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A0737 – September 16, 2007 – Jas 3:13-16 – Human Viewpoint
Wisdom

This chapter is the second section in the Body of the Letter. Let's review the structure of the letter. Historically James has been notoriously difficult to outline. As one author noted in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, and keep in mind *BibSac* is THE premier theological journal in America, it's been around since 1843, it's the oldest theological journal in the entire Western Hemisphere, it used to be run by Princeton University now it's held at Dallas Theological Seminary, and one article in 1978 says, "The Epistle of James is notoriously difficult to outline. This is confirmed by the great diversity of the outlines which have been proposed. They range all the way from twoⁱ to twenty-fiveⁱⁱ major divisions. The epistle itself does not herald any clear structural plan concerning the organization of its contents. Hendriksen well remarks, "A superficial glance at this epistle may easily leave the impression that every attempt to outline it must fail."ⁱⁱⁱ

And let me assure you, how you outline a book is critical to your understanding of the book. It is all-important. And what has been discovered by a study of the literary context is that James is following the 1st century method of Greek rhetoricians where you have a Prologue, near the end of the Prologue a Thematic Statement, followed by the Body of the letter and concluding with an Epilogue. So, this is a lot like a term paper in modern English classes. You have an opening paragraph that says, "This is what I'm going to say, the body where you say it and then a concluding paragraph that reiterates what you said. And that's exactly what James does.

- I. Prologue (1:1-20)
- II. Body (1:21-5:6)
 - A. Be Quick to Hear (1:21-2:26)

B. Be Slow to Speak (3:1-18)

C. Be Slow to Anger (4:1-5:6)

III. Epilogue (5:7-20)

So, the outline of the letter is embedded in James, he gives it to us in chapter 1 v 19, “But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger...” So, there are three main points or three main sermons if you want to call them that. These three points make up the core of James and we’ve already been through the first one, Be Quick to Hear in 1:21-2:26, now we’re in the second, Be Slow to Speak in 3:1-18. This is the section about silence, and so, of course, James has a lot to say about the tongue, it’s the very world of iniquity, it’s untamable by man and it’s two sided, it blesses and curses so it’s dangerous. And if our lives are not supposed to be characterized by a quick tongue what are they to be characterized by? See, the word of God never just says “Don’t do this.” It always comes along and says “Do this instead.” Replace this with this. So, the first command in this chapter is “Do not many of you become teachers”, that’s a negative but notice the positive command we get now in verse 13, “Let him show by his good behavior his deeds”. So, we’re in the Slow to Speak section and the replacement for a quick tongue is a good behavior, good deeds done in quietness.

So, in this paragraph, 3:13-18, James frames the issue in verse 13 with a question, **Who among you is wise and understanding?** The verses that follow can be divided into two kinds of wisdom. Vv 14-16 outline the wisdom from below and vv 17-18 outline the wisdom from above. There are two sources of wisdom and thus two kinds of wisdom. They differ in every way imaginable. Wisdom from below is sourced in the world, the flesh and the devil, wisdom from above is sourced in God. Wisdom from below is selfish, wisdom from above is selfless. Wisdom from below results in disorder and evil, wisdom from above results in peace and righteousness. So, as we leave the tongue directly and move to wisdom keep in mind that this is not a sharp break. As you will quickly see we are still dealing with the heart and the mouth, that which comes out of the mouth is that which fills the heart. So, let’s take a look at wisdom from below and next week wisdom from above.

James 3:13-16 Τίς σοφὸς καὶ ἐπιστήμων ἐν ὑμῖν; Δειξάτω ἐκ τῆς καλῆς ἀναστροφῆς τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν πραΰτητι σοφίας. ¹⁴Εἰ δὲ ζῆλον πικρὸν ἔχετε καὶ ἐριθείαν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν, μὴ κατακαυχᾶσθε καὶ ψεύδεσθε κατὰ τῆς

ἀληθείας. ¹⁵Οὐκ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ σοφία ἄνωθεν κατερχομένη, ἀλλ' ἐπίγειος, ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης. ¹⁶Ὅπου γὰρ ζήλος καὶ ἐριθεία, ἐκεῖ ἀκαταστασία καὶ πᾶν φαῦλον πρᾶγμα.

