

James 3
(The Tongue and Wisdom)

Roxborough Bible Chapel

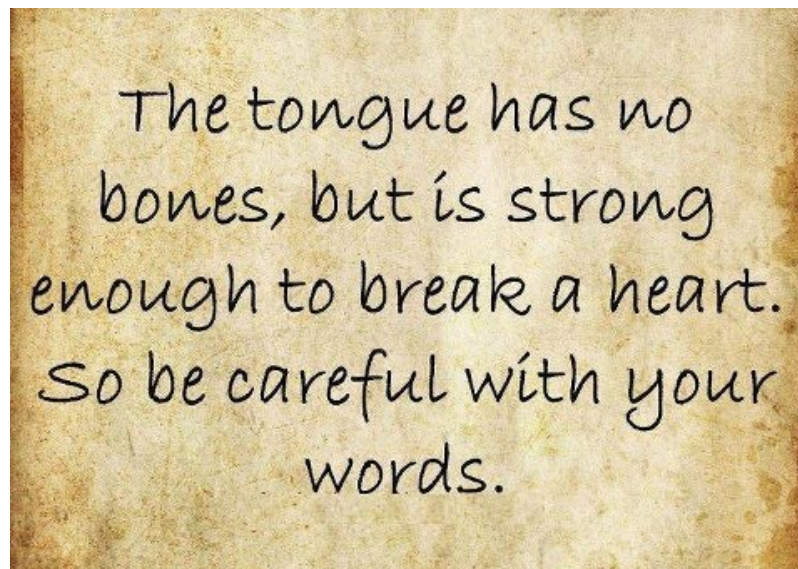
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OUTLINE

- **The Tongue: Its Use and Abuse (verses 1-12)**
 - The tongue used by the teacher (verse 1)
 - Controlling the tongue is a sign of maturity (verse 2)
 - Similes/Metaphors for the tongue (verses 3-8)
 - Bits in horses mouths (verse 3)
 - Rudders of ships (verse 4)
 - Fire (verses 5 and 6)
 - Wild, untamable creatures (verse 7)
 - Unruly evil (verse 8)
 - Both blessing and cursing come from the tongue (??) – verses 9-12
- **Wisdom: The True and the False (verses 13-18)**
 - True wisdom shown by good conduct and humility
 - False wisdom is envious and self-seeking

Introductory Comments About the Tongue

- Proverbs 6:16-19 These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: (1) A proud look, (2) A lying tongue, (3) Hands that shed innocent blood, (4) A heart that devises wicked plans, (5) Feet that are swift in running to evil, (6) A false witness *who* speaks lies, (7) And one who sows discord among brethren.



The Tongue used by the Teacher

3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

- The more you teach, the more responsible or accountable you are.
 - Teachers could teach the wrong thing
 - Teachers can be guilty of conceit and pride.
 - Teachers must be doers of the Word, not just teachers (Actions speak louder than words.)
 - The more we learn (in order to teach others), the more we should recognize our own ignorance (resulting in humility)
 - We should be slow and cautious to become a teacher realizing that our responsibility is great.
 - But, if we are properly motivated (love for the Saints and/or love for the lost) then we should not hold back a gift that the Lord wants us to use.

Controlling the Tongue is a Sign of Maturity

3:2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

- James now moves from the specific ministry of teaching to the general area of conversation.
- We are all prone to stumble in many areas
 - Matthew 18:7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!
- If you control your tongue, you are a perfect man.
 - Perfect = mature, complete, thoroughly disciplined, well-rounded, full-grown Christian
- If you can control your tongue (speech), then you should be able to have self-control in other areas of your life as well.
- Our tongue “gives us away”. It identifies us. It is a strong indicator of who we truly are.
 - Matthew 26:73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are *one* of them, for your speech betrays you."

The Tongue

3:3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.

