

The Book of James – Chapter 3

(James 2:17,18)

Introduction: Here we have an entire chapter on the tongue! This teaching reaches all of us in a most practical way. James by inspiration speaks to us about this unruly member of the body which can destroy so much good. Very eye opening doctrine and practical help to know what is acceptable and to know what is God's wisdom from above and what is evil wisdom and speech from the Devil. Never forget God is privy to every conversation we have even to the point of our thoughts.

The story goes of a man fishing on a pier and not catching a thing. Two ladies happened down to where the man was fishing just as the man pulled in a rather small fish. One of the ladies commented how the man should be ashamed to catch that poor little fish. The man without even looking up being a bit discouraged said "Maybe you are right, lady, but if the fish had kept his mouth shut he wouldn't have been caught."

Key Verses – James 3:1,2

Vs.1 -*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*

James is speaking to you and me as he begins with the words "My brethren..." What I mean is that obviously the following wisdom is for believers. James is addressing specifically the fact that we should not be too quick to pursue the status of being a teacher of doctrine. The leadership role taken as a teacher of God's word is a great responsibility. Think for a moment how many people can and will be influenced by one person's personal understanding and teaching of the doctrines of the Bible. I without hesitation encourage anyone assuming the role as a teacher or the office of pastor to be sure God has called them. There is a great danger in teaching the wrong doctrine or maybe being very vague in helping people completely understand the teachings of the scriptures.

Let me remind you what the verse says, and that is that the teacher or leader assuming the role as teacher will be judged with greater scrutiny. So, comes the warning to us by the writer James that to rush into a teaching or leadership role, God has not directed could be a very bad decision with far reaching hurtful results. We will all be judged but leaders will be under even greater scrutiny, and far reaching judgment. **Heb.13:7,17**

Vs.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.*

We all offend others at times. To offend means to cause to stumble or trip someone's walk with God; specifically in what words come out of our mouths. Imagine with me if just one

day every word we said was tape recorded; then was played back for all the world to hear. Well God hears our words every day and more importantly the thought and intent behind them.

Now, if we do not offend or cause people to stumble by our words, then we are becoming more mature and complete as a Christian. If a person can bring his tongue under control than that person can bring his whole body under subjection to God's word. So then we see by what the verse says, that, to keep our words from offending others is a fairly good read of our spiritual condition.

The illustration is that of a ship which is turned about by such a small rudder. Some great ships as aircraft carriers and oil tankers are up to 1/5 of a mile long. They are turned by such a seemingly small rudder which shows the influence that even a small member such as the tongue can have. It seems the tongue though a small member of the body is a significant indicator of the spiritual health of the Christian.

Vs.3 - *Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.*

Anyone who has ever ridden a horse would know just how important it is to have the reins they hold in their hands attached to the horse's mouth. That bit and bridle are able to control almost 1,000 pounds of astonishing speed and power. I certainly would not want to be sitting atop a galloping horse with no ability to control that animal. It also amazing just an experienced rider can do with a horse obeying every tug on the bit within its mouth. The horse is seen to reach the full gallop and then be turned almost 180 degrees because they are responding to the rider's desires. **Psalm 39:1** *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.* David wanted to keep his testimony right.

Vs.4 - *Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.*

Here is another illustration God gives us showing the power of the tongue. The sailing ship could be blown off course by very strong winds if it did not have a rudder guided by the helmsman. That great ship like any Christian can be kept on course if the rudder (tongue) is brought under the control of the pilot or governor as the verse indicates here. That governor for Christians should be the Holy Spirit of God who guides us into all truth. **John 15:26** The Holy Spirit will help us to control our tongue if we yield ourselves to His help.

Vs.5 - *Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*

Yes it is the boasting of a person, the prideful words and haughty spirit that those words come from that can cause such disaster. There is nothing hotter or more destructive than a forest fire. All the fuel and oxygen to keep it going can destroy large amounts of forested area and many times human life and property. The tongue though a little member speaks great and swelling words which do not originate at the tongue but spring from the heart. It is this prideful spirit in man that destroys all it touches. How much damage can be done by one person and their boasting tongue? Not to mention the damage done by a lying and gossiping tongue.

Vs.6 - *And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

The tongue is that fire or destructive force which is bathed in sin. We can say things that destroy others and also ruin our testimonies as Christian's. There is so much destruction literally just sitting on the tip of our tongues. Of all the different members of our body – ears, hands, eyes, and feet... it is the tongue that has the capacity to defile the whole body. It can set on fire all that it comes in contact with. Who can measure the evils from which have arisen scandals, slander, and profanity, lies, blasphemy, and obscenities, by the tongue? Who can measure the amount of fights, contentions, strife's, suspicions, and wars? "*Course of nature*" – Our tongues set a course of action and what we say cannot be retracted only forgiven.

