

Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 25, James 3:13-18

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This is Dr. David Bower and his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 25, James 3:13-18.

As we mentioned, arguably at the heart of this segment, 3:1 through 4:12, is 3:13 through 18, the discussion of the contrast between heavenly wisdom and wisdom from below.

And so, what we really have here is contrasting exhortations in verses 13 through 14 with the substantiation of those exhortations in verses 15 through 18. And as a matter of fact, you'll notice that this is structured according to chiasm. So, he begins with the, in the exhortation, begins with a positive, who is wise and understanding among you, by his good life let him show his works, the works of wisdom, his works in the meekness of wisdom.

But, by way of contrast, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, do not be arrogant and boast, do not be, do not be, do not boast, and be false to the truth. And then, when it comes to the substantiation, as we'll see, he begins the substantiation by describing this negative wisdom from below that involves bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. And then, finally, we'll go back to the positive in describing the wisdom that is from above, this A-B-B-A.

And again, he wants to inculcate the wisdom from above. And so, that's why he begins and ends with that. That's a major thing.

And then by way of contrast, and in a rather subordinate way, he talks about the wisdom that is from below. But of course, besides the use of the tongue, another characteristic of teaching is wisdom. The tongue is a formal instrument of teaching.

Wisdom involves the material content of teaching. So, again, although he has other matters in mind, much more general than teaching, this notion of teaching, which was introduced in the Exhortation 3.1, continues to be there and kind of hover over what he says in this whole segment. Apparently, some teachers, and perhaps others in the church as well, were claiming, or James at least thought that they might be inclined to claim, to be wise and understanding.

Who is wise and understanding among you? This, of course, would involve boasting, a boasting that was connected with jealousy and selfish ambition. Really, that is the expression of jealousy and selfish ambition, in which in turn resulted in disorder, chaos, and all sorts of evils. Now, ironically, in the very process of claiming to be

wise, they showed that they did not understand the true character of wisdom, which is meekness.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Of course, wisdom has to do with knowing the truth and acting upon it.

This indicates the fact that such wisdom is not wisdom at all. It does not pertain to truth but to falsehood. Now, you have, of course, certain main points that are made here regarding wisdom that is from above and wisdom that is from below.

The first thing we might note is that the wisdom that is from above is active. It involves works, whereas the wisdom that is from below is merely verbal. This is, as I say, the first contrast that he develops here.

The wisdom from above and the wisdom that is from below, true wisdom over against a kind of false wisdom. Matter of fact, he even talks about falseness here in this regard. But the first difference is that the wisdom that is from above is active.

It involves works, he says, whereas that which is from below is merely speech. Even as faith without works is dead, so wisdom without works is dead. So, he says here in verse 13, by his good life, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

This is a clear allusion and involves a clear connection back to 2.18. But someone will say, you have faith, and I have works; show me your faith apart from your works, and I, by my works, will show you my faith. Even as the claim to faith without works indicates inauthentic faith, so the claim to wisdom without works indicates inauthentic wisdom. It gives a lie to any claim to authentic wisdom.

Again, the contrast is between speech alone versus action. And by the way, this mere speech here really involves empty boasting. Do not boast and be false; true to the truth.

Now, beyond that, the wisdom that is from above is characterized by meekness. It is meek, *prauteti*, rather over against the wisdom that is from below, which is characterized by pride, by self-centered boasting. By his good life, he says, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. True wisdom involves showing works in meekness, *prauteti*. Now, meekness really, here, is important to nail down, of course, key terms.

Meekness has to do with, first of all, the attitude towards oneself. Meekness in the biblical tradition involves a true and accurate perception of oneself, especially regarding limitations. Limitations both in relation to God and in relation to other persons.

It involves, really, a refusal to put forth one's own claims in the face of recognizing the transcendence and ultimacy of God and the unique adequacy of God. Refusal to put forth one's own claims, to establish or to further one's reputation, to make a name for oneself, boasting, or to grasp or obtain something for oneself. Obtaining, grasping.

