

Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Torah, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:8–11)

...there is disorder and every evil thing. – Where people within a believing community are engaged in “jealousy and selfish ambition,” that is, they are characterized by that which is opposite of the very person of Yeshua, and thus of the purpose of God for His people, there can only be a fountain that gives forth disorder and more—“every evil thing” (πᾶν φαῦλον πρᾶγμα), that is, all manner of base and evil deeds, actions, and their consequences.

James’ words ought likewise to be considered by those who have leadership positions within the believing community. As Moo puts it in his commentary:

While what James says here applies to any Christian who prides himself or herself on being “wise and understanding,” he may especially have in mind the leaders of the community. For envy and selfish ambition among the leaders have tremendous potential to damage the unity and order of the church as a whole. When those who are being looked to for direction and wise counsel act on the basis of a personal agenda or in a spirit of “one-upmanship” toward one another, great damage to the church ensues.¹

Surely these pointed and inspired words of the Scriptures ought to strengthen our resolve to turn from any form of jealousy or self-centered ambitions, and especially from slander and gossip, and give ourselves wholly to honor the One Who died for us and to be living testimonies of His glory, power, grace, and love, not only as individuals, but especially as being community members together in a local assembly.

17– But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

The opening word “But” (δέ, *de*) marks a contrast to the “wisdom”

1 Douglas Moo, *James*, p. 174.

described in v. 15 which is “not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic,” that is, worldly “wisdom,” which is the product of depraved minds encouraged by the enemy.

In utter contrast to “worldly wisdom” is the “wisdom from above,” that is, the wisdom that comes from God Himself, given to the child of God through the work of the Ruach, enabling the believer to know the mind and will of God through the study and application of the Scriptures. Then, as the believer grows in understanding God’s truths, applying this wisdom to all aspects of one’s life, he becomes more and more conformed to God’s will as his faith is strengthened and matured through a life of prayer and fellowship within the believing community.

In describing the “wisdom from above,” James puts “pure” in a primary position by noting that it is “first” (*πρῶτος, protos*). The new life in Messiah granted to all who exercise faith in Yeshua, is, in an overall sense, marked by being “unstained from the world” as James teaches us in 1:27.

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27)

To “keep oneself unstained by the world” means to have one’s life characterized and marked by that which God declares to be righteous and not by the ungodly, decadent, sensual, and self-centered qualities which characterize the world.

Thus, “pure” (*ἄγνός, hagnos*) being put “first” and therefore in a prominent position, indicates (by the added word “then” *ἔπειτα, epeita*) that all the remaining aspects of God’s wisdom listed by James likewise have “pure” as a necessary component.

The primary sense of “pure” (*hagnos*) in our context is that of “holy,” meaning “separated unto God” and “from that which is contrary to Him.” This is the sense of the Hebrew verb *קָדַשׁ (qādāsh)* and its cognate noun *קִדְוֹשׁ (qādōsh)*, i.e., “to consecrate,” “to separate from that which is “unconsecrated.” God, by His very nature, is “holy, holy, holy,” and thus those who belong to Him are to be separated unto Him and from that which is contrary to Him. While “earthly wisdom” can be used for that which is sinful, selfish, illegal, and contrary to God holiness, the wisdom which God gives will always be characterized by aligning with God Himself and thus with His self-revelation in the Scriptures and ultimately the incarnate Word, Yeshua.

Thus, the wisdom that comes from God will be recognized as the opposite of that which marks out earthly wisdom, that is, “disorder and every evil thing” by which James characterizes the fruit of “earthly wisdom” (v. 16).

But the wisdom which is from God not only is seen in a life that is separated from the world of sin and self-centeredness. It is also characterized by expressing the goodness and holiness of God, that is, becoming more and more conformed to His likeness.

Wisdom that is pure, however, is not merely separatistic. This purity of life communicates the unsullied goodness of God. Pure wisdom does not inject that which is base and dehumanizing into relationships and conversations, nor does it compromise the goodness and blessedness of God for the sake of expediency. Pure wisdom applies itself to the love of the believers (or congregation) without showing favoritism...¹

Likewise, James seems to emphasize that those who are marked by God’s wisdom which is pure, are “free from the moral and spiritual defects that are the marks of the double-minded (cf. 1:7, 8; 4:8).”²

...then peaceable - The Greek word *εἰρηνικός* (*eirēnikos*) carries the general sense of “being conducive to a harmonious relationship, peaceable, peaceful.”³ While the Greek noun “peace” (*εἰρήνη*, *eirēnē*) is regularly used in the Apostolic Scriptures (92x), the adjective *eirēnikos* used in our text is found only one other time, in Heb 12:11.

