

## Diagnosing the Wrong Kind of Wisdom

James 3:14-16

July 28, 2024

We're going to be returning to the section at the end of James 3 that we started covering last week, and which we will finish up next week. Last week we only really covered the first verse of James 3:13-18, as we took the rhetorical question that James asked at the beginning of verse 13. And then we used it as an opportunity to kind of jump in, make sure that we had a good understanding of what wisdom is and where wisdom is from.

The idea was to make sure that we would be coming to this text, this text in James 3, with the same understanding of wisdom that the original audience would have had, remembering that this is a congregation of converted Jews. They would be thinking about wisdom the same way that it is presented in the Old Testament, which would be different than the understanding

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that many in the surrounding Greco-Roman culture, influenced by Greek philosophy, might have been at that time.

We saw that wisdom is not just a synonym for being smart. It isn't just being the person who has the superior argument, the one who sounds the most reasonable. Maybe most importantly, we looked at the fact that wisdom doesn't have its origin in man's intellect or in growth and understanding, or in the giving of oneself to study and to learning.

Wisdom belongs to God. It is his attribute. God is wisdom, as we just read, as we just heard from in Job 28. Wisdom is not something that God just possesses or something that he is the best at. He is wisdom and its perfection, and therefore, anyone whom we would call wise can only truly be wise in so far as they are emulating the character of God. Apart from God, there is no wisdom. Even those who do not know God who do something that would be considered wise, they're only acting wise in this instance because they are acting in accordance with the revelation of God, whether they realize that that's what they're doing or not.

So with that in mind, we looked in the Old Testament for a little bit to get an understanding of what God says about wisdom, the definition of wisdom, the value of wisdom. We spent a lot of time in Proverbs 8, which is one of the most important sections on wisdom in the Bible. It's a poetic chapter where we see wisdom personified, wisdom describing itself.

In this section, we saw that wisdom is more valuable than silver, more valuable than gold or pearls, more valuable, like what we just heard in Job 28, also more valuable, in fact, than anything that we can think of. It says that its value is incomparable even to anything else, but it's in line with the will of God, that with it will come a reverence for God, a fear of God, and a hatred for all that is evil. It brings about holiness and righteousness to the one who possesses it. Really, the pursuit of wisdom, the pursuit of godliness, it's really the same thing.

We discovered that wisdom isn't something that just happens to you over time, but is something that must be, again as we

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just read in Job 28, diligently sought after, something that takes work, something that takes effort to have. It is the reward of those who work hard for it.

We further see that it is in God, and therefore, since it is in God, that it can only come from God and that the wisdom of God was brought forth during creation, brought forth during creation, the idea that even though its existence is always in the eternal God, it wasn't until the action of God where wisdom can actually be seen. Just as we heard in Travis' prayer just now, we are crawling around, we're walking around the manifestation of the wisdom of God in the creation of this planet.

And that fact was a reminder to us that just as James indicates in the latter part of verse 13, wisdom has to do with how we live, not merely how we think. Wisdom can only truly exist when action is taking place. Just as the wisdom of God was defined as his infinite knowledge at the service of his holy will, so, too, with us; wisdom is when our knowledge, as it is

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informed by God and his truth, manifests itself in a righteous life that logically proceeds out of righteous knowledge.

With the value of wisdom so high, then it was be expected that the one who truly understands and believes the Bible will want wisdom and would ask about how to get it, which is the exact instruction we looked at in Proverbs 4:7. Since all these things are true of wisdom, then we are commanded in the Bible to get wisdom, to acquire it.

The Bible doesn't leave us wondering where we should begin if we want to obey this command. We're not lost in that, as we looked at several places that showed us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If you fear the Lord, you will fear nothing else, and that will naturally lead you to wisdom, because in all of your decisions, you will only and always choose to do what pleases the Lord.

You wouldn't make decisions based on how others might see you. You wouldn't make decisions just to give yourself a temporary sense of peace if you're fearing the Lord. You would

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not decide to do something just because it would make someone happy at the expense of what is best for them if you are living in fear of the Lord. So you can see how fear of the Lord, if we could really walk in that all of the time, would not be able to help but lead us constantly down the path of true wisdom.

This is the point of James' little description of what one who is truly wise will look like at the end of verse 13. It will be a lifestyle of good works done in the gentleness of wisdom. It's not just someone who makes wise decisions every once in a while that they can point to and feel good about, allowing them to then make selfish decisions the rest of the time. This is right in line with the notion of being a God-fearer, someone who is fearing God, that that describes who they are and how they live their life. That person is going to be making decisions that are pleasing to the Lord on a moment-by-moment basis. Living to please the Lord in all things is wise living.

