

James 3:1-16

Day 1

Controlling the Tongue. Read James 3:1-2

1. What warning did James give in 3:1 and why?

- In what ways and by whom might a teacher be judged more strictly?

FYI: "The synagogues and the early church services were places for open discussion, invited a plague of unqualified world-be teachers – ecclesiastical climbers who promoted themselves with loud, uninformed discussions which often led to disruption and dispute."
- R. Kent Hughes (126)

2. What do Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus say about the care they were to give to teaching? List key phrases.

- 1 Timothy 4:13
- 2 Timothy 2:15,24
- 2 Timothy 3:14-15
- 2 Timothy 4:2
- Titus 2:7,8

Digging Deeper

What were the apostles able to say about their teaching?

2 Corinthians 4:2

1 John 1:1-3

2 Peter 1:16

3. What is true of everyone? 3:2a (Cross-ref. 2:10; See Romans 3:10,23) *Why do you think this is brought up in the context of teaching? What destructive consequences can the mistakes/sins of a teacher have?*

4. What does having control of their tongue indicate about a person? 3:2b (Compare 1:26)

FYI: "**Perfect** – that is, he has come to 'completeness and maturity – not sinlessness.' The control of the tongue is evidence of extraordinary spiritual maturity...It is so natural to gossip and criticize and slander that the person who can control his tongue can easily rule the rest of his body."
- R. Kent Hughes (131)

5. How would James's warnings be *protective* for a teacher, for those considering teaching, or for those listening to teachers?

- What did Paul recognize about godless and empty teachings? 2 Timothy 2:16,17

6. Underline the characteristics and circle the (motives) of false teachers.

- 1 Timothy 1:6-7 For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. NAS
 - Acts 20:29,30 I know that after I am gone fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Even from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truth to draw the disciples away after them. NET
 - Matthew 7:15,16 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.
 - Philippians 1:15-17 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment. NET
 - Titus 1:10,11 For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. NIV
 - 2 Peter 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories...
- Which does this indicate about the intensity of attacks on the gospel even from the start?

7. What warning did Jesus give about teachers? Luke 20:45-47

8. What safeguard did the Bereans take with teachers? Acts 17:11

Applying the Word: In what sense are we all teachers? (See Colossians 3:16) With whom do your words exert a strong influence? With whom do you need to be more careful about your words?

Day 2

The Power of the Tongue. Read James 3:3-8

9. What three examples did James give to illustrate the destructive power of the tongue?

Analogy	What it says about the tongue
3:3	
3:4	
3:5	

FYI: "The word translated forest (*hyle*) could refer to the brush which covered so many Palestinian hills, and which, in that dry Mediterranean climate, could so easily and disastrously burst into flames." - Douglas Moo (123)

"Christians are commanded to keep their speech truthful (Ephesians 4:25), gracious (Ephesians 4:29), serious (Ephesians 5:4), relevant (Colossians 4:6), courageous (I Peter 3:15), corrective (Titus 1:9), always purposeful (Matthew 12:36), and always in the context of a possible testimony for the Lord (II Timothy 4:2). On the other hand, it should never be deceptive, abrasive, trivial, inane, fearful, compromising, idle, or hurtful to our Christian witness in any way."
- Henry Morris

10. From 3:6, list the phrases that describe the tongue.

FYI: "**set on fire by hell** Strong's NT:1067 *gehenna*— a deep, narrow glen to the south of Jerusalem, where the idolatrous Jews offered their children in sacrifice to Molech (2 Chron 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31; 19:2-6). This valley afterwards became the common receptacle for all the refuse of the city. Here the dead bodies of animals and of criminals, and all kinds of filth, were cast and consumed by fire kept always burning." - Easton's Bible Dictionary <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/eastons-bible-dictionary/gehenna.html>

Course of life "What others say to us and what we say to others can last a long time, for good or for evil. The casual sarcastic or critical remark can inflict a lasting injury on another person. The well-timed encouragement or compliment can inspire someone for the rest of their life."
- David Guzik

"James does not elaborate the ways in which the destructive power of the tongue can make itself felt: but he undoubtedly would have thought of those sins of speech that are enumerated in Proverbs: thoughtless 'chattering' (10:8...) lying (12:19); arrogant boasting (18:12) gossiping (10:18). Think what enormous, sometimes irreversible, harm can be caused by people by unsubstantiated, often false, rumors. Such a rumor can be harder to stop than any forest fires."
- Douglas Moo (126)

