

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 24

Text: 3:13-18

Date: 8-27-23

Trinity Lutheran Church

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(13) Who is wise and understanding among you?

By his good conduct let him show his works in **the meekness of wisdom.**

(Dt 1:13-15; Mt 5:5; Eph 5:15; 1 Pet 2:12)

(14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts,
do not boast and be false to **the truth.**

(15) This is not **the wisdom that comes down from above**, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

(1 Ki 22:22; Prov 2:1-9; Acts 5:17; Rom 2:8; 13:13; 1 Cor 2:6-16; 3:3; 2 Cor 12:20;

Eph 4:31; 2 Thess 2:9,10; 1 Tim 4:1; Rev 2:24)

(16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,
there will be disorder and every vile practice.

(Mk 7:20-23; 1 Cor 14:33; Gal 5:20,21)

(17) But **the wisdom from above** is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason,
full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

(18) And a **harvest of righteousness** is sown in **peace** by those who make peace.

(Prov 11:18; Is 32:17; Hos 10:12; Amos 6:12; Mt 5:9; Lk 6:36;

Rom 12:9; 14:19; 1 Cor 2:6,7; Gal 6:7,8; Php 1:11,17; 2:3; Heb 12:11)

Commentary on James – "The Epistle of Faith" – Dr. David Scaer - CPH

abilities and envious of the talents of their colleagues. James' admonition for a proper use of wisdom and knowledge is not unlike Paul's enumeration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:7-8).

similar to the challenge he puts upon himself in 2:18: "I by my works will show (*deixō ek tōn ergōn*) you my faith." Again, James is addressing the central problem of this epistle, that their outward behavior or works were contradicting what they publicly professed. The quality of meekness does not refer to a hypocritical show of humbleness but to the Christological, self-effacing humility which does not call attention to itself.

Paul's division of works as either fleshly or spiritual: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . ." (Gal. 5:19-23).

Both James and Paul agree in seeing jealousy (*zēlos*) and envy (*eritheia*) as unacceptable qualities and peace as a virtue. James parallels Jesus in Matt. 18:35 in seeing the heart as the source of all evils, whereas Paul resembles the Johannine picture of Jesus, placing the source of evil in the flesh (John 3:6). Matthew is not so unlike John, in that he also knows of the flesh as that part of human existence which is most receptive to Satan's working (26:41; cf. also 16:17).

Good works are attributed by James to the wisdom from above and by Paul to the Holy Spirit. The dualism between the works of God and those of Satan is a theme common to James, the synoptic gospels, Paul, and John. James' readers are combatting no simple problem of mere ethical behavior, but one which afflicts their inborn, yes, inherited natures. All sorts of evil practices arise from "bitter jealousy" and "selfish ambition" within their hearts (vv. 14, 16). James' indictment of their hearts as the real source of their problems carries more than a faint resemblance to these words of Jesus: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matt. 15:19). The evil perpetrated by his readers is called "earthly, unspiritual, devilish (*epigeios, psuchikē, daimoniōdēs*)," a triad which is clearly the equivalent of Luther's "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Recognizing this similarity makes Luther's distaste for James all the

"Earthly" is used by Jesus in His discussion with Nicodemus concerning human illustrations to make divine truth more understandable. Such illustrations should be comprehended by everyone since they are not the divine truths themselves but vehicles for them (John 3:12). For these the assistance of the Spirit is not needed. Paul uses the term "earthly" to describe the thought processes of those whose god is their belly and who are destined to eternal destruction (Phil. 3:19). "Earthly," which corresponds with Luther's "world," refers to those who have no living awareness of God and so let their thoughts and behavior be governed only by what is observable in the world. Materialistic might cover Luther's "world" and James' "earthly."

"Unspiritual," sometimes rendered in English as "fleshly," speaks of the condition of a man in his preoccupation with this world. In 1 Cor. 2:13-14 Paul distinguishes between the spiritual person and the fleshly or unspiritual one. While the former comprehends the things of God, the latter does not. The word for unspiritual or fleshly (*psuchikos*) is derived from the word for soul (*psuchē*). The incorporeal part of man which survives death is called either

LIFE APPLICATION

Describe the difference between worldly wisdom and the wisdom that comes down from above.