

James 3:13-16 Wisdom Part 1



James 3:8-16

But no one *among* mankind can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰ from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brothers *and sisters*, these things should not be this way. ¹¹ Does a spring send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers *and sisters*, bear olives, or a vine *bear* figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.

¹³ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

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- While everything in creation produces one kind of fruit, the tongue has this odd fruit bearing which is either evil or good.
- **Source** is the key concept.
- As believers we have the indwelling sin nature as well as the new nature of Christ.

Paul and James do not contradict each other.

- Both teach the two natures of the believer.
- Both teach that we are not slaves to the sin nature.
 - Paul – Romans 6:11 “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.”
 - James – James 3:10 “It is not necessary, brothers of me, for these things to be so.” (Nestle-Aland)

We are under no obligation to respond to the desires of the flesh.

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James 2:12 “so speak and so act as those who will be judged by the principle of freedom.”

So Act - 2: 14-2:26 James’ teaching on “works” (our actions)

So Speak – 3:1- 3:12 James’ teaching on “the tongue” (our speech)

In 3:13-17 James describes two sources behind our words and works.

Two kinds of wisdom

- 1) Earthly, natural, demonic
- 2) From above, pure, peaceable, gentle...



Who among you is wise and understanding?

- Trials is the major theme of James
- In chapter 1:2-8, wisdom is that by which we navigate and endure trials.
- Wisdom is to underlie our words and works.
- It is not readily apparent who had Godly wisdom.

Wisdom from above will be manifest for what it is, through the outworking of our works and words.

“Let him show”

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There may be a presentation of doctrine without organic expression: that does not worry Satan very much. We may be orthodox and as sound as it is possible to be, and still not meet the full force of Satan's objection. But let an organic expression of the Church for practical purposes be brought into view, and you will find trouble coming from everywhere and nowhere!

Again, when Christianity is a formal, ecclesiastical system, without spiritual power, Satan does not trouble himself or it one little bit.

When there is but a name, a title, a designation, without correspondence to the Divine pattern, it is left to go on it's way unchallenged. --- But let the Lord bring into view something that really sets forth Christ corporately, then there is trouble...

T. Austin-Sparks



v 13b How is wisdom shown?

Let him show (expose to the eyes/give proof)
out of (by means of)
good (beautiful/ honourable/ proper/ useful etc.)
behaviour (state of being; conduct/behaviour/manner of life [Groves])
his works (or acts)
in gentleness (power under control)
of (which comes out of; which is sourced in)
wisdom. (skill in living)

We have the righteous life of the Lord Jesus as the source of our life.

We know and say that we have this nature, but unless we are actively exercising faith in that fact, then there is no outflow of that life.

It must be by faith!



v 13b gentleness of wisdom

Gentleness or meekness πραΰτης

Proútēs is not readily expressed in the English since the term “meekness” suggests weakness, but *proútēs* is a condition of mind and heart which demonstrates gentleness not in weakness but power. It is a virtue born in strength of character.

Zodhiates – The Complete Word Study New Testament

Gentleness or meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all

Larry Pierce - “Outline of Biblical Usage”

There is a ‘superhuman’ ability to navigate the most pressing trials when we know the source of our new life!



v 14-16 Two kinds of wisdom

Wisdom is basically skill in living. (knowledge applied)

There are fundamentally only two kinds of wisdom.

- 1) the world has a “skill set” for “success” in life (today’s topic)
- 2) The wisdom that comes down from above (next week)

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

SELF is at the center of this type of wisdom



v 14-16 The wisdom of the sin nature

Bitter jealousy - πικρὸν ζῆλον (pikron zēlon) – zealousness, zeal in embracing, pursuing, defending anything, an envious contentious rivalry.

Selfish ambition - ἐριθείαν (eritheian) – electioneering, or intriguing for office, a desire to put oneself forward.

There seems to have been a jockeying for position in the early Church.

If the desire to speak is not coming from the Spirit, but from your own, self glorifying zeal, then there's a serious problem!

James 3:15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

earthly – of the world

natural – of the flesh

demonic – of the devil



v 16 The fruit of natural wisdom

James 3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

Disorder – The noun form of the adjective in 1:8 & 3:8 (unstable, restless, uncontrollable)

Every evil thing (deed) – “thing” is *pragma* from which we get “pragmatic”. It literally means “deed”.



Conclusion

Does this mean that when believers are operating this way it will look immoral or distasteful?

Human wisdom operates in a way that is very attractive to our flesh.

- Great leadership skills
- Charisma
- Smooth speech
- Flashy marketing

These things **sell!** But they are truly **evil!**

It takes Spiritual discernment to see and know this kind of wisdom for what it is.