




Wisdom from above based on James 3: 13-18 as an antidote and way of Life that produces peace and its implication for Indonesian Churches

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ABSTRACT

There are several studies that have been conducted on the subject of wisdom as found in James 3:13-18, but these studies have not given adequate attention to the function of the fruits of wisdom from above. The purpose of the research in this article is to offer a new perspective on the function of the fruits of wisdom as an antidote and a way of life that produces peace. To achieve this purpose, this article used a qualitative analysis of the text of James 3:13-18. The analysis showed that James demonstrates the function of the fruits of wisdom from above, not only as an antidote, but also as a way of life in the daily practices of the Christians to whom the author addressed this letter. This article concludes with a summary of the dangers of worldly wisdom explored by James and the distinction between divine and worldly wisdom. James proves that the fruits of wisdom from above or from God can be an effective antidote and at the same time a way of life for Indonesian churches in facing various problems both in the Indonesian churches.

Keywords: James 3: 13-18, Antidotes, Wisdom from above, Worldly Wisdom, Way of Life.

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have discussed the theme of wisdom in the letter of James,¹ but only two are stated here because they specifically discuss James 3:13-18, namely, Aaron A. Pachal and Jason Isidoro Davila. Pachal begins his discussion by asking, "Is wisdom the dominant theme in the letter of James?" In answering this question, he argues that the theme of wisdom in James 3:13-18 is the culmination of wisdom discourse, which is delivered to shape the behavior of the church in private. The goal is for readers to embrace the wisdom of God by emphasizing the faith that must be manifested in deeds. Pachal believes that the focus of the wisdom in James 3:13-18 is a discourse to provide an integrated framework

¹ Robert F Chaffin Jr, "The Theme of Wisdom in the Epistle of James," *Ashland Theological Journal* 29 (1997): 23–49; Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Dan G McCartney, "The Wisdom of James the Just," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 3 (2000): 52–64; Darian R Lockett, "The Spectrum of Wisdom and Eschatology in the Epistle of James and 4QInstruction," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (2005): 131–48; John C Poirier, "Symbols of Wisdom in James 1: 17," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 57, no. 1 (2006): 57–75; Sarah-Jane Austin, "The Poetry of Wisdom: A Note on James 3.6," *Ecclesia Reformanda* 1, no. 1 (2009): 29–45; Robert W. Wall, *The Wisdom of James* (Seattle, Washington: Center for Christian Ethics of Pacific University, 2009); William Varner, "The Main Theme and the Structure of James," *Master's Seminary Journal* 22, no. 1 (2011): 115–29.

for James to offer insight for readers that is related to the wisdom tradition.² Furthermore, Pachal argues that "wisdom is an important part of the Christology that appears in the Bible."³ In other words, in James's view, wisdom comes as a gift from above, that is, from God.

Pachal also analyzes the centrality of the theme and structure of James 3:13-18, and argues that James is a wise man who advocates the restoration of the wisdom tradition as a law of freedom (2:12).⁴ Pachal asserts that God enables believers to obtain wisdom from above through the mediation of Christ. Pachal concludes his discussion by saying that James 3:13-18 is a thematic center that invites believers to obtain God's wisdom through "good behavior and gentle wisdom (3:13)."⁵

Unlike Pachal, Jason Isidoro Davila discusses James 3:13-18 and connects wisdom with leadership meant to overcome paralysis in organizations. Davila discusses wisdom by analyzing Proverbs 1:1-7, 1 Kings. 3:1-28, 1 Cor. 2:6-16, and James 3:13-18.⁶ He presents three views. First, all true wisdom and knowledge begin with the fear of God. Second, God gives wisdom and understanding to govern and lead God's people. Third, God's wisdom is different from the wisdom of the world. God's wisdom is revealed through the word of God and given by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the responsibility of Christian leaders is to seek and use wisdom from above when making decisions.⁷

Looking closely at the presentation of Pachal and Davila's views, we see from Pachal's view that James 3:13-18 is the culmination of a wisdom discourse that emphasizes faith and works. James advocates that wisdom is the law of freedom given by God to the readers of the letter. Pachal's view is a contribution to the development of wisdom theology, but Pachal does not discuss the function of wisdom from above as an antidote and way of life for the reader of James. Meanwhile, Davila analyzes wisdom from the standpoint of Christian leadership. Of course, Davila's comments offer a significant contribution to Christian leaders who wish to prevent organizational paralysis by relying on wisdom from above. However, because Davila is more focused on leadership, like Pachal, he does not explore the function of wisdom from above as an antidote and way of life.