Vs.7 - *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:*

There are thousands upon thousands of different types of animals which for the most part are under man's dominion. They have that natural fear of man and subsequently many very dangerous animals have been tamed. Imagine the tiger, lion and a huge elephant doing the bidding of the person with the whip, as in a circus. Man reigns supreme over the animal kingdom which is ordained of God. **Genesis 1:26** *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

Vs.8 - *But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

Verse seven ends with a grammar colon meaning the thought is not complete. So we begin verse eight with the word "*But*" which means there will be an opposite thought on the other side of the word 'but'. Though the fiercest beast can be tamed the tongue seems to be untameable. It is unruly meaning it is ungovernable; not given to authority. The tongue simply will not be restrained. **Psalms 140:3** *They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.* **Rom.3:13** *Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:* There is the sense that God wants

us to see the bite of serpent as it injects it deadly poison, as akin to our tongue. Oh the damage inflicted by this little member the tongue. Almost makes you want to search for the anti-venom, which is... to bridle it, and change its source! Clean up the heart, and yield to the Holy Spirit.

Prov.17:28 *Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.* **Prov.29:11** *A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.* Sometimes we just need to be quiet!

Vs.9 - *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.*

So with the same tongue we speak praise and blessings upon our God we curse our fellow human beings. There is something strange about cursing men who are made in the very image of God the Father whom we bless.

Vs.10 - *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*

From one source flows blessings and cursing's. Absolute opposites in that the same tongue proclaims blessings and spews out cursing's. This just shouldn't be happening but it does.

Vs.11 - *Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?*

When you go to the source of a fountain you will either get fresh water or bitter not both. The water will either be agreeable to the taste or unpleasant. Not both!

Vs.12 - *Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.*

Such a thing is impossible in nature, and must be seen as equally absurd in Christian conduct. A fig-tree bears only figs; and so the tongue ought to speak only one way or the other. **Matt.7:16-18** *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.* What an illustration for us to see. It shows the power of the tongue; it shows what a dangerous power it is for a man to wield who has not the proper relationship with the Lord. Think how wrong and against nature it is for a fig tree to bear olives. It is impossible and so it should be for cursing to come out of a mouth that blesses God.

Vs.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.*

Who is a wise man that holds any place of leadership among the people; let it be known that the Lord requires that his life be one of good report? The man who has knowledge and imparts that knowledge to others must do it with humility. Let that man know he is accountable to God and the Bible. **Philippians 1:27** *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ:”*

Vs.14 - *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.*

It would be the worst of lies to harbour envy and strife in your heart and then to glory in it as if you were qualified to pass on the wisdom of God. Nothing disqualifies a person faster than to have a bitter or boastful spirit. **Prov.16:18** *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.* Sooner or later your attitude of pride will catch up to you. The truth is that at some point that bitterness and envy will come out, because it is in your heart and we know we speak that which comes from our hearts. **Matt.12:35; Luke 6:45**

Vs.15 -*This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.*

This wisdom doesn't come from God but straight out of the pit of hell. What thinking you say? The thinking that a man could be placed in a leadership role and have a boastful striving spirit in his heart. It is a carnal thought at best to think that God would be pleased with such thinking. **1Cor.3:3** *For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* The wisdom that believes it can harbour strife in the heart and teach the wisdom of God is sensual meaning fleshly and not from a godly point of view. It is devilish in that this is what the demons would think they could do.

Vs.16 -*For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

What is the actual fruit of envying and strife? Confusion is the result of envying and strife in the hearts of those who want to impart knowledge to others. **1Cor.14:33** *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.* No one who is glorying in that state of mind or heart is able to communicate clearly the truth of scripture. It is true that where this spirit is there will only be an evil result to look forward to. Where this spirit prevails in a church, it is of course impossible to expect any good work to come from that.

Vs.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.*

1Cor. 2:6,7 *Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our*

glory: The wisdom which comes from heaven, is from God. The man who is characterised by that wisdom will be pure, peaceable, etc. James 1:22 tells us to do what the Bible instructs us to do and be. The Bible when saturating the life of the believer will make us more like its Author.

“But the wisdom that is from above is first”

- **pure** – clean, truth, unmixed, undefiled, **Prov.15:4; 30:5;1Tim.6:3**- A wholesome tongue...
- **peaceable** – quiet, calm, no strife, **Rom.14:19; Heb.12:14.**
- **gentle** –mild (but strong) – **John 10;11; 2Cor.10:1** – The Lord was strong, tough, but gentle.
- **easy to be intreated** – easily persuaded, yielding
- **full of mercy** – compassion, pity - **Matt.9:36-38** What do you see when you look at others?
- **good fruits** – prompts good works, deeds, **Matt.7:20** God’s wisdom in means good fruit!
- **without partiality** – no favour toward anyone, **2:1-4**
- **without hypocrisy** - genuine, real, sincere,

Vs.18 - *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

The effect of all that has been taught in chapter three, about the tongue and the wisdom from above; brings forth good fruit to the doer of the word. Righteousness brings peace when sown in peace. It should be our desire to bring two entities together – God and man. **Rom.5:9-11** Peace in the heart because the truth (fruit of righteousness) sown in peace of them that make peace!

Notes:
