

James 3 - Teachers Beware; The Power of the Tongue; The Tongue's Affect on Our Life; Wisdom in Speech; False vs True Wisdom; Evidence of Wisdom

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James 3

(7) Faith controls the tongue (3:1-12)

The chapter division between James 2-3 is unnatural. We should consider them as flowing together: James 2 ends by telling us that works prove our faith is useful. James 3 talks

about the ultimate work we can do as a Christian, which is controlling what we say. The greatest good work that a Christian can do to prove their faith is useful is to control their tongue. If you're a Christian who has learned to control your tongue, you've reached a level of spirituality, in terms of practical righteousness, that not many Christians ever achieve.

(A) The tongue's influence (3:1-5)

(a) In relation to teaching (3:1)

1 Do not become teachers in large numbers, my brothers, since you know that **we who are teachers will incur will incur a stricter** judgment.

1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more severely than others.

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

- "Do not" - negative imperative, present tense; this implies that there was a movement among James' audience by many to become teachers. James is warning that this movement must be stopped.

- "...teachers" - *didaskalos*, only usage in the NT; it refers to someone who is fitted/gifted to teach, or thinks himself so. The Greek literally reads: "Do not press yourself into the role of teaching."

— James is referring to someone who places themselves in the role of a teacher, not of an individual, but of a group or a church. Those who teach should be sure it is the answer to a gift.

— Every Christian is responsible to teach (share, impart the gospel to) others what God has revealed in His Word (Cf. Matt 28:19; Heb 5:12). James is warning people who have either taken on the role of teacher in the church, or are thinking about it, to count the cost.

— James is not dealing with the issue of false teaching *per se*, but with the problem of ungifted or untrained teachers

— The reason why James commanded his readers to not become teachers in large numbers was because teachers have influence over the thoughts and actions of people who listen to them, whether for good or evil. Thus, with the ability to do much good also comes with the ability to do much harm.

- In James' day, the Jews regarded teachers with great awe and gave them much honor. Since there was no NT at the time (James was likely the first NT book written), a church service would consist of men in the congregation rising and addressing the rest of the assembly (Cf. 1 Cor 14:26-33).

— Consequently, there were many men doing this, although they were not qualified with ability, publicly for the sake of prestige or some other unworthy, prideful motive (Cf. Titus 1:10-11).

- "...we *who are teachers*" - James included himself to be a teacher who would also be under a stricter judgment

- "...will incur" - *lambanō*, future tense, indicates this judgment will occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ

- "...stricter" - *meγas*, a comparative adjective implies degrees of treatment at the judgment seat of Christ

— If God has given you the gift of teaching, you are in a position of greater accountability because you are directing the thoughts of many people. The gift of teaching is not like the gift of mercy or administration or giving in that it influences the thinking of many people. The gift of teaching has the ability to influence more people than any other spiritual gift that God has given to the Church.

When a preacher or teacher stands in front of God's people, he must remember these things:

1. If people leave knowing five helpful hints to a better life, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, the pastor has failed.
2. If people leave having been amused by humor, entertained by anecdotes, or captivated by dramatic stories,, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, the pastor has failed.
3. If people leave admiring the pastor, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, the preacher has failed—and will be held to account before God.

Understanding needs to be the first goal of any preacher or teacher. Their job is to "put the cookies on the bottom shelf."

(b) In relation to all of life (3:2)

2 For **we allstumble** in many *ways*. **If anyone does not stumble in what he says**, he is a **perfect** man, **ableto rein in the whole body as well**.

2 For we all stumble in many *ways*. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

2 For all of us make many mistakes. If someone does not make any mistakes when he speaks, he is perfect and able to control his whole body.

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.

- A person of many words will err ("stumble") in his/her speech because the tongue is the hardest member of the body to control (Cf. v5-12). No man has been able to master their

tongue yet except Jesus Christ, yet spiritual maturity requires a tamed tongue.

- "...we all" - James included himself among those who stumble/err in their speech, yet he did not excuse it.

- "...If anyone does not stumble in what he says" - James provides a way to measure our spiritual maturity, both for teachers and for all believers.

- "...stumble" - *ptaiō*, fall, offend, err; the present tense indicates that this stumbling happens consistently/repeatedly. This does not imply a fatal fall, but rather something that trips us up and hinders our spiritual progress.

- "...perfect" - *teleios*, not sinless, but someone who has reached a goal of spiritual maturity. A person who consistently does not stumble in word is someone who has reached the goal of spiritual maturity.

- "...able to rein in the whole body as well" - the control of the tongue is a product of faith and, if faith can control the tongue, it can control anything.

— If a Christian can control their tongue, James says that he/she can master anything.

Controlling anything else in your life is easy in comparison to controlling the tongue.

