

# James 3 - Taming the Tongue; Wisdom in Speech; False vs True Wisdom; Evidence of Wisdom

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## James 3

### (7) Faith controls the tongue (3:1-12)

#### (A) The tongue's influence (3:1-5)

(a) In relation to teaching (3:1)

**1 Do not become teachers** in large numbers, my brothers, since you know that we *who are teachers* will incur a stricter judgment.

**1** Let not many of *you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

**1** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more severely than others.

**1** My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

- The chapter division between James 2-3 is unnatural. We should consider them as flowing together...James 2 ends by telling us that works prove our faith is useful. James 3 talks about the ultimate work we can do as a Christian.

- The greatest good work that a Christian can do to prove their faith is useful is to control the tongue. If you're a Christian who has learned to control your speech, you've reached a level of spirituality, in terms of practical righteousness, that not many Christians ever achieve.

- Here, James is not dealing with the issue of false teaching, per se, but with the problem of ungifted or untrained teachers

- Teachers have influence over the thoughts and actions of people who listen to them, whether for good or evil. Thus, with the ability to do much good also comes with the ability to do much harm.

- If God has given you the gift of teaching, you are in a position of greater accountability because you are directing the thoughts of many people

- The gift of teaching is not like the gift of mercy or administration or giving in that it influences the thinking of many, many people

- When God makes you a teacher, you have to understand that God will hold you far more accountable than those with other gifts because you have the capacity to direct the thoughts of large amounts of people, with the ability to influence thoughts both positively and negatively.

- The gift of teaching as the ability to influence more people than any other spiritual gift that God has given to the Church

- "Do not" - negative imperative, present tense implies that there was a movement by many to become teachers

- "...become teachers" - literally, the Greek reads: "Do not press yourself into the role of teaching"

- The focus is on public teacher in the Church, since all may teach on a one-to-one basis

- "...will incur" - future tense indicates this judgment will occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ

(b) In relation to all of life (3:2)

2 For we all **stumble** in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a **perfect** man, **able to rein in the whole body as well**.

2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

2 For all of us make many mistakes. If someone does not make any mistakes when he speaks, he is perfect and able to control his whole body.

2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

- "...stumble" - *ptaiō*, fall, offend, err; verb meaning that everyone continually failing to do what is right. This includes teachers.

— Sometimes it means moral lapse; figuratively it means failure in duty, a mistake or a sin

- "...perfect" - not sinless, but describes a sense of having reached a goal of spiritual maturity; James refers to someone who does not stumble in word as one who has reached a goal of spiritual maturity

- "...able to rein in the whole body as well" - control of the tongue is the product of faith and, if faith can control the tongue, it can rule everything

— This person can reign in his whole body to effectively restrain so sin cannot have its way

— The hardest thing in life as a Christian is to control your tongue. If you can master control of your speech, you can master anything. Controlling anything else in your life is easy by comparison.

- The tongue has a disproportionate influence on our lives compared to the size and power of the organ.

The point is that someone who has control over his tongue has reached spiritual maturity in the sense of controlling his body, and thus qualifies as a teacher. Even teachers will stumble, but their lives must be generally characterized by a lack of stumbling, especially with their tongue.

James now goes on to give three illustrations of similar things that are small in size, but have a disproportionate influence on larger things:

1. Bit vs the horse (v3)
2. Rudder vs the ship (v4)
3. Spark vs the fire (v5)

(c) Illustrations of the tongue's influence (3:3-5)

(i) Bit in a horse's mouth (3:3)

3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we **direct** their whole body as well.

3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

3 Now if we put bits into horses' mouths to make them obey us, we can guide their whole bodies as well.

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

- The key point of this verse is that the bit is tiny, yet it has the ability to control a large, powerful horse

- "...direct" - "to change the direction of"; with a bit, one can control the whole body of the horse

#### (ii) Rudder of the ship (3:4)

4 Look at **the ships too**: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are *nevertheless* directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot determines.

4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

4 And look at ships! They are so big that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the helmsman directs.

4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

- "...the ships too" - connects this illustration with v3 to establish the same point: a small thing can control a large thing

- Just as horses have a will of their own (internal forces), ships are huge and driven by rough winds (external forces). Both are controlled by small devices.