It stands over against independence and self-reliance. It's going to pick up on this, really, in chapter 4, verse 7. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God, as he says there. And again, in verse 10, humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

But also a true and accurate perception of the self, not only in terms of refusal to put forth one's own claims but also; meekness has significance in terms of a true and accurate perception of oneself in relation to God. In terms of relation to God or towards God, it manifests itself in submission to God and trust in God. Again, as we mentioned, over against a kind of independence or self-reliance.

Now, one reason why I mention this regard just a moment ago, chapter 4, verses 7 through 10, is because of the belief that what he says here with regard to the wisdom from above in 3.13 through 18, he goes ahead and particularizes in verses, in chapter 4, verses, especially verses 7 through 10. So that meekness here, the meekness of wisdom, is expressed in terms of submission towards God, humble submission towards God, and humble trust in God, a rejection of independence and of self-reliance. But also, towards others, that is to say, a true and accurate perception of the self, especially its limitations towards others, so that it leads to peaceableness and gentleness versus violent, harsh assertiveness.

So, really, the wisdom from below is particularized, I think, in 4.1 through 5. What causes wars? What causes fighting among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have, so you kill. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and wage war. Again, this business of meekness involves a repudiation of grasping for ourselves.

You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions, this kind of thing.

Really, meekness involves taking others more seriously than we take ourselves. Now, here again, by the way, he brings in the notion of the tongue, says, he talks about

wisdom from below as being expressed in terms of empty boasting. So, it involves not only a matter of merely speech, but also improper speech.

This is one of the sins of the tongue. Now, this pride of boasting, really, as he'll go ahead and describe it here, and here we can move to the next slide. You have the substantiation of these exhortations, so that he talks about the character of earthly wisdom, and then, by way of contrast, that's in 15 and 16, and then by way of contrast in verses 17 through 18, the character of heavenly wisdom.

But he says with regard to the character of earthly wisdom in 15 and 16, which, of course, then will substantiate that it is not from above. It is not divine; rather, it is earthly, unspiritual, and even demonic. So, he says here, first of all, he talks about it's being characterized by jealousy. Verse 14 you find this, really, in verse 14 already, but if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, you have the recurrence of jealousy and selfish ambition connected, really, with this witness from below. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there will be disorder in every vile practice.

Now, the word jealousy, of course, is *zelos*. Really, our word jealous or jealousy is more of a transliteration than a translation of the Greek *zelos*, which is the word here for jealousy. *Zelos* really has to do with zeal, and jealousy involves self-centered zeal, zeal for the self, preoccupation with the self, and the prerogatives of the self.

The issues that divide when it comes to matters of jealousy, zeal, the issues that divide are linked with personalities. In fact, the reason they divide is that they are linked to personalities. It involves, therefore, necessarily rivalry, a zeal for the concerns and the interests of the self.

Now, he'll go ahead and develop this, especially as it comes to expression in community relationships in 4:1 through 4. But this, of course, involves an irony because this kind of jealousy involves a zeal to promote the interests of the self while all the time claiming that this is a transcendent divine wisdom. Also, it involves selfish ambition, *eritheia*, which involves really acquisition for the self. It moves from zeal for the self to acquisition for the self, driven by the desire to get ahead, both in terms of reputation or status and in terms of possessions.

And again, he'll bring the changes on both of these, especially possessions, you know, where he links this selfish ambition to covetousness in 4:1 through 4. But notice, he says, if you have jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, this is a radical problem. It is a heart problem that has to do with, of course, because he talks

about in terms of heart, has to do, of course, with the seat of the will, of the thinking and the emotions. It is a radical, deep-seated problem in need of a radical solution.

The problem is not ultimately with the tongue. As he's been discussing in 3.1 through 12, the problem is not ultimately with the tongue. It is with the heart.

Such a situation calls for repentance, chapter 4, verses 7 through 10. Wisdom, then, is a matter of essential will. It is not purely a matter of fact; in some ways, it is not even essentially a cognitive sort of matter.

It certainly is not exclusively a cognitive sort of matter, but it has to do, really, with thinking, emotions, and will all bound up together, this complex that in biblical anthropology is referred to as a heart. Wisdom is a matter, especially as presented here in this passage, is a matter of essential will. A change of character, a change of will, is demanded.

