

# How To Recognize Bad Advice

[James 3:13-16 NKJV](#) “13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”

There are many people who don't seem to have a clue about knowing what's wrong in their world today, or what to do about it. Everyone's "standard of living" seems to have shifted and confusion abounds on these matters. As always, the Bible not only identifies the cause, but also gives the cure. Based upon this passage in James 3, there are two tests to help us see if we are following bad advice.

## 1. The “fruit” test.

Observe the “good conduct” that should be evident if one is following the wisdom “from above” ([James 3:15](#)). If, however, a person's religious wisdom (or philosophy) produces “bitter envy and self-seeking,” it is not from Heaven.

“Bitter envy” is the motive for: “keying” another's expensive car; constantly raising taxes “on the rich;” throwing animal blood on someone's fur coat; destroying a “capitalist's” business; engaging in a murderous “jihad” or “crusade” against the non-members of a religion; or setting fires to burn down big houses.

“Self-seeking” is the motive for: claiming to be the spiritual head of a religion (e.g. Pope, Prophet, Father Divine, TV-Ministries, Buddha, Archbishop, Swami, Imam, Reverend, Rabbi, ad infinitum); or attempting to control political power over many people(s); or being the ego-stroked spoiled brat(s) who must be the center of attention regardless of what it takes or what embarrassment it causes.

This is just as Jesus taught His disciples to recognize false teachers in [Matthew 7:15-20](#)

15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

God could call “the works of the flesh” “evident” in [Galatians 5:19-21](#) because no one in their right moral mind could ever justify such practices, and even people in the world find reason to condemn such deeds!

## 2. The “Level” Test.

There are 3 levels of lower wisdom listed in the James 3 passage: 1) “earthly,” 2) “sensual,” 3) “demonic.”

1) By “earthly,” is meant only the level of humankind. Jesus could draw spiritual lessons based upon “earthly” things ([John 3:12](#)), but to live on that level means not to lift oneself above that to a higher moral plain ([Philippians 3:17-21](#)). This lifestyle is justified because “everybody else does it,” or “look what my parents did to me,” or “I haven't been treated fairly.” It lets humans set their own morals and is woefully inadequate for improving anyone. These people use “human government” to set their standards and grant them “rights” to practice: homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, birth control outside of marriage, covetousness, divorce and remarriage, prejudice against the “rich,” extortion, murder. This is the violent “do it to them because they have done it to me” philosophy that totally contradicts God's wisdom in [Romans 12:17-21](#):

“17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. 20 Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

2) By “sensual” is meant only the level of animals. Everything that only appeals to the baser instincts of sex and survival reduces humans to acting like “natural brute beasts,” with “eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin” ([2 Peter 2:12-14](#)). They engage in sexual behavior without any respect for God’s laws concerning marriage, adultery, or fornication ([Hebrews 13:4](#)). They react to present situations and circumstances without any regard for the future, living entirely for the moment(s) of pleasure. These people use drugs, alcohol, bars, dorms, movies, TV shows, blogs, etc. and find like-minded individuals who will make this way of life sound “normal.” This is contrary to God’s faithful leaders. Moses, for example, in [Hebrews 11:25-26](#), chose, “25 rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”

Truly, John’s inspired assessment in [1 John 2:15-17](#) is completely accurate:

“15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

When the fleeting moments of lust, avarice, and selfishness have had sway, one is doused with sadness because it’s over; moans because nothing is completely satisfactory; and feels emptiness because he/she, or their friends, didn’t “commit” to long-term relationships! Jesus adequately described such a person in [Luke 15:13-20](#).

3) By “demonic” is meant only the level of the Devil. Everyone that “loves evil” has been completely “de-graded.” Rape and robbery, pillage and plunder, hijacking and kidnapping, all without conscience, are characteristic of this life. One doesn’t have to attend a “church of Satan” to be his minister. In [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#) the Apostle Paul wrote:

“13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

The line of evil is clearly drawn as Jesus said in [John 7:7](#), “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.” When people have reached this level of life, then they think Jesus Christ and the church of Christ are their enemies! Jesus further identified this as

“19 the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” ([John 3:19-20](#)).

While in this mindset, even God gives up on them ([Romans 1:18-32](#)). Again, there is no question that evil can be recognized, for Jesus said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” ([Luke 6:45](#)). These are vile, perverse, uncontrolled, blind, and ignorant people who have descended into the darkness of their own doing and may not be recoverable. A stark warning is given in [Ephesians 4:17-20](#)

“17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ.”

If, by a careful study of God’s wisdom contained in His Bible, we have determined on which low level we are living, but we wish to go up to a higher level of life, we must then get on the escalator of “repentance.” God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” ([Acts 17:30](#)), because “godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” ([2 Corinthians 7:10](#)). If you can, respond to what “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” ([Acts 2:38](#)). We should all pattern our “good conduct” ([James 3:13](#)) after Jesus Christ ([1 Peter 2:21-25](#)). Contact a church of Christ nearest you for further study in God’s Word.

—[John T. Polk II](#)—