

JAMES CHAPTER 3

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V. THE PROBLEM OF THE TONGUE (3:1-12)

1. Summary of Passage—Personal Discipline Begins with the Tongue

vv 1-2 Begins with the context of teaching—and setting the example for self-discipline

- Teachers set the example—implied
- Teachers are held more accountable
- We should strive for perfection [implied]
- But we all stumble—even teachers [implied]
- We should endeavor not to stumble
- But to do this—we must be able to bridle the whole body

vv 3-5a Bridling the body—self-control

- Two examples of controlling direction/actions
 - Bit in a horse's mouth
 - Small rudder of a ship
- The tongue is a small part—but it boasts of great things

vv 5b-6 The tongue is like a fire—in the church and in our life

- [Large] forest fires begin with a small fire
- So a whole body—the whole church—is defiled by the wrong use of the tongue
- The tongue—set on fire from hell—can set our whole life on fire

vv 7- 8 The tongue cannot be tamed

- Every kind of animal can be tamed by humans
- But the human tongue cannot be tamed
- It is restless and full of poison

vv 9-12 The impurity of the tongue—it mixes evil with good

- It mixes blessing with cursing—and this is wrong
- It blesses God, but curses those created in His image
- Three examples—of expected purity
 - Fountains do not produce both fresh and bitter water
 - Plants produce their own crops—not figs to olives—not vines to figs
 - Salt water cannot produce fresh water

2. THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING—SETTING THE EXAMPLE—**vv 1-2**

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

NIV— 1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

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

a. Setting the Example as Teachers—**v 1**

1. James uses ‘teachers’ as his illustration of leadership and self-discipline

a. Term is **διδασκολος** = master, teacher

- Term frequently used by disciples to address Jesus—‘teacher’ or ‘master’
- Parallel to ‘rabbi’—teachers that had schools of disciples who followed them

b. James’s emphasis for leadership in the church is on ‘teaching’—**διδασκω**

- Fits with key task Jesus called His followers to fulfill—in the Great Commission—Mt 28:18-20
- ‘make disciples’ of all nations—‘teaching’ them to observe what He commanded them
- The church continued in the ‘teachings’ of the Apostles—**διδαχη**

2. Only a few should teach—why?

a. Implied—they set the example—in what they do and say

b. Explicit—they will held to a higher level of accountability

- **μειζων [μεγα] κριμα**—greater sentence, punishment, judgment
- Higher standard of judgment or justice

b. Striving for perfection—**v2**

1. James implies that we should all strive for ‘perfection’

- Implied in phrase—“he is a perfect man, who is able to bridle the whole body”
- Relates to 1:4—the end of trials—testing faith—and endurance—is becoming ‘perfect’

2. Being ‘perfect’

- **τελειος** = brought to completion—accomplishing purpose—finished
- Same word used in **1:4** perfect work—**1:17** perfect gift—and **1:25** perfect law
- Again this ‘perfection’—is becoming all that God calls a person to be/become

c. James includes himself in the personal note

1. Rare use of first person in Book of James

- So far used only three times
- **1:2**—my brothers
- **1:18**—God brought us forth by the word of truth, so we would be first fruits among His creatures
- **2:18**—quoting hypothetical proposition—“Show me your faith . . . and I will show you my faith”

2. James uses Himself as an example—he, too, is held to this high standard for teachers

d. The need for humility

1. James recognizes that we all stumble—even as we strive to become perfect

- **πτωω** = trip, make an error, make a mistake
- Not a permanent condition—not fallen beyond recovery

2. He includes himself in this admission—we *all* stumble

e. The sign of perfection

1. We do not stumble

2. This suggests that we are led the right way—and follow the right lead

3. So our *whole* body follows the right leadership—we are properly bridled

- to bridle = **χαλιναγωγέω** = lead one with the use of a bit

4. *Whole* body—implies that this must also include the tongue—even the smallest of parts

5. Bridle—this is the ‘bit’ in the mouth—which implies that this control *begins* with the tongue

f. Summary:

- Perfection is expected of leaders—i.e. being godly examples—what God wants us to be
- Perfection is a *sign* and *result* of self-discipline—self-control
- This *begins* with and is *exemplified* by proper use of the tongue

