

Faith in Action: A Study of James
Wise Living
James 3:13-4:12

Trust in Christ....

- ... is not developed absent of challenge but by applying trust in the midst of challenge. (1:1-8)
- ...provides perspective to help us live God oriented lives. (1:9-18)
- ...will produce Christlikeness. (1:19-27)
- ...produces mercy as we love our neighbor as ourselves. (2:1-13)
- ...must change us. (2:14-26)
- ...must be demonstrated in our words. (3:1-12)

Good Deeds Show Wisdom

3:13-18

The Measure

13

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

James 3:13

Those who wished to teach others as wise sages (3:1) needed to show their wisdom by gentleness: this is the antithesis of the advocates of revolution, who were gaining popularity in the tensions stirred by poverty and oppression in the land.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

The Bad Fruit of Worldly Wisdom

14-16

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

James 3:14-16

The Good Fruit of Godly Wisdom

17-18

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 3:17-18

To achieve “righteousness,” spiritual maturity, practical holiness—the theme of this book—a believer must learn to speak with care. Winsome speech comes from a wise spirit. A controlled tongue is possible only with cultured thought. A mouth filled with praise results from a mind filled with purity.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Beyond the active yielding that is submissiveness, heavenly wisdom is linked to the virtue of fruit-bearing faith. The wise are to produce a wealth of mercy and good fruit. Mercy can be a forgiving relation to others, not holding sins against them in a judgmental way but lovingly correcting them. Mercy is also to act generously to others, especially those in need, such as in the act of almsgiving. Just as sin impoverishes the human soul and needs to be covered through conversion and forgiveness, the poverty of the world needs to be alleviated by any and every means. This perspective of seeing spiritual poverty both in active sin and in passive neglect of those in material need was James’s own, and he regarded it as essential for understanding faith (cf. 2:13–17). For James mercy and good fruit should be seen as nearly synonymous or at least related as cause (the former) and effect (the latter).

James

Wisdom Shapes Desires

4:1-11

Unchecked Desires Leads to Chaos

1-6

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

James 4:1-6

God’s wisdom was not the populist wisdom of the revolutionaries (3:13–18); thus those whose faith was genuine (2:14–26) could not waver between the two options. James addresses here many of the poor, the oppressed, who are tempted to try to overthrow their oppressors and seize their goods.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

The two chief categories of reference in this entire passage are a friend of God and a friend of the world. Anticipated in the declaration that the evil of the tongue is ignited by the evil of hell (3:6), the chief question to be posed to James’s hearers was, Which wisdom is guiding you, the heavenly (v. 17) or the hellish (v. 15) variety? This third part of the body of James’s epistle alerted them to their interpersonal warring, to the peaceable wisdom among them, and to the source for correcting their warring desires.

James

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

James 4:7-11

**Trust in Christ
shapes our heart and desires
with wisdom.**

Questions for Application

- Q1. What damage can envy do to you and others? What damage can selfish ambition do to you and others?

- Q2. How are your desires?

- Q3. What can you do this week to plant peace in a relationship or situation which has been troubling you?