James 3:13-16 Who is wise and understanding among you? From his good conduct let him exhibit his works in the humility of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This is not the wisdom that is coming down from above, but earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition *is*, there *is* disorder and every base thing.

James 3:13-16 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

Verse 13 sets the stage for the discussion by asking a question. So, I ask you, **Who among you is wise and understanding?** He's asking us to do a mental search. To flip through our mind and think of men who have wisdom and understanding. What does he mean by **wise** (*sophos*)? He means someone who has an intense understanding of Bible doctrine that results in good conduct, not something based on rationalism or empiricism but something based on the authority of Scripture. As Paul said, "be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise" (Eph 5:25). What does he mean by **understanding** (*epistemon*)? He means someone who has the kind of knowledge that is exercisable, applicable to daily life circumstances. Again, not rationalistic knowledge or empirical knowledge but revelational knowledge. These Jewish believers had been facing trials, so James is asking, "Who among you has been applying Bible doctrine in the midst of these difficulties? Who has the biblical know how and the discipline to navigate trials effectively without blowing up! Is there such a man among you?" If there is then this one qualifies to become a teacher. Not many should become teachers but if there is among us one who is so learned in the truth and an expert in practicing it, then certainly this man is a candidate for teacher. Surely such a man is mature. Are you? Are you learned in Bible doctrine? Are you an expert in applying Bible doctrine? There was a rush in the Jewish culture among men to become teachers. And the teacher needed to have DVP

wisdom and understanding. From even before Solomon's day these characteristics were coveted (see the Book of Job). Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, was the archetype of Jewish wisdom and understanding. He spoke of DVP wisdom and understanding as chief, saying of wisdom it is better than gold (Prov 16:16a) and of understanding that it is to be chosen over silver (Prov 16:16b). It is more valuable than the most precious metals. He said, "Buy truth and do not sell it". In other words, truth is so valuable that it's worth buying. But once you attain it give it to others freely, don't sell it, not everyone can afford it. "Get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Prov 23:23). By all means these are the things to get, the most precious items. Christianity is in a sad state of affairs today. Get this, get that but wisdom, "Oh, I can get that later." Few people want wisdom. Few people are doing everything they can to get it. They want someone to tickle their ears but sound doctrine, "Nah, that's not that important." Daily Bible study, "Nah, I'll get to it another time, I've got more important things to do." He also said, "By wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established" (Prov 24:3). Wisdom builds and establishes and brings stability to our lives and others. That other stuff is not going to build a family legacy, it's not going to bring stability to your family. All the money, all the stuff in the world is not going to bring stability to you and your family, but wisdom and understanding will. And how do we get it? What did Solomon say is the first step toward attaining wisdom? "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10). The "fear of the Lord", a reverential awe and respect for the divine majesty. Who is God, what is He like? As we peer into the depths of who God it produces a godly fear, a reverential awe and this is the beginning of wisdom that produces stability in our lives and builds a biblical legacy. James adds that if you lack wisdom "let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach." Despite past failures if you truly want wisdom and you ask for it, trusting that He is willing and able to give you wisdom, then He will supply it.

So, a teacher must certainly have wisdom and understanding. If a teacher has DVP wisdom it can bring righteousness and peace to the lives of others but if not he'll bring evil and destruction. Unfortunately, Jewish men often claimed they had DVP wisdom and understanding prematurely when all they really had was HVP wisdom. Many of them developed a power lust to rush into the position of teacher so they could show off their learnedness. But if this happened it would only be a soap box for asserting their arrogance and