— The point is that someone who has control over his tongue has reached spiritual maturity in the sense of controlling his body, and thus qualifies as a teacher. Even teachers will stumble, but their lives must be generally characterized by a lack of stumbling, especially with their tongue.

— The point James makes here, that if a person can control their tongue, which is a very small organ of the body, they can control everything else in regards to their body. James now gives us three illustrates of similar small things that have a disproportionate influence on larger things:

1. Bit vs the horse (v3)
2. Rudder vs the ship (v4)
3. Spark vs the fire (v5)

(c) **Illustrations of the tongue's influence** (3:3-5)

(i) Bit in a horse's mouth (3:3)

3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their whole body as well.

3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

3 Now if we put bits into horses' mouths to make them obey us, we can guide their whole bodies as well.

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

- The key point of this illustration, and the following, is that the bit is tiny, yet it is powerful enough and has the ability to control a large, powerful horse.
- First we need to understand that the bit, even though small, is important. Without it, the horse is completely out of control and doesn't know what to do. It has no directional capability.
- You don't solve the problem of an unruly horse by keeping it tied up in the barn. In the same way, even a vow of silence is not the ultimate answer for our misuse of the tongue.
- You solve the problem of an unruly horse by letting an experienced rider hold the reins. If you have no one with hands on the reins of your tongue, whatever pops into your mind comes out of your mouth.

(ii) Rudder of the ship (3:4)

4 Look at **the ships too**: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are *nevertheless* directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot determines.

4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

4 And look at ships! They are so big that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the helmsman directs.

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.

- "...the ships too" - connects this illustration with v3 to establish the same point: a small thing can control a large thing.

— Just as horses have a will of their own (internal forces), ships are huge and driven by rough winds (external forces). Both are controlled by very small devices by comparison.

— Both the bit and the rudder can overcome contrary forces: the wild nature of the horse, or the wind and currents that would drive a ship off course. They also, with small incremental movements, can affect things greatly.

— A small pull of the reins of a horse, or a small move of the rudder of a ship turns them in a different direction. The idea is that these small things (tongue, bit, rudder) have the ability to direct much larger, more powerful things (our life, a horse, a ship).

(iii) Spark and a forest fire (3:5)

5 So also the tongue is a small part of *the body*, and *yet* it boasts of great things. **See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!**

5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and *yet* it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

5 In the same way, the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can boast of great achievements. A huge forest can be set on fire by a little flame.

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

- James summarizes his two previous illustrations (v3-4) by saying that although the tongue is small compared to the size of the body, it is powerful enough to direct the course of your life.

— Keep in mind the power of words...in Gen 1:1, God "spoke" the universe into existence. The Bible is called "God's Word" and it changes lives. Words are the most powerful things a person can do. The tongue has more power than any other organ in our body, including our minds.

- "...See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!" - James now moves from the need to control the tongue to the destruction that happens when you don't: his illustration is that even the smallest of spark (careless word) can cause a huge fire that destroys an entire forest.

— If you start a small campfire, you don't ever imagine it turning into a raging inferno. Same goes for our tongue...sometimes we don't think a careless comment could turn into a raging brush fire of broken or damaged relationships or loss of privileges or blessings...but it can and does.

— Sometimes a campfire can be beneficial, warming, pleasant. But we have to know when and where it is appropriate. Sometimes controlling our tongue is not what we say, but when we say it and/or how we say it.

- We can't just focus on the negative aspects of our tongue...it has the same control and long-lasting ramifications for good as much as it does for bad. A critical remark can inflict lasting injury on another person, but a well-timed encouragement or compliment can inspire someone for the rest of their life.

Prov 12:18: There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Prov 21:23: One who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

Ps 141:3: Set a guard, LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Eccl 3:7: A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak.

(B) The tongue's propensity for evil (3:6-12)

(a) The tongue's Satanic potential (3:6)

6 And **the tongue is a fire**, the *very* **world of unrighteousness**; the tongue is set among our body's parts as **that which defiles the whole body** and **sets on fire the course of our life**, and **isset on fire by hell**.

6 And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell.

6 The tongue is a fire, a world of evil. Placed among the parts of our bodies, the tongue contaminates the whole body and sets on fire the course of life, and is itself set on fire by hell.

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 a fire" - an uncontrolled fire is destructive; the tongue, if uncontrolled, is equally destructive. It takes years, even decades, for a forest to recover from a forest fire. An uncontrolled tongue has the same kind of recovery time.

— Prov 26:18-19 speaks of a person who doesn't realize or consider the destructive power of their words:

18 Like a maniac who shoots flaming arrows, arrows, and death,

19 So is a person who deceives his neighbor, And says, "Was I not joking?"

— Translation: a crazy jihadist on a hill shooting at people is the same thing as someone who constantly says things that are deceptive or manipulative in a sarcastic way.

