

“An Exhibition of Wisdom”

August 5, 2012

Text: James 3:13-16

Wisdom is a very precious/priceless commodity.

Prov 16:16=> *“How much better it is to get **wisdom** than gold!
And to get **understanding** is to be chosen above silver.”*

Wisdom enables man to most-fully utilize his powers as the only being ever created in the image of God.

It enables him to accomplish the best/noblest purposes of human life, & to enjoy the richest satisfactions.

It also warns him away from many of life's pitfalls.

And with true wisdom man can rise to all the dignity God created for his manhood to attain, becoming a fit companion for angels, & ultimately their judge.

Where does one find this precious thing called wisdom?

Col 2:3 says that in X *“are hidden all the treasures of
wisdom and knowledge.”*

In forming a saving relationship with Jesus X, a person gains access to all the blessings of God's wisdom.

I Cor 1 says that for such a person, X becomes=>

*“the power of God & the **wisdom** of God” (1:24).*

But coming to know X is just our introduction to wisdom.

We then grow in wisdom as we grow in our knowledge of Jesus, & in our relationship with Him through study of God's Word.

So Paul prayed for the Ephesians that God would give them=> *“a spirit of **wisdom** and of **revelation** in the*

knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17).

As a Xn’s study of God’s Word leads to trusting Him more/more,
the believer puts God’s wisdom to work in his own life.

Prov 16 tells us=> *“He who gives attention to the **word**
shall find good, & **blessed** [happy] is he who **trusts** in
the LORD. / The **wise** in heart will be called
discerning” (Prov 16:20-21).*

**Capitalizing on the wisdom that is ours in X comes from
studying God’s Word, learning about X in it,
trusting Him, & living gentle lives as He lived.**

*E.g. when Judas betrayed X w/ a kiss that identified Him to the
soldiers so they could arrest Him, Jesus gently said to him
“Friend, do what you have come for” (Mt 26:50).

*When brutal Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, He gently
prayed for them=> *“Father, forgive them; for they do
not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).*

*According to the Apostle Peter=> *“While being reviled,
[X] did not revile in return; while suffering, He
uttered no threats, but kept **entrusting** Himself to
Him who judges righteously” (I Pet 2:23).*

Peter adds that Jesus was—*“Leaving you an **example**
for you to **follow** in His steps” (I Pet 2:21).*

X left us this example of living a wise/gentle/godly
life of faith, so that we would live that way too.
Instead of fighting angrily for His-life/His-rights, He
quietly entrusted His wellbeing to His Father.

That’s the divine wisdom by which we too are to live also.

**Today's text is an exhibition of two very different types of
wisdom=> Heavenly Wisdom <=and=> Earthly Wisdom.**

*** An Exhibit of Heavenly Wisdom**

**[James 3:13]=> “Who among you is *wise and understanding?*
*Let him show [deiknumi—exhibit] by his good behavior his
deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.*”**

**James begins by raising the issue of wisdom and inviting his
readers to ask themselves if they are wise.**

But first, both they/we must understand the nature of true
wisdom, as the Bible defines/describes it.

That becomes clear in Deut 4.

There Moses commanded Israel to obey God so that they
might live & take possession of the land God had
promised them.

Moses said to them=> “*See, I have taught you statutes and
judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me,
that you should do thus in the land where you are
entering to possess it. / So keep and do them, for that
[obedience to God's commands] is your **wisdom** &
your **understanding***” (Deut 4:5-6).

Wisdom is learning God's Word & then doing it, embracing it as
one's own way of life.

It is adopting for oneself the Bible's truths/perspectives,
a/w/a its commands & the way of life it teaches.

I.e., wisdom is learning God's Word and living it out.

It is living skillfully—consistently making good decisions
based on the principles/insights of God's truth.

More than intellectual knowledge, it is an obedient,
humble, holy life that is lovingly submitted to God's
sovereign control, trusting Him fully.

Wisdom results in a godly lifestyle like that of Stephen & the
other 6 men chosen to serve/lead in the early Church.

