

Walking in Wisdom – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – James instructs his audience to work out their faith in wisdom and understanding
2. aim – to cause us to put aside selfish ambition and to seek the wisdom from above in all things
3. passage – James 3:13-18

b. outline

1. The Place of Wisdom (James 3:13)
2. The Perversion of Wisdom (James 3:14-16)
3. The Purity of Wisdom (James 3:17-18)

c. opening

1. the **issue of relevance**
 - a. the insistence that pastors use their pulpits to address cultural matters – to “make a statement,” as representatives of the church, regarding the latest reality going on in the world around the people of the church (**i.e.** instructing “Christians” how to *think* about whatever)
 - b. thus, I intend to be *extremely* relevant this morning, maybe even **eerily relevant** ...
2. the **second half** of the letter
 - a. **chaps. 1-2** concentrated on the **definition** of faith (**i.e.** what is genuine saving faith?)
 - b. **chaps. 3-5** concentrates on the **transformative effects** of faith (**i.e.** what are the works of faith?)
 1. James started by giving insight into the nature of language – **faith = transformed language**
 2. (**now**) James discusses the nature of **knowledge and understanding** – **i.e.** we show our faith by how we *apply* what has been revealed to us **in the way we relate to others** – **faith = transformed understanding of ourselves and others**
 3. first, a **rhetorical question (v. 13a)**: who is wise and understanding amongst you (all of us!)
 - a. understanding = able to recognize the *ramifications* of what God has revealed
 - b. wise = able to apply that understanding to daily life in ways *consistent* with one’s new nature
 4. second, an **imperative (v. 13b)**: the believer is to walk “*in the meekness of wisdom*” – he is to *demonstrate* his faith in God by how he applies *what he knows from God*
 - a. wisdom is a “work of faith” = it is the *innate* desire **of the regenerated heart** to use the knowledge God has given to demonstrate *trust* in that revelation
 5. now, the **opposite (vv. 14-16)**: (**as is typical, see vv. 5b-10**) the nature of “wisdom” in the mind and heart of the *unbeliever* is *utterly inconsistent* with what it means to be a *believer*
 - a. **IOW**: James will now **contrast** Godly wisdom with the thinking pattern of the world
 - b. **thesis: fallen humanity embraces a form of thinking (about themselves and others) that is utterly broken from what God has revealed (resulting in unimaginable evil), which has no place in the church amongst those who claim to know Christ**

II. The Perversion of Wisdom (James 3:14-16)

Content

a. the nature of fallen thinking (v. 14)

1. two words with adjectives, repeated in **v. 16** (albeit with one adjective **assumed**)
2. “*jealousy*” (*zēlos*) = envy; desire; a **zealous** concern for what someone else has or is
 - a. **question**: what is the difference between jealousy and coveting? **answer**: coveting is about what someone else **has** (possesses); jealousy is about what someone else **is** (inherently, by nature)
 1. true, coveting has elements of jealousy = to envy **why** they have something (**i.e.** wealthy)
 2. but, jealousy is the envy (or desire) of someone else for what they **are** (primarily)
 - b. **question**: is jealousy inherently evil (even though we use it almost *exclusively* in that way)?
 1. **e.g.** God calls himself a “*jealous God*” in **Exodus 20:4** – in the Second Commandment, God declares himself to be jealous when humans make idols and worship them instead of him
 - a. God is *jealous of his own nature* – God is jealous of the *Imago Dei* in human beings turning away from him (the source of that image) to worship what is **inferior** to him (**idolatry**)
 - b. so, jealousy (in this sense) is for God to “envy” his own nature *and the expression of that nature in man*, desiring for humans to acknowledge **him** as their only object of affection