And these actions will be proved to be true wisdom because they will be inherently gentle. Again, the description of gentleness is unsurprising for those who are living in the light

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of the Gospel because those who truly fear God and understand the gentleness with which God has treated them in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they will naturally be characterized by gentleness.

In light of all of this, remember that we posed the question, it's kind of how we ended, of whether or not, if we are honest, we actually desire wisdom, actually desire it, if we actually give it the same value that the Bible gives it, to value it more than gold or silver, that to possess it is to possess something that exceeds all riches.

If we really see it that way, is that reflected in our lives, not merely seeing it as something that we would love to have if someone offered it to us, but do we really desire it? Do we really desire it enough to put some work into it, enough to discipline ourselves to study, to search for it, not just not wanting to be foolish or just wanting to be able to make the big decisions that are wise, but do you actually desire wisdom as a lifestyle?

Verse 13 of this section opens with a question that kind of assumes that we do. It is meant to get us to think along those lines, to challenge us, to examine ourselves, to really look at ourselves and see whether or not we truly possess the wisdom from above. For those who believe that they do have wisdom, at least to some extent, James then uses the remainder of this passage to challenge them about what type of wisdom they have.

He points out two types of wisdom in verses 14-18: a false wisdom and a true wisdom. One is a wisdom that comes from above, the other does not. And since we know that wisdom only truly exists in so far as it is connected to God, we can be confident that only the wisdom from above is real wisdom. And in order to help us to test which type of wisdom we might have, he describes important aspects of both. That's what we're going to be looking at over the next couple of weeks.

But before we get any further, let's go ahead and read our passage once again, James 3:13-18. "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good conduct his works in the



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gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant, and so lie against the truth. For this wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

This morning we are going to be focusing on the false wisdom that is not from above. Next week we will spend our time talking about the wisdom that is from above. And so naturally that will lead today's message to have a little more of a negative, kind of convicting, feeling. And for those of you who are sensitive in your conscience, the intent today is not for everyone to walk out of here doubting their faith.

But think through what we've already confessed this morning. Be reminded of the salvation that you possess in Christ. If you see things in here that are inconsistent, as we

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just read in Ephesians 4, inconsistent with the conduct of a believer, confess it, repent of it, and go forward. Please know that these last few days in this passage, I have done much confessing, much confessing.

Before we get into our outline this morning, though, I do want to make sure that we are approaching these verses the right way, because as we look at the description of false wisdom in verses 14-16, we see a lot of phrases that we pretty naturally think have nothing to do with us. We might readily admit that we are not perfect. Hopefully we do; we have things to grow in. We have to be humble, after all.

But usually when we see words like "selfish ambition," "bitter jealousy," "evil practices," "demonic," it's our tendency to kind of brush those things off on the unbelievers, put them on them. When we read passages like this about false wisdom, our minds immediately go to politicians, movie stars, famous people. "This is describing the so-called wisdom of unbelievers. And I'm not an unbeliever, so it is good for me to know about this false wisdom so I can recognize it, maybe help

others, maybe even just check myself to make sure this type of thinking doesn't creep in and influence me.”

Again, there are some good things in that type of thinking. There's a sense you should think like that. You should sound like that. You should always be on guard against this world, on guard against syncretism in your life, where you're trying to combine worldly beliefs and values with your Christian beliefs and values.

That's true, but don't just quickly go to that place. As we study this passage, and in order for it to do its deepest work, we need to be open to the fact that this might not just be describing a dangerous, false wisdom that we could fall into if we are not careful, but possibly the type of wisdom that we actually exercise regularly in our lives, the type of wisdom that maybe describes us best.

Remember, James begins this section by saying, “Who among you?” To introduce this whole section, he uses that phrase. He's not just saying, “Be careful, Christian, so you don't start

practicing a false wisdom." There's an implication, here, that there are people in this community who are living like this, who, if they really looked at the wisdom that they claim to be operating with, would see that they are not actually living according to the wisdom that is from above.

This is implicit in the way that he still refers to it as a type of wisdom. He doesn't just outright call it sinfulness or selfishness. He believes that there are people there that think they are practicing wisdom, but it's actually this type of wisdom. These are those who would affirm and not deny all of the Scripture's teaching on the source of wisdom, the value of wisdom, and what wisdom looks like, that we looked at last week, that we heard in Job 28 this morning.

It's not like these people would have heard all of the Scriptures that we looked at last time and said, "Well, that's not what I believe wisdom is." These are people who, like some of us, think that they are probably, for the most part, practicing true wisdom. They've just either never really been

challenged on it, or they're refusing to look critically at the evidence.