Acts 6:3 says they were=> *“Men of good reputation, full
of the **Spirit** and of **wisdom**”* (Acts 6:3).

Wisdom like that is a virtue for which James commands us to
pray (1:5), asking the Lord to help us apply His Word to
our lives consistently.

**In our own text, James insists that true wisdom exhibits itself
in deeds of good behavior, marked by gentleness.**

And he links wisdom together with *“understanding,”* which is
in-depth knowledge of Scripture truth.

Wisdom, then, isn't simply memorizing God's Law and obeying
it the way we might deal w/ the laws of the state.

It is assimilating God's Word, filling our hearts/minds with
it, and letting it control the way we think & behave &
value & respond & relate & worship.

I.e., letting it become the dominate force in our whole lives.

**James emphasizes that “wisdom” is inherently gentle,
because it's inherently humble.**

It is taking upon oneself the gentle/humble character of Jesus.

Isaiah had prophesied that Messiah would be very gentle=>

*“He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His
voice heard in the street. / A bruised reed He will not*

break, & a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish” (Isa 42:2-3).

In Mt 11, X Himself said=> *“Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am **gentle** and **humble** in heart.”*

Matthew hailed Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem w/
the OT words=> *“BEHOLD YOUR KING IS*

*COMING TO YOU, **GENTLE**, AND
MOUNTED ON A DONKEY” (Mt 21:5).*

Because Jesus was gentle/humble, those who believe in Him &
become His followers, must embrace His gentle ways.

Jesus Himself taught=> *“Blessed are the **gentle**, for they
shall inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5).*

Gentleness is one of the fruits of the Spirit which is seen in
a believer’s life (Gal 5:23).

The Xn way of life is to adopt X’s humility, entrusting
oneself to God, as He did—and gentleness follows.

Believing in Jesus entails an initial act of wisdom, which humbly
entrusts oneself/one’s-soul to Him.

Paul called this=> *“The **wisdom** that leads to **salvation**
through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).*

**Wisdom is essentially assimilating the truth of God into one’s
life, and in the process resisting/repudiating Satan’s lies.**

* So when Satan counsels us to make our own will our rule of
life, we close our ears to his temptation, & trust our Lord.

He tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, telling her=>

*“**In the day you eat from it** your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God” (Gen 3:5).*

God had said=> *“In the day that you eat from it you shall surely die”* (Gen 2:17).

Satan counseled her to trust her own wisdom—not God’s.

When she saw that the tree was good for food & a delight to the eyes, she did so.

Like many people today, Eve was deceived/destroyed by her own wisdom, which was really Satanic folly.

- * When Satan suggests that instead of directly defying God (as Eve did), we simply compromise with God’s Word, heavenly wisdom teaches us to ignore the tempter. We do what we know to be right, and trust the Lord. Rebecca foolishly compromised with God by deceiving her husband, Isaac, so he’d bless her favorite son, Jacob. God had fully intended all along for Jacob to be blessed, and He didn’t need Rebecca’s interference/deception. As a result of her devious behavior, her favored son was driven away from the home, toiled for years under the dishonesty of Laban, & committed polygamy.

- * When Satan subtly changes his tune and advises you to rely on ourselves, rather than God, Prov 16:20 instructs us=>

*“He who gives attention to the **word** shall find good, And **blessed** [happy] is he who **trusts** in the LORD.”*

If you’re wise you don’t seek success in your own strength.

You don’t let worry keep you up at night, or cause you to dread every change in your fortunes.

Instead, you trust the Lord & remain calm, *“casing all your*

anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you”
(I Pet 5:7).

You don't waste your life building up some career/business
as a monument to your own pride, sacrificing health
& joy for a tombstone that reads, “He was a
miserable wretch, but at least he died rich.”

**If you're not born again, place your faith in Jesus X for the
salvation of soul, and then wisely rest yourself in Him.**

Entrust your physical/financial welfare to Him as well, just as
you've entrusted your soul to Him—trust Him & be happy.
That is living wisely.

