

## James' Second Theme: Wisdom and Speech, pt. 2

James 3:13-4:12

### 1. The Challenge of Taming the Tongue (3:1-12)

### 2. Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:13-18)

#### A. Wisdom is shown by how one lives (vs. 13).

1. Two ways to live – “talk the talk” or “walk the talk.”
  - We’ve seen the contrast between empty words, and pure religion.
  - Ultimately, one cannot just “choose” to exercise pure religion, this is a gift. (1:18, 21; 3:15)
2. Wisdom involves a beautiful lifestyle.
  - “Good conduct” = “way of life” or “lifestyle” NIV = “let him show it by his good life, by deeds in the humility that comes from wisdom.”
  - This lifestyle is good or beautiful.
    - This is the exemplary life – proven by good works (see ch. 2)
    - This is more than just law-keeping, it is imitation of Jesus’ example.
    - This is a lifestyle that flows from a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2), from a reborn nature (1:21), it is the evidence of fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).  
*“When loving-kindness flows from a renewed heart, not from conscious efforts to keep regulations, it creates the beautiful lifestyle James has in mind.”*  
-- Daniel Doriani, *James (Reformed Expository Commentary)*, [P&R, 2007], 121.
3. Wisdom also involves gentleness.
  - NIV = humility, ESV = meekness, RSV = gentleness. The word is not easily translated.
  - This isn’t a shy humility, or a soft meekness. One can be firm, assertive and gentle. It is restraint. (2 Tim. 2:23-25)

#### B. Earthly Wisdom [or Folly] (vs. 14-16).

1. Bitter envy or jealousy is central and takes pride of place. See v. 14, 16, 4:5.  
*“Envy is the enemy of Christian living. It is the opposite of grace, for it wants to grasp rather than to give. Envy is the opposite of caring for the needy. Envy sees only its needs and desires. Envy thinks other people should care for themselves.”* -- Daniel Doriani, *James (Reformed Expository Commentary)*, [P&R, 2007], 119.
2. Natural thinking, selfish ambition, envy – this leads to all sorts of disorder.
  - This is ultimately, earthly, unspiritual and even demonic.

#### C. Heaven-sent Wisdom (vs. 17-18)

1. This wisdom is ultimately a gift – it comes down from the Father of lights (see 1:17, and 1:5).
2. Purity or innocence/moral blamelessness takes pride of place in describing this wisdom.
3. Then peace-loving, considerate/gentle, and submissive (literally “open to reason” or easily persuaded”)
  - These three terms are alliterated in Greek but together describe a Christian character that is the opposite of strife and personal/selfish ambition
4. Full of mercy and good fruits – this highlights that this wisdom produces mercy (seen in action) and works itself out in good fruits or good deeds.
5. Impartiality and sincerity characterize this wisdom. It is an unwavering commitment to God, and a sincere outlook.
6. This attitude, this character of wisdom has a harvest of righteousness. This is what James is hoping for in his audience – to see peace rather than what we find in 4:1 and following.

### 3. The Challenge of Quarrels & Fighting (4:1-12)

#### A. The Cause of the Problem of Quarrels and Fighting (4:1-5)

1. James wants them to stop and think about this from another angle – why are they experiencing this quarreling and bickering? Isn't it from an inward, earthly wisdom? Isn't it from their own bent passions?
2. In your members (not church members), but inward person (see Romans 6:13).
3. James gives a cause + effect analysis of their problem:

Fact	You desire + [you] do not have	Result	So you murder
Fact	You covet + [you] cannot obtain	Result	So you fight + quarrel
Fact	You do not have	Reason	Because you do not ask
Fact	You [do] ask	Result	[But you] do not receive
Full Reason	Because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.		

--based on the NIV and adapted from Daniel Doriani, *James (Reformed Expository Commentary)*, [P&R, 2007], 130-31.