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTROLLING THE TONGUE—vv 2-12

a. Overview

1. A small part with a big role—controlling the direction—vv 2-5a

2. A small spark with a big effect—its incendiary nature—vv 5b-6

3. A restless and poisonous thing—its untamable nature—vv 7-8

4. An ungodly thing—it defies even the normal courses of nature—vv 9-12

b. A small part with a big role—controlling the direction—vv 2-5a

1. Two examples uses

- The bit in a horse’s mouth
- The rudder of a ship

2. The horse example

a. Horse’s weight

- o Light riding = 800-1200 pounds
 - o Heavy riding = 1100-1300 pounds
 - o Draft = 1500-2200 pounds
- b. The bit = less than a pound (12-13 ounces, or so)
- o Only—less than one-tenth percent of horse weight
3. Ship's rudder
- a. Titanic dimensions
- o 882.75 feet long
 - o 92.5 feet wide
 - o 175 feet high
 - o 46,000 tons
- b. Titanic rudder
- o Was .014 of the longitudinal area of its hull = only 1.4%
 - o Normal size for cargo ships is .015
- c. The rudder not only controls direction of the ship
- o It harnesses the power of mighty winds
 - o And can accelerate or retard speed based on how it is turned
 - o Ex: wrong turn at the wrong moment can a racing skill to a dead stop
4. The human tongue
- a. Average weight
- 70 grams for male
 - 60 grams for female
 - Between 2.1 and 2.5 ounces—about .15 pound
 - For the average 150 pound person—only one-tenth of a percent
- b. Average length = 4 inches
- Average American male = 5'10
 - Average American female = 5'4"
 - 4 inches is about 6% of height
5. A *small* organ—with a *big* role
- a. In proportion to size and expectations
- It is a small thing—*μικροσ*
 - But it boasts—speaks in lofty terms—*grows* things to a large size
- b. In its ability to reveal—to control—and to make impressions
- What it reveals—often expresses the real inner direction of the mind

- What it controls—the direction we go and the way we behave
- What impression it leaves—it is often the only thing people remember about us

c. A small spark with a big effect—its incendiary nature—vv 5b-6

5b Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. **6** The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

1. The contrast—great forest—small spark

a. Great wood

1. Great = **ηλικος**—same root word for ‘helix’—not **μεγα**
2. Means ‘as tall as’—or ‘as small as’—depending on context
3. Here meaning ‘how tall’—because it describes the trees/woods
4. Used only here in the NT
5. Forest/trees/woods = **υλη**—meaning wood—or fuel

b. Small fire

1. Small = **ολιγος**—little, small, short, few
2. Same root for ‘oligarchy’—rule of the few (instead of one—or all the people)
3. Other biblical uses—often used in contrast
 - o Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life—and only a few find it—Sermon on Mount—Mt 7:14 (Compared with wide gate, broad road—that many enter)
 - o Harvest is great—but the laborers are few—Mt 9:37
 - o Many are called—but few are chosen—Mt 20:16
 - o Well done, good and faithful servant—you have been faithful over a few things—I will make you ruler over many things—Mt 25:23
3. Fire = **πυρ**—root for pyro

2. The burning of the forest

a. ‘Is set on fire’

1. **αναπτω** = ignites, kindles, lights up
2. The word means to originate the fire—to set on fire—not just to burn
3. The tongue *initiates* the fire—spontaneously from nothing—it doesn’t just sustain burning
4. Active voice—not passive (is set on fire)—so a more accurate translation is KJV

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

5. The focus of this verse is on the power of the tongue to ignite—more than on the burning wood

b. Examples of great fires

1. Peshtigo Forest Fire—Wisconsin

- o 8 October 1871
- o Smaller fires fanned by great west wind
- o 1.2 million acres burned—twice the area of Rhode Island
- o 12 communities destroyed
- o 1700 people killed
- o So intense it caused a tornado that threw boxcars and houses into the air
- o So powerful—it jumped Green Bay and burned the opposite peninsula
- o Little remembered because the Great Chicago Fire—started on the **same day!**

2. Great Black Dragon Fire—May 1987

- o Along the Amur River between Russian Siberia and Chinese Manchuria
- o Burned 18 million acres—15 million in Russia—3 million in China
- o Area = size of New England—or 10 times Yellowstone Park
- o Burned as much wood as the forests of Scotland
- o Soviets let their fire burn—did not plan to cut that timber for 100 years
- o Chinese fought their fire—needed the timber reserve
- o Lesson learned: once ignited—it is **impossible to control** such a huge fire

c. The points

1. Proportion—great disasters come from small starts
2. Uncontrollable—once ignited—it is hard to control a fire
3. Permanent results—once burned—it is impossible to reverse the results of a fire