- Both the bit and the rudder can overcome contrary forces: the wild nature of the horse; the wind and currents that would drive a ship off course, etc.

- The point is, the one who controls the rudder commands the entire ship

- Loose lips sink ships, but they also wreck lives.

- A bit and a rudder can affect the lives of others. A runaway horse or a shipwreck can mean injury or death to pedestrians or passengers.

- A few words can affect the lives of an accused, his family, and his friends; they can place a nation at war; they can redirect the life of a child (Cf. Prov 10:19; 12:22; 15:1)

#### (iii) Spark and a forest fire (3:5)

5 So also the tongue is a small part of *the body*, and yet it boasts of great things.

**See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!**

5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

5 In the same way, the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can boast of great achievements. A huge forest can be set on fire by a little flame.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

- The tongue is a small part of the body, but like a bit and rudder, it achieves great results over our whole life

- Just as a small thing can control a large thing, control of the tongue helps to control the entire body

- Just as the bit and rudder command the direction of the horse and ship, the tongue directs our lives toward spiritual maturity and rewards, or toward divine discipline and lack of rewards.

- "...See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! " - the smallest of sparks can destroy an entire forest

[Prov 18:21]

(B) The tongue's propensity for evil (3:6-12)

(a) The tongue's Satanic potential (3:6)

6 And **the tongue is a fire**, the *very* world of **unrighteousness**; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is **set on fire by hell**.

6 And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell.

6 The tongue is a fire, a world of evil. Placed among the parts of our bodies, the tongue contaminates the whole body and sets on fire the course of life, and is itself set on fire by hell.

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

- "...the tongue is a fire" - an uncontrolled fire is destructive; the tongue, if uncontrolled, is equally destructive

- "...world" - *kosmos*, emphasizes the world as an orderly system

- The tongue is part of this vast system connected with iniquity because the world is controlled by Satan

- The present world system (*kosmos*), which is hostile to God, displays this hostility through the tongue

- "...unrighteousness" - definite article "the" precedes iniquity in Greek

- As part of this vast system of iniquity among our members, the tongue is unique, as no other part of the body has the range of possibility in causing evil
- If we permit our tongue to be used as an organ for sin, we risk torching the entire course of our life. Our valued relationships are set ablaze by an uncontrolled tongue.
- "...set on fire by hell" - hell (*Gehenna*) is the source of an uncontrolled tongue; the fire of the tongue is fed by the unending fires of hell
- The present passive participle implies it is habitually set on fire by Gehenna because it (the tongue) consistently permits itself to be used by Satan
- An uncontrolled tongue is a tool of Satan in spreading the fires of hell
- The more God uses your tongue to edify others, the more Satan works in your life to use your tongue for destructive purposes
- A good historical example is that of Martin Luther; a good biblical example is the life of Peter (Cf. 16:13-23). See [James 16 Taming the Tongue - Part 1 \(James 3:1-8\)](#) for an example from the life of Martin Luther.

Eph 4:26-27:

- 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,
- 27 and do not give the devil an **opportunity**.
- "...opportunity" - a foothold; don't allow the devil to stake a claim to your tongue because of your unresolved anger issues

If I'm a bitter person because I'm unforgiving of others, what happens in my heart is I get very angry, very bitter. As I get angry and bitter, Satan says, I can't possess you, but I can place a stronghold in your life in the area of bitterness and anger. The next time you open your mouth at your spouse, your parents, your family, or friends on social media, and you say something in an angry tone, Satan just took your tongue and used it for his own purposes.

This is why Eph 4:26-27 is followed by Eph 4:29...

Eph 4:29: Let no **unwholesome word** proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need of *the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

- This is an example that the tongue can be set on fire by hell itself
  - You get angry because you have been treated wrong, but rather than forgiving we want justice, which makes us angry. When this happens, bitterness wells up and Satan takes ground in your life.
- "...unwholesome word" - doesn't mean profanity; it means fleshly speech that doesn't build anyone up; destructive speech
  - When we talk, we should only speak things that pertain to the topic of the moment, and build others up

(b) The tongue is untamable (3:7-8)

7 For every **species** of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is **tamed** and has been tamed by the human race.