They would maybe point to the occasional good thing in their life as proof that they are operating according to divine wisdom, but in reality they haven't really understood it fully. James fully expects that there are people in this congregation who are living according to the description that we just read in verses 14-16, maybe not openly or defiantly, but rather as those who have been deceived.

And if that is the case here, it certainly would be the case for us also. If you were thinking wrongly about something, if you have been deceived into thinking that you are right in a particular area when you're not, you shouldn't expect to just snap out of it by hearing the opposite teaching. That's not what being deceived is. You are deceived: That means you really believe you're doing the right thing.

The only way for this deception to be made known is to come openly and honestly before the Word of God and see if your

belief, see if your lifestyle lines up with it or not, and then to conform yourself to the truth even if you don't immediately feel like it, even if it doesn't feel right.

This is what James is asking, here. He is talking to a bunch of Christians and asking them to take an honest look at their lifestyle and see who among them truly possesses or is truly aspiring for the true wisdom that actually all who practice either type of wisdom believe that they are trying to acquire.

But who among them actually possesses it? This isn't a passage to try to convince those who practice false wisdom to switch over to true wisdom. It's a passage that asks all who claim to have some sort of wisdom to some degree or another, or who are striving after wisdom to look at themselves and make sure that the wisdom that they seek, or the wisdom that they think they have, is truly of God, or are they just perceiving that it is from God?

And we'll do that this morning as we examine three points together. Point one, the evidence of false wisdom; number two, the character of false wisdom; number three, the result of false wisdom. So first, the evidence of false wisdom. You see that in verse 14. Look again at verse 14: "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."

So you see with this verse exactly what we were just talking about, right? That last phrase is saying that if you say you have wisdom or that you are practicing wisdom, but you see these two things in your heart, then, even though you say you're practicing wisdom, you're actually lying against the truth. Such a person claiming to have wisdom is lying whether they think it or not. You may think you are doing good. You may have read Proverbs 8. Maybe you read, re-read Proverbs frequently. Maybe people come to you and ask for advice. Maybe you have been credited with giving good advice. Maybe others have called you wise in the past.

Even if these things are true, and yet you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, you're not actually wise. You may have said wise things or done wise things, again only in so far as they're connected to God, but to say you are wise with these motivations in your heart is to lie against the truth. So let's take a look at both of them a little more closely so we can make sure we're thinking about this well.

The first evidence of false wisdom is translated here in the LSB as "bitter jealousy." And when you hear that phrase, none of us would probably argue. Of course, that's a bad thing. We know that jealousy is sinful because it demonstrates that we're not content with what we have received from God. So the word "jealousy" naturally strikes us as bad.

But the Greek word translated here as "jealousy" is the word *zalos*. It is a word that could be used in a positive or a negative way. We have no doubt that James intends the negative version, here, because he attaches the adjective "bitter" to it. But you can hear in that word *zalos*, you can probably hear the word that it is most often translated as, which is "zealous,"



the idea of zeal expressing active enthusiasm or an ardent affection for something.

We are commanded, many times, to have a zeal for God, to have a zeal for obedience to his Word. Those who are actually practicing true wisdom would no doubt have an appropriate zeal for the things of God. And some have suggested that a good translation for "bitter jealousy" would be maybe "harsh zeal," the idea being that someone might be convincing themselves that they are appropriately zealous for the truth, appropriately zealous for God, but upon examination, that which is actually driving them isn't godliness.

The word "bitter" generally applies to water that is not fit for drinking. It lends also to the idea of something that might look good at a glance, but is actually not good. It's most likely not that their jealousy and resentment is evident for everyone to see. Not everyone's walking around describing them as jealous, bitterly jealous people. It's not evident for everyone to see, but it's still there. It's still driving them, still in their heart.

During a political season, right, it's quite easy to see this type of thing, right? People who say these magnanimous sounding things, they try to demonstrate that the reason that they are making the decisions that they're making, the reason that they are adopting the platform, the policies that they're adopting, the very reason that they're even running for office is because of how much they care about you. You know, that's how they sound; that's kind of what they have to say.

But none of us really believes that about them. Most of us really believe that the reason that these people are doing the things that they are doing is because they want something that they don't have, or because they're resentful that someone else has something that they want. They know the things to say to make it sound like this is not what is driving them. But we know, we all know we're going to the polls to vote for the selfish person that will help us the most.

In a similar way, it's quite easy for us who are familiar with the Bible and biblical principles to say and do the right

things, but with a heart that is motivated by bitter jealousy. A good test for us in this is whether or not our zeal for God kind of runs equally across the board, right? Or do you notice that your zeal for God is a little actually stronger when that so-called righteousness that you're pursuing, that you're zealous for, maybe helps you out a little, that it makes you look good, when it's something that you don't maybe struggle with as much as other things, or when your strengths are praised because of it or your weaknesses are looked over because of it.