3. Four things that describe the destructiveness of the tongue

- o A fire
- o A world of evil
- o Corrupting influence
- o Affects one's whole life

a. A fire—here James directly identifies the tongue as a fire—implied in previous verse

b. A world of evil among the members [of the body]

1. Evil = **αδικια**—unrighteousness, unjust—the opposite of being in right relationship with God

- o The Lord of the house will tell them—depart from me you 'evil-doers'—parable in Lk 13
- o Used to describe the 'unjust' steward—parable in Lk 16
- o Judas's money was described as the reward for 'iniquity'—Acts 1:18
- o The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and 'unrighteousness'—Rom 1:18

2. World of evil = **κοσμος** = full of evil—saturated—completely full

3. Among the members

a. The tongue affects the whole being of the person who uses it

b. It also affects *each* member of the body—i.e. all members of the church!

c. It defiles—the whole body

1. Defiles = **σπιλωω**—also means ‘to spot’

2. A stain that gives external evidence something is not clean

3. Used only here and Jude 23—with its allusion to fire

22 Be merciful to those who doubt, 23 snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

4. The *whole* body

Improper use of the tongue affects not only *each* member

It *stains* the reputation of the whole church—each and every member collectively

It ruins the reputation of the body of Christ—the reputation of Christ Himself

d. Setting on fire the course of nature

1. Setting on fire = **φλογιζω**—to ignite—set aflame

2. The course = **τροχος**—the wheel

o So—like a flaming wheel

o Like burning tumbleweeds rolling into town

o Like setting a wagon aflame—and rolling it into a barricade

3. Of nature = **γενεσις**--the beginning of all things—nativity—the start and all life that follows

a. Setting aflame the source—so that it follows the thing to the end of its life

b. Word pictures

1. This parallels the use of **κοσμος** above—comprehensive and from the beginning

2. It parallels the picture of a forest fire—in nature a fire gains momentum until it is uncontrollable

e. The source—from hell

1. The tongue itself is set aflame [same verb as above]—by the fire of hell—**γεεννα**

2. Word picture—Gehenna—filthy origin

Originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned; a fit symbol of the wicked and their future destruction

3. Word picture—hell—identifies the source as unholy

4. Contrast with all that is good and godly

- o World (kosmos) of evil—contrasted with the good kosmos God created
- o Setting on fire the course of nature (genesis)—contrasted with God’s Genesis creation
- o Set aflame from Gehenna/hell—contrasted with holiness and purity of godly speech

4. Some guidelines for holy speech

- o James 1:19—be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger
- o James 5:19—let your yes be yes, and your no, no
- o Eph 4:15—always speak the truth in love
- o Eph 4:29—do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen
- o II Tim 2:23-25—Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

5. Reminder from Jesus—regarding the seriousness of this issue

Mt 12:36-37—*But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*

d. A restless and poisonous thing—its untamable nature—vv 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. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

1. An example of contrast—the animals

a. Connects with previous verse—the tongue is a—‘world of evil/iniquity’—v 6

- 1.. Verse 6 uses the term **ΚΟΣΜΟΣ**—suggesting the whole world and all that is in it
2. But here—v 7—we see all the animals [implied—of the world] are unlike the human tongue

b. It also builds on verse 4—the control of horses by bits

c. All the animals of creation are represented here

1. Fifth day of creation—Ge 1:20-23—God made all the animals in the sea and

Here—Birds and creatures of the sea

2. Sixth day of creation—Ge 1:24-25—God made all land animals—cattle, creeping things, and beasts

Here—beasts and reptiles (creeping things)

3. Genesis later shows the animals are divided into four groups

1:26—Man is created to rule over the fish, the birds, the cattle, and everything that creeps on earth

9:1—all animals will fear Noah—every beast, bird, creeper, and fish

d. The taming

1. Word ‘tame’ = **δαμαζω**—to curb—restrain—or tame

2. Same word used of Legion—Mk 5:4—“no one was strong enough to subdue him”

3. Taming—mentioned twice

a. First time to show the result—“is tamed”