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Heb 12:11)

This same Greek word, *eirenikos*, is found several times in the Lxx, to translate *שְׁלָמִים*; *shelāmim*, “peace offering.”⁴ It is difficult, however, to ascertain how the “peace offering” coincides with the general sense of “peace” which the Hebrew word *שָׁלוֹם* (*shālom*) carries. It may have some connection with restoring relationship with God or celebrating acceptance by Him.

1 Richardon, *James*, p. 169.

2 Martin, *James*, p. 134.

3 BDAG, “*εἰρηνικός*,” p. 288.

4 1Sam 10:8; 11:15; 13:9; 2Sam 6:17–18; 24:25; 1Ki 2:35[Lxx]; 3:15; 8:63–64; 2Ki 16:13; Prov 7:14.

It seems best to understand “peaceable” in our verse as carrying the sense of “peace loving,” thus, “not contentious.” The wisdom that comes from above will produce a true desire in the believer to establish peace and to work to maintain it. While this includes inner peace, it seems clear in the wider context that James is emphasizing “peace” in the relationships that exist within the believing community.

What is clear in the context of our verse is that by “peaceable” James is emphasizing that quality of having both the desire and the willingness to strive for peace rather than allowing contention and self-centeredness to bring about divisions and turmoil within the community of faith. That James has the striving for peace within the believing community will be emphasized further in the opening verses of chapter 4.

Paul teaches us that “peace” or “shalom” is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and thus to strive for shalom within the community of believers is to evidence a willing submission to the Spirit. The wisdom which is from above, being itself “pure,” means that one must strive for peace and do what is necessary to help maintain peaceable relationships among the members of the believing community. This, however, is not “peace at any cost,” for peace which is pure will not compromise the clear teaching of God’s truth in order to appear as accepting of everyone and all manner of contrary beliefs. But when there is the need to confront someone regarding something that clearly needs correction, it must be done with a genuine heart of love and with the goal of correcting and bringing that person to acknowledge and accept the truth as clearly set forth in the Scriptures. This requires humility, patience, and forbearance on the part of the one or two who do the confronting. But when successful, the reward is great.

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city,
And contentions are like the bars of a citadel. (Prov. 18:19)

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he
listens to you, you have won your brother. (Matt 18:15)

...*gentle* – The next quality that characterizes Godly wisdom is that of “gentleness.” Obviously gentleness is likewise an aspect of “peaceable,” for gentleness is demonstrated when disagreements erupt. The Greek word translated “gentle” is *ἐπιεικής* (*epieikēs*) and is found four other times in the Apostolic Scriptures. These occurrences help give us an understanding of the various aspects this word may carry.

Paul gives us this admonition in his epistle to the Philippians:

Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.
(Phil 4:5)

In the context it appears that there existed dissensions in the community at Phillipi, and Paul therefore appeals to those who are part of the dissension to show gentleness toward those with whom they disagree. To add weight to his request, Paul reminds them and us that “the Lord is near.” This most likely is related to the fact that believers are to live with the eminent return of the Lord in mind. The Aramaic $\text{מְרַנְנָא תְּרַנְנָא}$, (*μαράνα θά*), *Maranatha*, used also in Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians (cf. 1Cor16:22), would seem to indicate that this was a current “watch word” among the believing communities.

We likewise find Paul emphasizing “gentleness” in his first epistle to Timothy when he lists the qualifications for an overseer.

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. (1Tim 3:2–3)

Here we see that “gentle” (*epieikēs*) is contrasted with “pugnacious,” that is, one who is short tempered and known for being out of control. Paul uses the same term when writing to Titus:

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. (Tit 3:1–2)

Here, “peaceable” and “gentle” are also combined, contrasted with maligning someone and failing to show consideration for all people.

We find Peter using the same word to describe masters who are “good and gentle.”

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. (1Pet 2:18)

In this case, “gentle” would appear to describe a master who did not use undue force when correcting a servant but, as Paul teaches, “showing consideration for all men.”

...*reasonable* – The next characteristic which flows from divinely

given wisdom is that of “reasonable” (εὐπειθής, *eupēithēs*). This word is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and does not occur in the Lxx. Johnson gives this information about the word:

eupēithēs derives from the nouns *eupēitheia* (“ready obedience”), suggesting the quality of docility and willingness to get along with others...¹

The word *eupēithēs*, translated “reasonable” by the NASB, may also carry the sense of “compliant” and “obedient,”² and perhaps “willing to obey.” When coupled with the words “gentle” and “peaceable,” “reasonable” continues to emphasize that James is describing the qualities necessary for cooperation rather than competition, that which results in seeking unity within the local community.