Can you walk in the gentleness of humble wisdom and be just as passionate in the fear of God in areas that you struggle with and also in areas that might make things more difficult for you in those areas, as you are with those things that would also work for your benefit?

Closely related to the evidence of false wisdom that we see in bitter jealousy is selfish ambition. So speaking of political offices, this word that's translated as "selfish ambition" was used by Aristotle and others to describe people who would seek

political office for their own good rather than the good of the public.

Again, remember, this isn't talking about someone who is just kind of sitting in a corner, conniving, secretly evil, and they know it, that they're working everything out for their own selfish ambition. This is a person who has probably convinced themselves that they're doing fine. Maybe he has even had others affirm it in them. They aren't even thinking that they're selfishly ambitious. They've convinced themselves that they are maybe even practicing wisdom.

This is definitely possible. This is something we need to be on guard for. We can appear to be committed Christians who seem to be walking in wisdom, but we need to carefully look at our hearts, look for the signs of this false wisdom. This is going to be evident when you examine your heart and find that your life within the church actually seems to prioritize you, prioritize your agenda over those around you, over the church as a whole.

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As you make decisions about serving and being involved, what is most important to you is your own growth, your own benefit, over the growth and benefit of the church. It's more important that you're cared for than that you are caring, that you're being ministered to more than that you are ministering, that you are being treated hospitably more than you are being hospitable, that you are loved over whether or not you are actually loving.

This is not to say that you can't point to places and times where you do serve, where you do love, where you do minister. But it's some part of the driving motivation, there, that you will be seen in a certain way, that others might reach out to you, that you might be loved and cared for. "If I do this here, maybe that will result in a pat on the back for me later." Maybe it's so you can just feel better about yourself. "I'm really dropping the ball in a lot of areas of righteousness in my life. So I'm going to really raise my level over here to feel better about myself."

The point is that this is something that can at least appear to be wisdom, that you can excuse as wisdom, and that maybe someone has affirmed you for in the way that you live. But a critical examination of the heart demonstrates a selfish motivation, shows you a selfish motivation.

We see here that such a person is described as arrogant. Again, not necessarily someone whom who you would look at and say, "Wow, that guy is arrogant." Yet they are. The way it might manifest itself is when you rebuff any type of correction that might come your way. Instead of embracing that, you focus on where you see the areas in your life that you're doing well in. "He sees that issue in me, but is he even noticing this other stuff. Look at this!" You kind of soften the blow of being corrected by reminding yourself of all of the areas that you're doing good in, the places you've improved.

These are possibly genuine marks of sanctification that God has kindly worked into your life, but over time these things have become less and less marks of grace in your life that you're continually giving God glory for, and now they've become

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more of something that you can point to and be proud of and take confidence in when other areas of weakness are brought into light. And because you have these areas of sanctification in your life, you're able to get away with this false wisdom that's not marked with gentleness, but actually selfishness.

This is the evidence of the existence of false wisdom, a selfish but many times spiritually sounding, maybe even spiritually looking, type of false wisdom. Again, the verse makes it clear that this is going on in the heart, in the heart, making it difficult for anyone else to really diagnose. So we must be constantly examining ourselves for the fear of God in our decisions, in our day-to-day living. Is that what's truly in our heart? Is it the fear of God that is driving me?

That brings us to our second point, the character of false wisdom, the character of false wisdom. And this is in verse 15: "This wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic." It is interesting that this type of thinking, this type of secretly selfish living, is still referred to by James as a type of wisdom, not just calling it sin outright.

It is, however, still distinguished from true wisdom by the word "this." He wants you to see the distinction. He adds the word "this." True wisdom doesn't need anything modifying it. It's this wisdom, this particular type of wisdom, this false wisdom. This is similar to earlier, where James referred to a type of faith that even the demons have but that isn't actually true faith. There is a type of faith that doesn't produce works, but that's not a true faith.

So, too, there is a type of wisdom that isn't true wisdom. And just like with the discussion on faith, we are to understand it is a wisdom that is still passed off or excused away as true wisdom; and it must in some way bear some sort of resemblance, at least in words, to true wisdom. It maybe uses the same language, but it's not true wisdom. He says that "this is wisdom that is not from above." He doesn't necessarily separate it by giving it another name, as we often do by calling it "worldly wisdom" or "false wisdom," as I'm doing in the sermon. Not that there's anything wrong with that.



But here James is just making the point that there is only one true wisdom, that which comes from above, and this is not it. No need to call it earthly wisdom or natural wisdom or demonic wisdom, even though these would work. It seems to be his intention to show that it doesn't really matter where it might come from. It's only important to know that it is not from above, that it's not from God, and that means it can't possibly be the wisdom that we are supposed to be seeking.

