

# Sermon Notes

## EARTHLY WISDOM

*James 3:13-16*

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### Introduction

Relation with the previous topics:

- Jesus said, “*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Mat 12:34). How do we deal with the source (the heart)? James answers: two wisdoms.
- Is there any of you who wishes to be a real teacher? Then let him live a life of such beautiful graciousness first that he will prove to all that gentleness is enthroned as the controlling power within his heart.

### What is wisdom?

- Oxford English Dictionary: “Capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgment in the choice of means and ends.”
- Charles Spurgeon: “the right use of knowledge.”
- James’ understanding is based on the Old Testament:
- The five books of wisdom: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.
- Ecclesiastes tells us how man sees his world, God, and matters relating to life from human wisdom’s perspective. It reveals the folly, the uselessness, the senselessness and the frustration of false human wisdom. Eccl 1:18, “*For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*” The bankruptcy of earthly wisdom.
- Job 28:12 asks a question: “*But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?*” Job answers in verse 13: “*Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living.*”
- So where then can we find **true** wisdom? Job 28:13 gives the answer: “*God understands the way to it, and he knows its place.*” And verse 28: “*And he said to man, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.*”
- Prov 9:10, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*”
- God is the source of true wisdom, and wisdom is not a question of how much we know. It is a question of whether we love and fear the Lord our God and depart from sin. Our relationship with God.

- Deuteronomy 4:5,6 say, “*See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them ... Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples...*”
- Knowledge, at its deepest, according to the Bible is living out a deep personal relationship. True wisdom is the God-given ability, not something acquired by man, to see how ‘in all our ways’, throughout the course of life, we may ‘acknowledge him.’
- Apart from Christ there is no wisdom. If a person genuinely possesses saving faith, he will manifest in his life the wisdom of God, that is one’s relationship to God. This is the test of wisdom.
- How do we show that we have that wisdom according to James? (verse 13)
  1. The general: ‘*by his good conduct*’. ‘Good’ means the attractiveness of goodness. So James actually is saying, “By the attractiveness of his good conduct or life-style he should show his works.” The wisdom of God makes the way you live attractive to others.
  2. The specific: ‘*let him show his works*’. The source is the good conduct, but the particular manifestations are our works. Each act in life must be consistent with the whole life as in evidence of the wisdom of God. Our lives as Christians ought not to be lived with the satisfaction that we are doing the ordinary everyday tasks of life well and in a Christlike fashion, but we are supposed to demonstrate especial acts of wisdom, to do things which men will take notice of and will remember us by.
  3. Our attitude: ‘*meekness*’. Mat 5:5, “*Blessed are the meek.*” Why he does not mention love, compassion, patience, and other traits? Because this experience of regeneration, of obtaining divine wisdom, elevates us so that the danger is that, as we preach to and tell (teachers) others of our elevated position, we are likely, consciously or unconsciously, to look down upon them with contempt. Secondly, we may see our own utter nothingness when facing with the demands of the gospel and the law of God. But, how much more difficult it is to allow other people to say things like that about us, especially for the preachers!

### **False Wisdom**

1. The origin: “*earthly, unspiritual, demonic*” (verse 15).
  - Earthly: a product of man or man-made. Acquired, not bestowed by God.
  - Unspiritual (Greek, *psuchikeê*): It means “life” that which animates the body, and makes it alive to become a person. The word denotes the immaterial part of man in its relation to the material part of man; whereas the word “spirit” (Greek: *pneuma*) denotes the immaterial part of man in its relationship to God. Earthly man-made wisdom only enables men to know the natural world about them. It does not bring them in touch with God, the Giver of true wisdom.

- Demonic: from the demon. That is the reason why this earthly wisdom is not easily identifiable. Man feels he is having contact with something that is greater than he is, and he is deceived into thinking that it is God, but it isn't.
2. The signs or characteristics: "*jealousy and selfish ambition*" (verse 14 and 16a).
    - Jealousy (or zeal): It is what Paul called "*a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*" (Rom 10:2). The perfect knowledge of God must be the driving force of our zeal. Is our zeal pushing us and our name ahead of Christ? If it is, then it is the wrong kind of zeal, which creates bitterness and strife.
    - Selfish ambition: J. H. Ropes: "an inclination to use unworthy and divisive means for promoting one's own interests. "Party spirit": A sharpness of self-interest, that easily leads into the formation of parties and cliques. James contrasts *division* and *truth* here.
  3. The result or outcome: "*there will be disorder and every vile practice*" (verse 16b).
    - Disorder: Instead of producing peace, it produces strife and division. 1 Cor 14:33—"God is not a God of confusion but of peace." Where there is such confusion, evidently God is not there, in spite of the fact that His presence is fanatically claimed.

Vile practice: KJV, "evil work". The more accurate meaning is shameful practice, good for nothing (Vine: worthless). When men judge themselves by the standards of their fellow men, they appear bright and wise, but when they compare their wisdom with God's they see how worthless and bankrupt it is.