

James 26-09-09b

We're in James chapter four, but as we have noted over and over again, this is a wonderful tapestry of truth that brings something forward, then moves to a different topic and then returns to it and casts it in a different light. And it is woven so beautifully together that as we come to our section in chapter four, it is helpful to review this section of chapter three, which has to do with wisdom. We started this back in chapter one.

And so wisdom comes to the four, and then it recedes, it comes back again in the intermediate chapters, and then it recedes, and then it comes back in chapter three, as we have just seen, who is wise and understanding among you. It ought to be reflected in our conduct. And our conduct is something that is pretty easy to review.

So it should be conduct that is accomplished in the humility of wisdom. We have to check ourselves. The main way that believers are distracted and deflected, in my view, is the pull of subjectivity.

I would rather spend my time thinking about that guy over there, or that group over there, or that situation over there, or that complex of circumstances over there, than to reflect on how am I doing? What is my thought life? What is my conversation? What are my actions reflecting? James calls us to self-analysis. How important is this? How practical is it? It just doesn't get any more rubber on the road than this. This is how we live a fruitful, God-glorifying life.

It's not hard, but it does take concentration. We have to stop and think, examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, acknowledge our sins so that God can faithfully and righteously cleanse us, forgive us, and cleanse us. As those who have been forgiven and cleansed, it is so much easier to be merciful to our fellow believers, to our neighbors, to those who are outside, even to our enemies, because we recognize that if it weren't for God's grace, there we go.

So, we should not boast and lie against the truth. We shouldn't claim to be people of truth and then not live out the truth. This wisdom that is reflected in boasting and lying against the truth does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic.

This is our third description. We've already seen what it is to be upon the earth, anything an unbeliever can do. Why does anything distinguish me as a follower of Jesus Christ, as a blood-bought, representative child of God, or am I doing what any godless pagan unbeliever would do in this situation? And this isn't just actions, it's also how are we thinking, how are we talking, are we letting ourselves be consumed with worry, with trying to strategize and figure out how we can, by our own efforts, that's the second word, sensual, figure this out.

We're going to do it the manly way, the earthly way, the human way. And it is demonic. Ultimately, this plays into Satan's influence.

Satan is the god of this world. With apologies to all of those who want to talk about kingdom work and being kingdom people and that Christ's kingdom is in the here and now, that is not what scripture says. The god of this world is Satan.

He is free to roam. My question to those who believe that we're implementing the kingdom is, if the Lord Jesus is implementing the authority that he was given by his father, Jesus said, all authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. And so there are people who think, well, King Jesus is now ruling the world.

Look at the world. Is this the kingdom? Do any of the descriptions, Old Testament or New, pertain? Of course not. This is a preparation phase, in the same way that we are preparing for our resurrection bodies and life in the eternal future.

Now, while we are in these Psychikos bodies, the man of dust that we saw in Corinthians, this is training. This is preparation. This is getting ready time.

Cultivating this humility is essential. We retrain our thinking. We retrain.

It's like rehab. It's like physical therapy, but it's spiritual therapy. And sometimes it's painful.

We have to do things in a new way. We have to think in a new way. The word of God enables us and empowers us in the hands of the Holy Spirit to do things ordinary humans and those without Christ, without the spirit, without a relationship with the father cannot do.

It is impossible. So we look to God. His wisdom is available because we are regenerate.

We have the spirit. We are blood bought. And by becoming spiritually alive, we now have a destination for the wisdom of God and we can use it.

So it is up to us daily to stop and think, who am I and why am I here? If God swapped some unbeliever into my shoes, my chair, my situation, my circumstance, my relationship, would it be different? If it wouldn't be any different, we are doing something wrong. So we can tell if the power of God, the wisdom of God is coming to our lives or not. The wisdom that is practiced by those that ignore God's wisdom does not descend from above.

It is earthly, sensual, and demonic. We have actually gone over to the other side. We are not friend of God.

We are not child of God. We are not brothers and sisters in Christ. We are siding with the enemy.

We are traitors to the cause. We are resistance in the cause of Christ instead of those who are a part of that. So how do we know if envy and self-seeking? Envy is looking at others.

