

God gives more grace

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[0 : 0 0] wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere, and a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. 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. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture says he yearns jealousy over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us? But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched, and mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Well, we saw this morning that speech matters. Godly speech is a vital, practical, and distinctive mark of the single-minded, God-focused Christian. So speech has great positive power and potential.

However, the reality is that our speech is often an area where we are double-minded in our faith. Our speech is naturally evil, inconsistent, and untameable. So, how can we live our faith, live out our faith in consistently godly speech? How is it possible? Well, what is important impossible with man is not impossible with God. By God's gracious work in us, consistent godly speech and godly lives are possible. They are possible as we firstly seek God's wisdom, secondly, as we recognise our spiritual adultery, and thirdly, as we humbly submit to our gracious God.

So, firstly, we are to seek God-given wisdom. We are to seek God-given wisdom. Have a look with me at verse 13.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, 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. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder in every vile practice.

[3 : 5 6] James reminds us again of the natural self-promotion that is in our hearts, that naturally, we follow the wisdom of the sinful world around us. This earthly, ungodly wisdom is very familiar to us.

We see it worked out daily in our broken, guarded and impatient words and relationships with each other. In stark contrast to this, the wisdom for a consistently godly life is a gift given from God above.

Verse 17. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

True godly wisdom comes from above as a gift. Only God can give it, for only God is truly wise and everything good comes from him. At Christmas, we all love to give gifts to the younger members of our families, don't we? To our children and grandchildren, to our nieces and nephews. This Christmas, I went to Hamley's toy store. I splashed out a little on some special gifts from my niece and nephews.

And it was a joy to see Ted smile as he unwrapped that sparkly, cuddly toy dragon. I loved giving him that gift. Now, there's no way Ted could have gotten that dragon by himself. He couldn't have gone from Leicester to London. He had no money to pay for it. He's six years old. But Ted could receive the dragon as a gift. And so for us, we can receive from God an even greater gift, the gift of godly wisdom and living. And what is the gift of god's wisdom like in verse 17? The wisdom god gives his people is marked firstly by moral purity. It is first pure. It is a purity that says yes to god's good moral commandments revealed in his word. It is a purity that says no to sin. It is a purity seen in the person that loves god's holiness and longs to be holy too. The wisdom god gives his people is also peaceable. God gives us peaceful hearts that are careful to avoid needless arguments.

[6 : 14] Instead, we are to be those who are gentle. The gentle person is considerate and generous towards others. The gentle person doesn't have to get their way or make sure their opinion is always heard.

Instead, they are open to reason. They are prepared to see things from another person's point of view or to try different ways of doing things. The wisdom god gives is also full of mercy.

So when wronged, the wise person is quick to forgive and does not stand over the other person in judgment. This will show itself in good fruits, in restored relationships.

God's wisdom is also impartial. As seen earlier in James, it is seen in those who don't show favoritism, but who instead treat all God's people with respect, so they are willing to talk to anyone in the church family on a Sunday. God's wisdom is also sincere. There is no hypocrisy, false flattery, or double-mindedness in those who are sincere. What you see on the outside is just like the inside. Kind words on the outside reflect the kind intentions on the inside. And what is more, a person with God's wisdom impacts those around them. So verse 18. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

A farmer sows his seed and works his land. The rain comes and there is an overflowing harvest. So too, for the Christians whose lives are marked by the gift of God's wisdom, there is an overflowing harvest. Peace seen in their relationships with each other. And this doesn't mean avoiding hard conversations or compromising sin. Remember, God's wisdom is firstly pure. But it means that even when we have those hard conversations with each other, we do so because we long for the good of each other.

[8 : 19] What a beautiful picture this all is. It's beautiful because God's wisdom reflects God's character. It ultimately reflects the Lord Jesus. Christians who live out God's wisdom are mirrors reflecting Christ-likeness to those around them, bringing God glory. Take a moment now to think of a mature Christian you know. You see such attractive godliness in their words and their actions. They are quick to forgive, slow to hold a grudge. They are prepared to be wrong and quick to say sorry for their sin.

They love the Lord and long to obey his word and fight the sin in their lives. They are full of mercy towards others because they know how much mercy God has shown them. How is it that their lives reflect God's character? It's because by the Holy Spirit they have the wisdom from above that God gives.

So for us too, we too can ask God for that wisdom. Look back with me to James chapter 1 and verse 5. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given him. God loves to give us his wisdom. God promises to give generously to all who ask him for it.

Isn't this massively encouraging? Wouldn't it be great if we were a church family that was always asking God for wisdom day by day, week by week? That we would be a church that was always longing and praying for God to work his godliness in us. And God will answer our prayer when we pray this. God will keep his promise to give us the wisdom that we are. And we pray this is the wisdom that comes from above. Even today, even now, as we sit under his word, God is growing us in his wisdom. So firstly, we are to seek God's wisdom.

Secondly, we are to recognise our spiritual adultery. We are to recognise our spiritual adultery. So chapter 4, verse 1. What causes quarrels and fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

[10 : 45] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. 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. You adulterous people. Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Even as James has painted a beautiful picture of peace, he turns to the sad reality that is all too frequent in church life. The Christians are quarrelling and fighting. Their time together is dominated by disagreement and friction. Conversations are defensive and critical. And there is hate and murder in their hearts, which may even lead to acts of murder too. What is going on? How could God's people be living like this? And what is going on in us when we fall out with each other or have disagreements or back off from each other? Well, James says it's all to do with the desires inside of us. It's that earthly wisdom that James has already mentioned. So when Christians fall out over what music should be sung at church or what kind of Bible studies we should have at growth group or how committed we should be to serving, we can actually be driven by what we want, by what we expect church life and other Christians to be like.

And even when we pray, when we ask God to work in our church, it can easily be because we want church to be more comfortable for us. What is going on? Well, James wants us to see that when Christians act like this, it reveals our spiritual adultery. It reveals that we are acting like and aligning ourselves with the world around us. Verse 4 again. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James rebukes the Christians and charges them with spiritual adultery. This is the root issue, not just of their ungodly speech, but of the very real danger these Christians face of falling away from Jesus altogether.

It is that double-mindedness we looked at last night, of wanting to live God's way, but at the same time wanting to live the world's way. Imagine a husband and wife get married. Both take great joy in their commitment and love for each other. But soon, the wife begins to look over her shoulder at her life before she was married. She begins to look at the lives of those around her who are single and she starts to notice other men. She starts to wander and she breaks her wedding vows. She says she loves her husband still, but she commits adultery. So too, the double-minded Christian. It is shocking and tragic.

[14 : 01] When Christians want to live for God and at the same time also for the world around them, they are committing spiritual adultery. They are abandoning their God who is husband to his people.

You see, our values and how we live are a matter of relationships. Our values reveal who we are loyal to. Our values reveal who we love. And so in choosing to be self-centred in our relationships with church family, we are allying ourselves with a world that hates God. We'll be treating God as an enemy.

And God takes this adultery massively seriously. Verse 5. God has given us his Holy Spirit. God himself dwells within us and he's jealous over. He feels strongly for his spirit. He is not pleased when we act like the world around us as though his Holy Spirit wasn't dwelling in us. So as we long for godly speech and godly relationships, we need to recognise first that so often we are also longing at the same time to live like the world around us.

This adultery and worldliness can look so normal, we hardly notice it in church life. We see it when we want to encourage others, but we also want others to think well of us.

We see it when we want to listen to others' ideas, but we also want to do things our way. We see it when we want to hear love and truth from others, but we back off defensively when someone does lovingly rebuke us. And when we want to serve others, but only in a way that fits our schedule or with how we enjoy serving. We need to recognise this as a spiritual adultery.

[16 : 02] It really is. We need to repent, to cry out to our gracious God for forgiveness and for help. And so thirdly, we are to humbly submit to our gracious God. We are humbly to submit to our gracious God. Verse 6. But he, God, gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. What precious, encouraging and heartwarming words. God does not condemn his humble children. Instead, God gives us more grace.

God's grace is his undeserved kindness to us. It is God's grace that led Jesus to die on the cross for our sin. It is God's grace that brought us to repentance and faith in Jesus when we first believed.

It is God's grace that gave us his Holy Spirit to dwell within us. And it is here, God's grace to work his godliness in our lives day by day. So where we are humbled and see our sin, it is God graciously stirring us to repent. And where we see our inability to change, God will graciously overcome our naturally sinful hearts and change us himself. Knowing this, we are to humbly submit ourselves to our gracious God.

And what does such humble submission look like in practice? Verse 7. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. James gives us a number of active commands here that show God's humbling grace at work in us. God's grace does not mean that we are passive and make no effort. No, God in his grace works in us as we act. So first we are commanded to resist the devil. It's not surprising that the devil will be there watching our conversations with each other and encouraging us to act on our desires in ungodly speech. He may tempt us to sin by thoughts that come to us or by words other people say. He may feed on our own doubts about God's goodness and the trustworthiness of God's word.

[18 : 45] He will feed our pride, encouraging us to stew over how other people have offended or hurt us. He may get us to look at how much easier life is for our non-Christian peers.

And he especially loves it when Christians fall out with each other. But when we feel the strong temptation to sin and to act on our earthly desires, we can stand our ground. We can say out loud, go away Satan. We can speak Bible verses to ourselves that remind us of who God is.

And we can pray for God's protection over our relationships at church. God promises that the devil will flee from us. He will run away from us, afraid of the Holy Spirit that is working in us. We are also, verse 8, to draw near to God. We need God's strength to live wholeheartedly for him in a hostile world. So this drawing near means seeking God in his word, the Bible, and in prayer. We need to do this both individually and in community as a church family.

Drawing near means wanting to hear God's voice, God's word, more than the voices of the world around us. It means wanting to come to him, asking him to help us to live for him day by day.

It means making the decision to prioritise time in God's word and prayer and then acting on that decision. And God promises that as we do so, God will draw near to us. When we open the Bible and when we pray, God is right there with us. We don't physically see him, but he is there. We are not alone. We are meeting with our maker. We are also to actively cut out sinful habits in our lives. So verse 8, cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. This is not talking here about dealing with sin all by ourselves. It's only through Jesus's death on the cross that we are cleansed from our sin and our hearts are made clean. No, James is speaking of bold action to cut out specific sin in our lives. He wants us to think over areas of our lives where we especially see our double-mindedness, where we are regularly compromising and living like the world around us.

[21 : 18] And so, in dependence on God who is near us, we are to act to cut it out of our lives. Empowered by the Spirit, we may, for example, need to put in active steps to fight the habit of moaning. We may need to ask each other, to gently call us up on this when we see it happening in growth group or in conversations after church. It will certainly mean us reminding each other of how much we have to be thankful for Jesus and his gospel. And as we fight specific sin, so too we are to continually confess our sin to God. So, verse 9.

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. This verse does not mean that Christians will never laugh or be light-hearted or joyful.

No, it means that as God's word reveals to us our double-mindedness, we are to grieve it. In growing as a Christian, the Spirit will continue his work of convicting us of our sin.

And our right response is to cry out to God to forgive us our sins through Jesus Christ. It is a mark of a humble, godly Christian that they never forget that they're a forgiven sinner.

Think of that mature Christian you know. This is true of them. A humble, single-minded, God-focused Christian will live out a lifelong pattern of repentance and faith in their Saviour. Prayers of repentance and faith are a daily discipline for the child of God.

[23 : 30] Now, all of these commands may seem utterly overwhelming, but that is why God gives us more grace. It is God's gracious work in us that really makes it possible for us to fight double-mindedness. It is God's gracious work in us that really makes it possible to actively live wholeheartedly for him. And so, we have God's promise here that as we humble ourselves before him, he will lift us up. Verse 10.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. As we humble ourselves before God, we can trust God's promise here to raise us up.

That is, God will assure us with his gospel of forgiveness in Christ. He will remind us that he is the faithful, patient and loving husband of his people.

And he will graciously give us his wisdom from above. The wisdom that really will show itself in consistent godly speech and a godly life. So, how is it that we can live out our faith in consistently godly speech that brings God glory?

Firstly, by seeking God-given wisdom. Secondly, by recognising our spiritual adultery. And finally, by humbly submitting to our gracious God.

[24 : 57] For we have this very great promise, verse 10. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will.