7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.

7 For all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be or have been tamed by humans,

7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

- "...species" - nature or "category"

— James is not saying that every wild animal has been tamed, but rather that animals within every species or group in the animal kingdom have been tamed

— There are four categories of animals (Gen 9:2): beasts (animals that walk), birds (animals that fly), creeping things (animals that crawl), and things in the sea (animals that swim)

- "...tamed" - to subjugate, subdue; to curb. Every creature on the earth, the sky, or the sea has been tamed by mankind

8 But **no one among** mankind **can** tame the tongue; *it is* a **restless evil**, full of **deadly poison**.

8 But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison.

8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil filled with deadly poison.

8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

- Although the four categories of the animal kingdom have been tamed, or open to subjection by man, the tongue is not tamed

- "...no one" - everyone, no exceptions; the emphasis is on the "natural" man

— This phrase would be better translated: "The tongue cannot be tamed by man," which opens the opportunity for God to do the taming. What man cannot do naturally, God can do supernaturally.

— Humanity does not possess the capacity to tame the tongue. The only way to tame our tongue is supernaturally, through the Holy Spirit.

- "...can" - present tense, calls attention to man's continual inability to tame the tongue

- "...restless evil" - fickle, inconsistent, ungovernable, unstable (Cf. 1:8); incapable of being restrained and always prone to break out in vicious words

— If we do not allow our tongue to be tamed by the Spirit, it is a "restless evil"

— "unruly" - it is ever-stirring and changing, eluding man's grasp and thwarting all attempts to subdue it. It is like an untamed animal, pacing back and forth, ready to pounce on anything that comes near.

- “evil” - base and degraded in character
- “...deadly poison” - the Greek literally reads “death bearing”; the impact of an unruly tongue is deadly; it is a weapon of mass destruction
- The tongue can kill someone's emotions, finances (bad mouthing their business or integrity), motivation (by denegrating their abilities or goals), health (creating anxiety in them through uncontrolled speech)

The most deadly poison is one that is tasteless and odorless: subtle criticism and slander, verbal venom which has done its work while the victim cannot react. It can include a word unsaid, an awkward silence, raised eyebrows, a quizzical look—all sent from the counsels of Satan. It can break hearts and ruin reputations.

The tongue is like an unruly animal, restless, and dangerous. It seeks a prey and then pounces and kills. Some animals are poisonous, as are some tongues. The deceptive things about poison is that it can work slowly, invisibly. A malicious word can spread, uncontested, and do a great damage to a person, a family, or an entire church. Animals can be tamed, a fire can be controlled, but only God can tame the tongue.

(c) The tongue's inconsistency (3:9-12)

(i) The tongue praises God and curses men (3:9-10)

9 With it we **bless our Lord and Father**, and with it **we curse people**, who have been **made in the likeness of God**;

9 With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;

9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in God's likeness.

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

- “...bless *our* Lord and Father” - the highest use of the tongue

- “...we” - refers to mankind in general

- “...curse people” - this lowest use of the tongue

— When people curse one another, they are cursing God as well because all mankind was created in the image of God

- “...made in the likeness of God” - Gen 1:26-28; a special designation of man only, not made of animals or angels

— This didn't change after the Fall...the image of God on man after the Fall was effaced, not erased. The worst sinner on earth still has value before God because they still bear God's image.



- When we unleash our tongue on another human being (gossip, slander, malicious talk, defamatory statements, antagonism), we are attacking someone who bears God's image. This becomes the basis for controlling our tongue.
- When I vent verbally against someone, I'm attacking someone who bears God's image (even if they deserve it). When we understand that, it should remind us to reign in and control how we react and what we say.
- Evolution destroys this concept because it reduces people to nothing more than evolved animals, so if I slander them, so what. That's not how believers are to categorize people, even unsaved or evil people.
- As we understand this concept of people created in God's image, it should motivate and encourage us to reign in our speech because I'm attacking someone who bears God's image

10 from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brothers *and sisters*, these things **should not** be this way.