I don't mean sitting around, doing nothing.

That would be presuming on God—not trusting Him.
Nor does wisdom make reckless/thoughtless decisions,
expecting God's protection from one's carelessness.
That would be placing trust in chance, not Him.

But as Solomon said=> *“Whatever your hand finds to do,
verily, do it with all your might”* (Eccl 9:10).

Do your best, live wisely according to the principles of
Scripture, & let the Lord lead you.

Then rest in whatever results He gives you for your efforts.

Wise living that places its trust in God has real benefits=>

* Not having to suffer guilt for having disobeyed the Lord.

If you haven't compromised with His Word, you can feel
confident that you are following Him w/ sincerity.

Even if you don't achieve great success from the world's
p.o.v., your conscience will be clear.

* Living a life of integrity that is consistent w/ your beliefs.

Those who base their decisions on the changing
values/morals of the world contradict themselves
from one decision to the next.

They lose track of who they are & what they believe.

They wear themselves out trying to remember which
guiding principles they're relying on this month.

* Being delivered from anxiety/care that could continually
consume your happiness.

If you can learn to simply do your best, keep a clear
conscience, seek the Lord's blessing on your efforts,
and leave the ultimate results in His sovereign hands,
you need fear no evil.

You can live in the confidence of Prov 3=> *"Trust in the
LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your
own understanding. / In all your ways acknowledge
Him, And He will make your paths straight"* (3:5-6).

Now that is the kind of wisdom that comes straight out of heaven.

* **An Exhibit of Earthly Wisdom**

Satan has always held out the illusion of wisdom through sin.

E.g. in his temptation of Eve we read=> *"When the woman saw
that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to
the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise,
she took from its fruit and ate"* (Gen 3:6).

This was the beginning of earthly/worldly wisdom—a counterfeit wisdom that makes men shrewd in dealing with the hardships of this world, & the sinfulness of other men. Jesus taught His disciples to be=> “*shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves*” (Mt 10:16).

The world replaces the 2nd half of that saying with=> “ruthless as predators.”

When you live in a dog-eat-dog world, & you’re one of the dogs, you must aggressively strike first, & always keep your guard up, so you get eaten.

In verse 14, James describes the kind of mindset that results from earthly wisdom.

[Verse 14]=> “*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.*”

You can always trace these self-centered, self-defensive, self-aggrandizing attitudes back to the heart.

That is the source of all man’s moral thoughts/feelings/actions.

It is the seat of his belief/unbelief, and central source of his righteousness/unrighteous.

It is the starting-place for sin in a person’s life.

And because of the damage done by the fall, Jesus said=>

“*out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders*” (Mt 15:19).

For this reason, the Xn must protect his heart from temptation,
knowing that if he is to sin, that's where it will start.

Solomon warned, "*Watch over your heart w/ all diligence,
For from it flow the springs of life*" (Prov 4:23).

**"Bitter jealousy" is the mindset that this world is all there is,
so I covet as much of it as I can get.**

And if you get more of it than I do, I'm going to resent you
w/ feelings that are cruelly uncaring.

While the truly wise set their minds on the things above, not on
thing of the earth (Col 3:2), the earthly wise "*set their
minds on earthly things*" (Phil 3:19).

But ultimately, their minds are set on themselves, & the things
they want are really just offerings to the false god of self.
So, there is no room in their hearts to love others, nor for
the gentleness of true wisdom.

And woe to anyone who accumulates more of this world's
things than they have.

"Selfish ambition" is self-centered sin's ultimate expression.

This attitude (*eritheia*) is at the core of earthly wisdom.

It is an instinctive/insatiable yearning of pride, that inoculates
man's heart against humility/selflessness.

It is the reason why Prov 9 says=> "*The **fear** of the **LORD**
is the beginning of **wisdom**, And the knowledge of the
Holy One is understanding*" (Prov 9:10).

Nothing but fear of the Lord's infinite power can
break thru man's pride so he'll focus on God.