1. To show the fact that they *can* be tamed

2. But also to show the condition—they are tame now

b. Second time to show how this is done

1. To show the agency—it is man who does this

2. Also shows **irony**—it is men—whose tongues cannot be tamed—who have tamed the animals

2. The untamable nature of the human tongue—v 7

a. Nobody can do it—*everyone* has problems with this—regardless

1. This is not merely a matter of human will—no human can do it

2. Recurrent Old Testament theme

Pr 10:10—*He who winks the eye causes trouble; and a babbling fool will be ruined*

Pr 10:20—*The tongue of the righteous is s choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little*

Pr 13:3—*The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin*

Pr 12:18—*The one who speaks rashly like the thrust of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing; truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment*

Pr 15:2,4—*The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly. A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.*

Pr 21:3—*To do righteousness and justice is*

Pr 31:26—*She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*

3. It is not simply ‘mind over matter’—not ‘self’ control

4. This is a deeply *spiritual* issue—with a *spiritual* solution—control can come only by the Holy Spirit

b. Two characteristics of this untameability—its nature and potential danger

1. The *nature* of the untamed tongue = restless evil

- a. This connects with verse 6—in two ways
 - 1. A result of it being a ‘world of evil’—now it is particularized in the individual persons
 - 2. And—verse 6 shows that this ‘defiles’ a person—because *here* it is an evil thing [which defiles]
 - b. Restless = **ακατασχετος**
 - 1. That which cannot be restrained, contained, possessed, or held fast
 - 2. Other biblical texts
 - c. Evil = **κακος**
 - 1. A bad thing—wrong—troublesome—destructive
 - 2. Not the same word as in verse 6 [**αδικια** = unrighteous = relational term]
2. The potential danger of the tongue—a ‘deadly poison’
- 1. A poison = **ιος**
 - a. Which can make sick on the *inside*—even cause one to die
 - b. ‘poison’—also means ‘rust’ in Greek
 - 1. so it affects the *outside* and can eat through a person
 - 2. Also used in **Ja 5:3**—the rust on your silver and will witness against you
 - c. Other biblical example—applies to the tongue

Rom 3:13—all persons, Jew and Greek are under sin and guilty

Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips

Paul is quoting—**Ps 5:9** [throat/grave] and **Ps 140:3** [poison]
 - 2. Deadly = **θανατηφορος**
 - b. This expresses the certainty and urgency of the results—ultimate matters are dealt with here
 - c. It brings death to two persons
 - 1. The one who is slandered—attacked by the tongue—character assassination
 - 2. The one administering the poison—is a murderer—punishable by death
 - d. It does not take much poison—a very small dose—to harm or kill someone
- Example: potent poisons**

clostridium botulinum = bacteria that produces neurotoxins
deadliest toxin to humans
6 million times more potent than rattlesnake poison
2 kg (4.4 pounds)—is enough to kill every human on earth
But can be used for treating certain muscular diseases
Such as Parkinsons, Multiple Schlerosis, and Cerebral Palsy

e. An ungodly thing—it defies even the normal courses of nature—vv 9-12

KJV—9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. **10** Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. **11** Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet [water] and bitter? **12** Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so [can] no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

NIV—9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. **10** Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. **11** Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? **12** My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

NASB—9 With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; **10** from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. **11** Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*? **12** Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.

1. This is an extension of verse 8—the tongue is ‘evil’ (bad—**κακος**) that produces ungodly results
2. Verse 9-10—the divine purpose—versus—the human perversion
 - a. Both these verses show what God intends for us—and how we misuse it
 1. God’s purpose—use the tongue to bless—affirm—praise
 2. Man’s perversion—use the tongue to curse—bring evil upon
 3. We think this is ‘natural’—for people to act this way—but it is not what God originally intended
 4. It may *common* to us all—but it is in fact an *unnatural* act—according to God’s plan
 - b. We are designed as humans—our purpose—(v9) is to praise God—so our mouth does the same (v10)
 - c. But—humans are made in God’s likeness
 1. **ομοιωσις** = to be made like—homo = like (homogenized, homonym)
 - a. We have the breath of God in us—God breathed only into man—we are living souls
 - b. We have the *imago Dei*—the very image of God
 - c. Not like the idols made by man—supposedly the likeness of gods—they are lifeless
 2. So each person has infinite value

3. So much value—that Christ died for every person
- d. Explicit conclusion—we should not curse humans

1. **καταπαομαι** = to doom, to call evil upon, to curse

2. To curse humans is to curse what God has made—and what God has made is good

3. God loves every person—to curse what He loves—is to hate what He loves

4. This is acting unlike God—it an *ungodly* act

5. Other biblical injunctions

Mt 5:44—*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute [curse] you*

Jesus' point—don't return cursing for curses—show kindness to those who curse you