10 from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. It should not be like this, my brothers!

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

- The tongue is inconsistent...one minute praising God, the next minute slandering their fellow man

- "...should not" - a moral abnormality; demonstrates the inconsistency of the tongue

James now gives three illustrations from nature in v11-12 to make the point of our inconsistent tongue:

## (ii) Illustrations of the inconsistency (3:11-12)

### (a) Fresh and bitter water from a fountain (3:11)

11 Does a spring send out from the same opening *both* **fresh** and **bitter** water?

11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*?

11 A spring cannot pour both fresh and brackish water from the same opening, can it?

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

- The question demands a negative answer...

- The inconsistency of our tongue is unnatural, just as fresh and bitter water coming from the same source is unnatural

- You wouldn't go to a water source and get fresh water from it one minute, then get bitter water from it the next; that is unnatural
- This is a truth that needs to be taught to Christians today...the average Christian thinks that when they join a church they're joining a sanctified community, and they get very distraught when they see hypocrisy in the church.
- Just because you join a church doesn't mean the sin nature doesn't still have control over you
- "...fresh" - clean and drinkable; refreshing
- "...bitter" - brackish, salty, undrinkable

### **Water as a Metaphor for Words**

- The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life (Prov 10:11)
- The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death (Prov 13:14)
- The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook (Prov 18:4)

(b) Olives from a fig tree (3:12a)

(c) Fresh water from salt water (3:12b)

12 Can a fig tree, my brothers *and sisters*, bear olives, or a vine *bear* figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.

12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.

12 My brothers, a fig tree cannot produce olives, nor a grapevine figs, can it? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

- Again, both questions demand a negative answer...

- When a believer doesn't control his speech, it's like a fig tree producing olives; it's contrary to nature because it's coming from our old nature, not our new nature

— James 1:8 tells us about our new nature... we have this new nature, but when something derogatory or negative comes out of our mouth, it's not coming from our new nature (it's coming from the old nature).

— If it was coming from my new nature, it would be good, positive, uplifting speech because everything produces after its own kind.

— So a born again Christian without control over their tongue is like a freak of nature...they should be speaking out of their new nature, but they keep dialing back into their old nature...they are like a fig tree producing olives.

When believers are exposed to this teaching, they are convicted and pray to the Lord for tongue control, help me to control our tongue. However, that is not the issue. God wants us to use our tongue, He wants us to use it in the right way.

Prov 4:23: Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life. The tongue is nothing more than a window to the heart. Chances are, if I have a tongue problem, I have a heart problem. But if wonderful things are coming out of my mouth, wonderful things are present in my heart. If your heart is under control, your speech automatically is under control. If your heart is out of control, your speech will also be out of control.

When I'm joyful, things are great, good things flow out of my mouth. But when I'm bitter, angry, or anxious, then bitterness, anger and anxiety will flow out of my mouth. You can tell a person's heart simply by listening to their mouth.

*What comes up in the bucket was down in the well.*

Jesus said the same thing to the Pharisees in Matt 12:34: **You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.**

- Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are speaking evil things because that is their nature (they were evil). Their mouths were just fulfilling their hearts.
- Jesus tells them the problem was not what they said, but what resided in their hearts. Their mouth was the result of their unregenerate heart.

Then in Matt 12:36 Jesus says: **But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.**

- "...careless word" - an unscripted word; impromptu, unplanned or unchoreographed; a word spoken without deliberation. A word spoken when you didn't know the microphone was still on.
- These "careless words" are what we should use to judge the heart condition
- We should not judge someone's character by their planned, written, pre-formed speeches; they are careful words, designed words which can be spoken in a way that doesn't reflect my heart.
- "...the day of judgment" - refers to the Great White Throne Judgment, which is the judgment of the unsaved
  - Believers are not subject to this judgment because we've been imputed with the alien righteousness of Christ

This is why James speaks of "sources" in v9-12...the heart is the source for what comes out of the mouth...if you fix the heart, you've fixed the mouth.

See **6 Sins We Commit With Our Mouth That Produce Death Instead of Life** in [Tongue](#).