This self-seeking is, I am working to get myself where I want to be in my own strength. I'm not

looking to God. I'm not even asking God if this is the right path and the right thing and the right ambition, the right goal, the right priority for me.

I've already figured out that it is, and I'm going to get there by might and by main. I am going to wrestle with the angel until dawn. I will not let you go until you bless me.

That was Israel's problem. Righteousness by works. Feeling like you've got what you want by works.

Envy and self-seeking. Confusion and every evil thing are there. Confusion for us and the evil things, which is what the demons are here to perpetrate.

We're helping. We're opening the defenses. Everybody's in the castle and they've drawn up the drawbridge and the moat is there to protect it.

And we're letting the drawbridge down. Let the enemy in. Every evil thing.

But, verse 17, the wisdom that is from above is first pure. The wisdom that is from above. And notice the contrast here is what is the source of the wisdom? There's a lot of different ways this could have been expressed, but this wisdom is not from above or this wisdom is from above.

If it's from above, it is supernatural. It has a power that you can't find on this earth. And the humble, the poor in spirit, it doesn't matter what your economic status is.

If you are poor in spirit, what are you saying? I have a, remember the pop quiz in the first session? What is it I should recognize? I have a need. The poor in spirit that Jesus talks about in Matthew chapter three, the Beatitudes. This could have been Joseph of Arimathea.

It could have been Nicodemus. It could have been any rich person in Israel. I recognize the need in my spirit.

That is the key. And James who heard the Lord Jesus present the Sermon on the Mount knows this and he has internalized it. He's digested it and he is communicating it in his terms and in his way.

So the wisdom that is from above is first pure. I'm not sure why they are translating this as pure because the word is proton. You know what a proton is, right? Protons, neutrons, and electrons.

But the proton is the positive charge. But proton or protos, this has the idea of something that is first. A prototype is the first of its kind.

I'm building a new kind of aircraft. This is the prototype. You can think of many English words that have this as a prefix.

And it means first. So that's the word first. And then you have pure.

Pure is hagnas. Hagnas. And this comes, it's a verbal adjective.

It comes from a verb that means that which awakens religious awe. That's what the lexicon says. So first, the primary characteristic, the proton, protos characteristic of wisdom that is from above is it turns our eyes not on people, but to God.

It's not pure in the sense that it's 100% without impurities. I'm not sure pure is really the best word. It is sourced in God.

And there is a praise song. I'm sure you've heard it. Our God is an awesome God.

And of course, people throw awesome around pretty freely. But genuine awe is in the spiritual realm, looking at God and recognizing the magnitude of his love, his grace, his gift of salvation in Christ. It turns our attention.

We are tempted to look at ourselves, to look at people, look at circumstances. The wisdom from above puts everything in the context of God. God is in his heaven.

This didn't happen without his knowledge. These circumstances, situations, these needs, these challenges, whatever they are. This is the context of the divine.

Lexicon says that which awakens religious awe. What is religious awe? It is an awareness that there is something beyond the material, something beyond the immediate and what is pressing me at this point. The wisdom that is from above is first, it sets my mind back in a perspective that sees God above all, over all, in us all.

This is a God thing, is a colloquial way of putting it. The wisdom from above, first and foremost, the very first thing it does is remind us and give us an awareness of God. So easy to forget that.

Going down the highway, blow a tire, got to get off, got to figure out, am I going to call somebody or I'm going to put my spare on myself? I'm going to be late. Do I need to call somebody? If we have the wisdom from above, any circumstance, whether it is a surprise, whether it is an ongoing grinding challenge, the wisdom from above, the first thing we're going to do is say, what does God think of this? How is this possibly a part of God's plan and purpose? So what I would say is the wisdom that is from above is first, God aware. That's what this word Hagnos means, H-A-G-N-O-S.

It first brings us back to awareness of God. It lifts us out of circumstance and the material and the immediate and the short-term and the perishable. We begin by changing our perspective and cultivating a perspective that says, God is here.

God is aware. God is my heavenly father. The Lord Jesus is my savior.

