *eupeithes*) (17) – "willing to listen and possibly be persuaded, easy to work with; conciliatory, willing to conform, willing to yield;" Teachers must be teachable and willing to learn from and be persuaded by the evidence and arguments of others. They must know when to be firm and when to be flexible.
 - e. This is a compound item. Works done in mercy produce good fruit. This is the heart of the royal law—to love your neighbor as yourself. Flashback to Jm 2:14-17.
 - 1) "**full of mercy**" (Gk., *meste eleous*) (17) – "having compassion for all, even those whose troubles are their own fault"
 - 2) "**full of . . . good fruit**" (Gk., *meste . . . karpon agathon*) (17) – "doing good to others not just feeling sorry for them"
 - f. "**impartial**" (Gk., *adiakritos*) (17) – "not prejudiced; non-judgmental; straightforward; unwavering;" Partisanship goes along with envy and ambition by favoring those who favor us or who will fall in line with our plan.
 - g. "**sincere**" (Gk., *anypokritos*) (17) – "genuine; not hypocritical; doing what one says"
 - 1) Compare with Mt 23:1-39 – Jesus pronounced seven woes on the Jewish teachers of the law and the Pharisees who were hypocrites with respect to their teaching and their practice.
 - 2) Zeal and ambition lead to false teaching, inappropriate behaviors, and partisanship. These actions deny the truth of the gospel.
 - h. Max Lucado writes, "When we face conflict that is escalating, we need to hit the 'pause' button and think it through. If envy, anger, or selfish ambition is present, wisdom is usually absent. Before we speak or engage in a conflict situation, it's wise to run our plans past the eight traits of wisdom that James listed. Is what I'm about to propose *pure, peaceable, gentle, submissive, merciful, fruitful, impartial, and sincere*? If our thoughts don't pass these tests, it's time to rethink" (Max Lucado, *Life Lessons from James*, 76).
3. **Result: "righteousness"** (18)
- a. Heavenly wisdom seed—purity, peace, consideration, submission, mercy, good fruit, impartiality, and sincerity—brings forth a wonderful harvest.
 - b. Wiersbe says, "Worldly wisdom will produce worldly results; spiritual wisdom will give spiritual results" (Wiersbe, 120).
 - c. "Peacemakers who sow in peace (reap a harvest of righteousness)" (18).
 - d. Peacemakers are important.
 - 1) Jesus in Mt 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
 - 2) In order to sow peace we must have peace with God through a right relationship with him in Christ Jesus.
 - 3) ". . . since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ro 5:1).
 - 4) When we are at peace with God, he sends us his heavenly wisdom seed by his Spirit.
 - 5) We must allow God's Spirit to sow heavenly wisdom seed into our lives each day by confessing sins, praying, reading the Bible, and by keeping our spiritual eyes and ears open to see and to hear what God is showing us so that we can act as his ambassadors in ways that are pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial, sincere, and full of the good fruit of His Spirit.

- 6) If we allow God to plant His heavenly wisdom seed in our hearts/minds, then our tongues will be a source of praise to Him, and our actions will show our faith in Him and His way.
- e. While peacemakers are important, the central focus of this sentence in Greek is not on the peacemakers (Gk., *en eirene speiretai tois poioussin eirenen* – lit. “the one who in peace sows making peace”) but the “harvest of righteousness (Gk., *karpos dikaiosunes*).
- f. I find the harvest metaphor of verse 18 to be the key to understanding this passage in context.
- 1) The wisdom that we sow into our lives bears a crop not only in our lives but also in the lives of those around us and in our world.
 - 2) That crop can be a good one or a bad one based on our source of wisdom.
 - 3) When we plant a garden, the seed is critical. Bad seed = bad crop; Good seed = good crop
 - 4) In Jm 3:12 James asked, “can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?” The answer is no.
 - a) If we plant carrot seed, we don’t expect to obtain corn.
 - b) If we want a harvest of heavenly wisdom, we must not plant the seed of earthly wisdom.
 - 5) Heavenly wisdom seed planted in a life brings about right relationships with God and with others.
 - 6) Heavenly wisdom seed bears fruit as we do what is just and right to the glory of God.
 - 7) Paul provided a fuller description of the harvest of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22 as “. . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”
- g. Wiersbe says, “Fruit is the product of life, and fruit has in it the seeds for more fruit. Usually it is the seed that is sown, but here it is the fruit that is sown. As we share the fruit of God with others, they are fed and satisfied, and they in turn bear fruit. The Christian life is a life of sowing and reaping. For that matter, every life is a life of sowing and reaping, and we reap just what we sow. The Christian who obeys God’s wisdom sows righteousness, not sin; he sows peace, not war. The life we live enables the Lord to bring righteousness and peace into the lives of others” (Wiersbe, 121).
- h. McKnight concludes, “a wise teacher is the one who creates godly, loving peace in the community” (McKnight, 303).
- i. James’ focus is not simply on the personal righteousness of the teachers but more importantly on the community as a whole living in righteousness. The words, judgments, and behaviors of the teachers are delivered peacefully with mercy and gentleness in view of creating peace in the community as it follows God faithfully.
- j. ¹³ Blessed are those who find wisdom,
 those who gain understanding,
¹⁴ for she is more profitable than silver
 and yields better returns than gold.
¹⁵ She is more precious than rubies;
 nothing you desire can compare with her.
¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand;
 in her left hand are riches and honor.
¹⁷ Her ways are pleasant ways,
 and all her paths are peace.
¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her;
 those who hold her fast will be blessed” (Pr 3:13-18).