ultimately this would do nothing but create disorder and every evil thing. I find nothing new today. People still want to use the pulpit as a place to show off rather than a place to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, this search for the man of wisdom and understanding implies a watchful trial period. You don't just jump into the position of teacher. And what that trial period is is your Christian life, how you conduct yourself. Verse 13b, **Let him show**, that's a command, if someone really has DVP wisdom and understanding then let him "exhibit it". This is the Greek word for "putting on an exhibition". It's a visual display not a verbal display. Do you remember after Jesus rose from the dead He appeared on the road to Emmaus and then they entered Jerusalem and found the 11 gathered and Jesus appeared in their midst and they were having a hard time believing because of the amazement and the text says "He *showed* them His hands and His feet" (Luke 24:40). That's the word here. He put the evidence on exhibition (also see John 10:32 and Jam 2:18). And how is a man to "exhibit" wisdom? **by his good behavior** or "from his good behavior", in other words, the exhibition comes through good behavior, his way of life. This good behavior consists of **his deeds** carried out **in** a specific manner, **in the gentleness of wisdom**. **his deeds** are **his works**, same Greek word, *ergon*, those works that are done under the filling of the Holy Spirit, in His power and strength not our power and strength. This is application of doctrine. This is how Jesus showed the Father to people; He did it through "good deeds" or "works", He applied Bible doctrine. Jesus said to the Jews, "I showed you many good works from the Father, for which of them are you stoning Me?" See, the Bible never says the world is going to like your good works. The Jews didn't like Jesus' good works. Why is that? Because the world is at enmity with God. And when you do good works in His power there's a manifestation of God and people don't like that. You're rubbing God in their face and most of the time they want to shut down everything in their mind that reminds them of God, because they are actively engaged in suppressing the truth. But Peter says, despite this believer, despite how the world responds to your good works, you keep a good conscience before God, you don't worry when people mock you for your good behavior (1 Pet 3:16). It's better to suffer for doing what is right than for doing what is wrong (1 Pet 3:17). There's pressure in this world, you aren't going to be popular for doing the word of God. People can't stand it. But you stick to good behavior, God set it up this way, eventually, someone will ask, someone will want to know why you behave so differently from everyone else

and it's an occasion for giving an apologetic, not apologizing, but giving a defense, an answer, a reason for the difference (cf 1 Pet 3:15).

How are these deeds to be done? How are they to be carried out? In what manner? **In the gentleness of wisdom.** But I highly prefer to translate this **in the humility of wisdom**, not "gentleness", it's the Greek word *prautes* and it was already used by James in 1:21 where he commands us to "receive the word of God in humility". This is an attitude, a disposition, of not thinking too highly of oneself. So, if you do good works but you have an arrogance about you then that cancels out the good works. "Oh, look at me, I did this for the church and I did that." That kind of bragimony session. Or "Doing good deeds in front of other people so they see, deliberately to invoke their praise." No no. There's nothing wrong with doing good deeds in front of others but to get their praise, that's a problem, that's not the humility of wisdom. There's a proper way to carry out good deeds. See, there are people who do the good works but they don't do them in humility. They are so impressed with themselves, and they let you know it. Well, that's not going to cut it. If a person really has DVP wisdom then guess what? Arrogance is excluded. How's that? Because someone who has DVP wisdom knows they aren't the source of the wisdom. Where did Solomon get his wisdom? Did he in all his intellectual strength bring about his wisdom? No. So, if we really have DVP wisdom then bragimony sessions are out. You can never get into that, "Oh, I did this and I one upped you here and all that." HVP wisdom likes to go into a bragimony session because I did it, I did it in my own strength, I came up with this all by myself by simple exerting my great mind, look at me.

Alright, that said, we're going to get into verses 14-16 where we have the manifestation of HVP wisdom. You want to know what HVP wisdom looks like. Look out! This can get personal real fast and some of us don't want to hear this.