So any circumstance, any situation, any conversation, any worry, any concern, step back. The

wisdom from above makes me God aware. And it kind of makes sense.

Wisdom that is sourced in God is going to remind me of God and settle me. I love those commercials when I was a kid, you're in good hands with all state. And these great big hands, and here's a couple of people, and they would come down from the sky and set a couple of people in a convertible.

You're in good hands with all state. The wisdom that is from above puts us in this pair of hands that is sourced above. We are held in his hands.

That's the first characteristic. It is first pure, then peaceable. This is Irene.

We get the girl's name Irene. Good night, Irene. Irene, peace.

Peacemakers are Irene Pollo, to make or to do. You just put those together. That's the peacemakers.

And the fruit of righteousness, we're going to see in the next verse, is going to be associated with this piece. But it is peaceable. It is gentle.

This is epi-ache, what is right, what is equitable. And we have a lot of scripture for this. You think about the fruit of the spirit.

But gentleness, it's the opposite of harsh, unyielding, sharp corners. We're gentle. We know what gentle is.

And we know whether or not we are acting in a gentle manner or not. James has been gentle in his approach to communicating this information with his use of the third person and gently calling his brethren to accountability in these areas. He didn't go in swinging a hammer.

I was recently talking to someone who is a teacher of troubled youth. And you can come in and try to be disciplinarian and really hard and fast about rules and demands and brooking no opposition and no coloring outside the lines. But in his experience, and he was telling us at some length, a gentle approach often achieves a kind of success that was thought to be impossible.

And gangbangers and people that are well outside societal norms respond to gentleness, a gentle approach, a welcoming approach, not necessarily toleration, but gentleness, calling to someone's better nature, gentle, willing to yield. This, of course, is where we have to apply the standard. We are unyielding about essentials.

There are things I will not compromise. There are hills on which I will die. In other non-essential areas, I can yield.

This gets back to Paul and doubtful things in Corinth. Some people regard days and observe feasts. Others treat every day alike.

Some are concerned about food offered to idols. Others are not. Whatever is not of faith is sin.

Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. I don't have to be convinced in my mind and go over there and convince the other guy. He's got to be convinced in his own mind.

I can yield. If he's worried about food and I'm not, God bless him. I am willing to yield.

I'm not going to die for every single point. I have the wisdom from above that is aware of God and is gentle. And in that light, I look to God to guide me on how to express myself in this particular circumstance.

I can be patient. I can be kind. I can be loving.

If I happen to be a more mature believer, Paul says, we who are strong should bear with those who are weak. How do you bear with? You're gentle, just like you would be with a younger child. You're gentle.

And yield. You don't have to run boot camp with little kids. There are certain things that are essentials, and we brook no argument.

We tolerate no disobedience. But there are other things where we're willing to yield. We don't necessarily always yield, but we're willing to yield where yielding is appropriate.

And so this willing to yield is an essential part of it. And it begins with EU. That word begins with EU.

And the idea here is when it is good to yield, we yield. So this eupathies means sometimes it's good to give in, to yield, full of mercy, full of mercy and good fruits. Now, how do we know if we should yield or not? How do we know if there is good fruit, if this is a time to be merciful? This is the wisdom from above.

These aren't things we have to try to cultivate individually and independently in our soul. We ask God for the wisdom, and when he grants it liberally and without reproach, these are the characteristics. We will know when and how to yield.

We will know how to be gentle. We will know how to be merciful. And we will know good fruits.

We can bear good fruits. We will recognize good fruits in others. It's the wisdom of God that makes these things possible.

And this is how we know that we're on the right track. Instead of self-seeking, envy, eyes on people, I'm upset with them, they're doing something wrong and bad. Notice without partiality, not double judging, not having it.

Kritos comes from krino. It means to judge. Dia means to.

I've got two standards of judgment. For my friends, I let them off easy. For my enemies, I hammer them flat.

And then there's an alpha privative in front of this. Not double standard. Not judging by a double standard is an expanded translation of this.

Not judging with a double standard and without hypocrisy. Don't make myself a hypocrite. And this is just hupokrit, hupokritas, with the alpha privative.

