

“Seven Pillars of Leadership” Proverbs 9:1

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:

WISDOM

Time would not permit us to do an in-depth study that is needed on the subject of wisdom. I would encourage you to read and study Proverbs chapters 8 and 9 as the wise man speaks to us about wisdom. The Old Testament speaks of wisdom as a person that is present with God in creation; she was there when the mountains were settled, when the heavens were prepared, and when the clouds were established she was there. If wisdom was of importance at creation then how much more do we need it as Christians, and especially as leaders? Proverbs states that by wisdom king's reign and prince's decree justice. By wisdom prince's rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. It is by no wonder that James writes to the New Testament church if any man lacks wisdom, let him by faith ask God for it and he will generously without reproach give it to every man who does.

It is our attempt to establish that true leadership in the New Testament church can only be done by heavenly wisdom. It is apparent the apostle James was dealing with those who professed, that they were teachers or leaders in the New Testament church, but the very fact that they bragged about their wisdom was proof that it did not come from God. The apostle will deal with earthly wisdom and its fruit and then heavenly wisdom and its fruit. He then deals with the seven characteristic traits of wisdom which we believe are the seven pillars of Proverbs. Below you will find commentary from personal notes and the Bible Handbook on James chapter 3, versus 13 through 18. We hope you enjoy the study

James 3:13-18

THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE

James sees the problem in jealousy and selfish ambition (verses 14 & 16) and sets these against the wisdom from above. The wisdom that is not from above brings disorder, but the wisdom that is from above makes peace. It appears that James may still be thinking of those who would like to be teachers, especially those whose motives are questionable, but what he says here applies to ordinary believers as well.

James 3:13

Who is wise and understanding among you?

THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE SOMEONE WHO VIEWED THEMSELVES AS LEADERS OR TEACHERS. SOMEONE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH WAS TEACHING FROM AND EVEN BRAGGING ABOUT THEIR WISDOM.

The wise person is not someone who possesses intellectual capacity or abstract knowledge, but someone who has moral insight on practical matters in daily life.

Someone who possesses expert knowledge with deep perception and understanding

James goes on to answer his own question by mentioning two things that are evidence of true wisdom, namely that true wisdom should show itself in deeds, and that it should manifest itself in meekness. First, the person who is truly wise and understanding should prove it by the quality of his or her own conduct. It is proven by his good life. The word life is not the usual word for life; it refers not so much to private and inner life, but to life in relation to others as shown in conduct. It is a favorite word in 1 Peter, referring to the whole manner and style of Christian living intended to be a witness to nonbelievers.

To show here means to “prove” or to “demonstrate”. The force of the imperative let him show may therefore be brought out more clearly as “You are to prove it” (TEV), “he must demonstrate” (BRC, or “he must give evidence of”. Other ways to express this clause are “show it by living right” (CEV) or “Show you are truly wise by walking a straight life” By his good life let him show his works The humility that comes from wisdom Meekness is the opposite of arrogance

IT IS THE UNDERSTANDING OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN GIVEN WISDOM OR ABILITIES FROM GOD THAT TRULY “EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE THEY THAT BUILD LABOR IN VAIN”

The following are possible alternative translation models for this verse: Are any of you truly wise? If you are, then you must show this by living (or walking) a good life, and also by doing good deeds with the humility (or gentleness) that comes from your wisdom. Is there any person among you who is wise or sensible? You must show it by living a right (or correct) life and by being humble and wise in everything you do.

James 3:14

The pair of terms in Greek for jealousy and selfish ambition appears in Paul’s list of vices (translated “jealously” and “selfishness” in 2 Cor 12:20 & Gal 5:20). The word rendered jealousy, literally “zeal”, was originally a neutral term. But the predominant meaning in the New Testament is the negative sense of a desire to promote your own opinion from a selfish motive. It is a zeal that is fanatical (Brc), and therefore may be rendered as “envy” (TNT, NIV, NRSV). James qualifies jealousy with the adjective bitter, thus intensifying the feeling of a contentious spirit, in contrast to humility and gentleness. Bitter in this context means “biting”, “intense”, or “severe”. Some other ways to express bitter jealousy are: “a heart full of intense jealousy”, “have a heart hot with jealousy”, or “have an inordinate desire to get what other people have”. Selfish ambition, one word in Greek, is a rare word sometimes used of the attitude of greedy politicians putting their own interests above everything else, often resulting in rivalry and partisan spirit. It may therefore be rendered as “spirit of rivalry” (TOB, FRCL, REB). We may also express it as “desire to be better than others”. In some languages this is described idiomatically in terms of the heart; for example, “have a black heart”, or “have a narrow heart”.