And so, you have the exhortation here: stop boasting, stop claiming to be inspired by God's wisdom. Now, he also describes this wisdom from below as earthly, over against the proper wisdom that comes down from above, which is heavenly. He says, this wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly.

Now, part of what's involved in the claiming to be wise, at least in the circles in which James was circulating, was the claim to have transcendent divine wisdom. In other words, the Christian community in which James travels and works really does understand wisdom as being a divine reality, a transcendent reality. And this boasting really involved boasting of a wisdom that was a divine or transcendent reality yet had none of the earmarks of the divine to it.

None of the earmarks of transcendence. It does not come down from above, as was at least implicitly claimed but is earthly. James indicates that it in no way comes from God. This kind of wisdom in no way comes from God.

It is a mere copy of the true heavenly wisdom and a poor copy at that. One that totally misunderstands the true essence of wisdom, a grotesque attempt to copy the wisdom that comes from God, and is, he says, beyond that, unspiritual. Psyche, unspiritual versus spiritual.

That is, and although the small s is used here, and that is probably correct, in the context of early Christianity and in the New Testament, when you have this kind of language that is, let's say, unspiritual, it really carries with it the idea that it, in this case, as I say, the word is *psukike*, that it is not of the Holy Spirit. The reason that this wisdom is so grotesque is that it arises from humans, with an emphasis upon the fallenness and futility of humans. Again, 3:2, for we all stumble much.

It tries to achieve this wisdom on the basis of human power. I mentioned Paul Rees just a few moments ago. This is what Paul Rees says about this word unspiritual here, describing the wisdom that is not from above, but is from below.

He says he puts it this way, you are being governed by the psychic processes of the unconverted man, the more or less refined impulses of instinct, and not by the mind and spirit of Christ. You are being governed by the psychic, psukikos, that's the word from which we get our English word, psychic, you are being governed by the psychic processes of the unconverted man, the more or less refined impulses of instinct, and not by the mind and spirit of Christ. But then he goes ahead and says, finally, and says here, and this is, I think, the climax to this list, is positively demonic.

That's a word that he employs here in verse 15. It is devilish, verse 16. Actually, I should say verse 15, at the very end of verse 15.

In other words, there is, as he said, with regard to the tongue, so also he says with regard to this kind of wisdom, it is transcendent. The insidious personal power of darkness is at work in it. Now, James could not do anything more than he has done to indicate the destructive force of a life and of a tongue that is motivated by selfish interests.

The effect of this he sets forth in verse 16. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder, and notice generalization, every vile practice. Disorder and every vile practice.

Again, he uses now the noun here, akatastasia, chaos. This assumes that God is a God of order and a God of righteousness. Anything that has these kinds of consequences must be demonic.

And again, as far as James is concerned, good, and the goodness of God is characterized by simplicity, by wholeness, by coherence. The opposite then of the goodness of God, the essential character of evil is in disorder, is in chaos. There would be disorder, both communal and personal, no peace, and every vile practice.

Now, this is one reason, the fact that he describes this wisdom from below in this way, every vile practice, is one reason why I think that 3:13 through 16 here, through 17, I should say, 3:13 through 18, I should say, is general and is then particularized and is also the cause for the specific vile practices that he describes both in 3:1 through 12, and he'll go ahead to discuss in 4:1 through 6, and also in 4:11 and 12. But the authentic wisdom involves, and this he, of course, goes ahead to describe in verses 17 and 18, the wisdom from above is first pure, very interesting, first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity, and then he talks also, moves, as he did with regard to his description of the wisdom from below, also now in a parallel way as he does, he'll do

with the wisdom, his description of the wisdom from above, he moves from talking about characteristics to the effect, far from, and in contrast to disorder in every vile practice, he says in verse 18, with regard to the wisdom that is from above, and the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. The chief characteristic of this wisdom that is from above is purity.

He wants to make this very clear, and he's not content with suggesting that purity is at the center of it simply by order of priority. He actually says explicitly, first pure. All the rest spring from this one and are particulars of purity. Now, when he talks about being pure, what exactly does he have in mind when he says that this is pure? Well, first of all, he seems in context to suggest that he has in mind purity of motive.