— Or do you walk around with a loaded gun in your mouth? If you get jabbed, do you shoot back? If someone jabs you, do you wait for an opportunity, find that person's weakness, then shoot back? Is your mouth like a loaded gun...and when someone gets off a weak shot at you, either deliberately or without malice, do you unleash both barrels verbally on them in retaliation?

— There are people right now, of various ages, who are mentally dealing with something that someone told them years, even decades, ago. Something that cut them to the heart, that they haven't forgotten about, and it's still affecting them to this day.

- "...the world of [the] unrighteousness" - there is a specific iniquity (there is an untranslated definite article ["the"] before "unrighteousness," referring to a specific iniquity), referring to the forces of evil in which the believer is constantly in conflict.

— As part of this vast "world" of iniquity, the tongue is unique because no other body part has the range of possibility or capability of causing evil. God does not cause this; the Greek is clear that the tongue "appoints itself" to do this, and as a result, it defiles the whole body.

- Two destructive things our tongues can do:

1. Defile our whole body
2. Set our life on fire

- "...that which defiles the whole body" - we need to understand that our tongue is available for Satan to use. Satan can use an unbeliever any time he wants. But Satan's goal is to use a Christian, and their speech, to further his agenda.

— The "defiling" of the tongue is a moral stain; a tongue wrongly used pollutes the whole person, every part of their being.

— So the world system, which is hostile to God, displays this hostility in the body through the tongue. By permitting itself to be used as a vehicle for sin, the tongue sets on fire the course of our life.

Prov 18:21a: Death and life are in the power of the tongue

- "...sets on fire the course of *our* life" - if we permit our tongue to be used as an organ for sin, we risk torching the entire course of our life. Our valued relationships are set ablaze by an uncontrolled tongue.

Eph 4:26-27: Be angry, and *yet* do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an **opportunity**...

— An opportunity is a foothold in my life, a place that I've carved out and allowed the devil to live there rent free. The command here is to not allow the devil to gain a foothold, stake a claim, on my tongue because of my unresolved anger issues

- "...is set on fire" - the tongue is the gateway that Satan uses to spread the evil influences of hell like "fire" to inflame every area of our life that it touches.

— The present passive participle implies it is habitually set on fire by hell because it (the tongue) consistently *permits* itself to be used by Satan. An uncontrolled tongue is a tool of Satan in spreading the fires of hell.

— Our tongue can start a forest fire...you know why? Because there is already a forest. You say something to someone, maybe sarcastically, after other people have said something similar to that person. You have a forest full of brush already, after your comment you now you have a fire.

— You ever said something seemingly innocent, then wondered why there was such a firestorm over it? It's because there was already a forest there, and you just lit a match.

(b) The tongue is untamable (3:7-8)

7 For every **species** of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is **tamed** and has been tamed by the human race.

7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.

7 For all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be or have been tamed by humans,

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:

- "...species" - nature or "category"; James is not saying that every wild animal on earth has been tamed, but rather that animals within every species or group in the animal kingdom have been tamed.

— There are four categories of animals (Gen 9:2): beasts (animals that walk), birds (animals that fly), creeping things (animals that crawl), and things in the sea (animals that swim)
- "...tamed" - *damazo*, subjugated, subdued. The entire animal kingdom has been "subdued" (controlled) but not necessarily domesticated.

8 But **no one among mankind can** tame the tongue; *it is* a **restless evil**, full of **deadly poison**.

8 But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison.

8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil filled with deadly poison.

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

- Although all four categories of the animal kingdom have been tamed, or open to subjection by man, the tongue is not and can not be tamed/subdued by mankind.

- "...no one *among* mankind" - everyone, no exceptions; if you're a human being, this includes you. This is the bad news.

— The good news is that the fact that the tongue cannot be tamed/subdued by man opens the opportunity for God to do the taming. What man cannot do naturally, God can do supernaturally.

— Humanity does not possess the capacity to tame the tongue. The only way to tame our tongue is supernaturally, through the Holy Spirit.

- "...can" - *dynamai*, present tense, calls attention to man's continual inability to tame the tongue

- "...restless evil" - fickle, inconsistent, ungovernable, unstable (Cf. 1:8); incapable of being restrained and always prone to break out in vicious words

— If we do not allow our tongue to be tamed by the Spirit, it is a "restless evil"

— "restless" - *akatastatos*, unstable; it is ever-stirring and changing, unpredictable, eluding man's grasp and thwarting all attempts to subdue it. It is like an untamed animal, pacing back and forth, ready to pounce on anything that comes near.

— "evil" - base and degraded in character; the nature of the untamed tongue is evil

- "...deadly poison" - *thanatēphoros ios*, the Greek literally reads "death bearing"; the impact of an unruly tongue is deadly; it is a weapon of mass destruction.

