

# Devilish Vs. Divine Wisdom

**Text:** James 3:13-18

## Introduction:

1. Review context – warnings concerning the evil, destructive use of the tongue in Vs. 1-12. This next section is connected with what has been discussed in the previous verses.
2. In this paragraph, James sets forth two kinds of wisdom that relate to the entire picture of the tongue just given. The use of the tongue manifests the nature of the spirit dominating a man, whether or not it is wisdom coming from above.
3. This passage reveals both the characteristics and the corresponding fruit of each of these two types of wisdom.

Let's consider the text under three headings...

## I. The Discussion Point (Vs. 13)

### A. A Question Posed (Vs. 13a)

1. This question seems to echo back to the introductory statement in Vs. 1 where James tackles the problem of those in the assembly who were in pursuit of a teaching position. They desired to be in reputation for wisdom and knowledge.
2. James will answer this question by discussing the two types of wisdom that will clearly identify who is in possession of true, godly wisdom and knowledge.

### B. A Challenge Given (Vs. 13b)

1. "let him show" = the importance of practice matching profession again highlighted
2. "good conversation" = 'conversation' means lifestyle, manner of life
3. "meekness of wisdom" = meekness has been defined as "that attitude of heart that produces gentleness and mildness in dealing with others. It is not weakness but power under control. The meek man does not feel a need to contend for the recognition of his rights or acceptance of his personal views." (Hiebert). Moo writes, "This Christian meekness involves a healthy understanding of our own unworthiness before God and a corresponding humility and lack of pride in our dealings with our fellowmen."

## II. The Devilish Wisdom (Vs. 14-16)

### A. Its Symptoms (Vs. 14)

1. Jealousy – "bitter envying"
  - a. 'bitter' = harsh, caustic and toxic
  - b. 'envying' = jealousy

2. Disunity – ‘strife’
  - a. ‘strife’ = a divisive and party spirit. Translated elsewhere as ‘contention’ (Rom. 2:8; Phil. 1:16) Strife is “exertion or contention for superiority” (Webster) It is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20)
  - b. “in your hearts” = problem is internal. The heart is being dominated by ungodly instincts. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (Lk. 6:45)
  - c. “glory not” = don’t boast! Boasting and arrogance the natural fruit of an envious and divisive spirit.
  - d. “lie not against the truth” = their claim to be spiritual when in practice they were carnal, was a blight against the truth.

**B. Its Source (Vs. 15)**

1. Where it IS NOT from – “descendeth not from above” It is not from a heavenly origin.
2. Where it IS from – “but is earthly, sensual, devilish”
  - a. Earthly = pertaining to this world, opposite of heavenly.
  - b. Sensual – soulish. Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor. 2:14 to describe the “natural man”. “The term describes a wisdom that springs from the mental and emotional impulses of fallen humanity.” (Hiebert)
  - c. Devilish – word is literally “demoniacal” This wisdom is demonic! Wisdom that is marked by jealousy, division and boasting reveals the work of the wicked one seeking to undermine the work of God. Note: In this chapter, the Word of God unmasks the sinister source of an evil use of the tongue. It is a tongue under the control of hell (Vs. 6)

**C. Its Spoilage (Vs. 16)**

This verse outlines the fruit/results of this contentious wisdom

1. Confusion – disorder, turbulence and chaos in the assembly. Word is translated elsewhere as ‘commotion’ (Luke 21:9) and ‘tumults’ (2 Cor. 12:20) This type of behavior disrupts and destroys the unity and fellowship of God’s people.
2. Corruption – “every evil work” The destructive influences of devilish wisdom know no limits. Just about any form of wickedness can spring up in an environment of division (e.g. broken marriages and families, immorality, severance from fellowship of God’s people etc...)

### **III. The Divine Wisdom (Vs. 17-18)**

#### **A. Its Features (Vs. 17)**

1. “first pure” = clean and undefiled. The word ‘first’ important. Heavenly wisdom has no room for unholiness or compromise. Peace is not pursued at the expense of purity.
2. “then peaceable” = it promotes harmony amongst God’s people
3. “gentle” = respect for the feelings of others
4. “easy to be intreated” = open to reason and willing to listen. Opposite of being stubborn and unyielding.
5. “full of mercy and good fruits” = ‘full’ is a word of abundance. True wisdom is not harsh and rude.
6. “without partiality” = to be ‘partial’ is to be unreasonably biased. Godly wisdom acts consistently. It is the opposite to the sort of duplicity discussed in Vs. 9-12.
7. “without hypocrisy” = without a mask, sincere and genuine.

#### **B. Its Fruit (Vs. 18)**

Contrast the “fruit of righteousness” in this verse with the “every evil work” of Vs. 16

1. The Seed – peace from peace making believers
2. The fruit – righteousness. This kind of godly fruit is produced in an environment of peace; an environment contrary to that of strife and division (Vs. 14-16) Note: Biblical peace and righteousness (holiness) are connected.

#### **Conclusion:**

1. Which of these two types of wisdom is dominating your heart and life? Heavenly or earthly wisdom? Divine or devilish wisdom? Contentious or peaceful wisdom?
2. The key to godly wisdom is for our hearts to be full of the Word of God and of the Spirit of God. When we are Word filled and Spirit filled, our tongues will be instruments that will promote harmony and holiness amongst God’s people.