

1. **Introduction:** James connects earthly wisdom to jealousy and selfish ambition which he says lead to disorder and every vile practice (3:14-16).
 - On the other hand, wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (3:17).
 - When believers sincerely ask, God gives wisdom from above freely and generously.
 - Every believer should do exactly that. When in doubt about what to do, ask for God's wisdom from above with the intention of obeying.
 - The indwelling Holy Spirit will provide the needed guidance.
2. **Behavior/Wisdom:** James connects behavior to the kind of wisdom followed. The question I attempted to answer last lesson was, "can believers distinguish between those who follow wisdom from above and those who follow earthly wisdom by observing their behavior?"
 - I believe the answer to that question is "no." If we could know what is in a person's spiritual heart, the answer would be "yes." But we can't know that.
 - Jesus' parable of the "tares and wheat" makes clear the difficulty of distinguishing redeemed from unredeemed by appearance (including behavior).
 - As the weeds (tares) germinate and grow, they look so much like wheat that until the wheat is ready for harvest, the tares cannot be distinguished from the wheat. Not every weed has that "like-wheat" appearance, but tares do.
 - How can an unredeemed person's behavior look so much like that of the redeemed?
 - There are two reasons, one is God's "common grace" given to some unredeemed people that enables them to do things we associate with the redeemed. The other is the residual "old sin nature" of the redeemed that causes them to sin.
 - God distributes both His saving grace and His common grace as He pleases.
 - Because of their residual sin nature, the behavior of a redeemed person will sometimes look like behavior of the unredeemed. Because of common grace, the behavior of the unredeemed will sometimes look like behavior of the redeemed.
 - The point is, the behavior of the redeemed is never **entirely godly in appearance**, nor is the behavior of the unredeemed **entirely ungodly in appearance**.
 - Thus, common grace and residual sin natures lead to an overlap in the appearance of the behavior of some of the redeemed and some of the unredeemed.
 - The truth about the behavior we perceive is known to God and will be rightly judged when the time comes. You can fool people, but you can't fool God.
 - For a redeemed individual, the right thing is to always ask God for wisdom from above and then follow it. Every redeemed person should depend on "wisdom from above." God gives that wisdom generously when asked.

- The overlap in question is then that between the behavior of those who have “saving grace” (but continue to have an “old sin nature”) overlapping with the behavior of those who have not received “saving grace” but have received “common grace.”
 - It is a partial overlap between the behavior of the redeemed and the unredeemed.
3. **Chapter 4:** In chapter 3, we saw that, without godly wisdom, knowledge tends to fill our hearts with things that produce bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.
- Selfish ambition is typically driven by envy. Envy and jealousy are opposites. Envy is an emptiness wanting to be filled. Jealousy is grounded in fear of losing something already possessed. Both envy and jealousy lead to disorder.
 - By disorder James means more than simple confusion. He means disharmony in relationships, antagonism, and the absence of unity and stability. These things are not consistent with wisdom from above but are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.
 - In chapter 4, James continues this train of thought but moves to a more general consideration of quarrels and fights. First, he gives an indictment against bad behavior. Then he gives a strong call to repentance.
4. **James 4:1:** *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*
- When He redeems us, God gives us a new nature. The new nature is gradually made manifest as it transforms what we think, say, and do. The struggle to overcome the effects of “worldly wisdom” is a continuing fight as we mature in the faith.
 - Paul says in Romans 12, we are being transformed through the renewal of our minds.
 - The ultimate purpose of our transformation is to make us holy as God is holy.
 - Achieving holiness is a battle against our residual old sinful nature, but it is a battle God has made possible for us to win. “wisdom from above” and “worldly wisdom” struggle for supremacy within our spiritual heart.
 - Wisdom from above is available to every believer. If we lack sufficient wisdom, we are to ask God who gives generously to those who ask from genuine desire.
 - Wisdom from above is pure and pleasing to God. It is peaceable toward other people.
 - Everyone begins life as unredeemed. Until redemption, we freely absorb worldly wisdom. After redemption, “wisdom from above” begins to replace worldly wisdom.
 - James says, as a believer, because you have access to the light of wisdom from above, what reason could you possibly have for fights and quarrels with fellow believers?
 - He continues by saying, isn’t it true that conflict with fellow believers arises because of passions (not reasons) that war within you.
 - James doesn’t pull any punches. He says undisciplined, unrestrained desire is at the root of most wrongdoing. Cicero, the Roman statesman, made a similar diagnosis.