Paul states this even more directly—below

Rom 12:14—*Bless those who curse [persecute] you; bless and curse not*

6. *If* one is to be cursed—it can be done only by God—not by man—and not until God's time

- a. A time will come when humans will be permanently blessed—or cursed

- b. This will be done at the final judgment—separating the sheep from goats

Mt 25:41—*Then He will also say to those on His left, Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels*

- e. Implicit conclusion

1. If we are to bless God with our mouths—we are also to bless His creation

2. Bless = **ευλογεω**—to say a good word to/about—to invoke blessings—to praise

3. Here—the meaning is 'to say a good word about/to'—not praise with adoration as we praise God

4. Why?

If we are to love the Lord our God—and our neighbor as ourselves

And if we are to bless God—in the context of this passage—we should do the same to humans

And again—Jesus said—*love* those who persecute/curse you

5. This does not mean 'praise' as in worship—but to affirm and say good things about

6. But the hard part is this

- o Not only are we to refrain from cursing people that we don't like

- o We should really think of something to say that will 'bless' them—the very ones we don't like!

7. Don't do what is expected—but do the very opposite! **Rom 12:18-21**

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. **19** Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. **20** "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

3. Three examples of *unnatural* things—that show how the tongue goes against God's nature

11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? **12** My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

a. These examples are—in fact—*impossible*

1. The first and last examples are impossible—and undesirable

a. It is impossible—by mutual exclusivity—for one thing to produce two opposite things

b. Even if this *were* possible—the results would be unsatisfactory—undesirable

o The salt water would make the fresh water undrinkable—polluted

o The fresh water does not make the salt water drinkable

c. When the tongue produces evil—it pollutes—and undoes the good it has done!

d. Once this evil is mixed with the good—it cannot be undone—cannot be separated!

2. The second and third examples—figs/olives—grapes/figs

a. These are also natural impossibilities

b. They remind us of the Sermon on the Mount

1. **Mt 7:15-20**—Jesus was talking about false prophets: by their fruit you will recognize them

2. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?

3. So—if our tongue bears false fruit—it raises the question—are we false prophets/disciples?

b. So the points are these

1. The **human tongue** does what—in all the rest of nature—is **impossible**

2. The **human tongue** reveals more about our real nature than we may want to be known!

3. Implied—we are all like this—and only God can make us change

Like he changed the bitter water to sweet in the Old Testament

Ex 15:22-25—Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore, it was named Mara. So the people

grumbled at Moses, saying What shall we drink? The he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree, and h threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

VI. Practicing Personal Discipline (3:1-18)

A. The Problem of the Tongue (3:1-12)

B. The Proof and Sources of Wisdom (3:13-18)—Two types of wisdom

1. The proof of wisdom (3:13)
2. Worldly wisdom (3:14-16)
3. Wisdom from above (3:17-18)

B. TWO TYPES OF WISDOM

KJV 13 Who [is] a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. **14** But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. **15** This wisdom descendeth not from above, but [is] earthly, sensual, devilish. **16** For where envying and strife [is], there [is] confusion and every evil work. **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. **18** And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace

NIV 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. **14** But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. **15** Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. **16** For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. **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. **18** Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

NASB 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. **17** But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. **18** And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

1. The two types of wisdom are (vv 14-18)
 - a. From below—worldly wisdom (vv. 14-16)
 - b. From above—godly wisdom (vv. 17-18)
2. The proof of genuine wisdom *and understanding* (v 13)
 - a. Note—this is not just ‘wisdom’—but wisdom *with understanding*
 1. Wisdom can be of two types—good or bad—godly or worldly
 2. But the truly wise man also has understanding
 - a. Wise man = σοφος
 - o one who is skilled, learned, cultivated