Verse 14, **But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart**, let's stop right there. Where are these two attitudes located? These are attitudes and where are they located? **your heart.** What have I been telling you week after week about the tongue? What did Jesus say about the heart and the mouth? "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt 12:34). The heart is the issue. What's in your heart? This word **heart**

(*kardia*) is so misunderstood in our culture. It's not some emotional fluffy thing. It is the most central part of a human being. It's central to what makes you a human and not an animal. You aren't some highly-evolved ape. The heart didn't evolve over millions of years. God created us in His image with a heart. And it's a mind word, an intellectual center. It's the center of your thought life. It's where your deepest thoughts are located. So, **if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** down there what do you think is going to come out of your mouth? So, the first part of our verse is dealing with the heart and if you look closely at the Greek words in the second part of this verse you'll see that it deals with what comes out of the mouth and we'll get into that in a minute. But now I want to deal with this **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition**. These are both attitudes or dispositions. The first one is **bitter jealousy**, this refers to that attitude of envy over someone else's achievements or success, the attitude of rivalry. Someone here wants to move into the place of the teacher, replace him because they're so much more learned than him and he should have a following. Let's turn over to Acts 13:45. I want you to see a group of people with **bitter jealousy** in their hearts. Here's the situation, Paul is at Pisidian Antioch and he's teaching in the synagogue one Sabbath and he gives an awesome sermon and as he's leaving the Jews start begging him to come back next week. How many times does a preacher get that kind of a response? So, he's getting a following and he comes back the next Sabbath and let's see the response. Notice in v 44 that nearly the whole city arrived to hear him. "But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming." You see that. They were "filled with jealousy". Paul's getting a following and they get jealous. That's the idea in James. That this attitude of **jealousy** is in some of our hearts. Now, turn over to 1 Cor 3:3, here's the word again and in this context Paul is getting on to them for their jealousy because it manifests carnality, they are walking by the flesh, "for you are still fleshly. For since there is *jealousy* and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" But we're called to walk by the Spirit, to walk as spiritual, not as fleshly and **jealousy** is fleshly. Second, James cites **selfish ambition**. This is another attitude or disposition here that is concerned solely with self. It's this drive to out-compete others, to climb over others and try to get the kind of following someone else has. Climb over the teacher and take his place or take his following. Paul faced this over in Phil 1:17, "the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress

in my imprisonment.” See, these people are trying to climb over Paul get Paul’s following and although they preach Christ their motives are impure. Note how they are trying to distress Paul. Is that DVP wisdom? No, not in the least. These guys just want recognition. They want recognition from men. They are men-pleasers not God-pleasers. What did Peter tell young men to do? Rather than fight to get to the top how did he instruct them? To submit to their elders “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. And if we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God what will God do? HE will exalt us at the proper time. HE not we. Jealousy and selfish ambition may get you somewhere at the expense of others but it is carnal, fleshly and HVP wisdom. DVP wisdom is humility and I’m waiting on God. I’m going to respect the God given authorities in my church and when He says I’m ready, when He exalts me, when He lifts me up to a position of authority then I’ll go but until then I’m just going to put on humility toward others. That’s God’s program for exaltation. None of this I’m going to force my way to the top.

Note the end of verse 14, this is terrible, James says, **do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.** Or better **do not boast** at the expense of someone else. See, this is the “I’m going to compare myself to other people and show I’m superior.” And that’s ridiculous. People always do that and all it really does is show how immature they are. Some other person is not the standard; God’s word is the standard. Compare yourself with that. Oh, but we don’t want to do that see because that standard’s above us, we never quite measure up in practical experience and that crushes my pride. Well, sorry, there’s no place for pride anyway in the Christian. The old, “I’ve still got my pride thing.” You can toss it, pride is not a Christian virtue. Humility is the classic Christian virtue. We don’t need pride and arrogance in the Church we need humility.

and so lie against the truth or simply **and lie against the truth.** When you have all this jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart and try to pawn off your HVP wisdom as DVP wisdom, you’re just lying against the truth. And if you’re lying where are you? Out of fellowship. This is James’ way of saying, “you’re out of fellowship.” Turn over to 1 John 1:6. 1 John is a book about staying in fellowship by remaining true to sound doctrine. It’s not a book of tests to see whether you have eternal life, it’s a book of tests to see if you are walking in fellowship and how if you buy into false doctrine it will

affect your fellowship status. And in 1:6 he says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;” That’s what James is saying, if we say that we have DVP wisdom and yet we have selfish ambition and bitter jealousy we’re lying against the truth. You may be able to slip past people but you’re not slipping one through on God.