James 1:17 said, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." This wisdom is not from above, so it is not good. It's all we need to know to come to the right conclusion about the wisdom. But the verse goes on to help us in our discernment by giving us these three characteristics of a false wisdom. This would include all wisdom that doesn't come from above. So these aren't three types of false wisdom, but rather three characteristics which are true of all wisdom that does not come from above.

So let's just look at these three characteristics together. "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 coming down from above, but is first earthly." It's earthly. It's interesting that the first two words, here, actually, "earthly" and "natural," aren't technically negative words. They're kind of neutral ways to describe something that in and of themselves, they don't have any moral quality to them.

Often we might think of this term the same way the Bible often describes things as "worldly." When we hear that something is worldly from a biblical perspective, we're generally talking about something that is of the sinful system of thinking in a fallen world that rebels against God. And contextually, sometimes it is that way.

But this isn't being used this way here. It's a different word and actually a different use than we see a little bit in 4:4, for example, where he says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" There he's clearly talking about the fact that being a friend of the world is being a part of this worldly system that sets itself up against God.

But here the word in our verse, the word “earthly,” just means existing on earth or belonging to the earth. We could describe almost anything made of matter as “earthly.” You're all sitting in earthly chairs wearing earthly clothes, that type of thing. We wouldn't really be saying much more about it other than the fact that it's terrestrial, belongs to this realm; not, again, in and of itself a negative thing, just a statement of fact.

But it becomes bad, it becomes a negative description when it is describing something that ought not to be earthly. Like how a word like “dry” isn't necessarily a negative description of something. It's just a state of being, a state of existence. It might even be positive if you're, you know, describing your clothes after running in from a rainstorm, “I stayed dry.” But when you say something like, “The steak is dry,” now it's negative, right?

That's the same thing that happens when you describe wisdom as earthly. Wisdom is from above, and it should bring us to

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focus on that which is above. Earthly wisdom is false wisdom because any wisdom that has at its focus that which extends no further in its ultimate purpose than this earth, it is not helping us to live in the way that in which we're called.

It is a wisdom that we see all around us, earthly wisdom. We see it all around us, marked by earthly principles like mere happiness, doing whatever you can to rid yourself of pain or discomfort, earthly; chasing after the same earthly goals, financial security, comfort, fun, enjoyment, entertainment; devoted to the same earthly objects, houses, furniture, cars, electronics. It's a wisdom that is only useful in helping you to navigate this life on this earth as smoothly as possible with no thought of what is to come, with no thought of what is above, no thought of the spiritual realm.

Therefore, closely related to the term "earthly" is that next term that's translated as "natural." It could also be translated and is in some places as "unspiritual." It's directly related to the last term, but it kind of brings the focus in more: that which is merely physical. So becoming obsessed with

the physical, living as long as possible, obsessed with maintaining a youthful appearance, obsessed with health and physical pleasure, that being the main end to which you live your life.

There is in our world no end to the books and the articles and the movies and the Ted talks and the podcasts, in the commercials and the interviews, from the earthly and unspiritually wise, a wisdom that's aimed to help you get the maximum enjoyment out of this life that you possibly can, to live as long as you can, and in that long life, to be as entertained as you can be, to be as liked by as many people as you can be liked by, to have as many friends as you can have, to feel as good as you can, both your physical health and your mental health, to avoid as much possible harm that's out there as you can.

There is a type of wisdom, there. There is a type of wisdom, there, when you think purely in terms of knowledge applied, purely in those terms, as people become experts in so many areas that will help people to live for these types of

things, and then applying that knowledge and that knowledge only to the way you live. That's the type of wisdom that reigned supreme when COVID entered the scene: physical only. Don't even think about the spiritual.

And though we've mostly come out of that, it's still everywhere. That same wisdom is everywhere. You can go online and have your choice of thousands of life coaches. They've spent a lot of time researching and thinking through all kinds of different topics to help you to apply their learning, all of their research, to your life so that you can be as happy as possible in whatever thing it is that makes you personally the most happy, since it differs from person to person.

And they can come into your life and be like, "Here's the type of people that you should hang out with. Here are the types of activities you should consider. Here are the types of places you should visit so you can get the most out of this life." These are suggestions, again, based on knowledge and research. They're here for you to apply. There is a sense in which it's

knowledge applied, but it is toward the goal of an earthly and physical fulfillment.

And it's not that there isn't some overlap in a few of these areas. We are to be good stewards of our lives, we're not denying that, good stewards of our bodies, good stewards of the earth around us. But to the extent that this becomes the goal, that this becomes the end for which we do it, that becomes a problem.