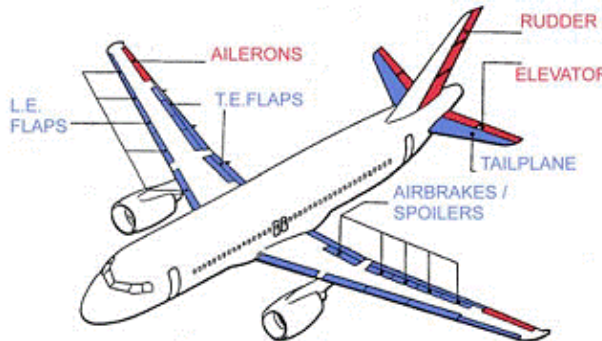
- The bit is part of a bridle that goes in the mouth
- Bridles control the body
- The word bridle is used in conversation to mean “control”
 - “Bridle” your tongue
 - ... was forced to “bridle” her anger
- Though the bit itself is a very small piece of steel, yet if a person can control that bit, he can control the behavior of the horse. So the tongue can direct the life—either for good or for evil.



The Tongue

3:4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

- A fierce storm may drive a ship, but a little rudder can control it.
- The tongue can also change the course of our lives
- The rudder weighs only a fraction of the weight of the ship (or airplane).
- Thus we should not misjudge the power of the tongue by its size. Though it is a very small member of the body, and relatively hidden, yet it can boast of great accomplishments, both good and evil.



The Tongue

3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

3:6 And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.



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- v. 5 - A lighted match, carelessly thrown, may start a brush fire. This in turn may ignite a forest and leave a charred mass of ruins.
- v. 6 - World of iniquity - The tongue, though so small, has vast possibilities of iniquity in it.
- v. 6 - The tongue defiles the whole body - A person can corrupt his whole personality by using his tongue to slander, abuse, lie, blaspheme, and swear.
- v. 6 - The tongue sets on fire the course (or the wheel) of nature - This is the “wheel” set in motion at birth. It describes the whole round of human activity.
- v. 6 - A wicked tongue is set on fire by hell - All evil speech has its source there.

The Tongue

3:7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

3:8 But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

- 3:7 The fourth figure to which the tongue is likened is a wild, untamable creature.
- 3:8 Just because man is successful in taming wild animals does not mean that he can tame his own tongue.
- James next characterizes the tongue as an unruly evil.
 - Linking this expression with the words full of deadly poison we suspect that James has in mind a restless serpent, with exceedingly poisonous venom. A drop or two would be fatal. So the tongue can poison minds and assassinate characters.
 - Who can measure the harm done (tears that have flowed, broken hearts, ruined reputations)?
 - Who can measure the misery it has brought to our own lives and to our families?
 - The price we have to pay for the undisciplined use of our tongue is enormous.

The Tongue

3:9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

3:10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

3:11 Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening?

3:12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

- 3:9 One minute a man blesses God with his tongue, the next he curses those who are made in the image of God. The tongue that blesses God should help men instead of wounding them.
- 3:10 It is inconsistent to use the tongue for both good and evil purposes. It is completely unnatural; there is nothing like it in nature.
- 3:10 All that we say should be subject to the threefold test: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?
 - Psalm 141:3 - Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.
 - Psalm 19:14 - Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.
- 3:11 No spring gives fresh water and bitter at the same time. The tongue should not do so either. Its outflow should be uniformly good.
- 3:12 A fig tree cannot produce olives, neither can a grapevine bear figs. In nature, a tree produces only one kind of fruit. How is it, then, that the tongue can produce two kinds of fruit—good and evil?
- 3:12 No spring can yield salt water and fresh water at the same time. It must be one or the other. These lessons from nature are intended to remind us that our speech should be consistently good.