To elevate the function of the fruits of wisdom, in this article, the researcher use qualitative research to analyze James 3:13-18 to promote the function of the fruits contained in that wisdom. The argument is that the fruits of wisdom from above, which James conveys to his readers, have ethical and theological functions that serve as antidotes to prevent the influence of human wisdom, which threatens the lives of the readers of the letter of James. In addition, James also intended for overseas Christians to apply the fruit of wisdom from above as a way of life that produces peace.

This discussion first begins by outlining the views of those who specifically discuss the text of James 3:13-18. Second, it explores wisdom from the world and wisdom from above to offer a new perspective on the function of the fruits of wisdom from above as an antidote that prevents the reader from being influenced by wisdom from the world, which is inspired by evil spirits. Third, this article demonstrates how wisdom from above serves as a way of life that produces peace. This article concludes with a summary of the dangers of worldly wisdom according to James, and the distinction between divine and worldly wisdom.

Wisdom From Above as an Antidote to Wisdom From Below

In this discussion, this article promotes wisdom from above as an "antidote" to wisdom from below. The word "antidote" comes from the Latin "antidotum" and in Greek, "antidoten." The term "antidoten" consists of two words, namely, anti + doten, which can mean something given to prevent or ward off adverse or undesirable effects. In general, the word "antidote" is used in the medical world, as is the case for certain drugs used to ward off poisons. The same word is also used to prevent a crime or any

² Aaron A. Pachal, "James 3:13-18: A Novel and Wise Approach to Recovering Traditional Wisdom," *The General Epistles*, August 8, 2018, 1-2.

³ Pachal, *James 3:13-18*, 11.

⁴ Pachal, *James 3:13-18*, 12-13.

⁵ Pachal, *James 3:13-18*, 16.

⁶ Jason Isidoro Davila, "Decisive Leaders: A Paradigm for Overcoming Paralysis in Organizations, Dissertation" (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), <https://repository.sbts.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/beadflfa-74d7-4a92-b539-f3bbac5609b5/content>.

⁷ Davila, *Decisive Leaders*, 29, 39.

unwanted influence in work or daily life.⁸ Based on the meaning of the term antidote, this article applies it to the concept of the fruits of wisdom from above, which are described in verse 17, as an antidote to the negative influence of worldly wisdom mentioned in verses 15 and 16.

The strategy that James uses to counteract the negative influence of the wisdom of the world is to describe the wisdom of the world by revealing its source and impact on the reader's life, which he then follows by presenting wisdom from above as a gift of God (James 1:5), which results in peace.⁹ James begins the commentary on worldly wisdom by asking the wisdom teachers, "Who among you who is wise and virtuous?", or *sophòs kai èpistémōn* (3:13a).¹⁰ His question is a strategy to test the wisdom of those teachers who think of themselves as wise and virtuous,¹¹ so that they pay close attention to what James says afterwards. James continues, "Well he is with a good way of life", where 'way of life' is *anastrophes*.¹² He declares that his actions come from a wisdom born of meekness (3:13b).¹³

In the last sentence, James insists on the wisdom teachers that they demonstrate wisdom in action: *prauteti sophias*; which the RSV translates as the meekness of wisdom (3:13, cf. 1:21). Through this statement, James wants the wisdom teachers to practice a good way of life as Abraham did as a friend of God (2:23).¹⁴ James reaches the heart of the matter by using a conditional sentence of antithesis, stating, "But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth" (v. 14). In 3:9, James uses the plural pronoun "us" to state that he belongs to the group of teachers. However, at 3:14, he uses conditional antithesis and the second-person plural pronouns: *ei de ... èkhetete*: "but if ... you", as contrasting expressions, so that he separates himself from them.¹⁵

Then James positions himself in opposition to the teachers. This position was taken as a way to criticize and avoid the way of life that they profess. There are two characteristics that characterize the way of life of the teachers, namely, *zèlon pìkròn*, or literally "bitter jealousy." In this sentence, James connects the word *zèlon* with word *pìkròn* to emphasize the word *zèlon*, so that jealousy, by which is meant not ordinary jealousy but jealousy with excessive enthusiasm, is seen as a despicable and destructive vice. Envy is also associated with certain behaviors including hatred, wickedness, and malice. These qualities indicate that envy is antisocial.