— The tongue is like an unruly animal, restless and dangerous. It seeks a prey and then pounces and kills. Some animals are poisonous, as are some tongues. The deceptive thing about poison is that it can work slowly, invisibly. A malicious word can spread, uncontested, and do a great damage to a person, a family, or an entire church. Animals can be tamed, a fire can be controlled, but only God can tame the tongue.

— The tongue can kill someone's emotions (bad-mouthing them), finances (bad mouthing their reputation or integrity), motivation (by denigrating their abilities or goals), or even their health (creating anxiety in them through uncontrolled speech).

— The most deadly poison is one that is tasteless and odorless: subtle criticism and slander, verbal venom which has done its work while the victim cannot react. It can include a word unsaid, an awkward silence, raised eyebrows, a quizzical look—all sent from the counsels of Satan. It can break hearts and ruin reputations.

(c) The tongue's inconsistency (3:9-12)

(i) The tongue praises God and curses men (3:9-10)

9 With it **webless our Lord and Father**, and with it **we curse people**, who have been **made in the likeness of God**;

9 With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;

9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in God's likeness.

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

- James now discusses how the tongue is inconsistent; one minute it will be praising the Lord, the next minute it will be dishonoring a loved one. Just as Peter's confession with his tongue blessed the Lord (Matt 16:16), he would later use that same tongue to deny Christ three times (Matt 26:69-75).

— The same tongue that John wanted to use to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:54-55) later said, "Dear friends, let us love one another" (1 John 4:7).

- "...we" [2x] - first person plural, meaning this is true of mankind in general

- "...bless *our* Lord and Father" - the highest use of the tongue

- "...curse people" - this lowest use of the tongue. When people curse one another, they are cursing God as well because every person was created in the image of God.

- "...made in the likeness of God" - when we "curse people" who were made in God's image, we implicitly curse the Prototype.

— The verb ("made") is in the perfect tense, teaching that the image of God was not totally obliterated in the Fall; this describes man in his present state, even after the Fall.

— The image of God on man after the Fall was *effaced*, but not *erased*. Sin marred man's image but did not destroy it. The worst sinner on earth still has value before God because they still bear God's image.

- When we unleash our tongue on another human being in the form of gossip, slander, malicious talk, defamatory statements, or antagonism, we are attacking someone who bears God's image. This becomes the basis for controlling our tongue.

— When I vent verbally against someone, I'm attacking someone who bears God's image—even if they deserve it and even if what I'm saying is completely true. When we understand that, it should remind us to reign in and control how we react and what we say.

— Evolution destroys this concept because it reduces people to nothing more than evolved animals, so if I slander them, who cares? That's not how believers are to categorize people, even unsaved or evil people.

— As we understand this concept of people created in God's image, it should motivate and encourage us to reign in our speech because I'm attacking someone who bears God's image.

10 from **the same mouth** come *both* blessing and cursing. My brothers *and sisters*, **these things should not be this way**.

10 from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. It should not be like this, my brothers!

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

- "...the same mouth" - this is the inconsistency; one minute our tongues are praising God, the next minute it is slandering our fellow man.

- "...these things should not be this way" - this is a moral abnormality; it is contrary to the will of God and also to the natural order of things

— A good historical example of someone who both blessed and cursed out of the same mouth is that of Martin Luther; a good biblical example is the life of Peter:

Martin Luther was a good historical example of James 3:10:

One of the pillars of the faith is Martin Luther. Late in his life, after all the good work he did completely revolutionizing the doctrine of soteriology and the founder of the Protestant movement, he wrote an 80-page tract (you can find it online for free) called *The Jews and Their Lies*. He rants for 80 pages against the Jewish people. Several historians have said that what Luther said in this tract became a blueprint for what Adolph Hitler would later do. Hitler called Luther his favorite theologian. Many Nazis who were defending themselves at the Nuremberg Trials stated that they were just doing what Martin Luther said.

We wouldn't have the Protestant Reformation without Martin Luther. This is why Satan starting working overtime on him because his same speech, from the exact same tongue later in his life, unleashed horrific evil. Seeds were planted for good and seeds were planted for evil from the same mouth of Martin Luther. This is exactly what James is talking about when he says in v6 that the tongue has the ability to be set on fire by the power of hell itself.

Peter was a good biblical example of James 3:10 (Cf. Matt 16:13-23):

Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was...Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus congratulated Peter, then told Peter that He was going to build His church on Peter's confession and gave Peter the keys of the kingdom. In the same setting, Jesus begins to predict His death and resurrection for the first time. After hearing Jesus, Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." Jesus rebuked Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!"