## II. Wisdom (James 3:13—5:20)

### (1) Wisdom defined (3:13-18)

(A) Wisdom demonstrated by works (3:13)

**13** Who among you is **wise** and **understanding**? **Let him show** by his good behavior his deeds in the **gentleness of wisdom**.

**13** Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

**13** Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his noble conduct that his actions are done humbly and wisely.

**13** Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

- The question is a call for self-examination...

- "...wise" - *sophia*, to possess moral insight; refers to skill in deciding practical issues of conduct; wisdom is more than the accumulation of data or knowledge.

- Wisdom was already discussed (Cf. 1:6); it can only be obtained from God, and involves practically applying knowledge to everyday life

- "...understanding" - only time word used in NT; a specialist who applies their knowledge and expertise to situations

- James is asking: Who is skilled in the art of living life?

- "...Let him show" - you can tell a person who has wisdom by how they act, not what they say; wisdom is always determined by your actions; knowledge is determined by what you know

- Wisdom is determined by your ability to take knowledge and apply it to your daily life

- You can't have wisdom without knowledge; knowledge was never intended by God to be the last step...God wants us to graduate into wisdom. God never gave knowledge as the last step (1:22; Cf. John 13:17).

- There are a lot of people who are knowledgeable, but un-wise because they never put their knowledge into practice. Wisdom is not demonstrated by one's vast knowledge of something, but rather by their behavior.

- The wisdom James is referencing is the wisdom that gives insight to the will of God and His purposes, and gives the ability to fulfill His purposes

- If there is anyone who is characterized by these two traits, they should demonstrate it through their actions. Wisdom must be proved by works just like faith must be proved by works (Cf. 2:14-26). Works, not words, is the test of wisdom.

- "...gentleness of wisdom" - wisdom is not the loudest voice in the room, shouting to everyone how much you know; wisdom has a quiet gentleness to it

*Spiritual maturity is the time spent learning God's truth, and the time you have spent obeying it. — Bruce Baker*

(B) Wisdom from below (3:14-16)

14 But if you have **bitter jealousy** and **selfish ambition** in your heart, **do not be arrogant** and **so lie against the truth**.

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your hearts, stop boasting and slandering the truth.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

- False wisdom is the result of an untamed tongue...

- "...bitter jealousy" - harsh attitude; a resentful attitude toward others because of their successes

- "...selfish ambition" - obsessed with pleasing yourself or advancing your own self-interest in an unethical manner, at the expense of others

- "...do not be arrogant" - do not boast or gloat over another; do not assume superiority

- "...lie against the truth" - living a life that does not agree with God's truth

— "the truth" - the article "the" modifying "truth" refers to the Gospel

— Thus, false wisdom evolves from this moral condition, which was originally caused by an untamed tongue

15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is **earthly, natural, demonic**.

15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

15 That kind of wisdom does not come from above. No, it is worldly, self-centered, and demonic.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

- The source of false wisdom (described in v14) does not come from God, in contrast to 1:17

- "...earthly" - worldly, not from God but from men

- "...natural" - fleshly, arising out of man's fallen sin nature (Cf. 1 Cor 2:14; Jude 19)

- "...demonic" - proceeding from an evil spirit

— Basically, false wisdom originate on the three fronts of spiritual warfare: the world, the flesh and the devil

16 For where **jealousy** and **selfish ambition** exist, there is **disorder** and every **evil thing**.

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

16 For wherever jealousy and rivalry exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

- Now that James has defined wisdom (v13), he explains (v15-16) that there is a false wisdom that comes from the world, and ultimately from Satan, using six Proverbs

- The result of false (earthly) wisdom: disorder and sinfulness; the reason for the problems of v14...

- "...jealousy" - resentful of the advantages enjoyed by others; we may envy the fact that someone has something, even if we don't want it

— Resenting someone because they have something and we want it is covetousness

— Jealousy is intolerance of rivalry; the fear of someone becoming equal or superior to us

- "...selfish ambition" - selfish ambition; our inclination to use divisive means for promoting yourself

- "...disorder" - form of anarchy, confused thinking, disharmony, restlessness, disruptive decision-making, disorder, unsettledness; confusion, commotion, chaos (Cf. 1 Cor 14:33)

— In 1:8, it described the result of being double-minded

— In 3:8, it described the result of an uncontrolled tongue

— Here, it refers to sinful actions

- "...evil thing" - vile deeds; a reference to all forms of evil, especially moral evil

#### 1. Jealous

- Prov 6:34: For jealousy enrages a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance.