Plutarch, as quoted by Johnson, called jealousy the only unspeakable mental illness.¹⁶ Furthermore, Johnson noted that the role of envy began to emerge in the stories of Adam and Eve, the story of the murder of Abel by Cain, the story of Joseph and his brothers, and the story of Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Johnson also suggests that the relationship between envy and the devil is found in James 2:24.¹⁷ James uses the term *zèlon pìkròn* in reference to 3:11, to show that the source of wisdom is from the teachers who are evil spirits, because it is not possible for one spring to emit fresh water and bitter water.¹⁸

Second, the term *èritheían*, "selfish", describes people who focus only on their personal lives. They place their own interests above all things, leading to unhealthy competition and division, because they want to be more powerful than others. Moo noted that this trait illustrates the narrow partisan spirit of the greedy politicians of his day.¹⁹ James uses the term for teachers who are selfish and justify various

⁸ "Antidote," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>, accessed 12 Apr. 2020.

⁹ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

¹⁰ The combination of the terms "wise" and "virtuous" shows the influence of the LXX translation, namely from Deut. 1:13, 15, 4:6; Ps. 107:43; and Hos. 14:10, but more often it means 'able' (Gen. 41:33) or 'clever' (Isa. 40:2 and Ezk 28: 4). In Gen 41:33, it is one who is discerning and wise; Henry Krabbendam, *The Epistle of James: Tender Love in Tough Pursuit of Total Holiness: A Commentary* (Lookout Mountain, GA : Culture and Science Publications, 2011). 1016.

¹¹ An explanation of the words "wise" and "virtuous" can be read further in Krabbendam, *The Epistle of James*, 1017, 1018.

¹² James uses the term *anastrophes* to describe their entire way of life. See Patrick J Hartin, "James (Sacra Pagina Series)," 2003. 191.

¹³ Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011).301.

¹⁴ Chaffin, "Theme of Wisdom in the Epistle of James," 26.

¹⁵ McKnight, *Letter of James*, 303.

¹⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2004).190.

¹⁷ A more detailed explanation of the role of envy can be found in Johnson, *Brother of Jesus Friend of God*, 193-195

¹⁸ Hartin, *James*, 192.

¹⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000). 193.

ways to achieve what they want. Their actions cause chaos and all evil deeds. As long as they are not satisfied, they will continue to use illegal methods to achieve their goals.

James refers to the source of envy and self-interest as *kardia*, or heart (v. 14). To those teachers who are jealous and selfish, James warns them, *mē katakaechāsthe kai pseudesthe katà tēs àletheias*, translated in the RSV, “do not exult over nor boast and be false to the truth” (v. 14). The term *mē* in this sentence is a ban on those teachers who pride themselves on being wise. Boasting as wise people while they are jealous and selfish is a lie to the truth, because wisdom is not from above. Wisdom from above is humility, not arrogance. In simple language, James insists that if you are truly wise, show wisdom through a good way of life that is humble and wise in everything that is done. That is true wisdom, as wisdom from above. However, if you have a heart full of jealousy and want to be greater than others, do not boast because by boasting, you turn what is right into a lie. In verse 15, James expressly opposes wisdom from above with wisdom from the world by using the phrases *ouk estin*, meaning “not is” (RSV). With that contradiction, James asserts that such a way of life proves that wisdom is not wisdom that comes from above, but comes from the world and from human lust (*psukhiké* in verse 15) is inspired by Satan.²⁰

In the New Testament, the word Satan occurs 36 times and Diabolos occurs 37 times²¹. Satan is described as a slanderer and accuser. Satan is the representative of all evil. He seeks to blind and pervert the minds of God's people so that they become apostates. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus saw Satan as an angel falling from heaven (Luke 10:18), then he appeared as the head of an army of demons. He tried to turn Jesus' followers into traitors. The Gospel writer Luke records that Satan (Satanas) entered Judas and then he seduced Judas so that Judas became a traitor and went to the chief priests and chief guard of the temple to negotiate and hand Jesus over to them (Luke 22:3). So, the task of this satanic army is to tempt, tempt and blind the minds of God's people so that they take actions that deviate from God's way (cf. Enoch xl:7; liiii:3). In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he describes the method used by Satan as more subtle and devious. The demon took the form of an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). The Apostle Paul himself realized that Satan had also tempted him (2 Cor. 12:7), that Satan even tried to prevent Paul from going to visit the church he had founded (1 Thess. 2:18).²²