11. How did James illustrate the difficulty of taming the tongue? 3:7,8

- What is the source of our words? Matthew 15:18,19

12. Write out the phrases James used to describe the tongue in 3:8b. How would you sum up the power of the tongue? (See Proverbs 18:21)

FYI: "Restless..." The same word is used in 1:8 and it translated there as 'unstable.' There it is used to describe the double-minded person."
- Lyman Coleman (39)

"Like the deadliest poisons, those which are most effective are tasteless and odorless: subtle criticism and slander, verbal venom which has done its work before the victim can react."
- R. Kent Hughes (141)

"Human beings, on their own, do not have the ability to keep their tongues in check. But if you know Christ personally, God's power through the Holy Spirit's presence can transform your heart and take full control of the tongue. As Christ said regarding another impossibility: 'With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible' (Matt. 19:26)"
- Charles Swindoll (70)

13. Underline what else the tongue is compared to.

- Psalm 52:2 Your tongue carries out your destructive plans; it is as effective as a sharp razor, O deceiver
- Proverbs 16:27 A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips it is like a scorching fire. NIV
- Proverbs 18:7 A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul. NAS
- Proverbs 25:18 Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor.
- Romans 3:13,14 Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.

Applying the Word: *If you receive a compliment from someone and unfair criticism or ridicule from someone else, which do you tend to remember more? Why? Who in your life is an example of someone with careful, restrained speech?*

Day 3

The Inconsistent Use of the Tongue. Read James 3:9-12

14. What misuse of the tongue did James focus on in 3:9,10?

FYI: likeness of God. (see Genesis 1:26-27) "Even though scarred by thousands of years of sin and the curse, man is still made in the image of God, and should be respected as such. Even the most depraved of men can be 'renewed' in that image (Colossians 3:10) if they will only come to Christ for regeneration."
- Henry Morris

"It is theorized that the context for this discussion was a problem faced by the Jerusalem church. Certain teachers were using their tongues to criticize others (and were probably being criticized in return)."
- Lyman Colman (38)

15. What illustrations from nature did James give to show the inconsistency of talking with blessings and cursings? 3:11,12

FYI: "Pouring salt water into fresh produces salt water and mixing bad fruit with good fruit produced a bushel of rotten fruit. Likewise, mixing the contradictory speech of blessing and cursing will only produce negative results."

- The Nelson study Bible (2010)

"If our hearts fill to the brim with grace, shouldn't our lips overflow with goodness?...This sobering thought forces us to ask ourselves: From where is this inconsistent speech coming? Or if we're consistently negative, deceitful, or bitter, we have to consider what our tongue reveals about our hearts...The answer? Stop all attempts at self-control and surrender to God's control. He can quench the raging fire. He can tame the snarling beast. He can provide the antidote to the poison of hellish, hateful speech."

- Charles Swindoll (72,73)

16. Pick one of the following categories about problems with the tongue and list key phrases from the verses describing it. (Try to have the people in your group pick a different one.)

Deception: Psalms 55:20,21; Proverbs 26:18,19; Isaiah 5:20; Matthew 15:7,8

Flattery: Proverbs 26:24-26,28b; 29:5

Verbosity: Proverbs 10:19; 17:27,28

Lying: Psalm 4:2; Proverbs 12:19,22; 31:18; John 8:44

Gossip, Slander: Proverbs 6:12,13; 10:12; 11:9; 16:28

Anger: Proverbs 2:22; 9:11; 17:14; 29:11,22

Foul language: Ephesians 4:29; 5:4

17. Write out what Peter said about it all. 1 Peter 2:1

18. List the ways we should talk to each other and the reasons given:

- Ephesians 4:25,29-32
- Colossians 4:6

Digging Deeper

What is said about a virtuous woman?
Proverbs 31:11,12,26.

19. In the following, underline other metaphors used to describe *beneficial* words:

- Proverbs 3:4 The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit. NIV
- Proverbs 21:24 Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. NET
- Proverbs 10:11a, 20 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life...The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value. NIV

20. Mark *constructive* things said about the tongue.

- Proverbs 16:21 The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction. NET

Proverbs 15:1,7 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger...
The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not upright. NIV

- Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise person win him favor, but the words of a fool are self-destructive.