- o one who develops the best plans and uses the best means for their execution
 - o related to **σοφια** = goddess of wisdom
 - o root work for—sophisticated, sophomore, sophistry (subtle deceptive reasoning)
- b. Have understanding = **επιστημων**
1. Not just to have knowledge/information/learning—i.e. **γνοσις**
 2. Not just to ‘know’ = **ειδον**
 3. Instead—to have experience of something—to fix one’s thoughts on—to be an expert
- c. True wisdom is based on experience—intimately familiar with, based on repetitive exposure
3. Genuine wisdom is experienced—but this is still not enough
- a. We say the difference between knowledge and wisdom is experience—and that is all right
 - b. But a person can still have *worldly* (bad) wisdom—and be very *experienced* at it (cunning/deceitful)
 - c. So for it to be the *right* type of wisdom and understanding—there must be other evidence besides just experience
- b. Further evidence of true wisdom = a ‘good’ life
1. Life—KJV = ‘conversation’
 - a. This is ironic—that the old KJV English equated ‘conversation’ with lifestyle
 - b. So the KJV could literally refer to the last passage—a good way of talking—and there is lot of truth to this—that the truly wise person is careful to speak good things!
 - c. But the word is **αναστροφη**
 1. This is much more than just the way we talk
 2. It means the ‘coming to and fro in life’—the everyday turning from here and going to there
 3. Meaning: behavior, deportment, manner of life
 4. So—it is not just words that count [though they are important]—but our *actions*
 5. And the *everyday* actions—of our ‘coming and going’ life—how we *habitually* behave
 2. ‘good’ life = **καλος**
 - a. That which is pleasing, excellent, handsome, admirable, commendable
 - b. The opposite of ‘unruly evil’ [**κακος**] in verse 3:8 above
 3. Note—this evidence is not just *intentional*—but actionable
 - a. It is not just the habits of a holy demeanor that talks holy talk—and speaks piously

- b. It results in ‘deeds’—i.e. works—that show if our life is really a ‘good life’
- c. Evidence of a ‘good life’ = deeds
1. **εργον** = root word for energy—to be employed—to be at work making a product
 2. Deeds—are external evidence of inner character
 3. This is the same word for ‘works’ that give evidence of ‘faith’—see 2:14-26
- d. What is the inner root *attitude* that produces these works—the *cause* of such ‘good deeds’?
1. These are produced by humility
 2. **πραυτης** = meekness, gentleness [yielding right of way]
 3. Other NT usages

Jas 1:21—the same attitude with which we should receive the word of God grafted into us

I Pe 3:15—the same attitude with which we should be prepared to give a defense of our faith when people ask us for the reason of the hope we have in us—do so with *meekness and fear*
 4. Related to ‘meek’ in the Sermon on the Mount’ = **πραυς**
 5. The opposite of this attitude is one that is **arrogant**
 - a. This is an attitude that ‘glories’—one that ‘boasts’ arrogantly
 - b. Like branches grafted into the olive tree—that boast against others pruned from it (see **Rom 11:18**)
 - c. Such an attitude produces selfish deeds/works—inherent to a ‘bad’ lifestyle
- e. What is the source of this humility?
1. Only true wisdom can generate such a yielding and generous attitude
 2. ‘meekness of wisdom’—‘gentleness of wisdom’ = genitive objective—humility produced by wisdom
- f. So—we come full circle
- What is true wisdom?
 - It is wisdom with understanding—experience
 - But beyond that—it is wisdom *proven* to be true by the evidence of a *good life*
 - What is the evidence of this good life?
 - Evidence = good deeds/works
 - What is the attitude that produces such good deeds/works?
 - Attitude = humility/gentleness
 - What produces this humility?
 - Source = true wisdom
 - **So—the real evidence that we have genuine wisdom is that we have genuine wisdom**
 - It is not something we generate because we want to do so—we cannot create godly wisdom

- Rather—it something we either have—or we do not have [though we can nurture it]
- It is something that comes from God as a *gift*—from *above*—see v 17
- It is another one of those good and perfect gifts—see 1:17
- It is something we must ask for—and God will give it to us 1:5

3. Worldly wisdom (vv 14-16)

NASB—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.

a. The structure of this passage (vv 14-16)

1. Central point = verse 15—identifies *type* of wisdom we do not want to experience—worldly wisdom
2. But this type of wisdom is introduced by *behavior* that typifies it—v 14—in contrast to v 13
3. Then v 16 shows the *results* of this worldly wisdom and behavior

b. v 14 = **behavior** opposite ‘wise and understanding’—not from ‘gentleness of wisdom’ [see v 13]

1. This behavior begins with two wrong *attitudes*—and ends with two wrong *actions*
2. Two wrong *attitudes*—‘in your heart’—[both of them are self-focused]

a. Bitter jealousy

1. Wording

a. bitter = **πικροσ**—harsh, virulent, cutting

b. jealousy = **ζηλοσ**—(root word for ‘zeal’)