In the letter of James, the word Satan occurs twice in plural form (Jas. 2:19; 3:15). According to James, Satan is the instigator and tempter of doing evil, especially when it comes to the words and teachings of the teachers in the congregation. James's reasoning is that speech and teaching accompanied by envy and self-interest will result in chaos and all kinds of evil deeds (v. 16), including riots, commotions, by committing of cruel acts against others, which come from the wisdom of the world. The word *àkatasia* means instability, confusion, or tumult. This term applies to those who do not have a permanent stance but are of two minds or speaking with forked tongues (3:9, 10). On the one hand, with tongues they praise God, but on the other hand, they treat others based on the wisdom of the world. Therefore, James emphasized that an uncontrolled tongue can be a source of great evil and can burn the whole body. He described how dangerous the power of the tongue can be, revealing that it can damage relationships with fellow human beings and with God. James emphasizes that the uncontrolled power of the tongue originates with Satan, and humans must be wary of temptation and its influence. Therefore, James teaches that true faith is not only believing in the existence of God, but also showing concrete evidence in deeds because faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). James advises the readers of this letter so that they reject Satan's influence that can damage the relationship between the congregation and God. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a relationship with God and keeping His commandments, as well as showing faith through daily actions. In this case, Satan is considered a serious threat to spiritual life and must be avoided by strengthening one's faith and following God's will. In addition, evil spirits are considered the cause of unbelief and doubt in one's faith. James invites the readers to be determined and persevere in the face of temptations and challenges from Satan. He emphasized the importance of trusting God and asking for His help in overcoming the influence of Satan. James also emphasizes the importance of actions that show belief, because faith without works is dead. Therefore,

²⁰ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Paternoster: Carlisle, 1986).469.

²¹ Colin Brown (ed) *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: 1975), p. 469.

²² C.H. Toy, ““Evil Spirit in the Bible,”” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 9, no. 1 (1890): 17–30.

people must maintain their belief in God and resist the influence of Satan, who can interfere with their relationship with God. James warns that Satan can influence a person's thoughts and actions and lead them to evil. In this letter, James emphasizes how important it is to avoid temptations that come from Satan. Therefore, James invites his readers to be patient and determined to remain faithful to God, and to ask God for help in overcoming Satan's temptations.

After James opposes wisdom from the world, which confuses, in contrast to wisdom from above as being born from gentleness, then in verse 17, he promotes seven fruits of wisdom from above as antithesis by using the word "but."²³ The word *he* is an expression used to contrast what will be said in verse 17 with what was said before in verses 14, 15, and 16. In my opinion, the function of the antithesis is as an antidote to the wisdom of the world. In verse 14, James uses a conditional phrase which is contrasting (*ei dè*, translated as "but if" in the RSV), then in verse 17, he uses the word *he*, translated in the NIV as "but," to more powerfully contrast wisdom from above with wisdom from the world. Through this sentence structure, James clearly shows how dangerous the influence of a way of life based on the wisdom of the world can be on the lives of the readers. In contrast, he shows them the nature of the fruits of wisdom from above as an antidote to prevent the influence of wisdom from the world. James presents wisdom from above or from heaven as wisdom from God as the giver of wisdom (James 1:5; Prov. 2:6). Wisdom is created by God and personified (see also Sirach 1:4), and even has a role in shaping creation (Prov. 8:22-31; Wisdom of Solomon, 9:9-18). In Proverbs 8:30-31, wisdom is described as God's loving and beloved friend.²⁴

Wisdom from God is first described as *hagnè*, which is translated in the RSV as "pure." Another meaning is without blemish, holy, and free from spiritual defects (cf. I Pet 3:2). Purity is a sign from Christ for those in fellowship with him (1 John 3:3).²⁵ James puts the term *hagne* as the first word, because this term is fundamental as an inner quality to ward off the wisdom inspired by evil spirits offered by the way of life of the teachers.²⁶ According to James, purity is flawless worship before God (James 1:27).²⁷ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus greets those who have pure hearts as happy people (cf. Matt. 5:8).²⁸ The Apostle Paul also assigns this attribute to the church as "a pure virgin for Christ",²⁹ and he asks the congregation that is addressed in 1 Timothy to manifest purity in their everyday lives (1 Tim 5:2).

Because 'wisdom from above' is free from moral contamination, it requires total sincerity and devotion.³⁰ In another sense, people who have wisdom from above must first be free from the taint of bitter envy and self-interest, and then focus on serving God. The placement of the term ἀγνή in front of the other adjectives is also to unmask those who consider themselves to have wisdom from God but whose hearts and lives are full of stains. Second is the term *eirenikè*, translated in the RSV as "peaceable" and in the NIV as "peace loving", meaning peace or love of peace. This term has the meaning of people who love peace, who act to bring about peace, and who will produce the fruit of truth (cf. Heb. 12:11). 'The way' refers to the way of peace and happiness (cf. Prov. 3:17; Matt. 5:9).³¹ The peace referred to here is peace with God, others, and ourselves. Therefore, the peaceful are those who do not cause chaos, crime and enmity in the church, but those who create peace.³²

By calling "reconciliation" one of the qualities of wisdom from above, James criticizes and contrasts the lifestyle of teachers who live in jealousy and cause chaos, malice, and quarrels (3:16; 4:1, 2). The term *èpieikès*, translated in the RSV as "gentle", means reluctant to demand strict claims.³³ In

²³ Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God*, 188.