“Boasting about wisdom while being jealous and ambitious is, in fact, lying or sinning against the

truth”.

“True wisdom is associated with humility. This is the truth. If so, to boast about wisdom when you are jealous and ambitious is a contradiction in terms; it cannot be true”. This is supported by what James goes on to say in the next verse. The following alternative translation for verses 13 and 14 will bring this meaning out clearly:

Are any of you truly wise? If you are, you must show it by living a right life and by being humble and wise in everything you do. This is true wisdom.

TRUE LEADERSHIP IS THEN BY EXAMPLE AND NOT BY STATEMENT- YOU ARE THE LEAD SHIP GETTING THE OTHER SHIPS BEHIND YOU TO GOD’S INTENDED DESTINATION. OTHERS ARE FOLLOWING, NOT BY WHAT YOU SAY, BUT BY WHAT YOU ARE DOING.

James 3:15

What James wants to say here is that any wisdom that results in envy and rivalry has nothing to do with God. James goes on to use three adjectives to describe the kind of wisdom that is not from God. The three adjectives are arranged in the form of a crescendo, a gradual increase in strength to a climax, from earthly to unspiritual to devilish.

NOTICE THE PROGRESSION:

1. Earthly-Flesh
2. Sensual-Soul
3. Demonic-Spirit

First, the claim to have true wisdom without consistent lifestyle is earthly. The word earthly is the opposite of heavenly. Secondly, such wisdom is also unspiritual. This adjective derives from the word usually translated as “soul”, and is used in contrast to the word “spiritual” in 1 Cor. 2:14. This is possibly the reason why a number of translators have rendered it as “unspiritual”. The difficulty in bringing out the meaning of the word is reflected in the variety of English translations; for example, “animal” (Gspd, TOB), “carnal” (SEG), “sensual” (KJV), “sensuous” (Mft), “natural” (NASB), “human” (Lu, NJB), “lowly” (GECL), “this worldly” (ITCL, JNIT), “selfish” (CEV). It is obvious that the word has a large area of meaning, and that each of the above renderings covers just part of the total range of meaning of the original. In any case it refers to something of sinful human origin, something related to the natural life that human beings and animals share, something worldly and devoid of the Spirit. In some languages this may be translated as “It does not come from God’s spirit” or “This is not the kind of wisdom that God’s Spirit causes us to have”. Finally, such wisdom is devilish or “demonic” (TEV; so also REB), “from the devil himself” (CEV). Devilish is the opposite of divine. This adjective is used only here in the New Testament. It may be taken to mean “demon-like” (Gspd), stressing that the behavior and wisdom of those described in verse 13 is similar to that of a demon. It may also be taken in the sense of “demon-inspired” (so Brc), emphasizing that the so-called wisdom of those who are

selfish and ambitious is demonic in origin, not from God. In many languages it will be helpful to render this as “It comes from the Devil himself” or “It is the Devil who gives it”.

THE ENEMY CAN ONLY WORK THRU FLESH OR THINKING THAT IS CONTRARY TO GODS. WHEN GOD CURSED THE SERPENT HE WAS TO EAT DUST OR WORK THRU FLESH

THE CRUCIFYING OF JESUS WAS FOUND IN THIS PROGRESSION OF EARTHLY WISDOM

God does not give wisdom like this to people. On the contrary it is the kind of wisdom that people in the world have. God’s Spirit does not give it. rather it comes from the Devil himself.