I say this because the purity of this kind of wisdom being from above reflects the pure character of God, as James describes God as pure elsewhere in the book. God is described as having a purity of motive. In 1:5, for example, let him ask God who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.

And again in 1:17, every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. As God gives himself entirely to us, he is pure in that sense. We give ourselves entirely to him and to others.

This wisdom from above is pure in us in that sense. As purity, in God's case, involves God giving and giving even himself entirely to us, we give. We give ourselves entirely to him and to others.

This involves really the desire to follow God's will unmixed with any other desire. Now, it is then, he says, peaceable. Clearly, this involves context because we will go ahead and develop this, especially in verse 18, which involves in context doing things that promote peace and reconciliation.

Now, the word peace in the Bible is a very interesting one. Of course, in the Old Testament, the word is shalom. New Testament, eirene.

But the New Testament use of eirene is very much influenced by the Old Testament use of shalom, which was translated eirene in the Septuagint. Really, as is often pointed out, it has to do with more than interpersonal concord. It has to do with holistic well-being.

But it has occurred to me that, and really it has both of those meanings. It has to do with holistic well-being, but more specifically, quite often, more specifically with interpersonal concord. I think it's quite possible that the notion of shalom, which had to do, had initially to do with interpersonal concord, and then came to refer to holistic well-being.

If that's in fact the case, it reflects a deep-seated assumption in the Hebrew mind, and that is that well-being or the lack of well-being is experienced primarily relationally. That the essence of well-being, or at least at the heart of well-being in general, is peaceableness. That is to say, interpersonal concord.

Interpersonal well-being lies at the center of holistic well-being. And, you know, really, that kind of double sense of peace is often manifest in the occurrence of this word in the New Testament, and I think that that's what you have here. In context, he clearly has because he's going to go ahead and develop this in terms of his opposite, that is to say, wars and fighting within the community in 1 through 6. So, he certainly has in mind here, or at least likely has in mind, peace as, or peaceableness in terms of interpersonal concord.

But there's reason to believe that he has in mind also holistic well-being, including, by the way, peace within ourselves. Notice that he talks about the way of folly over against the way of wisdom in the rest of the book of James. James will talk about it in terms of disputes, a divided man, a divided person, a double-minded person.

He has done that already, of course, in 1.6, actually 1.7. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord. And he will bring it up again through the same word in verse 8 of chapter 4. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you people of a double mind, so that peace may also involve a kind of peace within ourselves over against a kind of existence, personal existence, that involves a kind of civil war within ourselves. Now, he goes ahead and says that this kind of wisdom is also gentle, which, of course, again reinforces the idea that at least part of what's involved in peaceableness is concord between or among persons, gentle, *epieikes*, sensitive to the needs, the feelings, and the emotions of others, sensitive, actively sensitive to the needs, feelings, and emotions of others, non-combative, over against anger, combativeness, a kind of proneness to attack under provocation.

And he carries, he continues with the characteristics of this wisdom that is from above by referring to it as open-minded. He translates this as open to reason, *eupeithes*. Literally, this means believing well or well-believing.

That is to say, easily persuaded or trusting. Now, I think it's quite clear, both on the basis of broader book context and on the basis of the New Testament as a whole scriptural testimony, that when he talks about, uses *eupeithes* in terms of believing well or well-believing, easily persuaded, trusting, he does not have in mind the sense of gullibility or of careless assent. Matter of fact, really, the whole epistle of James is an argument against believing things that aren't so and embracing reality, which implies being very careful to assess reality and to place trust only in those things that deserve our trust.

So, not in the sense of gullibility or careless assent, to whom issues are not important. But he's talking about a person who listens to what is said. Again, going back, interpreting this in light of broader book context, going back to 119, let every person be quick to hear.

One who listens to what is said, assuming the value of the perspective of the other person, the person who is speaking, and who draws fair and reasonable conclusions from it. Now, James is suggesting here that irrationalism and closed-mindedness, an attitude that says, I have my mind made up. Don't confuse me with the facts. Irrationalism and closed-mindedness is a result of selfish ambition and jealousy, of a kind of self-centeredness.

I have my mind made up. I have reached convenient conclusions. Don't confuse me with the facts.