4. Murder (hearkens to 2:11), is unlikely real murder but along the lines of Jesus' sermon on the mount (Mt. 5:21-22). Fighting, the word is usually for verbal conflicts or struggles (like "attack ads").
5. Fighting and striving for good causes is just, but fighting for selfish ambition is evil.
6. Likewise, prayer is good, but prayer for selfish reasons only, prayer for selfish desires, is bad.
7. Ultimately the problem is our hearts are in step with the world. We are adulterers (not fornicators – we are joined to Christ, but have fallen away from him). We are married to Jesus but run after other gods.
  - See Jer. 3:20 for OT examples of this spiritual adultery.
  - Not just adultery but even a close friendship with the world is problematic. We are to be unstained (1:27, see also 2 Cor. 6:14).
  - This world is all about getting things, promoting oneself, and judging based on merit – antithetical to God's value system. We shouldn't judge based on what's in it for us, or on what they can do for us – we serve and minister in mercy, doing good as we have been blessed by God.
8. Vs. 5 explains the rock-bottom reason for all this mess is the very human spirit that God has put in man – the Bible's entire record is a witness to man's natural lusting to envy.
  - NIV [similar to KJV] translation is best here: "The spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely."
  - Contextually, "spirit" is the human spirit.
  - The words "longs" and "envy" shape the translation. "longs" or "envies" is usually a positive verb in the NT, but it can be a negative longing (in OT Greek and other Greek literature). But "envy" has already in context been a negative thing. And In the NT, OT Greek, and other Greek literature is always a negative vice.
  - God is never said to be envious, the word for God's jealousy is the word for "zeal" not this word "phthonos."
  - God has given mankind a desire to achieve and to long after things – but we have twisted God's gift and strive for envious purposes. We fight, quarrel and lust. We always have.

#### B. The Cure for Quarrels and Fighting (4:6-10)

1. What's the cure for man's hopeless condition? God's grace: "But he gives more grace." (4:6a)
2. We are not left to ourselves, God gives grace to the humble. The grace of forgiveness and restoration.
3. James' account of speech and wisdom leaves man looking pretty low – but the solution is not to earn God's favor, it is to realize we need Heavenly Wisdom and so to humble ourselves in repentant submission to God, and our hope is the God who gives generously to all without reproach (1:5).
4. Humility is the answer (as opposed to pride) – vs. 6 and vs. 10 highlight this.
5. Submission to God involves arranging our lives under God's control – not a passive acquiescence but a positive living under His sphere of authority.

6. Resisting the devil is part of submitting to God. The Devil will flee – he'll have to come back another day – but this doesn't happen immediately. If we give in, he stays around. If we resist (sometimes long and hard), he will have to attack us some other way. 1 Cor. 10:13 does hold true. God makes a way of escape. One way of resisting is to flee (Rom. 13:14, 1 Cor. 6:18, 10:14, 1 Tim. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:22).
7. Drawing near to God may involve the language of worship (Is. 29:13, Heb. 7:19). Or covenant renewal. (Mal. 3:7, Hos. 12:6). This is more than just repentance, it is worship and commitment. When we do this God responds and comes to us. This in itself is amazing – see Dt. 4:7.
8. In drawing near to God we then naturally desire to repent and get right. “hands” represent actions/deeds. Hearts ultimately need purifying more than just our hands. Double-mindedness is the problem – but just like we are called adulterers, the issue isn't so much that we aren't truly saved as it is we have competing loyalties. We are unstable, and liable to fall – but those who are believers will be pricked by this message and not continue with a disloyal heart. See Ps. 24:3-6 for similar language.
9. Our repentance should involve godly sorrow (see 2 Cor. 7:10). Joel 2:1, 12-14 – prophetic call to return to God before judgment.

*“Like Jesus, James says we can laugh now, at sin, and mourn later, over judgment. Or we can mourn now, over sin, and laugh later, at God's grace (Luke 6:25).”*

-- Doriani, James, [P&R, 2007], 150.

10. We must humble ourselves, but it is God who ultimately infuses us with the desire and ability to do this. We must choose which path to take, wisdom or folly, friendship with world or friendship with God, peace or selfish ambition, mercy or envy. And it is God's giving us “more grace” in the Gospel, that stands behind our ability to follow Him in the way of pure religion.

#### C. Conclusion regarding Speech and Quarrels (4:11-12)

1. These last verses tie the section off and show James' focus.
2. Speaking evil / evil use of the tongue, is what James is honing in on.
3. In light of all he's said, we must conclude that we are in danger of judgment if we speak evil against a brother.
4. If we treat God's children lightly we are speaking against Him. And then we are not doers of the law, but our own law-makers.
5. Ultimately it is selfish ambition and envy that is setting them up to be judge against their neighbor, rather than one who loves their neighbor.