Unhypocritical. Now, the fruit of righteousness. Remember it said mercy and good fruits.

The fruit is going to be characterized by righteousness, good fruits, righteous fruits, beneficial fruits, agathos fruits. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace. We're back to Irenaeus.

Notice the complex. You see the fruit of the Spirit here that Paul summarizes. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Poiao and Irenaeus. These are the same two words that Jesus employs when he says blessed are the peacemakers in the Beatitudes. This sows a crop that is going to result in good fruit.

So we look at the result. Is my approach producing good fruit? Is it multiplying peace? Is it multiplying patience? Is it defusing anger and conflict? This is very practical. Tomorrow, as we move through the world and exercise our options and enjoy our relationships near and more distant, what is the result? Is the environment better because the wisdom of God guided me and the glory of God was able to reflect in and through me? And there is peace.

It has defused conflict. Sometimes the best way to not have conflict is don't be conflicting. Don't go in and push somebody's apple cart over.

Don't rock someone's boat. You think this person ought to be different. They ought to think different.

That's not the peaceable fruit. Remember what James said earlier. The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, not in wrath. Such a wonderful, you know, that is back in 318. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

This is actually coming up. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. But we remember that chapter 1, verse 20, the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

So these two tie together. Well, that brought us to chapter 4. We have seen this already. Where

do wars and fights come from among you? You can see how beautifully this flows out of, are you making peace or are you causing wars and fights? And so we looked at that and in verse 7 of chapter 4, submit to God, resist the devil.

The wisdom that is not from above is demonic. The demons work for Satan. Resist the devil.

Don't partake of the demonic. Resist the devil. He will flee from you.

Draw near to God. He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands if you're sinners.

Purify your hearts if you are double-minded, double standards, pulled in two directions, wavering between two opinions, double-souled, double-standard, inconsistent. That is the very nature of hypocrisy, is to try to be one way and end up being another way. And then again, verse 10, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.

Because verse 6 says, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Well, how do we become humble? We have to become humble by doing it ourselves. I don't wait for God to humble me.

I don't wait for my enemies to humble me. I don't wait for my friends to humble me. We have to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord.

And when we humble ourselves, He lifts us up. Then in verse 11, do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law.

Now, how does this happen? What is the relationship between a brother and the law? First of all, remember, in my view, my belief is that this is James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, who is writing. He was martyred early. This is very early, very soon after Pentecost.

We're in the church age, but the church is still Jewish. Gentiles have not yet appeared on the scene. Peter has not yet seen the sheet let down.

Arise, Peter, kill and eat what God has declared clean. Let no man call common. That's coming, but not yet.

This is early. And so believers in the Lord Jesus are Jewish and they are steeped in the law. The law is the covenant that Israel has with God.

The group is in covenant relationship with God. It's not an individual covenant. It's a corporate covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for whom the author of this book was named.

So if you judge your brother, you're saying that God's provision for dealing with wrong behavior is insufficient. I need to punish. Now, you remember our what I think is a very helpful distinction is

we are enjoined, we are commanded, we are told to discern what's going on with our fellow believers.

What is the difference between discernment and judging? If I look at somebody and think that believer is in the weeds, that's discernment. If I go and interfere, if I say that's wrong and I'm going to produce consequences for you, I'm going to whisper about you. I'm going to talk badly about you.

I'm going to character assassinate you. I'm going to lift you up for scorn, ridicule and abuse by other believers. I am now inflicting a penalty.

Who inflicts a penalty on malfeasance, on bad behavior, on crime and on wrong? Who does that? It's a judge. Especially in Old Testament days, they didn't have jury trials in Israel. You went to an elder.

You went to someone who judged. Sometimes it went all the way up to the king. But someone is judging and meeting out punishment.

Remember when Haman was trying to slaughter the Jews and Esther told her husband, the king Xerxes, about it? He determined what would happen to Haman. The judge in this perspective, in this situation, is the one who meets out punishment. Do not decide that someone is wrong.

I'm going to punish them. I will frown at them. I will make them feel bad.

