

Check the Tongue - James 3:1-18

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[0 : 00] James chapter 3. Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures are being tamed, and have been tamed by mankind.

But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who have been made in God's likeness.

[1 : 34] Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

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. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

[2 : 41] Peace-makers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. Peace-makers who sow in peace. Thanks, Chris.

Let's keep our Bibles open and we're going to pray. Psalm 19, verse 14.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Amen. Amen. What am I? I can start wars, break marriages, divide families, destroy churches.

I can bring healing, redeem marriages, restore families, renew churches.

[4 : 10] I have the power to cause great evil and I have the power to do great good. What am I? Well, of course, we're talking about the tongue.

Look at verse 9. With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse human beings who have been made in God's likeness.

James has already introduced us to the use of our tongues. In fact, he said, if we claim to be a Christian. Have a look back at chapter 1, verse 19.

If we claim to be a Christian. Verse 19. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Verse 26. Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves and their religion is worthless.

[5 : 33] So how we use our tongue reveals if our faith is genuine. That was the theme of chapter 2, if you look at verse 14.

Chapter 2, verse 14. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith, so they claim to be a Christian, but has no deeds?

Can such faith save them? Well, the answer comes in verse 24. You see that a person, as you watch, as you look at a person, a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

The mark of true Christianity is seen by what we do, how we live. And now in chapter 3, James gives us another example of what true Christianity looks like.

And it all comes down to how we use our tongue. Three things we're going to look at. First, check your tongue.

[6 : 57] Check your tongue. Not surprisingly, James starts with teachers. Those who teach God's word, like pastors. Those who are responsible for the teaching of this church, the elders.

Look at verse 1. Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers. Well, why is that? Because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Right now I'm teaching. And as I teach, I'm using my tongue. I'm saying a lot. I'm talking a lot. I'm going to be doing more speaking than listening.

That means I have to be very careful. And as I teach, I've got great influence. The words that I use have influence.

What I say can build up or tear down. What I teach can be of great good or of great evil. I need to check how I use my tongue.

[8 : 07] Because, look at the end of verse 1. You know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. This is serious.

The more I say, the more I will be responsible for. The more I'm responsible for, the more accountable before God I am.

So it's crucial that I check out how I use my tongue. But it's not just teachers that James is concerned about.

He's concerned for the whole church. Verse 2. We all stumble in many ways when it comes to using our tongue.

Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect. Able to keep their whole body in check. James is just so real and practical.

[9 : 12] He just gets straight to the issue. No messing about. Look, he says, we all stumble. We all mess up. We all fail to keep our tongue in check.

But here's the encouragement. When we keep our tongue in check, our whole body is kept in check. If we can control the tongue, we can control our whole life.

Proverbs 18 verse 21 tells us that the tongue has the power of life and death. And those who love it will eat its fruit.

Control the tongue and we control our whole life. Sam Albury uses a very helpful illustration in James.

He talks about it like this. It's like James is inviting us into the doctor's surgery. We are to stick out our tongue and to get it checked out.

[10 : 22] Let the word of God diagnose anything that is sinful and let the word of God heal and make it useful.

Let the word of God diagnose anything that is sinful and let the word of God heal it and make it useful. So as we continue, I give us all permission to stick out your tongues and enter into the surgery of God's word.

What does God's word diagnose about our tongue? Well, second, know your tongue. Four things we need to know about our tongue.

Four things that the word of God diagnoses about our tongue. First, the tongue is a controlling power. Look at verse three. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

I don't know if you've ever been on a horse, but a horse is very strong and very powerful. With a tiny bit, it's a small little steel bar about so long which inserts into the horse's mouth attached to the reins and with it, you control the whole animal.

[11 : 52] A tiny tug in the reins and the horse will stop. A pull to the right or a pull to the left and it will go the direction you want it to go. It's the same with a large ship or a cruise liner.

Look at verse four. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

The largest cruise ship that sails the seas today is called Symphony of the Seas. It's 360 meters long and 60 meters wide.

It has 18 decks and it weighs in at 227,000 tons. But the small rudder, only a few meters long, can turn this ship in any direction.

verse five. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body. The tongue is just like a bit or a rudder, but it makes great boasts.

[13 : 13] It has the power to control the whole body. In other words, the tongue powerfully determines and directs the course of our whole life.

The tongue controls our destiny. How we use our words, what we say in our conversations, how we talk to one another powerfully controls what our life is going to be like.

So it's a controlling power. Second, the tongue is a destructive fire. Look at the second part of verse five.

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. In France last year, there was a forest fire covering eight square kilometers and it destroyed everything in its path.

