

BOOK OF JAMES

TAMING THE TONGUE

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THE CENTRAL TRUTH

“You will never tame your tongue unless you change the source of your wisdom”

James emphasizes the power of the tongue and contrasts earthly wisdom with wisdom from above. Mature faith controls speech and is marked by humility, peace, and good fruit flowing from God’s wisdom.

Key Verse

James 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.” (NKJV)

James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. (NLT)

READING – THE MAIN PASSAGES

Taming the Tongue

James 3:1-12

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 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. ³ Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 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. ⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 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. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸ But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

James 3 breaks down like this:

- **Verses 1–12:** The **problem of the tongue** (uncontrolled speech)
- **Verses 13–18:** The **source behind the tongue** (two kinds of wisdom)

So the connection is:

Your words reveal your wisdom.

1. The Tongue Is the Symptom: Wisdom Is the Source

James shows us in verses 1–12 that the tongue is:

- Unruly
- Destructive
- Inconsistent.

Then in verse 13, he pivots: ***“Who is wise and understanding among you?”***

- That’s not random—it’s diagnostic.
- The tongue problem is not ultimately a speech problem—it’s a **wisdom problem**.
- Bitter words → come from **bitter envy and self-seeking wisdom (earthly)**
- Peaceful words → come from **pure, gentle, godly wisdom (from above)**.

2. Two Kinds of Wisdom Produce Two Kinds of Speech

James 3:14-16

¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.

James contrasts:

(i.e. – cancel culture, political correctness, wokeness, philosophies)

Earthly Wisdom (vv. 14–16)

- Bitter envy
- Self-seeking
- Confusion and evil

This produces:

- Harsh words
- Divisive speech
- Toxic conversations



Heavenly Wisdom (vv. 17–18)

- Pure
- Peaceable
- Gentle
- Full of mercy

This produces:

- Edifying speech
- Peacemaking words
- Life-giving communication



3. The Tongue Reveals What Rules the Heart

This ties directly back to verses 9–12 (spring/tree imagery).

Just like:

- A spring can't produce both fresh and bitter water and a tree produces according to its nature
- **Your speech reveals your spiritual source.**

So James is saying:

- ***You don't just need a tamed tongue—you need transformed wisdom.***
- ***You cannot fix the tongue without fixing the wisdom that feeds it.***
- ***Your mouth speaks what your wisdom teaches your heart.***

MAIN POINTS/OUTLINE

1. Our Words Carry Great Responsibility and Accountability (vv. 1–2)

- a. James opens by warning that **words matter more than we think—especially for those who teach.**
- b. Teachers are judged more strictly because they shape others through their words.
- c. Speech is a primary measure of spiritual maturity—***“if anyone does not stumble in word...”***
- d. The tongue reveals the condition of the whole person; control of speech reflects control of life.
- e. ***You don't need a platform to be accountable—every believer teaches in some way. Your words are forming lives, including your own.***

2. The Tongue Has Disproportionate Power to Direct and Destroy (vv. 3–8)

- a. James uses vivid illustrations to show that something small can control something large—and destroy it.
- b. Like a **bit in a horse's mouth** or a **rudder on a ship**, the tongue directs the course of life.
- c. Like a **spark that starts a forest fire**, words can cause massive destruction.
- d. The tongue is humanly uncontrollable—***“an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”***
- e. ***Your life is headed in the direction of your words. Left unchecked, your tongue can wreck relationships, reputations, and destinies.***

3. The Tongue Reveals the True Condition of the Heart (vv. 9–12)

- a. James exposes the inconsistency of using the same mouth for both blessing and cursing.
- b. ***Some preachers know how to address demons, but they don't know how to speak to people properly***
- c. We bless God and curse people made in His image—this is a spiritual contradiction.
- d. Nature teaches consistency: a spring, a tree, a vine all produce according to their nature.
- e. Therefore, our speech exposes what's really inside us.
- f. **The issue is not just the tongue—it's the heart. You don't fix your speech first; you let God transform your nature.**

4. From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks

- Bible teaches that whatever is overriding and abundant in your heart will eventually come out of your mouth. Therefore, the heart, the mouth and the tongue are connected.

CONCLUSION

Fill your heart with God's wisdom – His Word.

Verses 1–12: “Your tongue is dangerous and inconsistent.”

Verses 13–18: “Here's why—because of the kind of wisdom you're living by.”