...full of mercy (μεστή ἐλέους, *mestē eleous*) – Mercy (*eleos*) is the desire and ability to empathize with someone who is suffering for one reason or another. Even when the suffering has been brought on by wrong choices or unwise behavior, the ability to empathize provides an opening to administer help. Clearly such empathy must be governed by wisdom, but the characteristic James is describing is that which flows from a genuine desire and ability to show love to someone in need. As Paul admonishes:

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (Rom 12:15)

Note also the directive found in Hebrews:

Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. (Heb 13:3)

Here, being part of the body of Messiah means that one should show mercy to others within the community who are in difficult straits. And the fact that James adds “full of” indicates that the Lord desires us to be abundant in showing mercy.

...and good fruits (καρπῶν ἀγαθῶν, *karpōn agathōn*) – The same abundance is to be evident in displaying “good fruits.” Since “full of mercy” is connected together with “and good fruits,” it seems very likely that

1 Johnson, *James*, p. 274.

2 BDAG, “εὐπειθής,” p. 410.

James has combined these two to give us a single idea, namely, to show mercy to those in need and to do so with an abundance of kindness. It is the combining of “mercy” and “good fruits” that allows us to fulfill the command of the Torah as reiterated and emphasized by our Lord and Savior: “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Being “full of mercy and good fruits” in order to help those in need requires that we continue to be filled with the power of the Ruach, feeding our own souls with the truths of God’s word and seeking to grow in our ability to love others within the community with the love which James emphasizes in our text.

... *unwavering* (ἀδιάκριτος, *adiakritos*) – Once again, James has utilized a word that is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and only once in the Lxx but which has no parallel in the Hebrew text.

These also are the “unwavering” proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed. (Prov 25:1, Lxx)

The addition of the Lxx, using *adiakritos*, may indicate “unchanged” in the sense of the Proverbs of Solomon being taken as a recognized and received standard of wisdom.

The word as used by James most likely connects with the final word used in this list, “without hypocrisy.”

The unwavering quality of actions indicates a purity or singleness of heart (cf. 4:8), characteristic of a person of integrity whose actions match his or her words.¹

“Unwavering” does not indicate the inability to change when change is needed. It rather emphasizes that the person who is known to be “unwavering” can be counted on to complete or fulfill that which he or she has promised to do. Moreover, the characteristic of “unwavering” describes someone who is not constantly being attracted by this “fad” or that one. In short, “unwavering” describes a person who lives by godly principles because he or she is committed to a life that is pleasing to God.

...*without hypocrisy* (ἀνυπόκριτος, *anupokritos*) – The opposite of “hypocrisy” is the quality of being “sincere.” A hypocrite is one who puts on a good outward “show” but his or her inward self is something quite

1 Richardson, *James*, p. 171.

different. Remember the parable or illustration Yeshua uses to describe the “unfaithful servant.”

But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites (*anupokritōn*); in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 24:48–51)

Here, in the illustration our Lord presents, the “hypocrite” is used to designate those who portray a “religious” exterior but are full of filth inside. The true character of the servant is known by the master when he arrives unexpectedly.

The point James is making is that true wisdom, the wisdom which is from above, is not characterized by hypocrisy. True divinely given wisdom, that which is from above, is lived out by those who possess it and are empowered to live their lives by it.

18 – And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James concludes this pericope with an obvious “capstone” which gathers together and summarizes the previous verses. The first question is how to understand “the seed whose fruit is righteousness.” While several options seem possible, it seems clear to me that the “seed” is the very work of God Who, by His sovereign grace, has drawn the child of God to Himself and who has therefore exercised saving faith in the Messiah Yeshua. It is this seed of genuine salvation that, through the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit, brings forth the “fruit of righteousness,” that is a life that is more and more conformed to the righteous life of Messiah Himself.

Therefore, the “seed” which is salvation continues to produce the fruit of righteousness, i.e., is “sown” to produce ongoing fruit, and even as the seed is “sown in peace,” so it thereby produces the fruit of peace. Even as seeds from a fruit tree may sprout new trees, all those sprouted from the seeds of a given tree will grow to be the same kind of tree.

That being the case, those who live by the wisdom which is from above will continue to have a positive influence upon others who will likewise be drawn to appreciate and seek that same wisdom, that which fosters peace and not division.