So when we're good stewards of the planet so we can save it, not because we want to please its Creator, we're good stewards of our body so we can feel good about ourselves, not so we can bring glory to God, when these are the things that we live for, that we obsess over, when these are the things that drive us, even though "earthly" and "natural" are in and of themselves neutral adjectives, when it comes to the ultimate end for which we are living, they describe someone who is refusing to walk in true wisdom.

And then there's a third word that we see here, a third characteristic that is definitely negative, right? There's no sense in which you could positively or even neutrally refer to something as "demonic." "How was your hamburger?" "Well, it was demonic?" You can't do that. Meaning "pertaining to or proceeding from demons": Pretty much all the commentators I looked at agree that this is in reference to the origin of this type of wisdom. This is the type of wisdom that proceeds from demons, proceeds from demons. This false wisdom has its source in demons and earthly and natural.

And that word "demonic" would be a little shocking on the list, right? The first two words are words that can just be neutral. They don't necessarily have to be a big deal. But when they're attached to another word, this word "demonic," that suddenly places everything into serious territory for us. Your attention is suddenly grabbed because there is no mistaking how serious this has just become.

It's like if someone was trying to warn you about someone and they said, "Look out for that guy over there, the guy with



the blonde hair, the red shirt, who's pointing a gun at you." It snaps you into attention. Those first two details that could have been excused as neutral at first are now key descriptors of something that is a real threat.

That's kind of what is going on here. For those who aren't taking this seriously by this point and just want to kind of excuse the marks of earthly wisdom: "Okay, I've got it, but it's not that big of a deal. I get it. It's supposed to be on heaven, but at least it's not on sin. Not that big of a deal." James says such wisdom is "earthly, natural, demonic." Wait, wait, what? It's not just "not that big of a deal." It is of demons.

So it's at this point that we need to think about this and start making some connections with what Travis was preaching on a few weeks ago from Ephesians 6, about putting on the full armor of God, preparing ourselves for the battle that is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil.

So if these first two words really are just neutral-sounding words, not really antagonistic at all, something that you would be prone to be like, "I'm kind of okay with that," it helps us to see again that these are people in this Christian community who probably don't see themselves as living according to the wisdom that is not from above.

But now we see that someone who is claiming to be a Christian and is living according to a wisdom that helps them to enjoy their physical life to its fullest and to enjoy the world around them as the main goal, this person most likely is not necessarily, especially if they're in the church trying to live in rebellion against God, they certainly wouldn't see it that way. If pressed, they might admit that they are making decisions primarily concerned with comfort and happiness, but surely not rebelling against God.

But here we see that one who isn't necessarily trying to oppose God, but just living for this life, maybe even asking for God's help and his blessing in their enjoyment of this life, but

living for this life nonetheless, this person is practicing the demonic.

We typically call things like Ouija boards, things that are inspired by the occult, witchcraft, witches, those are demonic. We'll even maybe go to a place where we ought to go, pointing out some of those things that demonstrate the great deception that so many in our culture are under, like the justification of abortion, arguments for transgenderism. That's deception. Those things are demonic.

They certainly are. There is no doubt that these things have demonic origins. But isn't it interesting that the New Testament reserves this adjective "demonic," and this is the only place in the New Testament where it's used as an adjective, for being caught up in the earthly, physical life.

Many who call themselves Christians, many who call themselves Christians are rightly outraged over the demonic influence that they see in the Democratic Party, with its most pro-abortion platform ever this year, and the demonic influence

in the Republican Party with its weakest anti-abortion platform ever, a culture demonically deceived into making abortion nothing more than a political issue that we've got to work around.

Christians who are rightly outraged by the denial of something as basic as "male and female he created them" are finding themselves now in a cultural battle that no one would have ever imagined just a decade ago, against the demonic deception that boys can be girls if they want to be. There are Christians who are rightly, maybe this week, disgusted by the demonic display of a bunch of drag queens reenacting the Lord's Supper during the Olympic opening ceremony.

Right outrage at those things, and yet these same Christians willingly falling into the demonic deception of having lives wrapped up in riches, sports, travel, technology, entertainment, everything the world has to offer. As drag queens are certainly part of something demonic, so is the church member who schedules their life around sports. So is the Christian who gets up in the morning and immediately starts checking social

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media right away to see what's going on. On my way to church this morning, I saw so many people jogging, walking their dogs, sitting outside just drinking coffee, playing games, having people over for a BBQ, getting started already, demonically influenced.

Questions that the rest of the world might think of as questions of preference: How much time you spend online? What are your favorite activities? What are the things you get most excited about? How much money do you spend in this area or this thing? These aren't just questions of preference for the Christian. They are questions of spiritual warfare, a call from Christ, our commanding officer, to take up the armor for battle.

