

## **JAMES: HANDBOOK FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING**

W3 - "A Disciple Controls His Words" - James Ch. 3

This week, we will be looking at everybody's favorite topic: our language.

Let's hop in.

**Point 1: RESPONSE WITH WORDS:** What do our words say about us?

Following WWI, the world was attempting to rebuild from the carnage that "the war to end all other wars" left behind. In that carnage, nations attempted to set up democracies "for the people by the people." These democracies were rather weak and therefore would be overrun by radicalism. Two men, Mussolini and Hitler arose in 2 separate countries preaching similar messages. With mere simple speeches, they were able to persuade an entire nation to believe their radical ideologies. Because of this, they drove the world into war once more.

On the other hand, a man by the name of Winston Churchill—British Prime Minister—gave powerful speeches encouraging the British citizens to remain in the fight. Following the evacuation from mainland Europe at Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain ensued. During the battle, Churchill uttered these famous words:

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.

This was a declaration not only to the British people, but to the world that surrender is not an option. President John F. Kennedy would go on to say "[Churchill] mobilized the English language and sent it into battle."

The tongue is a powerful weapon, it can be used for harm or for good.

***Proverbs 18:21*** “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

Three people, two messages, but both messages swayed nations. One sent a nation into hate, into war, into prejudice and the other encouraged a nation to remain in the fight, to stand up against tyranny no matter the consequence.

Why am I sharing this? James is transitioning into discussing the importance of our words. The essence is our words reveal who we are and what we believe. One commentary on this topic suggested the “[tongue] is a tattletale that tells on the heart and discloses the real person.”

Jesus states to the Pharisees:

***Matthew 12:34*** “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? ***For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.***”

Wiersbe writes “When Jesus Christ is the Lord of the heart, then He is the Lord of the lips too.”

Words reveal the person.

With this knowledge, let’s get into James ch. 3. There are 3 descriptions of the tongue and it’s power: Power to direct, Power to destroy, and Power to delight.

#### I. Power to direct

**James 3:1** *“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”*

Ch. 2 talks about showing our faith through our works. James telling the Jewish believers that they need to show their faith by their works likely stirred a great desire for teaching. A direct way to show someone that you are saved is to teach. However, James—as Paul often does at times—back tracks.

James is not discouraging us from becoming teachers, however, he wants us to weigh the costs.

If God is real, then Preaching the Word is the MOST important action that can be done. Currently, we have thousands of people in the pulpit who do not take this job seriously and decide to treat it as a show. James writes this so those who decide to speak from a pulpit in any circumstance should carefully weigh their words.

Our simple words can literally influence another’s actions. They can lead others to Christ, or lead others to self indulgence. They can preach heresy, or orthodox Bible-based Christianity.

Jesus says this:

**Matthew 12:36-37** *“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every **careless** word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

The greek word for careless (argos) can also be translated useless. It is the same word used in **James 2:20** *“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is **USELESS**.”*

Words reveal who you are. I would go as far as saying words are a direct representation of your faith. Because in order to have faith one must confess with their mouth (***Romans 10:9***), and out of the heart the mouth speaks.

Regarding James 1, James is not discouraging us from becoming teachers, however those who desire should know what they are choosing to do, and the weight that it carries.

A preacher also has to live what he preached.

Hebrews 13 instructs:

***Hebrews 13:7*** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Paul also states:

***1 Corinthians 11:1*** Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ

When you teach, you are therefore saying listen to me, and imitate me.

Here's the sad reality with these examples, many people's relationship with Christ are fragile and built solely on a preacher they listen to. When the preacher falls to unchecked sin, they too fall. Why? Because they are only imitating their shepherd.

- If a literal shepherd walked off of a cliff, what would the sheep likely do?

Teachers have a great responsibility to not only preach the truth, but live it as well.

**James 3:2** *“For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.”*

Every single person, preacher or not, stumble in many ways. We all sin.