21. What power do we need to have? Philippians 4:13 What prayer do we need to make?
Psalm 19:14

Food for Thought "What would happen if we discovered that our emptiness has already been filled?...What if we realized that we're already loved, treasure, appreciated, and fulfilled? We wouldn't have to defend ourselves anymore. We wouldn't have to try to build ourselves up by cutting others down...As you realize your Father is the One taking care of you, I promise you'll understand that things really are going to be OK. And that kind of realization will begin to change how you speak for the rest of your life." - Ben Stuart (102)

"A number of years ago I discovered that it's virtually impossible to learn anything while I'm talking. That's undoubtedly true of everyone. So, rather than fill a conversational void with needless chatter, use the time you have with others to listen well in order to understand more about them. Ask open-ended questions until you find a topic that excites them. More often than not, the conversation will take a meaningful turn as they describe their field of interest and explain why they find it exciting. As they let you into their world, you have an opportunity to learn and gain insight into a realm of that person's expertise. When the time has passed, you haven't merely talked; you've connected." - Charles Swindoll (92)

Applying the Word: Think back over the last week. What kind of life-giving words did you speak to someone or did someone speak to you? How did that make you feel?
(Challenge for this week: The next time you are together with a group of people, try to make **every word** edifying.)

Day 4

Wisdom. Read James 3:13-16

22. What characterizes someone with wisdom? 3:13

Digging Deeper

See the qualifications Paul instructed Titus to look for in leaders/ "elders." Titus 1:5-9

FYI: "Some of James's readers were no doubt claiming to be wise and intelligent. The author challenges them to prove it. Wisdom is not a philosophical theory but something that has to be demonstrated in daily life."

- The Africa Bible Commentary (1513)

"The ambitious would-be teachers who had been devastating the church with their incendiary tongues were claiming to be superior in their wisdom and understanding. They imagined those who disagreed to be mentally inferior. In their thinking, wisdom had to do with the mind, intellectual prowess." - R. Kent Hughes (150)

"Smarts, wits, and education do not make a person wise; what does make a person wise is how well his or her lifestyle reflects the truth." - Charles Swindoll (77)

23. Why do you think humility/gentleness/meekness are an outgrowth of godly wisdom?

- What men were characterized by humility? Numbers 12:3; Matthew 11:29

FYI: "When we truly see God and truly see ourselves, we become humble and meek, and therefore teachable and receptive to God's wisdom...Whole libraries can exist in a man or woman's head without even a whiff of wisdom, but in humble relationship with God – WISDOM!" - R. Kent Hughes (149)

"**Gentleness/humility/meekness** is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23 and it's closely tied to 'self-control.' It's a word used to describe a high-spirited horse brought under control. He hasn't lost his natural strength, but he carried that strength with gentleness and humility. That's biblical wisdom."

- Charles Swindoll (77)

24. Underline ways we obtain wisdom.

- James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. NIV
- Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. NIV
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. NIV
- Psalm 119:97-100 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. NIV
- 2 Timothy 3:15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Digging Deeper

Read Proverbs 4 for the path to wisdom.

25. Apparently, what were some doing in contrast to “*deeds done in humility*”? 3:14a

Digging Deeper

What bitter rivals did Paul encounter and how did he react? Philippians 1:15-18

- What warning did James give about these attitudes? 3:14b

FYI: “Some who pride themselves on their wisdom and understanding are displaying a jealous, bitter partisanship that is the antithesis of the meekness produced by true wisdom.” - Douglas Moo (133)

Self-seeking Strong’s NT: 2052 *Eritheia* electioneering or intriguing for office...apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit
“to work for hire...used in the bad sense of those who seek only their own. Contention, strife, rivalry....It also meant canvassing for public office, scheming.” - The Complete Word Study Dictionary

“Those whose hearts are filled with this sense of rivalry and party spirit ought not to pretend that they are speaking God’s wisdom. That is merely to compound the wrong.” - Lyman Coleman (43)

26. Shockingly, what are the sources of so called “wisdom” characterized by envy and selfish ambition? 3:15

- To what does this lead? 3:16 What does this indicate about some of the concerns James had for these believers? (See 2 Corinthians 12:20)

FYI: “**Earthly.** The word means ‘of the earth’...It’s a purely *horizontal perceptive* – worldly measures of truth, earthy standards of success, material motives and temporal priorities... The source of this wisdom is our own thoughts, attitudes, interest, and pursuits, not the Spirit’s wisdom from above.” - Charles Swindoll (80)

Natural/sensual/unspiritual Strong’s NT:5591 *psuchikos*; governed by breath; the sensuous nature with its subjection to appetite and passion

“It has to do with that part of man where human feeling and human reason reign supreme (Knowing)” - Douglas Moo (134)

Applying the Word: *Where do you see yourself walking in wisdom leading to “deeds done in humility/gentleness”? Where do you struggle with envy and selfish ambition? Why? How can a wise heavenly perspective change that?*

“They won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” - Howard Hendricks

Memory verse:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life,
by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. James 3:13 NIV