

“The Power Of The Tongue”

James 3:1-13

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July 7, 2024

Teaching Aim: To demonstrate the power of the human tongue. To realize, though small in size, the tongue can be used to bring about either good or evil. To recognize the reality that a few unwise words can injure a person for life. To understand no one can tame the tongue on his or her own, we need the help of God’s Holy Spirit working within us. To make it our goal to use our tongues every day to bring God glory.

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (*BIBLE STUDY*)

Part I: People should count the cost before becoming a teacher of God’s Word (Jam. 3:1-2)

1. As we come to **James chapter 3**, we come to one of the most practical sections in all of Scripture. According to **verse 1**, to whom was James writing? What specific kind of teacher was James referring to in **verse 1**? (See **Matt. 7:15-17**) Why will these teachers receive a stricter judgment than, say a schoolteacher, or even an ordinary Christian? Why will teachers be judged more strictly when they mishandle the Word of God or teach it wrongly?
2. It appears many Jews of the *diaspora* (the dispersion) desired to be teachers, but many of those for the wrong reasons (**vs. 1**). What are some wrong reasons that people want to be pastors or teachers of God’s Word today? (See **Luke 20:45-47**) Do you think people would be more cautious if they realized that teachers of God’s Word will not only be judged more strictly for the way they teach the Bible, but also for the way they live their lives? In studying the life of Jesus, who did He speak of the most harshly against? (See **Matt. 23:13-36**) Will Christians be judged for the way we live our lives? If so, how? (See **2 Cor. 5:10**)
3. If a person “*stumbles*” while walking, what is about to happen (**vs. 2**)? (See **Prov. 16:18**) What are some ways that Christians stumble in their spiritual walk today? How have you see Christians stumble with their tongues? What are some ways that you’ve stumbled personally with your tongue? According to James, “*If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man.*” What did James mean by being “*a perfect man*?” As you grow more mature in Christ, have you noticed that you are gaining more and more control over your tongue? If not, why not? When will Christians finally reach complete maturity in their faith? (See **Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Cor. 13:11-12**)

4. What object did James use in **verse 2** as an illustration control over the entire body? How does this object work on a horse? Is God or our flesh holding the reigns in our lives when our tongue is out-of-control? What are some practical steps we can take to live out our lives more righteously and to be more sensitive to how we use our tongue. How will the Holy Spirit help the born-again Christian in this endeavor?

Part II: The surprising power of little objects (Jam. 3:3-6)

1. What three illustrations do we find James using in **verses 3-6** to demonstrate the truth that tiny things can control the direction of very large objects? In the ancient world, horses were used because of their speed and physical might for both travel and warfare. What little tool in a horse's mouth can quickly change the direction of this powerful animal (**vs. 3**)?
2. In **verse 4**, James used a second illustration, what was it? What little device can easily control the direction of a large ship? The largest ship in the world is "*The Seawise Giant*" at 1,504 feet long. This massive ship was built in Japan in 1979 and its gross tonnage is 260,941. How can a small rudder (perhaps just 2/10's of one percent of its total size) work to move such a large ship? How can our little tongue change the direction of our entire lives (**vs. 5a**)?
3. What third illustration did James use in **verse 5b**? Describe some of the most destructive fires that you've read about in recent years? What is the result of those fires today? What made these fires so destructive? How were some of these fires started? Why is "*a match*" a good metaphor for the human tongue? Have you ever witnessed somebody's tongue changing the whole atmosphere in a room for the worse? If so, what did they do? How have you seen the human tongue used for good to build others up?

Part III: God's order in nature and a few more illustrations (Jam. 3:7-12)

1. Why is fire such a great illustration for the damage that an out-of-control human tongue can cause (**vs. 6**)? What are some ways that our tongue can defile our whole body? How can our tongue injure others? Have you ever witnessed this? How long can the negative effects of hurtful words last in a victim's life? According to **Prov. 15:1**, how should we respond when we are faced with potential conflict? What does the Bible say will most likely happen if we respond gently in these situations? According to **Rom. 12:19-21**, Who should we allow to deal with people who continually attack us verbally? What did Jesus promise to believers who are being persecuted for their faith? (See **Matt. 5:10-12**)

2. According to **verse 6**, where do evil words originate? The Greek word for “hell” in **verse 6** is “Gehenna.” This word was used for the garbage dump SW of Jerusalem known for its perpetually burning fires. Why is Gehenna such a great illustration for hell? Why should this illustration scare everyone who misuses their tongues into repentance? Is it possible to destroy someone’s life by the things we say? Do you remember hurtful words that someone has said to you?

