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| Topic | Making Wise Relationships |
| Reference  | James 3: 13-18 |
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The entire book seems to be anchored on this one verse, Chapter 1:22

But do doers of the word and not hearers only.

The writer talks about the importance of what we must do and must not do. We are taught that works, specifically good works must accompany our faith and we have already seen in previous sermons that our doing good is not a prerequisite for our salvation or a condition for our salvation unlike what other religions teach, rather it is an expression or an evidence of our faith. It is like the exercise of our faith. The writer goes on to say three times in Chapter 2 that faith without works is dead and we find this mentioned in chapter 2 verses 17, 20 and 26.

James therefore is a very useful book for us to digest and then to put into action. It lends practical dimension to what we believe in and more importantly it gives shape to our faith. This morning we shall focus on what we need to do in the conduct of our relationships with one another.

Besides controlling our tongue what else must we do when we relate to our fellow believers and the text offers us specific guidelines to help steer our dealings within the community of God’s people. As a matter of fact these lessons can also be applied not only to relationship within the church but also relationships within our families and also to relationship within marriages.

One Monday afternoon in early October in 2015 I found myself visiting the Sharia Court of Penang. I was invited by the Penang State secretariat to be one of three member panel of judges to judge a competition among state employees and this was part of my work. To take part in the competition you need to form a group of between 5-10 people or colleagues and to undertake the project lasting six months to a year to improve the services that you provide to the citizens. And the Penang Sharia Court being a state agency had a team participating and hence my visit to judge their project. They treated me with utmost respect and courtesy. The outcome of their project is encapsulated in this pamphlet that the group produced which says, *“If today you agree, today it will be settled for you”*.

Now what happened was that before their project if a Muslim couple wish to get a divorce it will take them about six trips to the Sharia Court over a period of at least three months and so they studied the entire process and they make some key changes and improvement to the process and now with this project completed they will only need to go to the Sharia Court once and get their divorce in one day. But they were careful to point out that this only applies to the cases of uncontested divorce, where both husband and wife have agreed amicably to the terms of the desolation of the marriage. I was stunned to say the least sitting in the room hearing about the project. So I asked them, “Wouldn’t this lead to a higher rate of divorce in the State of Penang?” Their answer was very convincing, “If a couple is determined to get a divorce, if the marriage is beyond repair, why make life difficult for the couple”. I further inquired what if in the aftermath of a sheeted quarrel between husband and wife say last night and today they go and get a divorce in one day and then next week later they regret their decision. Again their answer was very good, “the couple can always get married again”. The actually won the context, they emerged as the winner.

Now I am relating this to you to illustrate that while the world out there may be hasty to breakup relationships or even to facilitate the ending of relationships in contrast Christians in general put in far more efforts not only to maintain and keep relationships but also to foster and nurture relationships and this serves as a backdrop to today’s sermon in a sense that as Christians we realize that to make a relationship work, any relationship not just marital ones, it requires a lot of efforts. Our faith compels us to work hard in our relationships and this squares up with the overall theme of the Book of James, namely works as an expression or evidence of our faith.

How then should our faith drive our relationships? What should we do in the conduct of our relationship with others?

To get on with the text James talks about two kinds of wisdom; an earthly wisdom in verse 15 and the wisdom that comes from heaven in verse 17. So we have Earthly Wisdom versus Heavenly Wisdom. The text starts by asking

*“Who is wise and understanding among you?”*

Since the text flows from the earlier versus, so this is linked to verse 1 at the beginning of the chapter where the writer mentions that not many of you should become teacher. So what we have here is directed at teachers. So if you think that you have wisdom and understanding, verse 13 continues

*Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

In order words if you think you have this qualities of wisdom and understanding prove it by the way you conduct your life, show it by what you do especially in the area of humility and this again squares with the overall theme of the Book of James (works as an expression or evidence of our faith).

Wisdom in general is certainly not same as knowledge. In general people will say, wisdom is knowledge applied and applied in such a way that the outcome is good for those involved. Knowledge is not power until it is applied and hence notion that wisdom is knowledge apply in the right way. Many of us possess vast knowledge in our respective fuse but that does make us wise, which makes this quotation rather profound.

*“Never mistake knowledge for wisdom, one helps you make a living the other helps you make a life”*, Sandra Carey.

Wisdom can be defined as application of not just knowledge but also experience which you accumulate along the years but that is mostly secular wisdom. Being sure of what to do, what is the best thing to do in a particular situation based on your knowledge and your experience but the Bible’s definition of wisdom is vastly different. In the pages of scripture in Bible times back then the people of God to them wisdom was certainly a highly value quality and people at that time look up to the wise. Part of the Old Testament is known as wisdom literature which includes Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and there are people in the Bible who are described as wise. We have the wise men from the east visiting Jesus after his birth, Daniel and his three friends are said to be 10 times wiser than anyone else in the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, but more notably we have King Solomon, supposedly the wisest man who has ever lived. God appeared to Solomon in a dream early in his reign and He said to him from.