Homes, buildings, the whole forest, the whole habitation was all wiped out. Eight square kilometers left in a pile of ash.

[14 : 28] You know what the cause was? A dropped cigarette. Look at verse six. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

just one word from our tongue and it causes devastation and destruction. One word, one phrase can break a marriage, destroy a family, wreck churches.

Look at the rest of verse six. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire. A tiny spark that lasts barely a second and barely visible to the human eye can set a whole forest on fire.

And the problem is, James is saying to us, when we open our mouths, sparks fly everywhere. A careless word, a bit of gossip, a lie, a put down, a snide remark.

And before we know it, our whole life is a blazing fire, devastated by broken relationships all around us. How do we cause such damage?

[15 : 59] Well, look at the end of verse six. The whole course of one's life is set on fire and is itself set on fire by hell.

The source of all this fiery destruction is the influence of hell itself. When we use our tongues, sparks fly and we're only speaking what the devil himself speaks.

As one writer has put it, our tongues are satanic. So our tongues are a controlling power, a destructive fire, and third, they are an untamable evil.

Look at verse seven. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind.

We've seen the pictures on television. Maybe you've been to a circus. We can make bears dance. We can make birds carry messages and come back again.

[17 : 13] We can make crocodiles not to bite and insert your head in its chops if you wanted to. We can make killer whales jump in the air to catch fish. But, look at verse eight.

No human being can tame the tongue. We can't stop ourselves from talking. We can't tame this tiny organ inside of our mouth.

I hate you. I'm not listening to you. You're such a pain. You always. Rather than me taming my tongue, my tongue controls me.

Look at the end of verse eight. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. How many times have we said to ourselves, I wish I didn't say that.

How many times have we said, I wish I kept my mouth shut? Look back upon the relationships that are now broken.

[18 : 32] What's the cause? Well, it just pops out of our mouth, doesn't it? Before we even have time to think what we are saying, our tongues just take over and an outburst of anger, a harsh response, a slanderous remark?

My tongue is like a viper, end of verse eight, full of deadly poison. I open my mouth and out comes poisonous words that crush, break, and destroy.

the words I'm quite sure that my family remember are the words that are like deadly poison, words that break and destroy.

I can't seem to stop it. It's an untamable, restless evil. fourth, the tongue reveals my heart, verse ten.

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. One moment we can be singing songs of worship to God, the next we're criticizing the people who stood behind us to somebody else.

[20 : 09] verse 11, can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs?

Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. James uses his words so carefully, but they are so clear.

his words are so revealing. A tree will always produce its fruit, pear trees don't grow apples, and you won't find an orange from a banana tree.

You see, it's what comes out of our mouth that reveals the state of our hearts. What comes out of our mouth only reveals the source from which it comes.

Remember what Jesus said. This comes from Matthew 15. He says, what goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.

[21 : 29] The things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, false testimony, slander, and we can add to that crosswords, malicious gossip, destructive lies.

Our tongues as we speak only reveal who we are and what our hearts are like. so what are we to do with this diagnosis as we step into the surgery, as God's word makes the diagnosis, what are we to do with our powerful, destructive, untamable, evil, poisonous tongues?

I guess we've never thought of our tongues like that, have we? Well, as we said at the beginning, let the word of God diagnose anything that is sinful, and let the word of God heal it, and make it useful.

God's word will diagnose what is sinful, but the same word of God can heal it, and make it useful. So we check our tongue, we know our tongue, and third, we transform our tongues.

Let me show you how our tongues can be transformed. It requires wisdom. Wisdom that comes from heaven, not wisdom from the world.

[23 : 15] Look at verse 13. Who is wise and understanding among you? wisdom. Well, if you're wise, let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Wisdom is not academic ability. Being wise is not about clever arguments and using our words to win people over or to prove your point.

Godly wisdom, true wisdom, is about living life God's way, living the way God has created us to be.

It is, as it says in verse 13, it's showing it by our good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom.

wisdom. So, having this wisdom, having the right kind of wisdom in our life, will keep our tongue in check. It will enable us to use our tongue to build up rather than destroy.

[24 : 22] It will enable us to tame and control our tongue so that we bring healing and peace. So, how do we get this wisdom to transform and change our tongue?

Well, there's two steps. First, we need to repent of worldly wisdom. Look at verse 14.

But if you harbor bitter envy, so if you store up, internalize those words of bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

You see, the reason James has been working through what the tongue is like, helping us to understand what the tongue is, is so that we can see how great a problem our tongues actually are.