Until man gains a knowledge of the Holy One that leaves him speechless, his pride controls him.

Eritheia (selfish/striving ambition) is one of the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:20)—a preoccupation w/ self that makes a person his own god, blinds him to the truth so that he denies it, and causes God's wrath to be stored up against him (Rom 2:8).

James says to his readers, if this describes you (& it does describe some identified as Xns), don't brag about it.

That's what "*be arrogant*" means—malicious gloating.

These "Xns'" minds are so saturated with earthly wisdom rather than heavenly truth, they actually boast about their ruthless treatment of others, as they claw their way to the top.

They foolishly view it as a virtue—a character strength.

Phil 2:3 says=> "*Do nothing from selfishness [eritheia] or empty conceit, but w/ humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.*"

But they are so blind to heavenly truth/wisdom, they do the opposite and proudly boasting about it.

James adds that they lie against the truth by claiming to be Xns, while their hostile/jealous/self-centered lives prove that they're not.

They are also lying against the truth in that heavenly wisdom is the assimilation of God's truth, & their lives repudiate that truth w/ every selfish word/deed—they are living a lie.

Now James delineates 3 sources of such earthly "wisdom."

[Verse 15]=> "*This wisdom is not that which comes down from*

above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.”

1st, he tell us where worldly wisdom doesn't come from—heaven.

This is the substitute “wisdom” man embraced when he
fell, rejecting the true wisdom revealed by God.

Now the sources of false wisdom=>

1st, it's “*earthly*”—from-earth/earth-bound, giving no thought to
eternity, actively rejecting God's will & His revealed truth.

Its basic godless/man-centered tenets remain unchanged,
and represent the impulses/aspiration of human
depravity and spiritual ignorance.

It's the foundation on which is built all human philosophy,
education, religion, politics, economic, & sociology.

2nd, it is “*natural*”—lit. “soulish” (as opposed to spiritual).

This refers to the principle that animates men/animals'
bodies, enabling them to live in this natural world.

It comes from man's sinful inclination to survive in a world
of competition by always putting himself first.

It functions on a physical level (not the eternal/spiritual), so
it considers the things of God foolishness (I C. 2:14).

In fact, it makes man (not God) the center of his own life.

3rd, it is “*demonic*”—it comes from Satan's suggestion to Eve
that she disregard God's instructions and live for herself.

Finally, the inescapable results of earthly wisdom=>

[Verse 16]=> “*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,
there is disorder and every evil thing.*”

The 1st result/consequence of earthly wisdom is “*disorder.*”

When everyone is looking out for himself, viewing everyone else as a potential spoiler of his selfish goals, disorder results, manifesting itself in deeds of the flesh=> “*enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions.*”

These can take the specific forms of bitter grudges, lawsuits, divorces, social alienation along racial/economic lines.

On an even broader scale, they can result in rebellion, anarchy, & a general atmosphere of anger/confusion.

Harmony/peace are inevitable victims of human wisdom.

The 2nd result of earthly wisdom is “*every evil thing.*”

“*Evil*” here lit. means “worthlessness.”

This throws the door open to everything that is foul/base/wicked.

Nothing of eternal value comes out of earthly wisdom.

E.g. no matter who wins an election in which the opponents use worldly wisdom to tear down each other’s reputations, the electorate is damaged in the process.

The Bible teaches believers to turn the other cheek, to bless those who curse us, & to overcome evil with good rather than being overcome with evil ourselves.

If our whole life were to be overcome w/ evil, it would prove that we didn’t actually belong to X after all, because 1 Jn 5:4 says=> “*Whatever is born of God **overcomes** the world.*”

The truth/righteousness of godly wisdom are a believer’s only weapons in his conflict with evil.

When we try to fight evil w/ the evil of worldly wisdom, we lose.

But that's the kind of wisdom comes natural to our flesh.

So natural, in fact, children do it w/o even being taught to.

Returning good for evil is the way of heavenly wisdom, but
giving evil for evil is so much more gratifying to our flesh.

