

Week Three: Read James Chapter 3:1-18

I. Controls the Tongue (3:1–12)

A. A Caution Against Becoming Teachers (3:1–2)

- Not many should become teachers, for teachers will receive a stricter judgment.
- We all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect (mature) man, able also to bridle his whole body.

B. The Power of the Tongue (3:3–5)

- Illustrations of small things that control large things:
 - A bit in a horse's mouth turns its whole body.
 - A small rudder steers a large ship.
- The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.
- A small fire sets ablaze a great forest.

C. The Danger of the Tongue (3:6)

- The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.
- It stains the whole body, sets on fire the entire course of life, and is itself set on fire by hell.

D. The Difficulty of Taming the Tongue (3:7–12)

- Every kind of beast, bird, reptile, and sea creature can be tamed by mankind.
- But no human being can tame the tongue—it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
- With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.
- From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. This ought not to be so.
- Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?
- Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

II. Displays Heavenly Wisdom (3:13–18)

A. The True Display of Wisdom and Understanding (3:13)

- Who is wise and understanding among you?
- Let him show it by his good conduct, with the meekness of wisdom.

B. The Display of Earthly Wisdom (3:14–16)

- If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.
- This wisdom is not from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.
- Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

C. The Display of Heavenly Wisdom (3:17–18)

- The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.
- A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

3:1–6 One of the primary ways we demonstrate who we truly are is by our speech, “for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” ([Mt 12:34](#)). In this broken world, sinful impulses remain in the Christian and, if allowed to run unchecked through the tongue, such sinful talk can cause immense personal and communal damage. Through various poignant metaphors and impassioned appeals, James calls for Christians to let all their speech be consistent with their Christian profession. James begins this section by focusing on persons who speak publicly the most (i.e., teachers) and warns against hastiness in taking up the mantle of teacher since it is so easy to err in speech (morally or doctrinally) and thus incur God’s strict judgment. James then broadens out his instruction on speech to all believers. Just as a tiny metal bit turns a large horse or a small rudder steers a ship, so one’s tongue, though small, has huge effects. One tiny spark starts a huge forest fire. So also the tongue, when broadcasting unchecked sinful inclinations, ignites a destructive conflagration in one’s life and relationships. The tongue is “a world of evil” ([Jas 3:6](#)) in that all the various forms of wickedness in this fallen world (e.g., lust, hate, jealousy, etc.) find audible expression through the tongue. “Hell” (Greek *gehenna*) is a place of eternal suffering where the devil, demons, and rebellious humans will be thrown in judgment ([Mt 25:41](#); [Rev 20:10](#)). To speak of speech as “set on fire by hell” ([Jas 3:6](#)) implies that sinful words are worthy of God’s eternal judgment. If Christians were judged on the basis of their speech alone, they would be eternally condemned. Thank God for the perfect life and perfect speech of Jesus, which makes us acceptable before God. And thank God for Jesus’ death, which atoned for our sinful deeds and words.

3:7–12 Though the world is filled with various domesticated animals, there are no examples of completely tamed tongues. Even Christians, regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit, must acknowledge how easy it is to stumble in speech (v. [2](#)) and how much harm their tongues can cause (v. [8](#)). James hones in on one particularly troubling sin of speech: slander—the hypocritical inconsistency of praising God while at the same time cursing a human being made in God’s image. James invokes various pictures from nature (water springs, grapevines, figs, olive trees) for his appeal that Christians live consistently with their new status as God’s reborn people ([1:18](#)).

3:13–18 Just as some people are naively overeager to be known as teachers in the church (v. [1](#)), so others want to be known as wise (v. [13](#)). That's fine, says James, as long as one seeks genuine wisdom. Genuine wisdom is not esoteric knowledge that exalts someone above others; it is a posture that accepts the true God as king and judge and then lives in light of that reality ([Pr 1:7](#)). True wisdom, like true faith, shows itself through deeds done in humility ([Jas 3:13](#)). There is a worldly and demonic "wisdom" that is characterized by pride, envy, and selfish ambition. Such "wisdom" spills out of one's life through disorderly and vile behavior (v. [16](#)). True wisdom, on the other hand, produces visible fruits that reflect the holiness, mercy, love, kindness, impartiality, and peace of God. Wise people will strive for godly harmony with others and, as a result, will see a harvest of righteous behavior in their own lives and in the lives of those around them (cf. [Mt 5:9](#)).