²⁴ For a deeper discussion of wisdom in the Old Testament, see McKnight, *Letter of James*, 309.

²⁵ McKnight, *Letter of James*, 312.

²⁶ Knowledge and intelligence can be considered as forms of wisdom but can easily be used as a means for boasting; McCartney, "The Wisdom of James the Just."56; the term *hagnè* describes a person's inner quality, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, Jude: Ariel's Bible Commentary" (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2005). 285.

²⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: The Anchor Bible, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: The Anchor Bible, 1995).273.

²⁸ A.T. Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nashville, Tennessee, 2015).68.

²⁹ Moo, *Letter of James*, 197.

³⁰ McKnight, *Letter of James*, 312.

³¹ Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James*, 68; McKnight, *Letter of James*, 313.

³² McKnight, *Letter of James*, 313.

³³ Moo, *Letter of James*, 198; Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Jewish Epistles*, 286.

the NIV, it is translated "considerate", which can mean attentive. The trait possessed by a gentle person is patience; the person is not demanding and does not look down on others. The person gladly gives up if others are right.³⁴ This quality is a characteristic of the mind given by God to evoke a gentle response towards others. Scot McKnight cites a good example of this meekness in Wisdom of Solomon. 2:19, where the meek is tested with contempt and torture to know his tenderness.³⁵ James uses this trait as an antidote to the jealous and selfish lifestyles of the teachers, which often leads to chaos and violence. Because, according to James, the way of life of people who have wisdom from above is gentle. The term *èpieikés* is also used by Paul to motivate the Corinthians to follow in the footsteps of Christ, who is meek and friendly (2 Cor. 10:1). Paul also demands that the overseers of the church be friendly (1 Tim 3:3; Tit 3:2). "Friendly" means being tolerant, willing to accept differences, not easily upset, and words are kind and polite.³⁶

The fourth term in James's list, *eùpeithés*, translated in the RSV as "open to reason" and in the NIV as "submissive", means obedient. In the New Testament, this term is used only once, which is here and literally means obedient, easily persuaded, and willing to adjust.³⁷ It describes people who are willing to yield and submit, who are understanding, open-minded, and like to make peace, and are not stubborn. James uses this term as an antidote to the way of life of teachers who claim to be wise but are not obedient in applying that wisdom in their daily acts and ways of life.

The fifth phrase in James's list, *mestè èléous kai karpōn agatōn*, according to the RSV, means "full of mercy and good fruits." James joins these two sentences to state that "mercy" is not just lip service but must be manifested in good works for those in need (cf. James 2:8-13). By using this phrase, James criticizes the nature of the teachers who teach with words but whose teaching is not manifested in acts of love towards others. For James, mercy is not empty words but an act that produces good fruit.³⁸ The word "mercy", James explains further in James 2:8-13. "Jesus himself used the term "mercy" as a key indicator for his listeners to make them manifest love in good works (Matt. 5:7; 18:21-35; 23:23; Luke 10:37).³⁹ Paul also wanted Christians in Rome to be "full of goodness" (Rom 15:14).⁴⁰

James presents two lists of wisdom as fruits of the above in the form of negative sentences. The term *àdiákritos*, translated in the RSV as "without uncertainties or insincerity," and in the NIV as "impartial", means sincere, impartial, firm, sturdy, or permanent. James emphasizes this quality because, among the overseas congregations, teachers of wisdom made judgments that were not merciful (2:12, 13; 4:11, 12), and they favored the rich rather than the poor (5:1-6).⁴¹ Therefore, James uses the term *àdiákritos* to counteract the insincere, inconsistent and biased nature of the teachers. James asserts that those who have wisdom from above are impartial, not wavering or hypocritical, free from doubt, and without prejudice towards others. People like this are steadfast and strong in their stance. The second term is *ànupókritos*, translated in the NIV as "sincere." Other meanings include not hypocritical, sincere, honest, and straightforward. This quality refers to people who are sincere, honest, and genuine to others. James uses this fruit of wisdom to counteract the hypocrisy of wisdom teachers who are not sincere in teaching and acting. These seven fruits of wisdom from above are taken up by James, who contrasts the fruits of wisdom from the world with the fruits of wisdom from above and makes the latter antidotes to the fruits of wisdom from the world. Furthermore, James intends to invite his readers to use the fruits of wisdom from above as a way of living their daily lives.