And when God's word reveals to us what our tongues are like, he's revealing to us what our hearts are like and what comes out of our hearts. And as the diagnosis is made, he's saying to us, don't ignore it.

[25 : 44] Verse 14, end of verse 14, do not boast about it or deny the truth. You see, if we try and hide the problem, if we fight against it and deny the truth, it's going to break us and destroy us.

Verse 15, such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

us. You see, as I sit under God's word and as the diagnosis has been made, if my response is, well, I don't have a problem with my tongue, I don't have a problem with how I speak, well, such a view, we're told in verse 15, is earthly or worldly wisdom.

It's unspiritual, it's demonic. And all it will result in is more damaged, broken relationships, end of verse 16, for there you will find disorder and every evil practice.

If we walk into a surgery and a diagnosis is made and we just walk out and do nothing about it, we will just get more sick.

[27 : 17] And I think that's the point James is making here. the diagnosis has been made. Worldly wisdom says, ignore the diagnosis.

Just keep on going and live the way you want to live and, well, if we do, we will just find further disorder and every evil practice.

We need to repent of worldly wisdom. wisdom. And second, we need to receive heavenly wisdom.

Verse 17. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

fear. Now, when I look at verse 17, I think, well, where do you see that kind of wisdom displayed? Well, the only place that wisdom is displayed is in the person of Christ.

[28 : 28] Because the wisdom that comes from heaven is Christ. Christ is pure. Christ is peace-loving.

He is considerate. He is submissive. Christ is full of mercy and good fruit. Christ is impartial and sincere.

So, Christ is the wisdom that we need. Look at how Paul refers to Christ. in 1 Corinthians. He says, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Again, Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Christ is the wisdom we need. And Christ is the one who has come to us. And in his wisdom, he came to us from heaven to me and to you.

[29 : 35] And through his wisdom, through his work here on earth, through his death on the cross, my destructive, evil, poisonous tongue has been dealt with.

Christ has paid the punishment, the price for all my wrong, hurtful, cursing words.

and through his wisdom, he has now forgiven me and gives me the power of his Holy Spirit to control and tame my tongue.

A greater power that I do not possess within myself. And when our tongue is so transformed, it produces words that are, verse 17, pure, peace-loving, considerate, words that are submissive, words that are full of mercy and good fruit, words that are impartial and sincere.

when we repent of worldly wisdom and humbly receive heavenly wisdom, our tongues are transformed and look what happens when we speak with a transformed tongue, verse 18, peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

[31 : 06] Rather than sowing words that produce hurt and division and angry responses and put downs, we now can sow words that reap a harvest of righteousness, transform tongues that bring words of healing, words that begin to redeem and forgive where marriages are breaking down, words that can restore families, words that can renew churches, words that enable us to unite broken relationships, peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness, transform tongues that enable us to respond to the people we will meet this week, not with anger or bitterness, but with words of compassion, words of grace and mercy, offering people the hope of

Christ, the true wisdom who has come down from heaven, the one who said, I will give of my life, I will die for you so that you can have life.

James's words are so clear. Check out our tongues, listen to the diagnosis from God's word, and let that same word heal our tongues and bring about a healing so that our tongues become useful, peace-loving, peacemaking tongues in this broken and disordered world.

Let's pray together. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. As we pray, reflect on these words and after I've read them, we'll just leave a quiet moment for you to bring our own confession and our own response to God in the quietness.

[34 : 02] these words come from Psalm 139 you have searched me Lord and you know me you know when I sit and when I rise you perceive my thoughts from afar before a word is on my tongue you Lord know it completely search me God and know my heart test me and know my anxious thoughts see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting exist

I I I I Father, we all stumble in many ways.

All of us use our tongues in the wrong way. We ask that you would forgive us for the times where we have used our tongues unwisely.

Help us, Father, that we would repent of worldly wisdom and stop trying to fix things on our own, but rather that we would receive humbly the wisdom from heaven, Christ himself, asking that you would fill us afresh with the power of your Holy Spirit as we depend upon you.

Heal us so that our tongues may become useful, that we may use words to build up, that we would be peacemakers, and that our words would point people to Christ, the true healer, the one who gives life to all who turn to him.

[36 : 48] Father, thank you. Thank you for one another. Thank you for words of encouragement. Thank you for words that build up. Thank you for your gifts to us.

And we pray that we would go into this week speaking words of peace, bringing words of compassion. Help us, Father, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing in response to that last verse in James about sowing peace.

Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring your love. Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord. And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Let's sing this as a prayer for ourselves personally, and our prayer for each other, that we would be a channel of peace.

[37 : 52] Let's stand together as we sing. Amen.