There's even a perverse sense of justice about it.

When we live by the rule that anyone who violates our
rights will pay for it, we're living by earthly wisdom.

We never have to pray for God's help to act on that principle.

We can trust our own flesh, & the devil will help us.

All we have to do is turn the worst part of our nature loose
relying on our unbridled tongue or unrestrained fists,
throwing away the gentleness of godly wisdom, and
repudiating for the moment X's command to forgive.

If that fails, we can always call a policeman or retain a
lawyer, as we feed the hellish fire w/i our own hearts.

**Fellow Xns, let the children of darkness meet to evil with evil,
& carry out all their selfish-ambitions/jealousies/battles.**

We are children of God, partakers of His divine/loving nature.

The gentle wisdom of love is our Savior's way of life, and we
have chosen to follow Him

Let us not be conformed to this world, but be transformed
by the renewing of our minds, as we follow our Lord.

Let revenge/fury be as alien to our renewed spirits, as it
would be to an angel before the throne of God.

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*** An Exhibit of Earthly Wisdom**

Satan has always held out the illusion of wisdom through sin.

E.g. in his temptation of Eve we read=> *"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate"* (Gen 3:6).

This was the beginning of earthly/worldly wisdom—a counterfeit wisdom that makes men shrewd in dealing with the hardships of this world, & the sinfulness of other men.

Jesus taught His disciples to be=> *"shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves"* (Mt 10:16).

The world replaces the 2nd half of that saying with=> *"ruthless as predators."*

When you live in a dog-eat-dog world, & you're one of the dogs, you must aggressively strike first, & always keep your guard up, so you get eaten.

In verse 14, James describes the kind of mindset that results from earthly wisdom.

[Verse 14]=> *"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."*

You can always trace these self-centered, self-defensive, self-aggrandizing attitudes back to the heart.

That is the source of all man's moral thoughts/feelings/actions.

It is the seat of his belief/unbelief, and central source of his righteousness/unrighteous.

It is the starting-place for sin in a person's life.

And because of the damage done by the fall, Jesus said=> *"out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders"* (Mt 15:19).

For this reason, the Xn must protect his heart from temptation, knowing that if he is to sin, that's where it will start.

Solomon warned, *"Watch over your heart w/ all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life"* (Prov 4:23).

"Bitter jealousy" is the mindset that this world is all there is, so I covet as much of it as I can get.

And if you get more of it than I do, I'm going to resent you w/ feelings that are cruelly uncaring.

While the truly wise set their minds on the things above, not on things of the earth (Col 3:2), the earthly wise *"set their minds on earthly things"* (Phil 3:19).

But ultimately, their minds are set on themselves, & the things they want are really just offerings to the false god of self.

So, there is no room in their hearts to love others, nor for the gentleness of true wisdom.

And woe to anyone who accumulates more of this world's things than they have.

"Selfish ambition" is self-centered sin's ultimate expression.

This attitude (*eritheia*) is at the core of earthly wisdom.

It is an instinctive/insatiable yearning of pride, that inoculates man's heart against humility/selflessness.

It is the reason why Prov 9 says=> *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding"* (Prov 9:10).

Nothing but fear of the Lord's infinite power can break thru man's pride so he'll focus on God.

Until man gains a knowledge of the Holy One that leaves him speechless, his pride controls him.

Eritheia (selfish/striving ambition) is one of the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:20)—a preoccupation w/ self that makes a person his own god, blinds him to the truth so that he denies it, and causes God's wrath to be stored up against him (Rom 2:8).

James says to his readers, if this describes you (& it does describe some identified as Xns), don't brag about it.

That's what "*be arrogant*" means—malicious gloating.

These "Xns'" minds are so saturated with earthly wisdom rather than heavenly truth, they actually boast about their ruthless treatment of others, as they claw their way to the top.

They foolishly view it as a virtue—a character strength.

Phil 2:3 says=> "*Do nothing from selfishness [eritheia] or empty conceit, but w/ humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.*"

But they are so blind to heavenly truth/wisdom, they do the opposite and proudly boasting about it.