Wisdom From Above as an Ethos that Produces Peace

This section applies the concept as an ethos or "way of life" to the fruits of wisdom from above. A "way of life" is the habits, customs, and beliefs of a person or group of people that affect all parts of life, individually or in groups. A "way of life" is also a view of life and living systems, as well as the life

³⁴ Gerald Flurry, "The Epistle of James; A Message to the Spiritual Exiles 'in the Last Days'" (USA: Philadelphia, 2007).54.

³⁵ McKnight, *Letter of James*, 313.

³⁶ Hartin, *James*, 194.

³⁷ Moo, *Letter of James*, 198; McKnight, *Letter of James*, 314.

³⁸ Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Jewish Epistles*, 286; McKnight, *Letter of James*, 314.

³⁹ Moo, *Letter of James*, 198

⁴⁰ McKnight, *Letter of James*, 314.

⁴¹ McKnight, *Letter of James*, 315.

pulse of a person.⁴² In essence, a "way of life" is a guide for people to live their daily lives to obtain peace. To achieve happiness and peace, James wants his readers to know which way of life is dangerous and which brings peace. In my opinion, James conveys wisdom from above in verse 17 to the reader, and not without purpose. The point is that the reader not only uses the fruits of wisdom from above as an antidote but also applies them as an ethos or way of life in their daily lives. Lemmelijn has described in depth how wisdom is closely related to the way of life of the wise.⁴³ Such a way of life is very helpful for readers of the letter of James (addressed in 1:1) who live in a society that has different ethnic backgrounds, social status and ways of life. In such an environment, the temptation from or influence of a bad way of life is powerful. Therefore, people need wisdom from above as a guide to a way of life in accordance with their faith.⁴⁴

In verse 18, James writes, *karpòs dè dikaiosúnes èn eiréne speíretai toís poióũsin eirénen*. The translation of this sentence from verse 18 is much debated. Therefore, it should be carefully examined. The RSV translation is, "And the harvest of rightness is sown in peace by those who make peace", while the NIV reads, "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." According to Hartin, the genitive "the fruit of righteousness" can be interpreted as "the reward which righteous conduct brings."⁴⁵ According to Hartin, the sentence is dative. Furthermore, Hartin notes, the phrase "the fruit of truth"⁴⁶ is used in Prov. 11:30, Amos 6:1-2, 2 Cor. 9:10, and Phil. 1:11. The meaning of the phrase is that peacemaking actions demonstrate righteousness.⁴⁷ The phrase "is sown in peace by those who make peace" can be translated, "by means of acts of peace." Hartin adds that sowing is the agricultural language that James uses in association with the word "fruit" (cf. Prov. 22:8; Sir 7:3; 1 Cor 9:11; and Gal. 6:7-8). Truth is the result of the actions of peace. Those who carry out peaceful action are peacemakers.⁴⁸

According to Moo, the NIV translation presents the text as a statement about what peacemakers produce.⁴⁹ He also favors the NRSV translation, "And a harvest of rightness is sown in peace for those who make peace." According to Moo, this translation has a strong grammatical base and is supported by many interpreters. But the NIV translation, which features peacemakers, fits the context better. Therefore, Moo is slightly more inclined to favor the NIV translation. Furthermore, Moo believes that the fruit produced by peacemakers is the truth. The intended fruit does not refer to the status of truth but to the list of virtues in verse 17, which contrasts with the fruits of wisdom from below, as described in verses 15 and 16. Truth cannot be produced in situations of chaos but only grows in a peaceful environment.⁵⁰

From commentators' notes on the translation of verse 18, we see that Hartin provided a translation that followed the NRSV, while Moo was more inclined towards NIV because it provided benefits for peacemakers and was appropriate to the context. I agree with Moo that the intended fruit is a list of virtues in verse 17. In my opinion, the NIV translation fits and emphasizes the context, but the NRSV is clearer because the seven traits contained in wisdom from above, as fruits of wisdom, are also called the truth.⁵¹ The truth planted in peace produces peace. This translation was chosen based on the consideration that, without truth or justice planted in a peaceful situation, the outcome will not be peace. In other words, those who actively sow the fruits of truth as a way of life in a peaceful situation will produce peace.⁵² This understanding refers to two metaphors that James uses to describe the two sources of wisdom and fruit at 3:11 and 3:12, that is, freshwater sources must produce fresh water, and vines

⁴² "Way of life," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>, accessed 12 Apr. 2020.

