

“The Test of Authenticity”

James 3:13-4:6

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3:13-4:6

13 Who [is] wise and understanding among you?

Let him show by good conduct [that] his works [are

done] in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but [is] earthly, sensual, demonic.

16 For where envy and self-seeking [exist], confusion and every evil thing [are] there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

4: 1 Where do wars and fights [come] from among you? Do [they] not [come] from your [desires for] pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend [it] on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously." 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."



We are halfway through this challenging letter. Let's take a look at where we have been thus far. Right out of the gate in chapter one, James opened up the subject of trials, tribulations, and testings, and how he believed Christians were to respond to them. He expected us to endure, and moreover, **with rejoicing!** Later in chapter one he turned to the issue of authentic Christianity, contrasting true claims to faith and false ones. The real stuff will manifest in our speech, it will be witnessed in our care for other believers, and it will show up in our refusal to conform to the world and its path.

In chapter two, he “throws down” on man's tendency to show sinful partiality when dealing with people. Then he went on in the latter half of the chapter to express the importance of being able to produce evidence of one's faith. How the “real thing” is a faith which acts, a faith which obeys and loves. Finally in chapter three, he goes after all of us who profess to be believers and yet our mouths belie such a claim. The world thinks our speech is a small issue, and yet James dragged it out into the light of day and made it again what it always was: a ‘big’ deal. One that reflects well the true state of our hearts and redemptive positions.

Now in this passage he finally gets to the root of all of what we have covered. The test of Christian authenticity, which occurs by looking into a man's heart. It is there we move beyond the *what* we do and into the *why*. Looking into there is something many of us will avoid at all costs. We will skate around the edges, but seldom are we willing to just stop, lift the lid, and look inside! Yet the point of this letter in its totality is make evident the real stuff, and separate it from the mere façade of religion. Eventually it all comes down to what's down

there in each one of us. The use of our tongues, as well as all of these other spiritual attributes James has discussed are simply reflections of that heart truth. And unless change happens *there*, in the heart, we will live our lives in the midst of chaos and confusion...a constant battle ground, a war we will eventually lose.

All that James has covered thus far, while certainly good counsel and stuff we need to address, is ultimately symptoms of what is in our hearts. James begins this section by asking the rhetorical question of just who “is wise?” Who is the one who has true wisdom and a faithful understanding? Plenty will claim such a mantle, and lots of folks “have the t-shirt,” but few will actually prove it by the conduct of their lives, actually living in the meekness that is inherent to the manifestation of wisdom.

Firstly, let's establish what exactly is this thing “wisdom.” We need to know this, because there are many different and particular definitions for stuff, and thus we want to be sure we are actually talking about the same thing. Wisdom is not the stuff of “book-learnin” but rather a natural ability to understand things and then apply such to real life situations. It's good sense and judgment and the ability to apply it. Knowledge is the stuff of the classroom, and perhaps even acquired through the experiences of life, but it is innately *learned*.

We can gather from Scripture elsewhere that God considers this wisdom to be a good thing! Proverbs 3:13 says, *"Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gets understanding."* Certainly it seems that wisdom is uniquely found, experienced, and shared, only while in motion; meaning in the natural rhythms and activity of life. Such is manifested through practical life experiences, through ‘being in the game’ and engaging the world around us. It is in these things that I find and share wisdom; not in a laboratory, a classroom, or a book. James just finished talking about how we deal with our mouths, which is a good place to reflect whether we have any wisdom or not. What comes out of us tells the whole story!

James, in verse 13, tells us also that a wise man will show himself to be wise by living in a way that actually reflects a life of a wise man. In other words, you know a wise man by the way he lives because wisdom isn't just about knowing things or even assenting to correct data; it is about living a faithful, wholesome, and consistent lifestyle that levels the road before him and others. For the believer, that life is one which pursues the Holy Spirit as the “way of the Lord.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your way acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight.”*

The Bible scholar Alec Motyer once said concerning wisdom, *"Wisdom is the God-given ability to see how in all our ways we may acknowledge Him."* James goes even further in declaring that wisdom is not simply seeing how we may acknowledge God in all our ways, but actually doing it! That will involve engaging God in fear, awe and respect, and yet it still goes further in that every aspect of our lives will also reflect the reverence of God. In that kind of life...in that kind of understanding, there is a real grasp of who I truly am in light of this God.