- Cicero wrote, *“It is insatiable desires which overturn not only individual men, but whole families, and even bring down the state. From desires there spring hatred, schisms, discords, seditions, and wars.”*
 - Cicero was not a believer, but he was wise in the ways of the world.
 - We flirt at being friends with the world, being seduced by worldly wisdom?
5. **James 4:2-4**: ***You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.***
- In the realm of worldly wisdom, self-gratification is of top priority. Desires become passions that drive behavior. The desire to acquire things (or power) pushes us to become covetous.
 - When we are trapped by worldly wisdom, we have a wrong understanding of ourselves and of our relationships with others.
 - James says, people who lust for things they do not have, will “murder” to get them. In most cases, people don’t commit murder in a literal sense but may commit “murder” in their hearts and with their lips. Remember Jesus’ comment about the Law.
6. **Matthew 5:22-23**: ***“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”***
- Covetousness leads to seeing people as tools to help us get what we desire. If a person is not useful in satisfying our desires, we are inclined to let that relationship die on the vine. Even our communion with God is affected.
 - Communion with God dries up because we approach Him with wrong motives.
 - Everyone faces similar temptations to worldly desires. We seem to become convinced that following Christ is no hinderance to pursuing worldly desires.
 - How is conflict to be avoided? Even the faith that binds us together in Christ can lead to conflict between believers because of different interpretations of God’s Word.
 - James warns against prayer that is motivated by pleasurable passions.
 - John adds clarification to James’ warning.
7. **1John 3:22**: ***Whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.***
8. **1John 5:14-15**: ***And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.***

- John means we should pray for things that are pleasing to God, not for things that are aimed only at satisfying our own selfish desires.
 - In 4:4, James calls redeemed people who place friendship with the world higher than their relationship with God “spiritually adulterous people.” He adds, desiring to be a friend to the world can make you an enemy of God.
 - “World” in this admonition refers to the world system that is at odds with God.
 - These first 4 verses say that frustrated inner desires, wicked thoughts, arguments, lack of prayer, and prayer with wrong motives are indications of a spiritual heart whose inclinations tend to oppose God and cause quarreling among believers.
 - How can we maintain communion with God and peaceable relations with others?
 - It is an impossible task to accomplish alone. But we are not alone!
9. **James 4:5-10:** *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*
- God does not give up on us. His Holy Spirit indwells us, and in our need, God gives us more grace. It is God’s grace that makes it possible for us to walk consistently with Him, just as His grace alone made us His children in the first place.
 - Grace is God’s gift to the humble, those who recognize their sin, who know that God is God, and they are not. To walk with God as He desires us to walk, we must walk humbly before Him. What does that mean?
 - James says being humble before God means having willing submission to Him. We are to be in complete submission to God’s commands. He promises us grace to resist worldly enticements.
 - Our submission is not to be a passive “what-ever” kind of a thing, but, rather, like a soldier, it is to be active and prepared. We are to submit to His authority and eagerly await what He next requires of us. What He requires will be revealed step-by-step.
 - James says to cleanse both our outer life (the actions of our hands and the words of our mouth) and our inner life (the thoughts of our hearts).
 - **“Cleanse your hands”** emphasizes stopping all individual sinful acts. **“Purify your hearts, you double-minded”** emphasizes removing inner attitudes that are disloyal to God. When we genuinely repent, God will lift us up.
 - It is true that God must enable, but it is also true that we must work cooperatively with Him. It is not possible to live a consistently godly life in only our own strength.

- But God is gracious and will strengthen us to be able to do what He requires. We can resist evil and practice righteousness, but only within the grace and mercy of God.

10. **James 4:11-12:** *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

- Slander and, in general, doing anything that defames the character of other believers is a direct attack on your relationship with them and with God.
- Common examples of unacceptable behavior include repeating rumors and lying.
- If we know something bad about a person's behavior that we know personally to be true, we are to go to that person and ask if what we think is true really is true.
- If the answer is yes, then we are to offer spiritual and physical help as appropriate.
- Otherwise, we are to say nothing unless testimony is legally necessary or speaking is necessary to keep someone else from harm.
- We are to regard other believers as brothers and sisters in Christ, as joint heirs of salvation. All were dead in trespasses and sins, including each of us.
- All were saved by the same precious blood sacrifice even though all deserved God's wrath. How could we dare defame a fellow believer, one for whom Christ died?
- Confirm to the best of your ability what is thought to be known and then follow the rules of God's guidance on dealing with problems (Matthew 18:15-17).
- James says to regard other believers as neighbors under the royal law.
- Refusing to obey the law sets one above the law, judging the law rather than being a doer of the law.
- There is only one Lawgiver and Judge. The law reflects the nature of God. To devalue the law is to devalue the Lawgiver. Who are we to judge our neighbor?
- We too know our sin and unworthiness before God.
- But for God's grace, we would yet be dead in sins. On what basis can we truly judge another believer?
- We are to submit always to God, study His Word, and pray for wisdom from above to direct our path and protect us from worldly wisdom.
- We are to regularly cleanse our hands and purify our hearts through controlling our behavior and through confessing and repenting our failures.