In v17, Jesus draws attention to Peter's confession and said that Peter's words were a revelation from God. In v23, after Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke Him, Jesus calls Peter Satan. The same tongue that just confessed the proper identity of Christ immediately rebukes Christ and tries to talk Him out of completing His life's mission. Satan hates it when God uses our tongues for good, so he works overtime to make sure that he is the one using Peter the next time. This shows the duplicitous nature of the tongue.

James will now give three illustrations to make the point of our inconsistent tongue:

1. Fresh and bitter water from a fountain (3:11)
2. Olives from a fig tree (3:12a)
3. Fresh water from salt water (3:12b)

(ii) Illustrations of the inconsistency (3:11-12)

(a) Fresh and bitter water from a fountain (3:11)

11 Does a spring send out from the same opening *both* **fresh** and **bitter** water?

11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter water?

11 A spring cannot pour both fresh and brackish water from the same opening, can it?

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

- The question demands a negative answer...

- The inconsistency of our tongue is unnatural, in fact it's an impossibility, just as fresh and bitter water coming from the same source is both unnatural and impossible. You wouldn't go to a water source and get fresh water from it one minute, then get bitter water from it the next. That is not how nature works.

— This is a truth that needs to be taught to Christians today...the average Christian thinks that when they join a church they're joining a sanctified community, and they get very distraught when they see hypocrisy in the church.

— Just because you join a church doesn't mean the sin nature doesn't still have control over you

- "...fresh" - clean and drinkable; refreshing

- "...bitter" - brackish, salty, undrinkable

Water as a Metaphor for Words

- Prov 10:11a: The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life
- Prov 13:14a: The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life
- Prov 18:4: The words of a person's mouth are deep waters

(b) Olives from a fig tree (3:12a)

(c) Fresh water from salt water (3:12b)

12 Can a fig tree, my brothers *and sisters*, bear olives, or a vine *bear* figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.

12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.

12 My brothers, a fig tree cannot produce olives, nor a grapevine figs, can it? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

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

- Again, this question demands a negative answer...

- When a believer doesn't control his speech, it's like a fig tree producing olives; it's contrary to nature and the natural created order. It's coming from our old nature, not our new nature.

— James 1:8 tells us about our new nature...we have this new nature, but when something derogatory or negative comes out of our mouth, it's not coming from our new nature—it's coming from the old nature.

— If it was coming from my new nature, it would be good, positive, uplifting speech because everything produces after its own kind.

— So a born again Christian without control over their tongue is like a freak of nature...they should be speaking out of their new nature, but they keep dialing back into their old nature...they are like a fig tree producing olives.

When believers are exposed to this teaching, they are convicted and pray to the Lord for tongue control, help me to control my tongue. However, that is not the issue. God wants us to use our tongue, He just wants us to use it in the right way.

Prov 4:23: Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life. The tongue is nothing more than a window to the heart. Chances are, if I have a tongue problem, I have a heart problem. But if wonderful things are coming out of my mouth, wonderful things are present in my heart. If your heart is under control, your speech automatically is under control. If your heart is out of control, your speech will also be out of control.

When I'm joyful, things are great, good things flow out of my mouth. But when I'm bitter, angry, or anxious, then bitterness, anger, and anxiety will flow out of my mouth. You can tell a person's heart simply by listening to their mouth.

What comes up in the bucket was down in the well.

Jesus said the same thing to the Pharisees in Matt 12:34: **You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.**

- Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are speaking evil things because that is their nature (they were evil). Their mouths were just fulfilling their hearts.
 - The problem was not what they said, but what resided in their hearts. Their mouth was the result of their unregenerate heart.

Then in Matt 12:36 Jesus says: **But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.**

- "...careless word" - an unscripted word; impromptu, unplanned or unchoreographed; a word spoken without deliberation. A word spoken when you didn't know the microphone was still on.
 - These "careless words" are what we should use to judge the heart condition
 - We should not judge someone's character by their planned, written, pre-formed speeches; those are careful, deliberate words, designed words which can be spoken in a way that doesn't reflect my heart.
 - What comes out of my mouth in the heat of the moment is what is really down deep in my heart
- "...the day of judgment" - refers to the Great White Throne Judgment, which is the judgment of the unsaved
 - Believers are not subject to this judgment because we've been imputed with the alien righteousness of Christ

This is why James speaks of "sources" in v9-12...the heart is the source for what comes out of the mouth...if you fix the heart, you fix the mouth.

See **6 Sins We Commit With Our Mouth That Produce Death Instead of Life** in [Tongue](#).

II. Wisdom (James 3:13—5:20)

(1) Wisdom defined (3:13-18)

(A) Wisdom demonstrated by works (3:13)

13 Who among you is **wise** and **understanding**? **Let him show** by his good behavior his deeds in the **gentleness** of wisdom.

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his noble conduct that his actions are done humbly and wisely.