As verse 15 says, **This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.** So, this is where we get the concept that there are two sources for **wisdom**: wisdom **from above** and wisdom from below. You may have wisdom but where is the wisdom sourced, where does it come from? Is it worldly wisdom or heavenly wisdom? So, let’s look at the wisdom that comes down from above. That Greek word **from above** is *anōthen*. This is the word used in a very famous discourse of Jesus with a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews in John 3, Nicodemus. In that dialogue Jesus told him that in order to see the kingdom of God he had to be born “again”, a second birth, and that word “again” is *anōthen*. In other words, you have to be born “from above” Nicodemus. The word is also used as a synonym for “heaven” (*ouranōthen, ek tou ouranou, tou ouranou*) where God dwells and so regeneration is solely a work of God (John 1:12). God regenerates a person at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone. This same truth is taught in James 1:17 and I really want you to see this. “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is *from above*, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” Notice the words “from above”? That’s our word *anōthen* and where does “every good thing” come from”? From Him, God the Father and so where does DVP wisdom come from? Same place. There is no wisdom that is good that is not from above, from God. In other words, there is no such things as HVP wisdom that is not corrupt. Somewhere, either in the mechanism or the motive it is corrupt. In fact, what does James say about it? It **is earthly, natural, demonic.** These are three adjectives that modify HVP wisdom. Do you see any neutrality here? Is some wisdom just good old human wisdom useful for everybody? No. There is no such thing as good old human wisdom. First, it is **earthly**, that is, it belongs to this earth it is not from heaven it will always remain on this earth you can’t take any of it with you to heaven, it is worldly. Corinthians says this is the kind of wisdom that put Christ on the cross. Hardly neutral, it’s murderous. Second, it is **natural**, “soulish” (*psuchikos*), we’d say, unspiritual, something not touched by the Spirit of God. It’s concerned with

this world only and not the next. Third, it is **demonic**, if we had any doubt where the inspiration of HVP wisdom comes from we don't any more. It's inspired by demons. So, HVP wisdom is a gimmick, it is unspiritual and it is demonic. It does not come from God so it is not good because every good and perfect gift comes from Him. We are not the source of divine good ever anywhere. This is why I said last week if you want to eulogize anyone at my funeral eulogize God, not me, because we are all earthly, unspiritual and demonic apart from His work in our lives.

Verse 16, here's the applicational results of HVP wisdom. When we apply HVP wisdom, that kind of wisdom that is characterized by **jealousy and selfish ambition** what are the results? There are two, **There is disorder and every evil thing**. When you try to advance yourself at the expense of others, contrary to the principles in 1 Pet 5:5-7 you create disorder. This word here means "opposition to established authority" or put bluntly, opposition to the elders. We create problems in the church that violate divinely appointed authority in the church. Now, we all serve under Christ but church government is given as an authority structure to maintain order to see how disorder in a church is never from God. God never caused a problem in a church, ever. The problems come from the world, the flesh and the devil, infiltrating, deceiving, malicious gossips, selfish ambition, jealousy, all the fruit of the flesh as we jockey for position in this world. Turn with me to 1 Cor 14:33, "for God is not a *God of confusion* but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." God's not the author of confusion, He never brings about disorder. We do that. Satan does that through us. Second, **every evil thing**. This is a broad stroke, all kinds of evil; lying, deceiving, murder, filthiness, fornication, adultery, greed, lust, malice, fighting, et. al. "Base" things that do not reach the standard of God's word.

Well, so much for HVP wisdom. It's from below, sourced in the world, the flesh and the devil, it's selfish, and it produces disorder and every evil thing. So, next time we want to turn our attention to DVP wisdom which stands in utter opposition.

ⁱ Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 341.

ⁱⁱ Burton Scott Easton and Gordon Poteat, "The Epistle of James," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 12:18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dallas Theological Seminary. (1978; 2002). *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 135* (135:221). Dallas Theological Seminary.



[Back To The Top](#)

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