1 Kings 3:5

[**5**](http://biblehub.com/1_kings/3-5.htm) At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.”

Instead of requesting for riches or longevity Solomon asked for wisdom and so God granted him wisdom.

**12** I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have!

That is why Solomon is now referred to the wisest man who has ever lived. Solomon was not that wise as he married 700 women and got 300 mistresses. Solomon was a man who was good at dispensing wisdom to others but not on himself. Solomon certainly started well with wisdom from God but unfortunately later in his life he allowed the other kind of wisdom to steal him away from God. In the way these two kinds of wisdom are in the competition or in opposition to each other but only one will prevail. Hence James talks about two opposing kinds of wisdom, the heavenly kind of wisdom as oppose to the earthly kind of wisdom. The text seems to be directed at teacher or aspiring teachers. Earlier in Chapter 3 the writer was talking about the tool of the teacher, the tongue and now in this text he describes the qualities of the teacher, whether he has the wisdom that comes from heaven and although not all of us are teachers or aspiring teachers, I think we should all desire this kind of wisdom. We are all teachers in one way or another since we have children, nieces and nephews coming to us for advice.

**EARTHLY WISDOM**:

The result of earthly wisdom is clear in verse 16

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

So earthly wisdom leads to chaos and sin and earlier in Chapter 3 verse 6 James talks about an untamed tongue (manifestation of earthly wisdom) corrupting the whole body. Later in Chapter 4 verse 1 the write also describes earthly wisdom causing fights and quarrels. Now such ugly results of earthly wisdom, when we look at it corrupted body to evil practice to fights and quarrels and these results are not really so surprising if we realize where they comes from. What is the origin of this wisdom, it does not come down from heaven and this wisdom is

**15** Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

In the original Greek text the word earthly refers to something of this world such as a system and its principles and methods. In other words a sort of wisdom that is rooted in the ways of the world, the worldly wisdom that is often very material in its focus which often draws us away from God.

The second word unspiritual, it is sometimes translated as sensual in some versions. It is related to the senses. Actually the original Greek word means natural, as such coming from the natural desires and appetites of a man, one who is devoid of the spirit of God and therefore he acts according to his natural human instincts.

The third word demonic simply means of the devil, coming from the devil itself and this kind of wisdom as you can imagine is characterized by pride and ego and rebellious attitude towards God.

So simply putting, from verse 15 we gather that the origin of this wisdom as oppose to heavenly wisdom is threefold;

1. The world
2. Self, it is natural desires.
3. Satanic.

It is possible that two or even all three of them work in tandem to dictate man’s decisions and actions. We do not attribute everything to Satan. Sometimes it is just our natural desires at work as in the case of Solomon marrying so many wives. Putting all three together, the world, self and Satan James describe them as a wisdom that has not come down from heaven.

These three forces are trying to undo our spiritual growth.

Nature of this kind of wisdom:

**14** But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

**16** For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

From these two verses we can gather that the nature of earthly wisdom is threefold:

1. Bitter envy.
2. Selfish ambition.
3. Untamed tongue from chapter 3 also

ENVY:

It is not actually the same as jealously. There is a difference between the two. Our God does not envy, there is nothing for God to envy, but the Bible does describe God as a jealous God. Envy is defined as our response when we do not have something others have, but this feeling is not necessarily bad. In bitter envy you become resentful even to the point of anger. Earthly wisdom is manifested in bitter envy.

AMBITION:

Our response when we want something that you don’t have and you are willing to work for it. Ambition on itself is good. Selfish ambition means we will not hesitate to take advantage of others or to step on others to achieve our goals. Earthly wisdom also shows itself in selfish ambition.

When we put together bitter envy and selfish ambition side by side the common denominator here is self-centeredness, thinking only of what we want, what we need, what we deserve, what we feel often at the expense of others. So earthly wisdom is based on the self-centered disposition. We must be careful not to conduct our relationship with any hint of self-centeredness. We must stop thinking only of what is best for ourselves but rather what is best for the other person.

It is not difficult to see how earthly wisdom can easily hurt or destroy a relationship, because self-centeredness often strains a relationship causing tension, unease and frustration and eventually the relationship starts to breakup.

**HEAVENLY WISDOM**

Origin Of Heavenly Wisdom:

It is not exquisitely stated in the text, it just says in verse 17, the wisdom that comes from heaven. Most other translations have it as the wisdom from above. Jesus mentioned in last supper

John 14:26

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 16:13a

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth;

So here we have Jesus on the last night with his disciples promising them of the coming of the Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and guide them in all truth and this in the way tells us that the Holy Spirit is the source of heavenly wisdom.

Isaiah 11:2a

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,…

It is a prophetic text pointing to the coming of the Messiah. It talks about how the Holy Spirit will come upon this Messiah which of course is eluding to the baptism of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is described as the spirit of wisdom and understanding.