**1 John 1:8** *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Even the Apostle Paul struggled with sin and he discussed this extensively in **Romans 7:15-25**.

Yes, works show our faith, but still, no one is perfect. Again, the Church he is writing to wasn't doing anything. Just because we work now does not mean perfection.

Therefore, the teacher needs to be extra careful with the words he is about to present. He needs to spend diligent time in study—as Paul directs Timothy (**2 Timothy 2:15**)—and needs to be in right standing with the Lord.

Paul gives qualifications for preachers in **1 Timothy 3:2** stating they need to be *above reproach*. The Greek word (anepilēptos) means to give no cause for accusation. Therefore, they are to live a blameless life, and that blameless life comes with diligently seeking the Lord.

The Preacher should work harder than anyone else—not because He is greater, but He has a greater burden.

James transitions to giving imagery on our words.

**James 3:3-4** *“If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.”*

One commentary wrote, “In other words, if we can control our tongue—which responds so readily and limitlessly to sin—then controlling everything else will follow.”

## II. Power to destroy

**James 3:5** *“So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!*

The tongue gives speeches. By those speeches, it persuades others to go down one of two paths: the wide or the narrow. Hell or Heaven.

Furthermore, the tongue boasts of great things. It is braggadocious about things you have done and how great you are. It boasts not in God, but in itself.

**James 3:6-7** *And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,*

James compares the tongue to a fire. Fire feeds off of itself.

- The tongue can destroy families.
- It can sew hatred and division.
- It can be racist.

- It can lead to someone being killed or physically harmed.
- It can incite violence of many kinds.

Who can tame the tongue?

***James 3:8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”*

The only person who can tame the tongue is Jesus. If we struggle with language, slandering, gossip, whatever it is—rely on Him to correct you.

- I have been asked multiple times the question “How do I stop cussing?” I begin with number 1: “Stop trying.” If your mind is constantly fixated on cussing, guess what you are likely to do—cuss. Here’s how to stop, seek the Lord with greater humility and ask Him to purify your speech.

You also have to find the root of the issue. The reality is, what goes in, is what comes out.

- If you are listening to bad music, watching awful shows, hanging around others who just cuss and gossip nonstop—change your environment. Don’t remove, replace.
- Replace these things with the Word of God and godly people. I promise you, if you seek the Lord in humility through the Word, you will realize a change in your speech, because the Word has the power to save your souls when received in meekness (1:21).
- And when the Word is received with meekness, out of the heart the mouth speaks.

III. Power to delight

**James 3:9-10** *“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. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”*

With it we PRAISE THE LORD, and then with it we tell the poor person to sit over here (2:3).

**James 3:11-12** *“Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.”*

James presents some rather obvious questions that have clear answers: no. It is blatantly obvious that a fig tree does not produce olives.

If a pinch of salt is applied to freshwater it becomes saltwater. Just a pinch of salt. This goes back to Ch. 1:27 a believer should be *unstained from the world*. If there is a stain of the world then you are of the world. If there is salt in freshwater, it is saltwater.

As I mentioned before, the tongue reveals our heart. Whatever we truly believe will be represented in how we speak. If you are a Christian, a disciple of Christ, your words will be uplifting, loving, truthful, faithful. Your words will point to Jesus.

## **Point 2: WHAT’S YOUR SOURCE OF WISDOM?**

We know the Jews cared about wisdom because of their literature they studied: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. In regards to the Proverbs, 1/3 of the scriptures had to do with one’s language. However, **knowledge without application is useless**. Faith without works is dead.

With this brief knowledge, James writes:

**James 3:13** *“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of **wisdom**.”*

But what is wisdom? Wisdom is defined by Cambridge dictionary as “the ability to use your knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgements.” Everything we have covered thus far through the book of James is knowledge unless applied. Wisdom is shown by good conduct.

There are two sources of wisdom that James briefly covers here: worldly and heavenly.

### I. Worldly Wisdom

**James 3:14** *“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.”*

What is in your heart? One translation states if you *harbor jealousy*. If it’s deep inside of you. If it influences how you act, then do not boast.

