

James 3 – Taming the Tongue

Read James 3:1 - 12

Vs 1 Why does James caution people from becoming teachers? James has a sober admonition for those who would become teachers in the church. They must take the responsibility seriously, because their accountability is greater and they shall receive a stricter judgment. God will judge with special strictness those who have influence over others. Notice he said “we”, meaning what? James was a teacher! Jesus addressed this concept in Luke 12:48. See Heb 5:12

Vs 2 Keeping in mind James as a teacher, what is he saying everyone (even teachers) do? The word translated stumble or offend means *to trip (fall), to make a mistake, to offend*. Just because a person is a teacher or a Pastor or someone you look up to, they are not without error. Extend mercy and grace to others, as you’d want them to extend mercy and grace to you. James provided a way to measure spiritual maturity for teachers and for all Christians. Jesus demonstrated in Matthew 12:34-37 that words are the revelation of the inner character. What is the focus of the rest of this verse? It is talking about your WORDS. What James is saying is if you keep from saying wrong things, things that offend, you are mature (perfect) and therefore able to control (*bridle, to be a bit-leader, i.e. to curb, hold in check, restrain*) your body. This is talking about physical actions. In other words, if you do what you say, and you say only right things, you will do only right things.

Vs 3 Here James is using an analogy common with horsemen. What does a bit (which is attached to a bridle) do to a horse? It provides a way for you to control the powerful horse’s body.

Vs 4 What other analogy does James make? Just like a small bit can control a strong horse, the small rudder of a ship allows the skipper to control the entire vessel.

Remember the subject is the tongue. If the tongue is like a bit in the mouth of a horse or the rudder on a ship, it leaves us with the question: Who or what holds the reins, or who or what directs the rudder? Some people have no hand on the reins or rudder, and therefore say whatever comes into their mind. Others direct their tongue from their emotions or from aspects of their carnal nature. James points us towards having the Spirit of God, working through the new man, set directing hands on the reins and rudder that is our tongue.

Vs 5 What did James conclude about the tongue? It is small but boasts great things (*to talk big, i.e. be arrogant, egotistic*). What is the result of an uncontrolled tongue? Although it starts small, it results in a great (*big*) fire!

Vs 6 This verse confirms the tongue is a fire, a source of destruction. What else characterizes the tongue? It is a source of a world (*cosmos*) of iniquity (*unrighteousness*). What three things happens to the Body of Christ when the tongue is not controlled? It defiles (*soils*) the whole body, sets on fire (*ignites, burn up*) the course of nature (*genesis - source of life*) and is set on fire (*to operate destructively*) by hell. See Prov 10:19-21, 12:25, 16:24, 18:21

Vs 7 What does this verse say about taming? Man is able to tame (i.e. *control, curb, restrain*) every animal.

Vs 8 What can not be tamed? The tongue! A wild animal can be more easily tamed than the tongue. Are we then without hope? No, because God can do what man cannot. The tongue can be brought under the power and the control of the Holy Spirit. See Eph 4:29, Gal 5:22-23 How does James now describe the tongue? It is an unruly (*that which cannot be restrained*) evil (*of a bad nature*) and full of deadly poison (*snake venom*).

Vs 9 – 12 Describe the contradictory character of the tongue. The tongue can be used for the highest calling (to bless our God) and it can be used for the lowest evil (to curse men, made in the very image of God). In those who are born again, it shouldn’t be said that out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. Read Matt 16:16, 26:74.

Our speech should be consistently glorifying to God. We shouldn’t use one vocabulary or one tone of speaking at church and a different one at home or on the job.

James points to the ultimate impossibility of a spring sending forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening. Jesus taught in Matthew 12:34-37 that a man’s words are a reliable revelation of his inner character. What we say can indicate what we are.

Charles Spurgeon said “It would be a monstrosity, a thing to be wondered at, and stared at as unnatural and absurd if a fig tree started bearing olive berries and it is just as unnatural for a Christian to live in sin. Can he so live as to bear the fruits of iniquity instead of the fruits of righteousness? God forbid that it should be so!”

The demonstration of a living faith in the presence of wisdom

Read James 3:13-18

Vs 13 Is it ok to want to be wise and understanding? Yes, these are characteristics of Godliness. What does James say we need to do to be wise and understanding? Our conduct should be seen in good deeds done gently (*not arrogantly or in a showy fashion*) and in humility (*meekness, controlled power, not weak*) by truth (*wisdom*). The word *sophos* ('wise') was the technical term among the Jews for the teacher, the scribe, the rabbi. True wisdom is also evident by its meek manner. Those who do their good works in a way designed to bring attention to themselves show they lack true wisdom. James is still speaking to those who would be teachers noting it is not what they say that he is concerned with, but rather how they live. 1 Tim 3:6 this is why you don't want new converts to start teaching.

Vs 14 What does James say is the opposite of meekness of wisdom? Bitter envy and self-seeking. These words actually refer to someone who has a critical, contentious, fight-provoking manner. Think "my way or the highway" and "I am always right" and "you can't tell me otherwise". What is the instruction to those who have these characteristics? They are not to boast against or lie against the truth. Anyone who shows bitter envy and self-seeking is not actually wise but they are deceived in thinking how wise they are. In other words, they are proud!

Vs 15 Where does this prideful wisdom come from? Not from above (heaven, God) but from the earth (the world, the god of this world 2 Cor 4:4). What kind of wisdom is it? This wisdom is characteristic of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Isa 14:12-15, Eze 28:17, Ps 10:14, Prov 16:18, 1 Tim 3:6

This wisdom that James referred to was not really wisdom at all. It is the wisdom claimed by the would-be teachers of James 3:14 whose lives contradict their claims. Such 'wisdom' evaluates everything by worldly standards and makes personal gain life's highest goal.

- Earthly: Having this life only in view.
- Sensual: Carnal - having for its object the gratification of the passions of the flesh, to the exclusion of the spirit.
- Demonic: Inspired by demons, and maintained in the soul by their indwelling influence.

Vs 16 What accompanies envy and self-seeking? Confusion (*instability*) and every evil thing: This is the fruit of human, earthly wisdom. The wisdom of the world, the flesh, and the devil may be able to accomplish things, but always with the ultimate fruit of confusion and every evil thing. In other words, no Godly good.

Vs 17 What are the characteristics of Godly wisdom?

Pure, absent of any sinful attitude or motive.

Peaceable. It is gentle and kind.

Gentle. A man who is gentle is the man who knows when it is actually wrong to apply the strict letter of the law. He knows how to forgive when strict justice gives him a perfect right to condemn. It is the ability to extend to others the kindly consideration we would wish to receive ourselves.

Willing to yield. It is not stubborn nor obstinate, the opposite of stiff and unbending. It is not being stubborn but being willing to listen to reason and to appeal. It is not rigid but is skilled in knowing when wisely to yield.

Full of mercy. It does not judge others strictly on the basis of the law, but will extend a generous hand full of mercy. This wisdom knows that the same measure of mercy we grant to others is the same measure God will use with us. Matt 7:2

Full of good fruits. This wisdom can be seen by the fruit it produces.

Without partiality. Without judging, prejudice or showing favoritism.

Without hypocrisy. Without pretending to be what it is not; acting always in its own character; never working under a mask. Seeking nothing but God's glory.

Vs 18 How do we get the fruit of righteousness (*of being right, rightness*)? By peacemakers sowing (planting) peace. This fruit is like a seed that will bear fruit as it is sown by those who make peace. Luke 3:8,9; Rom 6:22; Phil 1:11