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^A Job 28:28

^B Matthew 11:29, 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Timothy 2:24-25

^C 1 Corinthians 2:12-15

^D 1 Corinthians 14:33

^E also references elsewhere in James as 1:5, 6; 2:4

^F Matthew 5:40

A. A Pointed Question. 3:13

I. Who? (verse 13a)

a. 'Who among you is wise and understanding? ...'

b. Wise

(A) wisdom in the Greek culture was very much a mind exercise

- (1) when I first went to university I thought I would audit some courses in philosophy
- (2) it wasn't for the best of motives: I wanted to be known as an intellectual – you may say that I wanted to be a wise guy
- (3) but I soon learned that the so-called philosophers were a rather confused lot of people – a good lesson to learn
- (4) much of Greek wisdom had to do with the theoretical and unfounded speculation

(B) but Hebrew wisdom was of a far more practical turn of mind

- (1) first of all it was founded upon a relationship with a known and trusted God, One whom history had validated
- (2) this is a God-revealed fact, as recorded in Job 28:28, "And to man He (God) said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'"
- (3) so that on this basis of reverence to God, there is a practical result, a change in life – a departing from doing wrong
- (4) if you read the first half dozen verses of the book of Proverbs you discover that Biblical wisdom covers a wide spectrum of every part our lives, including righteousness, justice, fairness, prudence, discretion, learning, counsel, understanding and instruction ...

c. Instructed

(A) this second word – understanding – describes a facet of wisdom that can be gained from instruction, whether that instruction be in a formal, academic setting or the school of hard knocks

(B) here's some quotes from children showing that kind of schooling:

- (1) Patrick, age 10, says, "Never trust a dog to watch your food."
- (2) Michael, age 14, says, "When your dad is mad and asks you, 'Do I look stupid?' don't answer him."; he also said, "Never tell your mom her diet's not working."
- (3) Randy, 9 years of age said, "Stay away from prunes." – wonder how poor Randy discovered that bit of wisdom?
- (4) Lauren, age 9 says, "Felt markers are not good to use as lipstick."
- (5) Joel, 10 years old, says, "Don't pick on your sister when she's holding a baseball bat."
- (6) finally, Eileen, age 8 says, "Never try to baptize a cat."–(2).

(C) but whether your understanding comes from formal studies or the experience gained by life, if you think you have it, then James has a word for you today

(D) it is this ...

2. Leaders Take Note (verse 13b)

- a. '... Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.'
- b. Show It!
 - (A) the 'stow it, don't show it' campaigns of police departments
 - (B) this means that when you park your car, you do not leave your valuables in plain sight so as to be a temptation to theft by any passer-by
 - (C) but if you possess these valuables of wisdom and knowledge, James has a different message: don't stow it, show it! ...
- c. In Your Living
 - (A) when the AV was translated, 'conversation' did not just mean talk but 'manner of life,' same as the Greek meaning
 - (B) so James says, 'if you have these fine, God-given possessions of wisdom and knowledge, show them by your fine manner of living'
- d. In Your Attitude
 - (A) the last few words of this verse can be translated as 'humility, meekness or gentleness of wisdom'
 - (B) It is the attitude that Jesus describes of himself in Matthew 11:29 and how 1 Peter 3:15 says we should give our witness to Christ
- e. Paul says to leaders, 'the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth' (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

B. Otherwise – False Wisdom. 3:14-16

I. Life Evidences (verse 14)

- a. 'But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.'
 - (A) 'but' – the alternative to a life showing possession of true wisdom
 - (B) that alternative is that their possession is false wisdom
- b. Bitter Zeal
 - (A) there can be good zeal and bad zeal – the Greek word is zelos
 - (B) jealousy is but one form of bad zeal – others include rivalry, envying, indignation and pride
 - (C) here it is modified by that little word bitter – 'Bitterness is when you poison yourself and wait for the other person to die.'^{-(3).}
 - (D) such an attitude, even in religious activity, is evidence of the false
- c. Selfish Ambition – 'strife in the heart'
 - (A) Woodrow Wilson was once Governor of New Jersey. One night the chairman of the state Bar Association called him to say that the chief justice of the state supreme court had just died. After the usual kind words regarding the deceased, the head of the Bar Association was trying to find an appropriate way to suggest that he be named to replace him on the bench. He said that he would be interested in 'taking the deceased's place.' 'Well,' said Wilson, 'If is all right with the undertaker, it is all right with me.'^{-(4).}
 - (B) that kind of selfish ambition soon reveals itself to others
- d. Arrogance – 'glory not, do not boast'

- (A) there is an error frequently made by Christians
 - (1) they are ready to credit to God their spiritual position
 - (2) but they credit their personal position: their job, their wealth, their education and so on, to their own efforts
- (B) such thinking reveals itself unmistakably in their words – boasting words which declare ‘these things are mine, they’re mine to enjoy’
- e. Contradicting Truth
 - (A) these three attitudes just described, rooted in false wisdom, all have the same effect upon the Christian and his witness
 - (B) they speak so loudly, that they make his words, however fine they may sound, appear to be a lie to those who hear

2. Source (verse 15)

- a. ‘This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.’
- b. Ungodly
 - (A) this wisdom – which is fictitious wisdom – is not from above
 - (B) God was not consulted in its acquisition
 - (C) God was not called upon in its use
 - (D) false wisdom refuses relationship with the one true God
- c. Earthly
 - (A) this wisdom is earth-level wisdom
 - (B) it is suited to earthly minds and employed in earthly things
 - (C) false wisdom does not rise above the horizon of this earth
- d. Natural
 - (A) how many of you believe in being psychic? ... sounds like the occult, science fiction, or the New Age religion, doesn’t it?
 - (B) but that is the word used here in the Greek: psuchikos – psychic
 - (C) the movie critic, Roger Ebert, died 10 days ago. About 15 years ago, he made this very interesting comment on this subject: ‘New Age spirituality is Me oriented and gives its followers top billing in the soap operas of their own lives. People like to believe they’ve had lots of previous incarnations, get messages in their dreams, and are psychic. When there’s a trend toward humility and selflessness, then we’ll know we’re getting somewhere on the spiritual front. ...’⁽⁵⁾’
 - (D) Paul contrasts psuchikos with the pneumatikos, or ‘spiritual’, in 1 Corinthians 2:12-15, ‘Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual (pneumatika) thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural (psuchikos) man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.’
 - (E) false wisdom is unspiritual; it is merely human wisdom
- e. Demonic

- (A) if it doesn't come from God and God is not considered in it
- (B) if it is earthly, of the earth, about the earth
- (C) if it natural and not spiritual
- (D) only one conclusion can be made, it originates from Satan

3. Results (verse 16)

- a. 'For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.' – citing those evidences, James gives two results
- b. Disorder
 - (A) one result is such a state confusion or turmoil that if it were found in the political sphere would be called anarchy or rebellion
 - (B) but in the church such wisdom is demonstrated to be ungodly in that it is contrary to God's nature and His purpose for the church
 - (C) as Paul reminded the Corinthians when they went wild in their meeting as a church, 'for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.' (1 Corinthians 14:33)
 - (D) so when false, human, natural wisdom takes over a church, the result is anything but what God would have by His Holy Spirit
- c. Trivial Pursuits
 - (A) the word translated as 'evil' in this verse – 'evil practice or deed' – does not convey the idea of moral evil, but rather of meanness, cheapness, or lowness
 - (B) as this wisdom is earthly rather than heavenly, so the deeds or practices that result reflect not heavenly but only earthly goals and aspirations – they focus on trivial pursuits
 - (C) if this is the qualification for leaders of a local church of Christ, then its people are lead into merely playing at church

C. Wise – True Wisdom. 3:17-18

1. Source (verse 17a)

- a. 'But the wisdom from above is ...'
- b. Godly
 - (A) if is godly because it is from God
 - (B) in its character and results it is like God
 - (C) in fact the passage we read, Proverbs 3:13-26, while it describes wisdom, clearly goes beyond the idea of a character attribute, to describe God the Son, Second Person of the Trinity
 - (D) how can such wisdom be ours? ... James already gave the answer:
- c. Prayer – James 1:5, 'But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.'

2. Life Evidences (verse 17b)

- a. '... is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.'

b. Pure

(A) we usually restrict the meaning of this word to sexual purity

(B) its force is much broader: the ridding of oneself of sinful attitudes and motives, purified from the influences of this world, in order to approach our holy God in worship and service

(C) but how can we objectively check the purity our own motives? Jeremy Taylor, a 17th century bishop gave this list of indicators:

(1) 1. valuing the eternal design of an action over the temporal

(2) 2. being more concerned of God's, than man's, acceptance

(3) 3. being in private before God what you are in public.

(4) 4. leaving the success of honest actions to God's disposal

(5) 5. loving and honouring virtue in whomever it is found

(6) 6. despising the world and all its vanities.

(7) 7. being indifferent as to the state God puts us in to serve Him

(8) 8. rejoicing that God is glorified when the expected temporal result does not accompany an associated spiritual gain. ^{-(6).}

(D) my whole message could have been on these words but today, let me make just a comment or two, along with some alternate translations, on the rest of the items in this list in verse 17

c. Peaceable

(A) how can it be otherwise if it is wisdom from the God of all peace?

(B) this is such a contrast to the bitter zeal and ambition of the false

d. Reasonable ('gentle' ^{AV, NAS} 'considerate' ^{NIV})

(A) when faced with a question of rights, it considers what is fair

(B) wisdom from above is one that would follow the royal law of love rather than the law exacting an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth

e. Submissive ('easy to be intreated' ^{AV} 'reasonable' ^{NAS} 'submissive' ^{NIV})

(A) as in the NAS margin, 'willing to yield'

(B) it is a practical word summing up our Master's teaching, 'If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.' (Matthew 5:40)

f. Full of Compassion ('full of mercy' ^{AV, NAS, NIV})

(A) literally, mercy, but since we primarily associate mercy with God's mercy to us as sinful, think of mercy's other aspect, that of pity

(B) compassion and pity must be practical: they give rise to action

g. Fruitful (or literally, full of good fruits) – I'll return in verse 18 to this

h. Whole-hearted ('without partiality' ^{AV} 'unwarvering' ^{NAS} 'impartial' ^{NIV})

(A) the Greek behind this word ('not judging between') was translated 'without any doubting' in 1:6, and 'not made distinctions' in 2:4, and both ideas may be present in this verse

(B) true wisdom does what is right when facing divided loyalties

(C) true wisdom presses forward, trusting God, casting doubt aside

i. Straightforward ('without hypocrisy' ^{AV, NAS} 'sincere' ^{NIV})

(A) being in public before men the same as in private before God

3. Results (verse 18)

a. 'And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.' or margin, 'And the fruit of righteousness is ...'

b. Righteousness

(A) I won't try to settle here whether James is treating righteousness here as the practical righteousness of living out our salvation, or the imputed righteousness that includes Christ indwelling us

(B) arguments could be made for either, but the result is the same

(C) righteousness that produces fruit

(D) in the days before widespread hybridisation, some of that produce would be set aside, grains, seeds (even potatoes) in order to be sown in the spring to give the next year's crops

c. Peace

(A) sown seed if it is to be fruitful needs the right climate: the earth must be tilled and enriched, stones and weeds removed

(B) so the right climate for sowing righteousness is peace

(C) and the right sowers are the peace-makers – those who have made their peace with God, and broadcast the gospel of peace

D. Conclusion – there is much in these verses: let me conclude with the question that Pastor Don Horban of Cedarview has entitled his sermon on these verses:

'Divine wisdom, demonic wisdom – which seed are you sowing in your life?'

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. From *'How Wise Are You,'* a message by Rev. Dr. John R. Hamby – Kerux sermons #25998
3. Quoted by Dr. James Merritt – Kerux illustrations #28225
4. Wit And Wisdom online by Richard G. Wimer – Kerux illustration #27990
5. Discipleship Journal #106, Currents – Kerux illustrations #28050
6. Considerably shortened from *'Holy Living and Dying,'* by Jeremy Taylon, J. W. Bradley, Philadelphia, 1860; pp 31ff (of the book proper); original available on request.