- o Meaning 1 = zeal, ardor, fierceness in defending something
- o Meaning 2 = contentious rivalry, jealousy

2. Other usage—jealousy

a. In list of faults Paul fears he might see when he visits the Corinthians—who were divisive

II Cor 12:20—*For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish; that perhaps there will be strife, **jealousy**, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances . . .*

b. Characteristic of deeds of the flesh—such things will not inherit the kingdom of God

Gal 5:19-21—*immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, **jealousy**, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these*

3. It is possible to be a religious zealot—but still go against God’s word and oppose His people

a. The same word is used for ‘zeal’

1. Paul said this of Israel—**Rom 10:2**—*For I bear them record that they have a **zeal** of God, but not according to knowledge.*

2. Paul said it of Himself—**Phil 3:6**—*Concerning **zeal**, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

b. We need to be careful not to become so jealous to protect our non-essential ‘religious’ traditions that we become divisive or wrongly accusatory

b. Selfish ambition

1. Wording

a. selfish ambition = one word—**επιθεια**

b. Meaning = electioneering or intriguing for office; putting oneself forward by unfair means

2. Other usage—Paul warns against this in Philippians—in two places

Phil 1:16—some preach Christ ‘of contention’ (for self-promotion), insincerely, wanting to bring affliction to Paul

Phil 2:3—in having the mind of Christ—nothing should be done contentiously (for self-promotion), but in humility, thinking of others before themselves

3. The power politics of religion

- o Sometimes a controversial religious ‘cause’ becomes the means to power
- o When the cause begins to wane—people stir up controversy in order to keep their power
- o This also happens *within* religious groups—when people try to *control* fellow believers

3. **v 15** = Two wrong *actions* that go along with these attitudes [bitter jealousy and selfish ambition]

a. Being arrogant

1. Wording—**κατακαυχασμαι** = boasting of oneself at the expense/injury of another

a. Exulting over another person; glorying or basking in the glory

b. Like ‘taunting’ in football = personal foul—unsportsmanlike conduct

2. Other usage

a. Negative connotation

Rom 11:18—Gentiles should not **boast** because they have been grafted onto the olive tree

b. Positive connotation

James 2:13—he will have judgment without mercy who has shown no mercy—for mercy triumphs (**boasts** itself) over judgment

b. Lying against the truth

1. lying = **ψευδομαι**—root word for prefix ‘pseudo’
2. if this continues and becomes perpetual attitude of lying—it can lead to departure from faith

I Tim 4:1-2: *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*

c. Put these actions together—it means this: being arrogant enough to lie about the truth

1. If you have these attitudes—you are likely to lie about them
2. But—James warns that this is a big mistake—at least we should own up to the truth
3. Truthfulness is the first step in curing the bad attitudes
4. Otherwise—self-deception just makes things worse—and leads to continued jealousy and self-serving behavior—which results in the consequences of verse 16

c. The **type** of wisdom that produces wrong behavior/attitudes and results—[v 15]

1. Not from above

- a. Meaning—**ανωθεν** = above, high, brim (as in filled to the brim)
- b. Usage—elsewhere in James

James 1:17—every good and perfect gift is from **above**

This highlights that this kind of wisdom is *not* one of the good things originating from God

2. Earthly and natural

a. Meaning

1. earthly—**επιγειος** = literally ‘from’ and ‘the ground/earth’—terrestrial—opposite celestial
2. natural—**ψυχικος** = belonging to ‘breath’—that which breathes like an animal
 - o connotes animal passion—that which is sensuous
 - o KJV translates it as—‘sensual’

b. Usage—other passages show this is contrasted with the ‘spiritual’

3. Demonic

- a. Meaning—**δαμονιωδης** = proceeding from a demon—demon-like
- b. Usage—unique—used only here in the NT

d. The **results** of this wisdom and behavior—[v 16]

1. Disorder

a. Meaning—**ακαταστασια** = state of instability, confusion, disturbance

b. Usage

1. Also used (like jealousy above) in **II Cor 12:20**—‘tumults’ (KJV) ‘disturbances’ (NASB)

2. **I Cor 14:33**—God is not the author of ‘confusion’