13 Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

- "...wise" - *sophia*, to possess moral insight; refers to skill in deciding practical issues of conduct; wisdom is more than the accumulation of data or knowledge.

— Wisdom was already discussed (Cf. 1:6); it can only be obtained from God, and involves practically applying knowledge to everyday life

- "...understanding" - *epistēmōn*, only time word used in NT; a specialist or expert who applies their knowledge and expertise to situations. Real wisdom and understanding will demonstrate themselves in our lives through our conduct.

— We can perceive understanding in people fairly easily, but wisdom is much more difficult to identify. James says that if you want to determine if someone is wise, look at their behavior. The wisdom that James is talking about does not result in what one thinks or says, but rather in what one does.

- "...Let him show" - *deiknyō*, demonstrate, expose, give evidence; imperative mood, meaning it's a command.

— James is a book of demonstration. If you say that you have

— In a sense, both wisdom and understanding are like faith...they are invisible, inner qualities that are not readily evident. If a person considers himself to be wise or understanding, it is fair to expect that these qualities would show themselves in regular life.

— You can tell a person who has wisdom by how they act, not what they say; wisdom is always determined by your actions; knowledge is determined by what you know. Wisdom is determined by your ability to take knowledge and apply it to your daily life.

— You can't have wisdom without knowledge; knowledge was never intended by God to be the last step...God wants us to graduate into wisdom. God never gave knowledge as the last step (1:22; Cf. John 13:17).

— There are a lot of people who are knowledgeable, but un-wise because they never put their knowledge into practice. Wisdom is not demonstrated by one's vast knowledge of something, but rather by their behavior.

— The wisdom James is referencing is the wisdom that gives insight to the will of God and His purposes, and gives the ability to fulfill His purposes

— If there is anyone who is characterized by these two traits, they should demonstrate it through their actions. Wisdom must be proved by works just like faith must be proved by works (Cf. 2:14-26). Works, not words, is the test of wisdom.

- "...gentleness" - *prauteti*, describes a horse that had been broken and trained to submit to a bridle. It pictures strength under control, specifically controlled by the Holy Spirit.

— The only way to control the tongue is to consistently and perpetually renew our mind through intake of Scripture, and place our mind deliberately under the authority of the Holy Spirit.

— Wisdom is not the loudest voice in the room, shouting to everyone how much you know; wisdom has a quiet gentleness to it

Spiritual maturity is the time spent learning God's truth, and the time you have spent obeying it. [Bruce Baker]

James will now contrast wisdom that comes from two different places. The world's wisdom, which does not come from God (v14-16), and God's wisdom, which comes from above (v17-18).

(B) Wisdom from below (3:14-16)

14 But if you have **bitter jealousy** and **selfish ambition** in your heart, **do not be arrogant** and **solie against the truth**.

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your hearts, stop boasting and slandering the truth.

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

- "...bitter jealousy" - harsh attitude; a resentful attitude toward others because of their successes

- "...selfish ambition" - obsessed with pleasing yourself or advancing your own self-interest in an unethical manner, at the expense of others

— Both "bitter jealousy" and "selfish ambition" refer to someone who has a critical or contentious spirit. These traits are the opposite of the "gentleness of wisdom" (v13). These traits must not inhabit the heart of a teacher or he will find himself saying things that he should not.

— These are attitudes and actions toward others and self that are the opposite of graciousness, which always seeks the welfare of others before themselves

- "...do not be arrogant" - do not boast or gloat over another; do not assume superiority

- "...lie against the truth" - living a life that does not agree with God's truth. Your bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are not fooling anyone about how wise you are.

— "the truth" - the article "the" modifying "truth" refers to the Gospel. Thus, false wisdom evolves from this moral condition, which was originally caused by an untamed tongue. So "lying against the truth" means teaching untrue things, things that oppose the truth.

15 **This wisdom** is not that which comes down from above, but is **earthly, natural, demonic**.

15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

15 That kind of wisdom does not come from above. No, it is worldly, self-centered, and demonic.

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

- "This wisdom" - the "wisdom" of v14 is not really wisdom at all. It is the "wisdom" claimed by those who don't have it because their lives contradict their claims.

- "...earthly" - worldly; only having this life in view

- "...natural" - sensual, fleshly; like an animal with the fulfillment of their passions as the object for their gratification. This arises out of man's fallen sin nature (Cf. 1 Cor 2:14; Jude 19).

- "...demonic" - inspired by the demonic realm and maintained by their indwelling influence — False wisdom originates on the three fronts of spiritual warfare: the world, the flesh and the devil

16 For where **jealousy** and **selfishambition** exist, there is **disorder** and every **evilthing**.

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

16 For wherever jealousy and rivalry exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

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

- Now that James has defined wisdom (v13), he explains (v15-16) that there is a false wisdom that comes from the world, and ultimately from Satan, using six Proverbs

- The result of false (earthly) wisdom: disorder and sinfulness; the reason for the problems of v14...