I'll try to guilt them into acting differently. I'll talk to others and describe their shortcomings. This is what they did to me and how dare they.

We will cause some sort of negative penalty to someone that we have decided is wrong. If you do that, if you judge your brother, if you inflict consequences on a brother for a real or imagined wrong, you have judged the law. Because what you're saying is God's law, God's word, God's way of managing justice isn't sufficient.

I need to augment it. I need to supplement it. I'm going to add to God's law.

God's law says this. God's law says that the Lord Jesus said, if you have ought against someone, lay down your offering before you decide to go worship God. Lay your offering down and go be reconciled.

That's God's law in the mouth of the Lord Jesus. If you say, no, I've got a different way. You're saying Jesus' exhortation, Jesus' law for dealing with conflict between brethren isn't right and isn't sufficient.

I've got a better way. I'm going to do something different. So that's what James is talking about here when he says, if you're speaking evil of one another, he who speaks evil of a brother and

judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law.

I can't just simply take this to the authority that God established. I can't handle this God's way under the wisdom that comes from God and descends from heaven. No, I've got my own way.

And I like this way because it gives me some kind of satisfaction. I feel like I got hurt. I'm going to find a way to hurt that other one.

This is not the wisdom that is from above. See how these tie together. It's the reason we reviewed chapter three.

If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one law giver. You're setting yourself up.

You're making up your own law. You're going to be the law giver. You're writing some new rules about how this is going to be handled.

That is not humility. I think that somebody else needs correction instead of humbling myself and looking for God to correct me, recognizing my need. I'm busy looking at somebody else's need, and I'm going to fix that over there.

There is one law giver, and guess what? It's not us. I am not the law giver. You are not the law giver.

There is one law giver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? You're going to elbow God out of the way. You're going to elbow God's law and God's way, God's instructions, God's wisdom.

You're going to elbow it out of the way. No, I've got a better way. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

If God is the law giver and God sets the rules, anybody that pushes his rules aside and establishes their own is elbowing God out of the way and attempting to take his place. This is serious business. And notice how this is that awe of God.

Remember the word, it is first pure. The wisdom that is from above is first pure. It's aware of God.

And when I am aware of God, I don't feel the need to do his job, right? The wisdom from above, I'm not going to implement this bad attitude by speaking evil of a brother. This is where this abstraction of acknowledging God and being aware of him, the purity of divine wisdom meets the road. If I have that attitude, I am not going to start criticizing and backbiting and attempting to punish by character assassination in the minds of other people, my brother.

I want my brother to be dealt with by almighty God in his grace and his mercy. He has been gracious and merciful to me. He will decide what needs to happen to my brother.

There's one lawgiver. Who are you to judge another? Are you God? What are you doing? Come now, verse 13, you who say today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell and make a profit. Why does this come up in a scriptural book? This is what we will look at next time.

Who are you to judge your brother? Who are you to say, here's my plan? There is a beautiful segue here and we will explore it next time. But isn't this a wonderfully practical book? We can take what James has written here in the presence and power of the spirit to the bank. This can change us.

This will reorient our thinking. This will get us on the same page with our father in heaven in terms of wisdom, what to do and what not to do and how to do what needs to be done and how to avoid doing what shouldn't be done. I can't think of anything that is more valuable in the time that remains to us in this life.

If we want to truly redeem the time and live a life that pleases God and glorifies the Lord Jesus, this is how. This dog will hunt, as they like to say. This will get it done.

We just have to pay attention. We just have to remember it, pray over it, think about it and apply it. This is the path to a successful, fruitful life as a believer.

What a wonderful provision from God that we have in this passage. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you that you care about us.

You are not lofty and inaccessible. You come to us. You communicate to us.

You give us the example of the Lord Jesus. You have given your spirit to interpret and to comfort and to encourage us with your word. We pray that as we reflect on what we've seen in this portion of your word tonight, that we will find it meaningful and practical, that it will shine the light on our path that is necessary to enable us to avoid sin and to sow the seeds of good fruit and righteousness in our lives.

We will end up being ambassadors of peace instead of perpetrators of that which is earthly, soulish and demonic. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.