⁴³ Bénédicte Lemmelijn, "Wisdom of Life as Way of Life: The Wisdom of Jesus Sirach as a Case in Point," *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 2 (2014): 444–71. (especially 444).

⁴⁴ Wall, *Wisdom of James*, 33.

⁴⁵ Hartin, *James*, 195.

⁴⁶ Hartin, *James*, 195.

⁴⁷ Hartin, *James*, 198; McKnight, *Letter of James*, 316, 317; Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James*, 70.

⁴⁸ Hartin, *James*, 198.

⁴⁹ Moo, *Letter of James*, 199.

⁵⁰ Moo, *Letter of James*, 200.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Letter of James*, 287.

⁵² Ger de Koning, *The Letters of James and Peter ()* (Zwolle: Uitgeverij Daniël, 2016), 65; Fruchtenbaum, "The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, Jude: Ariel's Bible Commentary, 287.."

certainly produce grapes.⁵³ In other words, if Christians sow the fruits of truth in peace, they will produce peace. The fruits of righteousness and the fruits of wisdom from above need to be used as a way of life so that people are not trapped in following the way of life of teachers who have wisdom from the world (4:1, 2). Therefore, James invites the congregation to wear the fruits of wisdom from above as a way of life in their daily lives. According to James, peace is the fruit of truth and justice. If the fruits of truth are sown in peace, they will produce peace.

This sentence should be heavily emphasized because it is the apex of James's view of wisdom from above. According to James, there is no benefit if, in a church setting, members are selfish and jealous of one another because such attitudes will only destroy the fellowship. On the other hand, a congregation that yields the fruits of wisdom from above as a way of life will produce peace.

Wisdom from God: Implications for the Churches in Indonesia

A Church Filled with Wisdom from Above

Data from the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia indicate that as of December 31, 2024, the Christian population in Indonesia stood at approximately 29.46 million, consisting of 20.72 million Protestants and 8.74 million Catholics. Collectively, this represented approximately 10.48% of Indonesia's total population in 2023.⁵⁴

There are three main branches of Christian churches in Indonesia: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. The Protestant branch itself comprises various specific denominations, such as Lutheran, Calvinist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Evangelical, and Adventist.⁵⁵

Each tradition possesses its own doctrines, which often lead to internal conflicts and divisions within the body of the church. Conflicts arise not only from non-essential doctrinal issues, such as the validity of a specific mode of baptism (i.e., immersion versus sprinkling) or differing views on the mission of the church,⁵⁶ but also from internal and inter-denominational competition, and even inter-congregational conflicts.⁵⁷ These conflicts are often rooted in personal envy and selfish ambition, masked in theological language.

The question that arises is how to address these problems within the churches. In the author's assessment, church leaders, in executing their leadership duties, must rely more on wisdom from God than on worldly wisdom. The most concrete example is Solomon, King of Israel. He understood that in carrying out his duties and responsibilities as leader of God's people, he would face various difficult and complex problems related to political, social, and economic issues in his governance. Therefore, he did not ask for riches, long life, or worldly wisdom; rather, he requested wisdom from God (1 Kings 3:7-14) to distinguish between good and evil.⁵⁸ The same wisdom, namely "wisdom from above," is advocated by James, who states: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God... and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

This wisdom from God challenges church leaders and Christians in Indonesia to resolve internal and inter-denominational conflicts based on divine wisdom—that is, wisely, gently, with humility, and peaceably, as affirmed by the author of James 3:13-18. A church filled with God's wisdom becomes a reasonable community (*eupethēs*), capable of resolving its internal issues gently (*epieikēs*) and peacefully. Indeed, efforts to resolve problems within the church and in society are not facile;⁵⁹ however, the church must possess a strong commitment to hold fast to the Word of God.

⁵³ Johnson, *Studies in the Letter of James*, 189.

⁵⁴ <https://www.google.com/search?q=Data+statistik+jumlah+orang+Kristen+di+Indonesia+menurut+Kementerian+Agama>

⁵⁵ <https://www.google.com/search?q=Jumlah+aliran+Kristen+di+Indonesia>

⁵⁶ Haposan Silalahi, "Bermisi Dalam Aksi: Kajian Teologis Misi Gereja Terhadap Perwujudan Kerukunan Umat Beragama Di Indonesia. TE DEUM (Jurnal Teologi Dan Pengembangan Pelayanan)," 10 (1), (2020), 26.

⁵⁷ Johnny Christian Ruhullessin, "Konflik Dan Rekonsiliasi Antarjemaat: Sebuah Analisis Teologis," *Kurios* 7, no.2(2021):329–37.