James adds that they lie against the truth by claiming to be Xns, while their hostile/jealous/self-centered lives prove that they're not.

They are also lying against the truth in that heavenly wisdom is the assimilation of God's truth, & their lives repudiate that truth w/ every selfish word/deed—they are living a lie.

Now James delineates 3 sources of such earthly "wisdom."

[Verse 15]=> "*This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.*"

1st, he tell us where worldly wisdom doesn't come from—heaven.

This is the substitute "wisdom" man embraced when he fell, rejecting the true wisdom revealed by God.

Now the sources of false wisdom=>

1st, it's "*earthly*"—from-earth/earth-bound, giving no thought to eternity, actively rejecting God's will & His revealed truth.

Its basic godless/man-centered tenets remain unchanged, and represent the impulses/aspiration of human depravity and spiritual ignorance.

It's the foundation on which is built all human philosophy, education, religion, politics, economic, & sociology.

2nd, it is "*natural*"—lit. "soulish" (as opposed to spiritual).

This refers to the principle that animates men/animals' bodies, enabling them to live in this natural world.

It comes from man's sinful inclination to survive in a world of competition by always putting himself first.

It functions on a physical level (not the eternal/spiritual), so it considers the things of God foolishness (I C. 2:14).

In fact, it makes man (not God) the center of his own life.

3rd, it is "*demonic*"—it comes from Satan's suggestion to Eve that she disregard God's instructions and live for herself.

Finally, the inescapable results of earthly wisdom=>

[Verse 16]=> "*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*"

The 1st result/consequence of earthly wisdom is "disorder."

When everyone is looking out for himself, viewing everyone else as a potential spoiler of his selfish goals, disorder results, manifesting itself in deeds of the flesh=> "*enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions.*"

These can take the specific forms of bitter grudges, lawsuits, divorces, social alienation along racial/economic lines.

On an even broader scale, they can result in rebellion, anarchy, & a general atmosphere of anger/confusion.

Harmony/peace are inevitable victims of human wisdom.

The 2nd result of earthly wisdom is "every evil thing."

"*Evil*" here lit. means "worthlessness."

This throws the door open to everything that is foul/base/wicked.

Nothing of eternal value comes out of earthly wisdom.

E.g. no matter who wins an election in which the opponents use worldly wisdom to tear down each other's reputations, the electorate is damaged in the process.

The Bible teaches believers to turn the other cheek, to bless those who curse us, & to overcome evil with good rather than being overcome with evil ourselves.

If our whole life were to be overcome w/ evil, it would prove that we didn't actually belong to X after all, because 1 Jn 5:4 says=> *"Whatever is born of God overcomes the world."*

The truth/righteousness of godly wisdom are a believer's only weapons in his conflict with evil.

When we try to fight evil w/ the evil of worldly wisdom, we lose. But that's the kind of wisdom comes natural to our flesh.

So natural, in fact, children do it w/o even being taught to.

Returning good for evil is the way of heavenly wisdom, but giving evil for evil is so much more gratifying to our flesh.

There's even a perverse sense of justice about it.

When we live by the rule that anyone who violates our rights will pay for it, we're living by earthly wisdom.

We never have to pray for God's help to act on that principle.

We can trust our own flesh, & the devil will help us.

All we have to do is turn the worst part of our nature loose relying on our unbridled tongue or unrestrained fists, throwing away the gentleness of godly wisdom, and repudiating for the moment X's command to forgive.

If that fails, we can always call a policeman or retain a lawyer, as we feed the hellish fire w/i our own hearts.

Fellow Xns, let the children of darkness meet to evil with evil, & carry out all their selfish-ambitions/jealousies/battles.

We are children of God, partakers of His divine/loving nature.

The gentle wisdom of love is our Savior's way of life, and we have chosen to follow Him

Let us not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, as we follow our Lord.

Let revenge/fury be as alien to our renewed spirits, as it would be to an angel before the throne of God.