So when I, as verse 14 reflects, express fleshly envy and self-seeking, I cannot therefore claim that I am wise or that I am walking out my life in wisdom. It says rather that I don't grasp who I really am and certainly who I am in God's eyes! So when stuff like this comes out of me, I reflect rather a life *void* of wisdom and *absent* of real godly understanding. James is saying that wisdom is not only God-honoring, but self-subduing and other-centered. Saying we are wise while yet spewing both words and a lifestyle of self-interest and envy is “lying against the truth.”

The fact is, wisdom or the lack of it, shows itself in its product. Wisdom is visible in what it produces. James tells us in verse 16, *"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."* That passage is starkly accurate and powerful. There are people who are consumed and controlled by jealousy and self, and their lives show it in a near constant state of confusion, chaos, and yes, even evil. This, of course, is the antithesis of wisdom and understanding. Scripture tells us, *"God is not the author of confusion"* (1 Cor 14:33). So we need to bear this in mind when we are dealing with decisions and priorities in our lives. God's wisdom, according to verse 17, is *"first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."*

Godly wisdom is first something Satan can never produce: **'pure.'** The word "first" prefaces the word "pure." We can gather then that unless purity is in place, the individual is sure to be void of these other attributes. Purity is accomplished by running every aspect of our lives through the Scripture and God's Spirit. It speaks of holiness. When we start with purity, what will naturally follow is peace. That seemingly simple gift is the sole property of the heavenly realm.

Romans 5:1 tells us, *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."*

We have peace with God, and moreover, peace with man and peace with one's self. Following purity and peace comes the attribute of gentleness. Gentle in speech and gentle in behavior. Not passive or weak, just 'gentle.' Even if the prior traits are unable to be seen by those around us, the blessing of gentleness is evident to everyone. Then follows "easy to be entreated," which means "quick to follow." Not isolated or rebellious. It means to obey easily.

Next comes the manifestation of a life "full of mercy." Mercy is something we do not deserve. Others around us do not deserve it either. But we abundantly get it from our Lord anyway. Understanding that fact via godly wisdom, the child of God then freely gives it to others. Note the language here! Such a person doesn't just passively *demonstrate* mercy, but rather he or she is FULL of mercy. We sure know how to receive God's mercy, but we are often so slow to give it out!

The passage before us continues, saying there will evidence of 'good fruit.' This means simply that what is being produced in our lives is actually "good." Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We are to be found full of God's good fruit.

Then there is the attribute "without partiality." This is the straight-shooter attribute. It is the person who doesn't play politics or move in a manner to secure status or position. He is righteous and fair with all, and has no concern as to someone's rank or place in the worldly scheme of things, even, *...and most importantly, himself.* This is a trait of maturity which follows the others. It is a trait of righteous judgment that is found in the person of Jesus Christ and comes to us as we become like Him.

Lastly James says, ***"without hypocrisy."*** This is a lifestyle reality that is evident to all. He is what he is. He is privately what he is publicly. A lifestyle wherein "there is no guile." It is a trait of consistency, honesty, and godliness. It is also a trait that is crucial in all of God's leadership.

Finally, James brings the final blessing home to each one of us who are God's children: *"...the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."* This is the providential hand of God upon each one

of us who have been born again and now walk in the peace of God before Him and in our relationships with our fellow man. It is sown and, *in time*, harvested by others around us.

James is trying to get through to us that, on the one hand, if we are going to know true blessedness, true happiness, and experience true satisfaction and fullness of life which God intended for us, then we need to have true, heavenly wisdom. On the other hand, he is telling us that you really can't grow as an individual in heavenly wisdom unless you are planted in the kind of soil heavenly wisdom grows in! And the kind of soil that heavenly wisdom grows in is a fellowship committed to living together in true peace; in the wisdom of truth and grace. Thus both of these are necessary in order to live the good life. It is a critical priority in this fellowship, and that is why some folks just don't stay. Those who are innately fighters, those who are bitter, those that cannot seem to see beyond themselves, will never be content here.