⁵⁸ Harls Evan Rianto Siahaan, "Hikmat Sebagai Implikasi Pendidikan Kristiani: Refleksi 1 Raja-Raja 3: 1-15," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 1, no. 1 (2016): 15–30.

⁵⁹ Suriani Sukowati Arifin, "Hikmat Menurut Kitab Yakobus [Wisdom in the Book of James]," *Diligentia: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 1, no. 1 (September 30, 2019): 16, <https://doi.org/10.19166/dil.v1i1.1888>.

The Church as an Agent of Reconciliation amidst Pluralism

Church members in Indonesia live within a pluralistic society, since the nation's populace comprises adherents of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In this context, worldly wisdom can manifest itself as spiritual arrogance and exclusivism from certain religious groups, potentially generating various conflicts. Conflicts may arise from competition within religious groups or between them. Conflict can also emerge when one group seeks to dominate another. When a conflict occurs, the result is the deterioration of relationships, both interpersonally and between groups. The gap between individuals and groups widens; hatred, envy, and hostility escalate.⁶⁰

In such situations, the church is called to be present as an agent of reconciliation, since reconciliation is one of the ministries entrusted by God to the church (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19). Ralph Martin, a New Testament scholar, asserts that God is the initiator in reconciling the world to Himself.⁶¹ Paul Barnett voices the same affirmation, stating that reconciliation is God's initiative, not a human endeavor. Barnett further notes that Paul emphasized God's initiative to counter the false apostles in Corinth, who relied on their own strength and promoted human rhetoric and achievements. Paul affirmed that reconciliation is God's initiative, accomplished through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.⁶²

The church's task is to present this reconciliation to the world. The "world" here refers to the context in which the church is present and serves, including Indonesia's pluralistic society. Thus, the church's witness is not mere words but is manifested in concrete actions for all people, regardless of ethnic, religious, or social background.⁶³

The Church as an Antidote to Societal Polarization

In Indonesia's socio-political landscape, polarization frequently occurs, causing citizens to divide into opposing factions over various issues. One example is the controversy surrounding the alleged falsified diploma of Indonesia's 7th President, which resulted in significant public division (pros and cons).⁶⁴

In such circumstances, the church must be vigilant and critical to avoid succumbing to worldly wisdom by aligning with a specific faction. Instead, the church must act as an antidote to radicalism to prevent societal polarization. To fulfill this role, James 3:17 calls the church to avoid disseminating disinformation (hoaxes) and intergroup hostility. On the contrary, the church must manifest the fruits of divine wisdom: purity, peacefulness, gentleness, mercy, impartiality, and sincerity. Equipped with these virtues, the church is equipped to speak prophetically to all groups in society with sincerity and impartiality. The goal is to build communication between opposing factions, thereby realizing peace and tranquillity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of James 3:13-18, it is evident that wisdom from above yields fruit, with purity as the primary element; other fruits include peacefulness, gentleness, submission (openness to reason), mercy, impartiality, and sincerity (James 3:17). James enumerates these virtues to contrast them with the fruits of worldly wisdom: envy and selfish ambition, which produce disorder and every evil practice. James's intent in contrasting these two forms of wisdom is to ensure that his community clearly understands their distinction. This understanding enables the community to adopt an appropriate stance and avoid the snare of worldly wisdom's influence.

Furthermore, James's purpose is not merely for divine wisdom to function as an antidote to worldly wisdom; he also intends for Christians to adopt these fruits as a way of life in their interpersonal interactions. For the churches in Indonesia, the primary challenge is not a lack of theological knowledge,

⁶⁰ Ruhullessin, "Konflik Dan Rekonsiliasi Antarjemaat: Sebuah Analisis Teologis."329-337

⁶¹ Ralph P. Martin, "2 Corinthians (Volume 40 Dalam Seri Word Biblical Commentary)" (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1986).152-155

⁶² Paul Barnett, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 299–303.

⁶³ Merensiana Hale and Franklin Ton, "Gereja Profetik Menurut Paulo Freire," *BIA': Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen Kontekstual* 4, no. 1 (2021): 90–108.

⁶⁴ <https://www.hukumonline.com/berita/a/polemik-ijazah-jokowi--saatnya-dewan-etik-ugm-bertindak-lt68ad99ad99a12/>

but rather which wisdom—"wisdom from God" or "worldly wisdom"—is adopted and applied in ministry within the church and society. In this regard, the churches in Indonesia face a critical test: will they produce "disorder" as the fruit of worldly wisdom within their own body and in society, or will they produce "peace" and unity as the fruit of divine wisdom?

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