I know best. I don't need to hear what you have to say. And I certainly don't need to take seriously what you have to say.

Now, he goes ahead to describe it also as full of mercy and good fruit. Now, of course, when James talks about mercy, it's clear on the basis, especially of chapter two, that he's not thinking about nice warm feelings about people. Mercy is not understood primarily in terms of feeling but in terms of action.

Acts of mercy, the kinds of things that he described in 2:14 through 16, full of mercy and good fruit, practical mercy, practical concern for the poor and the suffering, over against hoarding, and without uncertainty. At least that's the way the RSV translates this. Without uncertainty, the word here is actually *adiakritos*, without doubting.

Matter of fact, a form of that word was used in 1:6, but let him ask in faith with no doubting. And actually, another form of this word was used in 2:4. Have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Make distinctions among yourselves. So that earlier in the book, a form of this word is used to refer to doubt and is used to refer to partiality.

That's why some urge that a better way of translating this word here is impartial, and some translations do render it so. In terms of context then, he may seem to be suggesting a kind of true faith, a kind of true faith that expresses itself by treating all persons alike without regard to position, status, or wealth or the lack thereof. A kind of faith that expresses itself by treating all persons alike impartially, especially in refusing to despise or demean the poor.

And unhypocritical, without insincerity or, yes, without uncertainty or insincerity, unhypocritical, without hypocrisy, sincere, does not pretend or flatter in order to win

approval of others. Again, you pick up on this major Jacobian, Jamesian emphasis on holistic so that you do not present yourself differently from what you are. That would be a manifestation of a divided person, not whole, not coherent.

But here, he introduces a kind of coherence that he doesn't really emphasize elsewhere, but it's apparently significant to him in that he mentions it here, and that is that there should be no division between who we are and the self that we present publicly to others. There's no pretense either towards God or towards others. And so, he goes on to say, and the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace.

Here, of course, is the effect. The harvest of righteousness, this picks up, by the way, on this business of fruitfulness that he mentioned earlier, full of mercy and good fruits, and also is sown in peace. And, of course, here he picks up on this notion of peaceableness, is first pure, then peaceable.

The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Peace and harmony, then, is the effect, not disorder, either internally or within the community in relationship to others, not destruction, but wholeness. Again, this notion of peace is holistic well-being, not destruction, but wholeness, health, and the like.

There is really a kind of implicit exhortation in verse 18, and that is that coming as it does right after this list of characteristics of the wisdom that is from above, talking about it now in terms of its effects, the effect of this kind of wisdom, he is actually suggesting that all of these things that he has talked about, things like gentleness, openness to reason, mercifulness, the bearing of good fruits, no uncertainty, no insincerity, that all of these, if they are really part of true wisdom, are to be done in the context of promoting peace in the community. They are to be done in such a way as to promote peace. Some of these actions, some of these characteristics of the wisdom from above could be done in such a way as would result in exactly the opposite effect.

For example, with regard to gentleness, if one abstracted gentleness and absolutized gentleness and did not consider gentleness as one of the characteristics of this wisdom from above in terms of its expression, its effect, as described here in verse 18, one could think of gentleness or could express gentleness in terms of the refusal to confront persons in their sin. Remember, James ends his book by saying if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, which necessarily in practice would involve some confrontation, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the air of his ways will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. Or you could understand open-mindedness as being open to everything that came down the pike with no discernment whatsoever.

But that, of course, would be destructive to the community. The wholeness of the community and peaceableness in the community are achieved by a concern for truth

and for the right doctrine. But if one had an attitude of a view of open-mindedness so that any view that anybody was to be accepted simply because it was held, that truth, including right doctrine, was no longer important, that would actually introduce division and destruction to the community.

Well, this brings us then to the point of chapter 4, where, as I said, I do believe that he goes ahead and particularizes, first of all, in 4:1 through 6, the wisdom that is from below, where he describes wars and fighting among you and all the rest there. And then, of course, in verses 7 through 10, he particularizes, in my judgment, the wisdom that is from above. And then again in 4:11 through 12, he goes back to particularizing in other ways the wisdom that is from below that he has been describing in 3:13 through 18.

At any rate, this is a worthy place to pause.

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