- "...jealousy" - see note on v14

- "...selfish ambition" - see note on v14

— Earthly wisdom climbs over people or undermines them in order to get ahead. God's wisdom lifts and encourages others while trusting God to lead.

— Earthly wisdom asks: How do I protect myself, win, or get ahead? How do I secure what I deserve? God's wisdom asks: How do I honor God, love others, and pursue peace? It requires faith and dependence upon God.

— In so many situations, the average believer will walk by sight and do what they have to do in order to get what they think they deserve. However, walking by faith in a situation will depend on the Lord to provide.

- "...disorder" - *akatastasia*, instability, disturbance, confusion; it's a form of anarchy, confused thinking, disharmony, restlessness, disruptive decision-making, unsettledness; commotion, chaos

— It's easy to tell when something is displeasing to God because it is characterized by instability, confusion, disharmony, and chaos. God is not a God of confusion, but of peace

(Cf. 1 Cor 14:33).

— In 1:8, it described the result of being double-minded; in 3:8, it described the result of an uncontrolled tongue. Here, it refers to sinful actions.

- "...evil thing" - vile deeds; a reference to all forms of evil, especially moral evil

1. Jealous

- Prov 6:34: For jealousy enrages a man,
And he will not spare in the day of vengeance.
 - When you're jealous, you don't think rationally; the twin sister of jealousy is envy (a stronger form of jealousy). James says that when you're operating in jealousy, you not operating in divine wisdom.

2. Selfish ambition

- Prov 16:18: Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before stumbling.
 - A NT example is Diotrephes (3 John 9) who was an ecclesiastical leader in the Church. John is saying that these churches will not respond to apostolic teaching because Diotrephes wants to be pre-eminent over the apostles.

3. Arrogant

- Prov 8:13: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverted mouth, I hate."
 - People who operate out of a sense of self, without seeking God's glory or the benefit of others. The prideful are on a collision course with God.
 - **Scripture & Pride:** Prov 16:18 • Is 14:12-15 • Ezek 28:12-17 • 1 Tim 3:6 • Acts 12:21-23 • 2 Cor 12:7 • 1 Peter 5:5; Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2; 4)
 - **Hall of the Humbled:** Satan (Is 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-17; 1 Tim 3:6) • Uzziah (2 Chr 26:16) • Herod (Acts 12:20-23) • Paul (2 Cor 12:1-10)
 - There are some sins that God seems to put up with in His people by His mercy, but pride doesn't seem to be one of them. It seems like God keeps pride on a pretty short leash in His people.

4. Earthly, natural

- Prov 14:12: There is a way *which seems* right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.
 - This wisdom does not come from God; it comes from the world, from man's flesh, or from Satan himself. This wisdom *seems* right to us, it *appears* right to us, but it's not from God.
 - Solomon describes this wisdom in Ecclesiastes as "nothing new under the sun" (Cf. 1:9). It's natural wisdom, which doesn't have the vantage point of heaven.

5. Demonic

- Prov 27:20: Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,
Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.
 - The more you move in the direction of earthly wisdom, the more your life is unsatisfying. Ecclesiastes calls it "chasing after the wind"; earthly pursuits never satisfy

6. Contentious

- Prov 11:29: He who troubles his own house will inherit wind,
And the foolish will be servant to the wisehearted.
 - In an environment where there is always contention, godly wisdom is not present

(C) Wisdom from above (3:17-18)

17 But the wisdom from above is **first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy.**

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

17 However, the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, willing to yield, full of compassion and good deeds, and without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

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.

- James now contrasts the false "wisdom" of v14-16 with 7 characteristics of heavenly (God's) wisdom:

- "...first" - primary and fundamental. All other traits are external to a man's heart. God is looking for purity of motive (Cf. 1 Sam 16:7).

- "...pure" - *hagnos*, it is undefiled and clean, without any flaw; uncontaminated by the elements in v14-16 (jealousy, selfish ambition, arrogance, disorder). It includes spiritual integrity and moral sincerity.

— Same Greek word is used to describe Christ (1 John 3:3); it is free from all characteristics of false wisdom

Prov 15:26: Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, But pleasant words are pure.

- "...then" - the next 6 external characteristics follow logically from internal purity

- "...peace-loving" - *eirēnikos*, a promoter of peace, a peace-lover, but not at the expense of purity. It is the opposite of contentious; not seeking to be disruptive or argumentative; they are looking for ways to make things cohesive, bringing people together.

— The world's wisdom is contentious, but wisdom from above is peaceable (Eph 2:14)

Prov 3:1-2: My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.

- "...gentle" - *epieikēs*, considerate, forbearing; courteous; with an air of sweet reasonableness; not seeking revenge; fair, generous in dealings with others; opposite of argumentative.