It's not necessarily that you never do any of these things that are earthly. You kind of have to in this life. But is your life about the enjoyment of these things? Are you wrapped up in them? Could any of them easily be removed from your life without you missing a beat, and it'd be fine? Or are earthly, unspiritual things the actual goal in your life? Are they the actual driving force in how you live? Are they the things that

you, if you're honest, look forward to the most? To whatever end they are, you're living a demonic life.

This leads into our final point, and point three, we see the results of false wisdom, the results of false wisdom, and that's in verse 16: "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil practice." Notice that he doesn't say, "For where this type of wisdom exists." He goes back to the evidence of it from the first verse. Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist as motivations of the heart, you are certain to find these results: "disorder and every evil practice."

Let's look at both of those words. So first, "disorder." The word "disorder," here, it can also mean something like "instability," "unrest," from a personal standpoint, disorder in one's life. This this makes sense. We would see disorder in our life. The establishment of order, the establishment of organization requires one to not be lazy, to do what is right instead of what's easy. So it requires you to put aside selfish desires and selfish ambition and live ordered. This is actually

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the same word that we find in 1 Corinthians 14:33, where Paul tells us that "God is not a God of confusion, but of peace." That word "confusion," there, that's our same word here, the word "confusion," the same word, there.

So in your life, if you see a lot of confusion, if you see confusion, if you see disorder, if you see instability, lots of mind-changing, lots of uncertainty, lots of anxiousness, disorganization, if you see some of these things as regular patterns in your life, it might be good to stop and take a look at the motivations in your heart that are driving you. You're most likely, at the very least, mixing in some false, earthbound, demonic wisdom that needs to be replaced with a healthy fear of God. So that's on a personal level where you see the disorder.

But as we think about this result of disorder, James, as we've seen all along, has this much greater concern for the unity of the church. All the commentators that I looked at brought these results straight back to the effect that this kind of wisdom would be having on the church, on this community. Some

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even believe that James is still primarily addressing teachers, here, and maybe he only has the effect of disorder on the church in mind here.

And you can just think of problems, the disunity, sometimes even the devastation of those who are not living according to a wisdom that comes from heaven, whether it is being done purposefully or while being deceived. Think of all of the issues that that brings into the church. If your heart motivation, even within the church, is tainted with that bitter jealousy, with that misplaced zeal, with that selfish ambition, more of that than you realize, then you are going to be much more focused on what, again, you're getting out of the church, how you're being ministered to, how you're being cared for.

And that's going to lead to, of course, it's going to lead to a degree of confusion in your life and in your relationships, disorder, lack of unity, not just within you and with your own personal life, but within your relationships and the interactions that you have with the church and other members of the church. This is manifested in the church, this type of



disorder, this type of confusion in a myriad of ways, but they all add up to disunity.

There can be no doubt that the disorder that is the result of even well-intentioned people who have not realized that the wisdom that they are living according to doesn't quite have the pure motivations that maybe they thought they had, that this type of living will lead to disunity. It can't actually help but do that.

So the first thing that many of us need to do when we feel disunity with our brothers and sisters in Christ, the first thing we need to do is to examine our own motivations. "What is really driving me here at the heart level? Is it actually the fear of God? Am I really feeling conflict, strife with this person because I fear God? Or is it my own comfort, my own ambitions, some stuff that I've masked over with godly sounding language and words? Is that kind of really what the problem is?"

We can do this masking-over thing, we can do it so easily, can't we? Mask over what is actually a selfish desire maybe to

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avoid a confrontation, to avoid admitting we're wrong. Maybe just to please others so we don't have to deal with blowback. I mean, we can even mask over our resentment of someone with godly sounding language, right? We can say, "I love that person in Christ, you know, the way God tells me to, but our personalities just don't mesh, and you know, to avoid sin, sin is bad, I'm just going to stay away from them. We're not going to interact."

We're going to do a bunch of sinful, selfish stuff and attribute righteous-sounding reasons to it, make sinful, selfish decisions, make them sound godly. "This is just how I feel God is leading me. Seems to be the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. Just seems like God is working in this way. God's just given me a sense of peace about this. Can't question any of that. It's God after all."

We say and excuse ourselves with all of that type of language as if we actually believe that this is the way that God leads us: through our feelings, through our heart, then in the end through what just ultimately feels right. It's amazing to me. Even we reformed Christians in a 1689 confessional church

who would die before we denied "*sola scriptura*," oh, how quickly we can easily abandon it all for Disney-movie theology that we hate so much when it comes to selfish ambition in the heart, right?

