

Spiritual Wholeness “Holy Wisdom”

Introduction: A moment to kind of refocus the theme of this series.

Several components:

- Readers of James, like the church today in many ways, were feeling marginalized, ostracized, and discounted in society.
- Temptation was to compromise, seek friendships with the world and sell out their faith (though trying to credally claim faith). Common today.
- Call of James is to spiritual wholeness (perfect, complete, lacking nothing).

NOTE: A time to excel spiritually, NOT decline.

— What does Spiritual Wholeness look like?

1. Endurance
2. Obedience to the Word
3. Guarded Heart

Today: The pursuit of Holy Wisdom is a crucial component of Spiritual Wholeness

- ✓ Wisdom seems very lacking as a sought-after value
- ✓ Traded charisma, talent, wealth, appearance, influence, intellect, for the value of wisdom
- ✓ Even in the church, wisdom no longer seems to be as important as it once was

(ILL) A day when slow, sound, careful wisdom marked the church—today—edginess, creative flare, and fads seem to be more desired.

Author of Proverbs extols the virtues of wisdom

- Its proceeds are better than the profits of silver or fine gold
- More precious than rubies; nothing we desire can compare
- Length of days, riches, and honor emerge from a life of wisdom
- Her ways are pleasantness and peace

James—in these 9 verses, articulates the beauty and virtue of holy wisdom

Will be four movements

- Holy Wisdom, like faith, must prove itself
- There is a pseudo wisdom that promotes strife
- Holy wisdom produces peace
- Unless Holy Wisdom is cultivated within the church, effective witness to a godless world will be undermined

I. Holy Wisdom, like faith must prove itself.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. James 3:13 NKJV

- A. James seems to invite those who think themselves to be wise in spiritual matters to step forward so he can analyze the legitimacy of their claim, “who is wise and understanding among you?”
- B. Wisdom has already been emphasized as a quality believers should seek to attain.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5 NKJV

- C. He also had said that faith had to be proven.

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. James 2:18 NKJV

- D. Now he lays out the proof of authentic (Holy) wisdom
 - 1. Not in theological terms
 - 2. Not in doctrine or parsed verbs

Instead—“Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.”

- E. We already know that good works are reason for authentic faith but NOW those good works have to be carried out in the “meekness of wisdom.”
 - 1. Meekness/humility not virtues that were treasured in Roman/Greek world
 - 2. All about strength/power/iron will

- F. The virtue of meekness was extolled by the Jews

(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) Numbers 12:3 KJV

Meek=anav

1. Moses criticized by his own brother (Aaron) and sister (Miriam)
2. Criticism because he married an Egyptian
3. But he did not retaliate

NOTE: Didn't say "but look what I have done for you. You can't talk to me that way!"

4. Exercised good works in meekness of wisdom
5. No retaliation
6. Wisdom is not retaliating

For James: Wisdom (Holy Wisdom) guards God's will but also carries that will out in meekness and humility.

II. There is a pseudo wisdom that promotes strife.

3 Thoughts

A. Characteristics of this pseudo wisdom

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. James 3:14 NKJV

1. Bitter Envy—a jealousy or self-oriented desire to possess things that are not really ours
 - a. Kind of jealousy displayed in territorialism
 - b. That's my area—stay away!

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Acts 13:44-46 NKJV

(Paul and Barnabas popular)

For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:3 NKJV

2. Self-Seeking—(eritheia)—selfish ambition
 - a. Pride myself in my wisdom
 - b. I'm partisan, never wrong
3. Don't boast about wisdom if it is pseudo-wisdom

B. Source of this pseudo wisdom

This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. James 3:15 NKJV

NOTE: It is not heavenly or divine (holy) wisdom

For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; Proverbs 2:6 NKJV

—That’s why we must ask God for it (1:3)

This wisdom is:

1. Earthly

Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things. Philippians 3:19 NKJV

—Narrow perspective that does not consider God’s realm and will

2. Sensual—pschikos—soul, of the selfish appetites, desire for pleasure (not spiritual)
3. Demonic—its origin

Wisdom from ABOVE—heavenly, spiritual, divine

False wisdom—worldly, fleshly, demonic

C. Outcome of this pseudo wisdom

1. Disorder (confusion)
2. Every evil thing

When church issues are sorted out by individuals who boast wisdom but are prideful, arrogant, want “their way” and “their agenda” that is not wisdom from above. Brings disorder, division, and destruction!

(ILL) Church Splits—Need wisdom—ask of God

III. Holy Wisdom provides peace

A. It is pure (hagnos)

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2 NKJV

And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1 John 3:3 NKJV

B. It is the opposite of human wisdom

1. Peaceable or peace loving vs. envy—produces peace, not confusion
2. Gentle (considerate) vs. selfish
3. Willing to yield (submissive vs. ambitious—not fight/doesn't have to be right)

C. It manifests in acts of mercy and good fruit

1. Not possessive
2. Not territorial
3. Not critical or judgmental
4. Not harboring grudge

(ILL) We write people off in church when we disagree

D. It manifests consistency (impartial-without hypocrisy)

PICTURE: When wisdom is godly, people don't balk. They don't fight. Don't feel manipulated or abused. Holy wisdom promotes order.

E. It produces peace

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:18 NKJV

When we sow peace, we reap fruit of righteousness

IV. Unless Holy Wisdom is cultivated in the church, effective witness in a godless world will be forfeited.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.
James 4:1-3 NKJV

A. While Holy Wisdom produces the fruit of peace, pseudo wisdom, the issue plaguing James' readers creates conflict in the body.

1. Fights and wars (wars-machai=battles) or strife of any kind
2. Murder (kill) and covet
 - a. It is possible it came to that
 - b. Could be words of Jesus—if you hate you have committed murder
3. Then fights are accompanied by the harsh words (criticism earlier in chapter 3)
4. This ruins the witness of the church

Spinoza (17th century Jewish philosopher) "I have often wondered that person, who makes the boast of professing the Christian religion—namely love, joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all men—should quarrel with such rancorous animosity and display daily towards one another such bitter hatred, that this, rather than the virtues they profess, is the readiest criteria of their faith!"

B. The source of this battle is carnal desire (thirst for honor, pleasure, significance, rank)

NOTE—Wars in our members—soul/spirit

C. The frustrated desire

"...You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

NOTE: One of the most misused texts in the Bible

"You have not because you ask not."

1. What is it that they don't have?

(Probably: Holy Wisdom that's is from above)

2. Reminder of earlier promise...

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5 NKJV

3. They have failed to ask God—because they want something else!
4. When you do ask—your motive is wrong, so you cannot receive.

NOTE: Ask and it shall be given (implies right motive)

IMPORTANT: Unanswered prayer can be:

— Doubt

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:6-8 NKJV

— Failure to ask

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. James 4:2 NKJV

— Wrong motives

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:3 NKJV

Conclusion: Tough text—important truth for church community

1. World is antagonistic to the church—we need Holy Wisdom.
2. This is a wisdom that manifests in meekness and gentleness.
3. A pseudo-wisdom that seeks to manipulate and control us is devastating to the church and its nature.
4. We must ask God for Holy Wisdom, not to empower or exalt us, but to further advance His kingdom in a world where the church is being marginalized.