— It is a disposition that does not seek its own rights, but rather takes into consideration the feelings of others; it carries the concept of equity and fairness

— If you're insulted by someone or treated unfairly, and instead of acting in the flesh you subdue your flesh, God says you're stronger than a man who goes out to war and captures a city.

Prov 16:32: He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

- "...reasonable" - *eupeithēs*, willing to yield, compliant, openness to reason; not thinking you are always right; yielding to persuasion; respectful; willing to listen with an open mind; ability to change mind if properly persuaded; teachable; a wise man knows how much he doesn't know.

— We're not called to be open-minded, we're called to use judgment, always discerning whether something is consistent with God's Word

— Worship is mentally active...God never tells Christians to check their brains at the door (Cf. Bereans, Acts 17:11)

Prov 14:15: The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.

- "...full of mercy and good fruits" - yielding compassion, pity, kind actions or helpful deeds. As a result, good fruits (a variety of good deeds) are produced on behalf of the needy.

— The world tells us that if we're merciful to people, we're getting stomped on or taken advantage of; the Bible teaches that the more merciful we are to people, the more we're watering ourselves

— Mercy is one of God's essential qualities; He does not give to us what we deserve. Mercy identifies with the difficulties of others; it shows concern for those who suffer pain or hardship.

— Godly wisdom is analogized to a tree that gives good fruit; similar imagery used by Jesus of Vine and branches in Upper Room (John 15)

Prov 3:18: She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.

— God never calls Christians to *produce* fruit, He calls them to *bear* fruit. Producing fruit is the branch trying to do it under its own power; bearing fruit is allowing the Vine to produce the fruit by simply staying connected to the Vine.

— The fruit we produce won't last; the fruit we bear will last, because it was ultimately produced by the Vine

- "...impartial" - *adiakritos*, consistent in conviction, unwavering; undivided in his commitment and conviction; a person without ambiguity
- It reinforces consistency in contrast to the untamed tongue, which is inconsistent
 - Prov 24:16: For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in *time of* calamity.
- The fact that you get knocked down is not the issue, because that happens to everyone; it's how fast can you get back up
- It speaks of a resilience or unwavering nature that Godly wisdom provides
- "...free of hypocrisy" - *anypokritos*, not two-faced; sincere, genuine, free from all pretense
 - Prov 28:13: He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.
- Hypocrisy is a double-life, which is something Christians are more than capable of. Our sin nature didn't go away when we came to faith, it just now lives alongside our new nature. However, after coming to faith, we now have the ability to deny the sin nature, whereas before belief we did not.
- Because our sin nature is still around, the Christian is capable of a double-life

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

18 And a harvest of righteousness is grown from the seed of peace planted by peacemakers.

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

- The ISV translation is probably best for this verse. Another way to render it is: The seeds of peace, planted by peacemakers, grows a harvest of righteousness.

- Righteousness cannot be produced when conditions are full of strife, jealousy and selfishness, which are products of false (worldly) wisdom

Now after James defines what wisdom is, and differentiates between worldly (false) wisdom and divine (true) wisdom, he now takes that wisdom that he has defined for us and begins to apply it to every area of life James 4-5)...because that is what wisdom is, the application of knowledge to our daily life.

Homiletics on James 3

- Our tongues (our words) are powerful tools. We use them to praise God one minute, then tear down our fellow man the next.

- Complaining is one of the most destructive uses of our words. Complaining, even about the smallest detail, is paramount to complaining about God and what He has provided for us. There is never an excuse to complain about anything.
- Our words show our heart condition, in effect our mouths are the “exhaust pipe” of our heart
 - Since no man (by himself) can tame the tongue (3:8), the only way to control it is to look to the Holy Spirit to change our hearts.
 - Ps 51:10 says “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”
 - We must ask God’s help in creating in us a pure heart, which will have the effect of changing our words
- Wisdom is not based on worldly knowledge, level of education, success
 - Wisdom is right conduct due to right thinking
 - Wisdom is not what you know—it’s how you act; wisdom is observable
 - Ps 1:1: Blessed is the man who **walks not** in the counsel of the ungodly, nor **stands** in the path of sinners, nor **sits** in the seat of the scornful.
- James outlines two types of wisdom: Godly wisdom and human wisdom:
- Human wisdom:
 - Source: earthly, unspiritual, demonic
 - Characteristics: “bitter envy” (resentful attitude toward others); “selfish ambition” (obsessed with pleasing self, even at expense of others)
 - Results: Confusion, anarchy, disharmony, disorder, disruptive decision-making, and eventually every evil practice
- Godly wisdom:
 - Source: heaven (God)
 - Characteristics: humility, pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocrisy
 - Results: good conduct based on above characteristics