Instead of saying that phrase that we've trained our kids never to utter, "I'm just following my heart," you know, the message of all these Disney movies, in order to avoid that we do the same thing, we say essentially the same thing. We say, "I'm just following the Holy Spirit. I'm just going where God's leading me." But we're talking about the same thing, as if following God and living according to the wisdom from above is vague and mystical and based on feelings.

This is at least one of the ways those who might be in the category of "among you," within the church might be living according to false wisdom but don't really know it. It is incumbent on each of us to truly examine our hearts as to what is really the driving force in our living, because if the results that we're seeing in our life seem to be disorder, a lot

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of disorder, a lot of confusion, a lot of disunity, it's a good chance we're living according to a secretly self-based wisdom.

And it's one thing to feel division, to feel disunity with others who claim to be Christ, over the truth, over what the Bible says. Boy, but it should cause us pause, it should cause us a lot of concern when the truth isn't at stake and we're still feeling that. There's still that anxiousness, there's still that disunity, when the correct interpretation of the Word is not in danger at all, and yet here is this friction.

It is very few people who experience strife in the church, disunity in the church, confusion in the church, disorder within the church, or even leave the church because of their concern for how others are being ministered to. Sometimes we can deceive ourselves into thinking that the decision that we are making must be wise because it is avoiding disorder or disunity in a relationship with others.

But really it's just selfish ambition in disguise, trying to avoid pressing the truth of the Word of God into our own life

or having to press it on someone else. So we just avoid it. We want peace, right? That's biblical. That sounds good. We should want peace, but we don't want it at the expense of dealing with the truth.

That is not true peace or true order. We're going to talk more about that next week. But if we will just make this decision or not make this other decision, this is how we think, if we just make this decision or not make this other decision, then it's going to cause peace with at least this relationship, it'll cause peace in the home. But it's not the heart of true wisdom. It's not the heart of true wisdom. I'm just essentially fearing man. It's just selfish ambition masked over with biblical-sounding words.

Again, remember, the key to true wisdom that we've talked about several times, is the fear of God. When we make decisions to just make someone happy so we don't have to deal with it, or to allow us not to deal with something uncomfortable, what we would call that is actually the fear of man. It's actually the opposite of fear of God.

Finally, we see that the other result of false wisdom is what we read here as "every evil practice." The word for "evil," here, is also translated as "worthless," that which is of no value. But "evil" is still an appropriate translation, here, because of what we've just looked at in the previous verses.

That which is worthless, we now know, isn't just neutral. It's not just a waste of time for those who understand that there is a God, and what takes place in this life is more than just the natural and the physical. It's not just that. This type of wisdom can never actually lead to anything that is of any true value. It can only accomplish, at best, at best, that which is worthless. In other words, it's good for nothing.

It should be the longing of every believer, every person who sees the glory of God and our eternity in his presence, every person who sees and understands that and longs for those things, it should be our longing, then, to hate the idea of living for worthlessness. It should not be a stretch for us to see that which is worthless as evil and even demonic.

So, beloved, this passage beckons us to examine our lives, look at our lives, look for disorder, look for worthless works, good-for-nothing time in our life; and then look back, look at those results, see if we can see those results, and then look back to see the selfish ambition of the worldly wisdom that is no doubt in our hearts, confess it, repent, replace it with the fear of God.

And I pray that the examination of what is being produced in our lives, what the driving desires of our hearts truly are as we looked at that today, I pray that that would cause us all to long for the true wisdom of God even more because, as we're going to see next week, after exposing this false wisdom, asking us to check ourselves for that, James is going to take us into the God-glorifying source and character and results of true wisdom.

So brothers and sisters, over this coming week, let's use the study from today, as hard as it might have been for us in some areas, examine our lives for the marks of false wisdom in

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order that we may weed it out wherever we see it, in order to better prepare the soil of our hearts to embrace the wisdom from above that we're going to look at next week. Let's pray.

Father, we are thankful for your Word. We are thankful for what you revealed to us in it, Lord, that we can see in it stuff that we, we wouldn't have thought about otherwise. You are gracious to show us the evidence and the character and the results of false wisdom, so that we can set aside our feelings, set aside any pride that we may have in our walk, in our relationship with you, areas where we might have been confident before that we are doing good, that we can set those aside, examine our lives, look at our hearts, and make sure that we are not practicing a false wisdom, and we're not those who claim to be Christians but who lie against the truth.

God, I pray that over this next week each of us would think through these things, think through the truths in these verses, that you would help us to see areas where bitter jealousy and selfish ambition rule and reign, places of disorder and worthless living, and that we would see those things and respond



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to them as those who love you, and are so thankful for your saving Gospel, that we'd repent, put off those things and put on the fear of God, and come back next week ready to apply the wisdom from above and put it in its rightful place in our lives. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.