2. Every evil thing

a. Meaning—**φαυλος**

1. Two meanings

- Easy, worthless, ordinary, mean, of no account
- Ethically bad, base, wicked

2. Not one of the other two words often used for evil—**πονηρος** and **κακος**

3. It is not just a static ‘thing’ here

- It is an evil ‘work’ = **πραγμα** = that which is accomplished or done
- Root word for pragmatic, pragmatism

b. Usage

Jn 3:20—Jesus said: “those who do **evil** hate the light”

Jn 5:29—at the end, when everyone comes forth—those who have done good will come forth to the resurrection of life; those who have done **evil** will come forth to the resurrection of damnation

e. SUMMARY—THE WISDOM WE MUST AVOID

- Opposite of being ‘wise and understanding’—and doing ‘good’ in ‘gentleness of wisdom’ (v13)
- Begins with a self-centered attitude of the heart—bitter jealousy and self-serving ambition
- It typifies one without godly wisdom—who is earthly and natural—influenced by the demonic
- This self-centered attitude and earthly wisdom produce—disorder—and ethically bad behavior

4. Wisdom from above

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. **18** And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

a. Structure of verses

1. This wisdom produces the positive benefits in verse 14

- o Understanding
- o Good behavior
- o Gentleness

2. This wisdom has nine qualities

- o From above
- o Pure
- o Peaceable
- o Gentle
- o Reasonable
- o Full of mercy
- o [Full of] good fruits
- o Unwavering
- o Without hypocrisy

3. The product of this wisdom—is righteousness

4. How this righteousness is produced—in peace by peacemakers [who have this kind of wisdom]

b. The qualities of good wisdom

1. From above = **ανωθεν**

a. Contrast with verse 15—the wisdom that is ‘natural’ and ‘earthly’

b. Same word ‘from above’—the source of every good/perfect gift from the Father of Lights—1:17

2. Pure = **μεν αγνοσ**

a. Two words used here

1. **μεν** = truly, certainly

2. **αγνοσ** = chaste, clean, immaculate, free from fault—derived from **αγιοσ** (holy)

b. Usage of pure

o **II Cor 11:2**—I am jealous over you—I have espoused you to one husband—so that I can present you as a chaste virgin to Christ

o **Phil 4:8**—Whatever things are true . . . honest . . . just . . . pure . . . think on these things

3. Peaceable = **ειρηνικοσ**

a. That which produces safety, security, happiness, prosperity

b. Used elsewhere only in **Heb 12:11**—chastening produces the ‘peaceable fruit of righteousness’

4. Gentle = **ειπεικησ**

a. Same word used in **Phil 4:5**—‘moderation’

b. Yielding spirit—equitable—fair—mild

- c. Opposite **I Pe 2:18**—‘froward’ = unfair, crooked, perverse = **σκολιος**
5. Reasonable = **ευπειθησ**
- a. Used only here in the NT
 - b. ‘compliant’ ‘easily obeying’
 - c. Derived from word meaning to be confident, to trust, to obey
 - d. Related to how one *responds* in action—not only limited to rational thinking
6. Full of two things—mercy and good works
- a. Full = **μεστος**—when one’s mind is full of something—full of certain thoughts/emotions
 - b. Mercy = **ελεος**--kindness, good will toward persons in misery—emotion that produces the following action → good works
 - c. Good works = literally good fruits [**καρπος**]
 - o Sermon on Mount (Mt 7:17-18)—good trees produce good fruit
 - o Parable of Sower (Mk 4:8)—good ground brings forth good fruit (30, 60, 100 times)
 - o Bearing fruit (Jn 15:8,16)—My Father is glorified by your bearing fruit—I have chosen you to bear fruit, and that your fruit will be permanent
7. Two characteristics related to stability and direction/focus
- a. Unwavering = **αδιακριτος**
 - 1. Without ambiguity, without uncertainty, without any wavering
 - 2. Used only here in the NT
 - 3. But this is the *negation* of the same root word used in **1:6**—used to describe the ‘wavering’ man
 - b. Without hypocrisy = **ανυποκριτος**
 - 1. The *negation* of the root word meaning ‘to impersonate, pretend, simulate, feign’
 - 2. The opposite word is used once—in Lk 20:20—describing those ‘spies’ who were sent to catch Jesus in His words—like the Pharisees and Herodians—later Mark tells us that Jesus knew their hypocrisy
 - 3. ‘without hypocrisy’
 - o **Rom 12:9**—Let love be without dissimulation/hypocrisy
 - o **II Tim 1:5**—Paul commends Timothy’s faith as being ‘unfeigned’