2. **answer:** jealousy, *when expressed as an envy of the nature of a perfect and holy God*, is a **good** within us (e.g. to desire the nature of Christ; the desire to be like him)
 3. **contrast:** a *fundamental* corruption of the Fall is the belief in man that he is an *autonomous being* – not a *dependent creature* (i.e. that he would “be like God”; **Gen. 3:5**)
 - a. this corruption is to (first) deny the existence of a Creator (**Rom. 1:19-23**) → denying the *Imago Dei* in humanity (i.e. seeing humans as *merely* “highly evolved animals”) → assuming that *destiny* is entirely in one’s own hands (i.e. to be “free” to do whatever; to be **lawless**)
 - b. it is this corruption that James is thinking of here, thus the adjective “bitter” ...
 - c. “bitter” = resentful; a jealousy towards others that is characterized by *resentment* towards them; a *hatred* of their condition and an envy of who they are *that causes one to be bitter towards them*
 1. **note:** the *only* other use in the N.T. is in **v. 11** – can a spring bring forth “salt” water?
 2. a *tainting* of our view of others such that we **hate them for who they are (Titus 3:3)**
“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”
 3. **IOW:** instead of seeing others as creatures made in the image of God, in our fallen state we see other humans as hateful beings who have what we want
 - a. everyone envies – there is *always* someone smarter, more articulate, stronger, wealthier
 4. **IOW:** a good desire (seeing God’s nature expressed) replaced by an evil envy (having one’s own desires fulfilled *regardless* of their relationship to the Creator)
 3. “ambition” = the strong desire to achieve something; determination
 - a. **question:** is ambition inherently evil? **answer:** no – ambition is a part of the *Imago Dei*
 1. God intended for Adam to work the Garden so it “filled the whole earth” (**Gen. 1:28**) – humans have a *God-given desire* to better themselves and their surroundings
 - b. “selfish” (not an adjective *per se* in the Greek) = ambition that is *entirely focused on self* – doing *whatever is necessary* to advance oneself, even if that means *destroying others* to get there
 1. **IOW:** it’s utterly **self-centered** – a dog-eat-dog mentality to advance
 4. “do not boast and be false to the truth” (**given the context of the letter**): this is *not* how Christians think, so, if these are present in you, *stop calling yourself a Christian*
 - a. **remember:** the entire letter is a warning to Christians to profess *true faith*, not just “words”
 - b. **i.e.** these are not attributes of those born-again; they are *not consistent* with regenerated hearts
 - c. **i.e.** a *warning about false professions amongst people still thinking like the reprobate*, particularly in their relationships with others (being inappropriately jealous of others and pursuing selfish ends)
- b. the source of fallen thinking (v. 15)**
1. James contends that this “wisdom” is not “from above” – it is the **opposite of God’s revelation**
 - a. it is “earthly” = on the earth; human; “wisdom” that is evident **in creatures without the Imago Dei**
 1. **question:** what would happen if you removed the *Imago Dei* from a man? **answer:** he would become a “base” creature, a creature without a soul, a “living” body with no immortality
 2. **IOW:** this is “wisdom” that sees other humans as nothing more than “evolved” animals
 - b. it is “unspiritual” = physical; worldly; “wisdom” that is **temporal in focus only**
 1. spirituality is an expression of the *Imago Dei* by which we see *eternity* – to recognize ourselves as more than “temporary” beings, with an *eternal nature*, thus an *eternal destiny*
 2. **IOW:** this is “wisdom” that sees life as nothing more than eat, drink and be merry ...
 - c. it is “demonic” = of the devil; “wisdom” that is **based on a lie** (i.e. from the father of lies)
 1. the lie that human beings are of no interest to God, that they are the arbiters of their own destiny, that they are free to live *however they please without consequence* (or justice)
 2. **IOW:** this is “wisdom” that encourages humans beings to deny *who they really are*
- c. the results of fallen thinking (v. 16)**
1. it will produce “every vile practice” = every imaginable kind of evil (**note:** *evil* as an anagram of *vile*)
 - a. James doesn’t produce a list here like Paul does in **Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 6; Gal. 5; Eph. 5; Col. 3**
 - b. but, he inherently understands **the above:** *naked individualism* can **only** lead to perversion
 2. it will produce “disorder” (*aka-tas-tasia*) = confusion; tumult; disorder; **riot**
 - a. the state where bitter jealousy and selfish ambition “spill over” into violence
 3. **principle: the fallen ideologies of the world can never produce reconciliation – they can only produce strife because they are built on the premise of naked individualism**
 4. **application: the only solution for brokenness amongst fallen men is for them to embrace a wisdom “from above” – the revelation of God that all men are created in his image (not equal in status, but nature), and their real problem is rebellion against him as they see him in others**