3. For years wild animals have been captured and trained to perform in circuses or other shows (**vs. 7**). Although a wild animal is captured and trained, it is important to remember that it is still a wild animal. Even though we are Christians, our tongues can still deeply hurt other people. According to James, what is even harder to tame than wild animals (**vs. 8**)? Why is this? Is this more a problem of the mouth or of the heart? (See **Jer. 17:9; Matt. 12:34a**) Who is the only One who can tame the human tongue? What did James liken evil words proceeding from the mouth to in **verse 8**? Have you ever known of someone whose life has been destroyed by the lies that somebody spoke against them? What did Warren Wiersbe mean when he said, “*When Jesus Christ is the Lord of the heart, then He is Lord of the lips too*”?

4. The Jews of James’ day had the practice of saying, “*Blessed be God*” every time God’s name was mentioned, they did this as a demonstration of their personal piety (**vs. 9**). According to **verse 9**, how else did some of these supposedly “*pious*” people use their tongues? Are we guilty of doing the same today as Christians? Why is it wrong for the same mouth to bless God and curse other people (**vs. 10**)? (See **Gen. 1:26-27**) What are some steps you can take to stop misusing your tongue? (See **Prov. 10:19; 14:29; 15:1; 17:27-28; 18:21**)

5. What illustrations from nature does James use to demonstrate that everything in God’s creation has a specific purpose (**vv. 11-12**) What is the purpose of the human tongue? What is the best way for a Christian to use his or her tongue? (See **Psa. 103:1; 106:1**) What characteristics should be evident in the life of a mature Christian? (See **Gal. 5:22-23**)

6. What would happen to the taste of freshly bottled water if salt water were mixed together with it (**vs. 11**)? What would happen if you were to drink it? What happens when bitter words are mixed into our everyday speech? How can misspoken words leave a trail of damage behind us? Fresh water springs are created to give fresh water; likewise the human tongue is created to glorify God, but does it? On a scale of 1-10, how are you doing at using your tongue to glorify God?

7. What can we learn about the proper use of our tongue from **verse 12**? Why do you think it is so difficult, even for Christians, to control our tongues? (See **Rom. 7:15-20**) How do fatigue, frustration, and anger come into play when we misuse our tongues? What are some things that trigger you into using your tongue to hurt other people? What are some disciplines that can help you avoid doing this? The theme James has been following (The Royal Law) has been to follow the law of love! (See **Jam. 2:8**) What can every Christian learn from **Jam. 1:19-20**?
8. According to **verse 13**, who is the person who is wise and understanding? Who is the ultimate example of this kind of living? (See **Luke 2:52; Matt. 11:29-30**) What if any difference is there between “*understanding*” and “*wisdom*?” Why is the distinction between the two important? What are some steps that you can take to become more knowledgeable in the things of the Lord and wiser in the application of that knowledge? Note: Another word for this kind of growth is “*maturity*.”
9. The Bible teaches us that no person can tame the tongue on their own. Who is the only One who can? How does He do this? If you are having trouble taming your tongue today and have never received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, why not do so right now in prayer? If you are a Christian and are still having trouble taming your tongue, why not ask God to help you through the power of His Holy Spirit and then personally take the necessary steps to become more righteous?

MINER’S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!*

- God will judge those who teach His Word more strictly than other Christians.
- Small objects can make huge impacts; this includes the human tongue.
- An out-of-control tongue can defile our whole body and negatively affect others for a lifetime.
- Sometimes it’s easier to recover from a physical attack than from verbal abuse.
- No person can tame the tongue; we need God’s help to do so.
- The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin for the purpose of correcting us and building us up spiritually; Satan condemns us of our sin for the purpose of destroying our lives.
- As Christians we are to train ourselves to be godly, this includes the proper use of that little muscle we call our tongue.