Challenge Questions about the Tongue

- Do I teach others things that I have not obeyed myself?
- Do I criticize others behind their back?
- Is my speech consistently clean, edifying, kind?
- Do I use filthy language or words that would be misinterpreted by the unsaved around me?
- After a solemn meeting, do I engage in levity or talk about football scores?
- Do I joke about the Scriptures?
- In retelling a story, do I exaggerate in order to make people more impressed?
- Do I habitually tell the truth, even if it means loss of face, friends, or finances?

Wisdom

3:13 Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom.

3:14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

- 3:13 If a man is wise and understanding, he will demonstrate it by his good conduct coupled with the humble spirit that comes from wisdom.
 - The Lord Jesus is the embodiment of true wisdom.
 - Matthew 11:29 - Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
- 3:14 The worldly-wise man is characterized by bitter envy and selfish ambition in his heart.
 - He is jealous of any competitors.
 - He is proud of his wisdom that has brought success.
 - But James says that this isn't wisdom at all. Such boasting is empty. It is a practical denial of the truth that the man who is truly wise is truly humble.
- A lying tongue is one who denies the Lord during the week by its conversation.

Wisdom

3:15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.

3:16 For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.

- 3:15 This bitter envy and self-seeking wisdom of verse 14 does not originate with God. James calls this false wisdom:
 - Earthly = not from heaven, but from this earth.
 - Sensual = not the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but of man's evil nature.
 - Demonic = actions that resemble the behavior of demons.
- 3:16 Whenever you find envy and self-seeking, you will also find confusion, disharmony, and every other kind of evil - all because men reject true Wisdom (the Lord Jesus Christ)
 - God is not the author of confusion.

Wisdom

3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

- The wisdom that comes from God is first pure.
 - In thought, word, and deed, it is clean. It is undefiled.
- True wisdom is also peaceable.
 - This simply means that a wise man loves peace, and will do all he can to maintain peace without sacrificing purity.
- True wisdom is gentle. It is courteous, not crude. A wise man is a gentleman, respectful of the feelings of others.
- True wisdom is willing to yield - approachable, open to reason, ready to give in when truth requires it, opposite of obstinate and adamant.
- Wisdom from above is full of mercy and good fruits.
 - It is full of mercy to those who are in the wrong, and anxious to help them find the right way. It is compassionate and kind. It rewards discourtesy with benevolence.
- True wisdom is without partiality - does not produce favoritism. It is impartial in its treatment of others.
- Finally, true wisdom is without hypocrisy - sincere and genuine. It does not pretend to be other than it actually is.

Wisdom: The True and the False (James 3:13-18)

3:18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

- This verse is a connecting link between what we have been discussing and what is to follow.
 - We have just learned that true wisdom is peace-loving. In the next chapter we find conflict among God's people. Here we are reminded that life is like the farming process.
 - Farmer (the wise man who is a peacemaker)
 - Climate (peace)
 - Harvest (righteousness).
 - The farmer wants to raise a harvest of righteousness. Can this be done in an atmosphere of quarrels and bickering? No, the sowing must take place under peaceful conditions. It must be done by those who are of a peaceful disposition. A harvest of uprightness will be produced in their own lives and in the lives of those to whom they minister.

Challenge Questions about Wisdom

- Do I respect the proud men of the world more than the humble believer in the Lord Jesus?
- Do I serve the Lord without caring who gets the credit?
- Do I sometimes use questionable means in order to get good results?
- Am I guilty of flattery in order to influence people?
- Do I harbor jealousy and resentment in my heart?
- Do I resort to sarcasm and unkind remarks?
- Am I pure in thought, in speech, in morals?

Conclusions

- Pray daily that the Lord will keep us from gossip, and unkind speech.
- Don't talk unfavorably about anyone; love covers a multitude of sins (1Peter 4:8).
- If we have something against another person, let us go to him directly, discuss it in love, and pray together (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3).
- Let us try to see Christ in our brethren instead of magnifying minor failures.
- If we start to say something unkind or unprofitable, let us stop in the middle of the sentence and explain that to continue wouldn't be edifying. Some things are better left unsaid.
- Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

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