Chapter four continues in the same line of thinking. Looking down into the pit that is the heart of each of us, James asks the very poignant question: *where do wars and fightings among you come from?* We tend to see such as originating 'out there' someplace, but James isn't letting us off the hook! He is speaking of those petty wars that spring up in the midst of us individually as well as the body of believers we seek to participate with. James lays out the truth: these things come not from *outside* the man, but rather from *inside* him!

Jesus declared in Matthew 12:34 that "*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.*" So what's in there, really? If the world is still in control of you, your decisions and priorities, then you and the fellowship you try to be a part of are going to feel the effects of such a heart. What results will be division and bitterness...at least with you personally.

We all naturally expect such behavior in the world, but we are slow to recognize the danger to the body of believers. We are lulled into a false safety, believing we are out of reach of Satan and our flesh, that things "in here" will naturally and inherently be different because there is a church sign hanging out front. But it starts with each of us individually. If we find such actions are commonplace in our lives, we must, *as James does*, question our very standing with God and whether we have ever really known a life-changing transformation. Jesus was always "all about everyone else." So how can we believe that we are like Him if it is all about us? We can be quick and easy to receive salvation by faith, but do we grow in grace to learn to live by that same faith?

As always, it is a healthy thing to often pause and ask ourselves, "Why am I here? Is this all about me, about getting what I want, about being recognized for what I do, and praised for what I am?" Few see such actions as lust, but James does. And he is brave enough to state it plainly, just as we should. Often, it seems that our prayers, which overflow from our hearts, are plagued with a "gimme" attitude that has no place in a believer's life. Is it truly "Thou be glorified" and "Thy will be done"?

James calls this "friendship with the world." That is not speaking of having an unredeemed acquaintance or seeking to shine Christ to the lost and dying around us in the world we live in. We are talking *friendship*: a unity, a yoking together. The fact is, we cannot have both God and the world. We cannot walk with one foot in the world and one foot in Christ. However, accomplishing that impossible task is indeed the "brass ring" for the evangelical world today, and we generally chose our church accordingly. But let us make no mistake here! Attempts at being lukewarm result in God spewing us out of His mouth (Rev 3:16).

We also must note that this goes beyond human relationship. Further, it speaks of unity or pursuit of any aspect that is of this world. Whether it be a job, a possession, or any earthly pursuit. As children of God, we are not to be of this world. It's a simple concept that gets lost in the obscurity of our own making. That does not mean we

move into the “compound.” Rather, it means that everything is filtered through the concept of “seeking first the Kingdom of God.”

After all, Jesus wasn't seeking that we “disengage.” In John 17:15, speaking to His Father, said... *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."* However we must be very careful not to link arms with the world under the guise of love and evangelism. God knows our hearts on this and so should we! The real test of this is not pleasant:

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." John 15:19

James calls this oft compromise for what it really is: **adultery**. Unity with another lover. Cheating on our first love. An illicit love affair with the flesh and the world! The Living Bible renders this verse as follows: *“You are like an unfaithful wife, who loves her husband’s enemies. Don’t you realize that making friends with God’s enemies-the evil pleasures of this world-makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy the evil pleasures of this world, you cannot also be a friend of God.”* We are reminded that no man can serve two masters (Luke 16:13). If an individual is comfortable in the mud, he is not a son, but a pig!

Amos 3:3 says, *"Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?"*

Thankfully, God does not leave us alone to fall into these pitfalls. He has given us a “Comforter” ...the “Holy Spirit,” to guide us and dwell in us to keep us from being entangled in this world.

Galatians 5:17 says, *"The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions."*

But we can, in reality, push the Spirit away. When we do, we operate alone and the old man, the “*spirit of the flesh*,” in the vacuum, will step back into the driver’s seat. If we operate without the conviction of conscience, we are void of His Spirit, either through rejection of His control or because we do not know Him, and thus He will not dwell in us.

The bottom line of the message of James here is, if we are indeed one of His children, then why are we walking as part of the world? It is a simple directive. Yet we sweep its reality under the rug through excuse and human reasoning.

We can pursue such a righteous and wise path, remembering always that the Spirit of God faithfully and constantly offers more and more strength to draw us into such a disciplined life. Humility before Him, understanding indeed who and what we really are in the depth of our being, is the path to overcoming the tendencies of the flesh.

2 Peter 1:3-4 promises us, *"By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires."*