

A STUDY OF JAMES ⁽¹²⁾

Controlling our tongues
James 3:1-12

The Book of James

- Continuing our study of James, we have addressed numerous practical applications.
- We now come to an emphasis on the tongue – the way we talk.
- James has previously addressed the tongue – **James 1:19-20, 26; 4:11.**

The tongue is also mentioned in other areas –
e.g. **James 2:14** – saying you have faith,
4:13 – making plans without God,
5:16 – confessing our trespasses

Let not many of you be teachers – **3:1-2**

- James begins to address the tongue with a warning to teachers. Why?
- Words are the primary vehicle of teachers
- Likely, James was aware of problems with some who wanted to teach who were either unqualified (e.g., wrong motives) or unprepared.

Let not many of you be teachers – **3:1-2**

- He begins by noting not everyone should be teachers (He says, “become”, no “be”).
- But doesn’t scripture say we are all to be teachers?
1 Peter 3:15, Hebrews 5:12-14, Acts 8:4, etc.?
- In one sense, we all should defend our faith, but not all can teach formally or publicly.
- James’ point is about both desire and ability.
Cf. Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, 1 Peter 4:11, etc.
- Some are not capable or have boundaries
- Many are simply not ready yet

Let not many of you be teachers – **3:1-2**

- *They will receive a stricter judgment*
- Teachers are accountable for what they teach
- We must ALL guard our character, but people look to their leaders for guidance, including example.

Cf. Matthew 23:1-4

- Of equal concern is understanding God's word. The Bible is clear about false teachers and their followers - **Matthew 15:13-14, 2 Peter 2:2-3, etc.**
- If we teach error, we will be held accountable.
- Consider **1 Timothy 4:12-16**

Let not many of you be teachers – **3:1-2**

- *For we all stumble in many things ... in word*
- For... ties this to the previous verse (and teachers)
- No one is perfect, especially with our conversations.
- IF one can completely control his tongue he is described as *perfect*, Τέλειος, (telios). Found only in James 5x **Jas. 1:4 (2x), 1:17, 1:25** and here.
The word means one perfect, without blemish and complete.
- IF we can control our tongues, we can control everything – *able to bridle the whole body*.

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- The Bible has much to say about the tongue.
- There are sins of the tongue
 - lying, gossip, boasting, grumblings, criticisms, harsh language, profanity & coarse jesting, slander, angry words, spreading false doctrine, etc.
- But the tongue can also be used for good – encouragement, correction, praise, to inform and teach, communicate, etc.

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- The power of the tongue illustrated (3-5)
- *We put bits in horses mouths and they obey us.*
Cf. Jas. 1:26
- *Look at ships, turned by a small rudder wherever the pilot desires.*
- NOTE: These examples show that the tongue CAN be controlled!
- *A little fire (a spark) can destroy a forest.* Our tongues, like a fire, uncontrolled can grow out of control and do great damage. *It is a small member but...*

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- Our “little” tongue affects the whole body (6)
- *It is a fire* – that can destroy. NOTE: One way big fires are prevented is with controlled burns. The process requires planning, preparation and the right conditions. OUR tongue “is lit” (like a pilot light). It is up to control how it burns.
- *A world of iniquity*. Or unrighteousness. Sinful behavior living outside of God’s laws. A world – means it is the source of MANY types of iniquity.

The power of our tongues – **3:3-12**

- Our “little” tongue affects the whole body. (**6**)
- *It is so set among our members so that it defiles the whole body* – while not literal, the point reflects that our tongues are a likely source of sinful conduct.
- *It sets on fire the course of nature.* NASB, *the course of our life*; LSB, *the course of our existence*.
The word for nature is γένεσις (genesis). The foundation of who we are.
Recall **Matthew 15:11, 17-20**

The power of our tongues – **3:3-12**

- Our “little” tongue affects the whole body. (**6**)
- *It is set on fire by hell* – the Greek word, γέεννα, geenah.
Uses 12x in NT. 11x by Jesus in the gospels and our text.
- The point – all sinful acts (including the tongue) originate with Satan and his domain.
- Consider **Genesis 3:4**, the first sin developed as the result of words.

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- Our “little” tongue affects the whole body. (6)
- *It is set on fire by hell –*
- Consider the damage the tongue can do:
 - It destroys relationships and trust, divides churches
 - Words have started wars and conflicts
 - Words have caused deaths
 - Words have damaged one's self-worth
 - Words can defile the character of society with profanity, etc.
 - Words can lead to distrust because of lies, half-truths, etc.
 - They will lead one to hell because of false doctrines being taught.

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- The tongue is difficult to tame (7-8)
- *Every kind of beast and bird... has been tamed* –
Man has learned how to tame and control animals
- *But the tongue no one can tame* –
This is hyperbole (exaggeration for effect)
We CAN control our tongues – consider the illustrations of bits and ships.
Consider **James 1:19, Matthew 12:35-37, Proverbs 21:23, Ephesians 4:29**, etc.
- But it VERY hard. *It is an unruly* (not controlled by others) *evil, full of deadly poison.*

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- It can be inconsistent (9-12)
- *With it we bless God and curse men* –
How consistent are we spiritually?
Do we praise God when we assemble, and curse our neighbor on the way home?
Do we read our Bibles and pray, but gossip and criticize others behind their back?
- *Out of the same mouth proceeds blessings and cursings.*

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- It can be inconsistent (9-12)
- *"These things ought not to be so!"*
This should NOT describe the life of a Christian!
See **1 John 4:20** and apply "brother" any way you think of
- *A spring does not bring forth both fresh and bitter (e.g., salt, briny, stale) from the same opening.*
What happens when we combine fresh and salt water? It may be diluted, but it is still salty water.
Even worse, what if we add a sprig of hemlock to our water supply? The WHOLE is contaminated.

The power of our tongues – **3:3-12**

- It can be inconsistent (**9-12**)
- *Can a fig tree... bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?*
The obvious answer is no!
WHAT you plant is what you are going to get!
- The Bible calls for consistency in our lives –
James 1:8, 5:12, Romans 12:9,
Ephesians 4:25, Philippians 1:27, etc.

The power of our tongues – 3:3-12

- Concluding thoughts:
- Clearly, the point James is making is that we MUST control our tongues.
- IF you want better control of you life, start with your words.
- If you can control your tongue, you can control your whole body.

What does your speech say
about who you are?

Let us pray!