The heavenly wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit.

Nature Of Heavenly Wisdom:

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

There are seven attributes of person blessed with heavenly wisdom. Another version of Bible describes it like this way

James 3:17 (ERV)

But the wisdom that comes from God is like this: First, it is pure. It is also peaceful, gentle, and easy to please. This wisdom is always ready to help people who have trouble and to do good for others. This wisdom is always fair and honest.

This is a slightly different way of translating that verse.

James 3:17 (ERV)

*But the wisdom that comes from God is like this:*

* *pure*
* *peaceful*
* *gentle*
* *easy to please*
* *ready to help people who have trouble*
* *ready to do good for others*
* *fair and honest*

*EASY TO PLEASE*: This is from the word submissive in the NIV translation. The converse of this is clear. If you are hard to please then going by this verse you are not so wise.

There is a quote; “*I am easy to please as long as I have things done my own way*.”

From here we can imagine what a person is like who is hard to please. He will always insist on doing things his way. It is very hard to nurture a relationship if we keep thinking that our way is the best and that we are always right. People around us eventually end up having to tolerate us. There is something self-centered about such a person who says I am right, my way is the best. Same as earthly wisdom is characterized by self-centeredness. Other Bible translation renders the word submissive as open to reason, willing to yield or accommodating. This is a quality of a person blessed with wisdom from above.

*READY TO HELP PEOPLE WHO HAVE TROUBLE and READY TO DO GOOD FOR OTHERS*

They both are related and they come from the phrase full of mercy and full of good fruit in the NIV and this seem to be a reinforcement of verse 13. As Christians we do not want to get involved into other people trouble as it is theirs, but the Bible teaches us;

1 John 3:17

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Deuteronomy 15:7~8,10~11

**7** If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites…do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them.

**8** Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need…

**10** Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless your in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

**11** There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

Christian charity and aid have been the foundation and hallmark of Christianity over the many centuries and in the context of our topic today, helping people who have trouble and doing good for others which I combine as good works. I am going to point out that good works will go a long way to strengthen the bonds within the church, within the community of believers. When we go around our way to meet the needs of our fellow believers when we have their interest and welfare they will feel it, the church will become stronger.

Paul also mentions about good works,

Colossians 1:9b~10

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,…

So to wrap up this point on the nature of heavenly wisdom when we relook at the qualities of a person filled with heavenly wisdom we notice that many of these are active qualities, not passive. It is about what we do, it is about doing something and often our image of a wise person is someone with wise words, someone may give a sound advice, someone with a higher understanding of things but a picture of a wise person from the text here is someone who is marked by his deeds and not his words and so the nature of heavenly wisdom is the walk and not the talk. It is all about actions not just articulations.

**18** Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

We can assume that peacemakers here are filled with heavenly wisdom since being peace-loving is an attribute of wise person from verse 17 and here we see peace as a result as the sow the seeds of peace which ultimately lead to righteousness.

*Earthly wisdom is based on self-centeredness while heavenly wisdom is centered on others and is to be fought by Godly qualities and above all good works towards others.*

Our mind represents the mental and the rational part of existence but the heart is the seed of our emotions and feelings and this is really the struggle in our life, the mind versus the heart, thinking versus feeling and finding the right balance between the two. We are created to enjoy feelings, but for every joy there is sadness, for every laughter we shed more than a tear, for every high feeling there is a low feeling and the heart can also be filled with envy and selfishness, bitterness and resentment, anger and hatred and all kinds of negative and destructive emotions. While we recognize that we are human being capable of emotions, we will hesitate to allow our heart to guide my actions. We must learn to control our emotions and the mind must rule the heart.

How do we cultivate relationships? Now if we feel angry will it affect our relationship with others? Of course it will, so therefore we have to do something about it.

We have seen heavenly wisdom was expressed in deeds and actions. Our actions are firstly the products of our decisions. Decisions leads to actions and our decisions should stem from rational thinking, from the mind and not the heart. The state of our heart fluctuates between high and low emotions, between positive and negative feelings and that should not dictate our actions.

Thinking of course is a function of our mental difficulty, so perhaps we should fix our mind first before we fix our hearts. Hence the order should be, rational thoughts which leads to wise decision, which leads to noble actions, not the other way around, negative feelings leading to reckless actions.

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is His good, pleasing and perfect will.

Love is much-much more than a feeling. Love involves feelings and we enjoy these feeling but if it is based on feelings alone our relationship including our marriages would be like a roller coaster ride going up and down. The world says that love is a feeling but the kind of love taught in the Bible is much-much more than feeling, it is really a commitment. We are committed to the people in our relationships and commitments like actions are the products of a mind that has made a decision and that should govern the way we relate to each other. Our relationships with one another should be also powered by love as much as they are guided by wisdom.

*If relationships were a sail boat, heavenly wisdom is the rudder steering the vessel so that we go in the right direction. Love on the other hand is the wind blowing into the sails pushing the vessels forward.*