- When you're jealous, you don't think rationally; the twin sister of jealousy is envy (a stronger form of jealousy). James says that when you're operating in jealousy, you not operating in divine wisdom.

#### 2. Selfish ambition

- Prov 16:18: Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

- A NT example is Diotrephes (3 John 9) who was an ecclesiastical leader in the Church. John is saying that these churches will not respond to apostolic teaching because Diotrephes wants to be pre-eminent over the apostles.

#### 3. Arrogant

- Prov 8:13: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.

- People who operate out of a sense of self, without seeking God's glory or the benefit of others. The prideful are on a collision course with God.

- **Scripture & Pride:** Prov 16:18 • Is 14:12-15 • Ezek 28:12-17 • 1 Tim 3:6 • Acts 12:21-23 • 2 Cor 12:7 • 1 Peter 5:5; Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2; 4)

- **Hall of the Humbled:** Satan (Is 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-17; 1 Tim 3:6) • Uzziah (2 Chr 26:16) • Herod (Acts 12:20-23) • Paul (2 Cor 12:1-10)

- There are some sins that God seems to put up with in His people by His mercy, but pride doesn't seem to be one of them. It seems like God keeps pride on a pretty short leash in His people.
4. Earthly, natural
- Prov 14:12: There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.
  - This wisdom does not come from God; it comes from the world, from man's flesh, or from Satan himself. This wisdom *seems* right to us, it *appears* right to us, but it's not from God.
  - Solomon describes this wisdom in Ecclesiastes as "nothing new under the sun" (Cf. 1:9). It's natural wisdom, which doesn't have the vantage point of heaven.
5. Demonic
- Prov 27:20: Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.
  - The more you move in the direction of earthly wisdom, the more your life is unsatisfying. Ecclesiastes calls it "chasing after the wind"; earthly pursuits never satisfy
6. Contentious
- Prov 11:29: He who troubles his own house will inherit wind, And the foolish will be servant to the wisehearted.
  - In an environment where there is always contention, godly wisdom is not present

(C) Wisdom from above (3:17-18)

17 **But** the wisdom from above is first **pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy.**

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

17 However, the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, willing to yield, full of compassion and good deeds, and without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

- Heavenly (true) wisdom is the result of a tamed tongue...

- "But" - a contrast with the false wisdom described in v14-16

- James provides a list of 7 characteristics of heavenly (God's) wisdom:

- "...pure" - ranked first meaning it's primary and fundamental. All other traits are external to a man's heart. God is looking for purity of motive (Cf. 1 Sam 16:7).

- Signifies it is undefiled and clean; without any flaw; uncontaminated by the elements in v14-16; spiritual integrity and moral sincerity
- Used to describe Christ in 1 John 3:3; it is free from all characteristics of false wisdom
- Prov 15:26: Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, But pleasant words are pure.
- "...then" - the next 6 external characteristics follow logically from internal purity
- "...peace-loving" - a promoter of peace, but not at the expense of purity; opposite of contentious; not seeking to be disruptive or argumentative; they are looking for ways to make things cohesive, bringing people together.
- The world's wisdom is contentious, but wisdom from above is peaceable (Eph 2:14)
- Prov 3:1-2: My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.
- "...gentle" - considerate, forbearing; courteous; sweet reasonableness; not seeking revenge; fair, generous in dealings with others; opposite of argumentative.
- It is a disposition that does not seek its own rights, but rather regards the feelings of others; carries the concept of equity and fairness
- If you're insulted by someone or treated unfairly, and instead of acting in the flesh you subdue your flesh, God says you're stronger than a man who goes out to war and captures a city.
- Prov 16:32: He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.
- "...reasonable" - willing to yield, openness to reason; not thinking you are always right; yielding to persuasion; respectful; willing to listen with an open mind; ability to change mind if properly persuaded; teachable; a wise man knows how much he doesn't know.
- However, we're not called to be open-minded, we're called to use judgment, always discerning whether something is consistent with God's Word
- Worship is mentally active...God never tells Christians to check their brains at the door (Cf. Bereans, Acts 17:11)
- Prov 14:15: The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.
- "...full of mercy and good fruits" - yielding compassion, pity, kind actions or helpful deeds
- As a result, good fruits (a variety of good deeds) are produced on behalf of the needy
- The world tells us that if we're merciful to people, we're getting stomped on, taken advantage of; the Bible teaches that the more merciful we are to people, the more we're watering ourselves
- One of God's essential qualities; He does not give to us what we deserve; identifies with the difficulties of others; showing concern for those who suffer pain or hardship; ability to forgive quickly
- Prov 3:18: She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.