James 3:16

“Whenever people are jealous and selfish” (CEV), “Whenever people have hearts that desire greatly to have what others have and to be better than other people”. These negative attitudes inevitably lead to disorder and every vile practice. The adjectival form of the noun disorder has appeared in 1:8, where James speaks of the double-minded person as “unstable”, and in 3:8, where the tongue is said to be a “restless” evil. In 1 Cor. 14:33 Paul uses this word in the sense of “confusion”, setting it in contrast to “peace”. The word is also used in Luke 21:9 of the commotions, or “tumults”, of war. As used to describe the troubled situation in the community, it can mean “confusion” (KJV, Gspd), “chaos” (TNT), and “disharmony” (Phps, NJB). Again it will be better in some languages to say, for example, “such people are always causing trouble” or “such people are always fighting *or, having disagreements+ with others”.

Whenever people are jealous and selfish, they are always causing trouble and doing every kind of evil.

James 3:17

He introduces the contrast by a contrasting word But and then uses a series of seven adjectives to explain what heavenly wisdom is. These adjectives are skillfully and artistically arranged. In Greek, after the first adjective pure, the next four begin with the letter “e”, thus creating an alliteration, that is, beginning every word with the same sound. The last two adjectives begin with the letter “a” and have the same ending- kritos. When reading aloud in Greek the rhythm is obvious.

Two observations may be made at this point about the seven adjectives. First, although they all describe what true wisdom is, the focus appears to be on the effects that wisdom should produce. And so we may say that these adjectives describe what true wisdom does rather than what it is.

“But the wisdom that God gives”. As already indicated, in biblical usage wisdom has little to do with intellectual capacity. Rather it is a practical ability to discern the will of God, that is, “spiritual discernment”.

BELOW ARE THE SEVEN PILLARS OF LEADERSHIP

1. PURE

Purity is the nature of God. Therefore to be pure means to share in the character of God. To be pure is to be free from self-interest and to serve God single-mindedly. It requires sincerity and moral integrity, being free from moral imperfection (compare 1 Pet 3.2, "chaste"); thus we may express it as "having a heart that is free from moral stain."

2. PEACEABLE

Peace is obviously the key word in verses 17 and 18, since after the first word **pure** it begins and ends the list of the moral qualities that are the result of divine wisdom. The word **peaceable** is used only here and Heb. 12:11. In biblical usage the word "peace" means primarily not absence of war or strife, but more positively the Hebrew idea of total well-being. The rendering **peaceable** or "peaceful" sounds too passive. It is also more than simply "friendly" (GECL, CEV); rather it is "peace-loving" (Phps, NEB/REB), "peace-making" (compare Matt. 5:9); as paraphrased by Barclay it is something that "produces harmony between man and man". It is a quality incompatible with jealousy and ambition and is very appropriate to the church situation James was in. In verse 18 James refers positively to "those who make peace". So we may translate in this verse "be people who help others to make peace", "help others to settle their grievances", or "..to forgive each other".

3. GENTLE

Besides the RSV **gentle**, this adjective is rendered in a variety of ways; for example, "courteous" (Knox), "considerate" (Gspd, NEB/REB), "forbearing" (Mft, JCV, JFT). Following more or less its use in classical Greek in the sense of "strict justice," Barclay paraphrases the meaning of this adjective as an attitude that "never stands on the letter of the law." In the New Testament the word is placed side by side with "meekness" (2 Cor. 10.1) and "not quarrelsome" (1 Tim 3.3; Titus 3.2). This indicates that the meanings of these expressions are related and parallel. The adjective may therefore be describing the kind of attitude that is tolerant and accepting of other people's different ways, not easily aroused and annoyed at what other people do and say. In some languages the idea of being "tolerant" will be a good way to express **gentle**.

4. EASY TO BE ENTREATED - open to reason

In Greek this is a single word and it is used only here in the New Testament. Its meaning is very close to **gentle**. This is seen in the fact that the word "considerate" has been used to translate both **gentle** (so Gspd and REB) and **open to reason** (so NJB). That the word has a wide range of meaning is seen in the various translations: "easy to be entreated" (KJV), "reasonable" (NASB, TNT), "sensible" (CEV), "never obstinate" (Brc), "willing to yield" (Gspd, NRSV), "compliant" (NAB), "open-minded" (REB), "friendly" (TEV), "conciliatory" (Mft). No doubt every rendering brings out part of the total meaning of the word. In general it describes someone whose mind is not closed, who is not insistent but always willing to listen to other people's views and ready to be persuaded.

5. FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS

THE FACT THAT THE EXPRESSION INCLUDES AN AND INDICATES THAT THE TWO PARTS ARE TO BE TAKEN TOGETHER. INDEED IT IS POSSIBLE TO TAKE THIS AS A HENDIADYS, INDICATING THAT THE WHOLE STATEMENT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS EXPRESSING ONE IDEA. IF SO IT MAY BE UNDERSTOOD AS “FULL OF MERCY THAT BRINGS ABOUT GOOD FRUITS.” MERCY MEANS SHOWING COMPASSION TO THOSE IN TROUBLE AND IN NEED. IT IS ONE OF THE DISTINCT QUALITIES OF GOD HIMSELF. IN Jesus’ teaching it is something God requires of people (Matt 9.13), and indeed something commanded by Jesus himself (Luke 10.37). James has his own definition of what mercy is: it is the love of your neighbor shown in practical deeds (2.8-13). For the meaning of mercy see the discussion in 2.13. To have true wisdom a person has to be compassionate and has to produce kind deeds to show it. To keep the image of good fruits, we may render it as “produces a good harvest of good deeds” (TEV), or “produces a rich crop of kindly acts” (Brc).

James completes his list of qualities with two negative adjectives.

6. WITHOUT PARTIALITY - without uncertainty.

This word is used only here in the New Testament, and its exact meaning is very difficult to define. This is reflected in a number of different renderings: “without partiality” (KJV), “free from prejudice” (TEV), “whole hearted” (Gspd), “unambiguous” (Mft), “without inconstancy” (NAB), “unwavering” (NASB), “straightforward” (REB), “genuine” (CEV), “free from doubts and hesitations” (Brc). Here again all of these components are interrelated and overlapping, and therefore context and general use in a given language will be deciding factors in determining the meaning. In this context “impartial” or “without prejudice” appears to be the best. This is in accord with James’ concern about impartiality expressed in 2.8-13. And we note that in that context he also mentions the importance of “mercy.” This meaning is also closely related to the next adjective without insincerity. It reflects James’ tendency to pile up similar or related concepts, as seen also in the use of gentle and open to reason (“friendly” TEV) observed above.

7. WITHOUT HYPOCRISY – without insincerity

It describes something that is genuine, without pretense, being truthful to others. In the New Testament it is often used in the sense of “genuine” or “sincere” to modify some important qualities such as “love” (Rom 12.9; 2 Cor 6.6; 1 Pet 1.22) and “faith” (1 Tim 1.5; 2 Tim 1.5). The double negative without insincerity is best rendered in the positive form “sincerity” (so CEV). Another possible rendering, equivalent to “sincere” in this context, is “straightforward” (Mft, Gspd, REB). As it has been observed, an “impartial” person is “sincere”; impartiality and sincerity go hand in hand.

In many languages it will be necessary to use verbal expressions all the way through this verse. The following may serve as an alternative translation model: But Christians who have this wisdom that God gives, first of all have hearts unstained by sin. They are also peacemakers,

tolerant toward others, and friendly. Their hearts are full of love for other people, and this produces a good crop of merciful (or kindly) deeds. They also have no prejudice toward others and are sincere.

James 3:18

The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace.

Translation

We need only to take the total meaning into consideration. While not abandoning other possibilities, the interpretation and therefore the resultant translation that appears to fit the context best is this: And harvest (or seed) of justice is produced (or sown) in a spirit of peace by those who promote peace..

We can restructure this sentence as:

Justice is the harvest reaped by peacemakers from seeds sown in a spirit of peace (similarly NEB).

We can also restate this in an active form; for example:

Peacemakers who sow peace in a spirit of peace will harvest justice.

If translators in certain languages cannot use the metaphor of “planting peace”, they may express this verse as:

When peacemakers bring about peace between people, the result is that justice is done.

COMMENTS:

Ask yourself what kind of wisdom do I manifest as a leader? Am I known for contention and confusion or as a peacemaker? Is my ministry, department or organization known for confusion or peace? Do I lead by earthly or heavenly wisdom?

James 1:5:

If any of you like wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him