- Godly wisdom is analogized to a tree that gives good fruit; similar imagery used by Jesus of Vine and branches in Upper Room (John 15)
- God never calls Christians to *produce* fruit, He calls them to *bear* fruit. Producing fruit is the branch trying to do it under its own power; bearing fruit is allowing the Vine to produce the fruit by simply staying connected to the Vine.
- The fruit we produce won't last; the fruit we bear will last, because it was ultimately produced by the Vine
- "...impartial" - consistent in conviction, without prejudice; unwavering person, undivided in his commitment and conviction; doesn't make unfair distinctions
- It reinforces consistency in contrast to the untamed tongue, which is inconsistent
- Prov 24:16: For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in *time of* calamity.
- The fact that you get knocked down is not the issue, because that happens to everyone; it's how fast can you get back up
- It speaks of a resilience or unwavering nature that Godly wisdom provides
- "...free of hypocrisy" - not two-faced; sincere, genuine, free from all pretense
- Prov 28:13: He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.
- Hypocrisy is a double-life, which is something Christians are more than capable of. Our sin nature didn't go away when we came to faith, it just now lives alongside our new nature. However, after coming to faith, we now have the ability to deny the sin nature, whereas before belief we did not.
- Because our sin nature is still around, the Christian is capable of a double-life

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

18 And a harvest of righteousness is grown from the seed of peace planted by peacemakers.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

- Righteousness cannot be produced when conditions are full of strife, jealousy and selfishness, which are products of false (worldly) wisdom

Now after James defines what wisdom is, and differentiates between worldly (false) wisdom and divine (true) wisdom, he now takes that wisdom that he has defined for us and begins to apply it to every area of life James 4-5)...because that is what wisdom is, the application of knowledge to our daily life.

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### Homiletics on James 3

- Our tongues (our words) are powerful tools. We use them to praise God one minute, then tear down our fellow man the next.
- Complaining is one of the most destructive uses of our words. Complaining, even about the smallest detail, is paramount to complaining about God and what He has provided for us. There is never an excuse to complain about anything.
- Our words show our heart condition, in effect our mouths are the “exhaust pipe” of our heart
  - Since no man (by himself) can tame the tongue (3:8), the only way to control it is to look to the Holy Spirit to change our hearts.
  - Ps 51:10 says “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”
  - We must ask God’s help in creating in us a pure heart, which will have the effect of changing our words
- Wisdom is not based on worldly knowledge, level of education, success
  - Wisdom is right conduct due to right thinking
  - Wisdom is not what you know—it’s how you act; wisdom is observable
  - Ps 1:1: Blessed is the man who **walks not** in the counsel of the ungodly, nor **stands** in the path of sinners, nor **sits** in the seat of the scornful.
- James outlines two types of wisdom: Godly wisdom and human wisdom:
- Human wisdom:
  - Source: earthly, unspiritual, demonic
  - Characteristics: “bitter envy” (resentful attitude toward others); “selfish ambition” (obsessed with pleasing self, even at expense of others)
  - Results: Confusion, anarchy, disharmony, disorder, disruptive decision-making, and eventually every evil practice
- Godly wisdom:
  - Source: heaven (God)
  - Characteristics: humility, pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocrisy
  - Results: good conduct based on above characteristics