Jealousy and selfish ambition, in the context of not many should become teachers, are terrible reasons to preach.

Paul states:

**Philippians 2:3** *Do **nothing** from selfish ambition or conceit, but in **humility** count others more significant than yourselves.*

These people should not brag about being wise because they used their knowledge to promote themselves instead of God.

Therefore, just like their faith, their wisdom is counterfeit.

**James 3:15** *“This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”*

Unspiritual refers to those who do not have the Lord’s Spirit and thus rely on their own-selves for wisdom.

Ultimately, the unspiritual person is influenced by the prince of the powers of the air. **Ephesians 2:2** states, that he is *“the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived.”* Therefore, their wisdom is not just earthly but demonic.

**James 3:16** *“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”*

The greek word for vile can be translated wicked and is the same word used in John 3:20

**John 3:20** *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

Jealousy and selfish ambition is wicked. It is someone who has turned from the light and is attempting to take others with him. Therefore, *not many of you should become teachers, my brothers.*

- Jealousy is angry at other’s accomplishments.
- The jealous person will use their tongue to direct and destroy.
- The jealous person will use the pulpit as a platform for self-gain and promoting their own ideologies.

- A jealous person will sow strife and cause divisions in the church. They believe they should be the one who preaches, or has a leadership position, or prays in front of the Church.

But why do they want to do that? Because it places them on a pedestal. They want to be seen, noticed, and heard. They understand that the pulpit gives them power and they want to wield that power for self-gain.

Instead, the disciple of Christ is humble. They don't view themselves higher than anybody else. They take Jesus' instructions that state:

***Matthew 6:6** But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

This is not a condemnation of public prayer rather the motive behind public prayer. In this direct context, the Pharisees prayed in public to show others their spirituality. However, for the disciple of Christ, they seek in private, and their confirmation of their spirituality is by the fruits that they show in public.

Let's connect this back to James—don't preach to show others your spirituality!

- Don't preach because you want the spotlight.
- PREACH because it promotes Jesus and it edifies the Body of Christ.

Paul says DO NOTHING OUT OF SELFISH AMBITION.

You want to show others how wise you are—do it by your good conduct. You want to show others your spirituality, do it by: taking care of orphans and widows, being unstained from the world, being impartial, and controlling your words.

The result of worldly wisdom is worldly actions. Unspiritual wisdom leads to an unspiritual life. An unspiritual heart leads to poor speaking, and bad language.

That's why James says in v. 3:1 *Not many of you should become teachers...*

Furthermore, some of us are not called toward teaching and we should be totally fine with that. As I mentioned earlier, a direct way to show your faith would be through preaching the scripture, yet James warns against the pursuit of the pulpit. Again, what are your motives? Is it based on selfish ambition?

If you are not called to teach the scripture vocationally, there are other ways to show your faith. Find your position in the Church and do it well—that's wisdom.

Paul writes in Romans:

***Romans 12:3-8** "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with **sober judgment**, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that **differ** according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."*

We all have been given specific gifts to operate in a specific role in order to complete the Body of Christ.

Here's the point, selfish ambition says **“give me the pulpit.”** Godly ambition says **“Where am I needed?”**

## II. Heavenly Wisdom

***James 3:17** “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”*

This is the direct antithesis to the world's wisdom. The wisdom from heaven represents heaven. In the same sense that our words represent our heart, our wisdom represents our source.

James lists 7 characteristics of heavenly wisdom:

### A. Pure

Why? Because God is pure. The world's wisdom would cause someone to be unstable in all their ways, but God's wisdom is without defilement.

This is the same word used by Paul to Timothy:

***1 Timothy 5:22** Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others, keep yourself **pure**.*

Heavenly wisdom leads to a pure life.

Peter puts it like this:

*1 Peter 3:16* having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Your purity justifies you in front of man.

#### B. Peaceable

Worldly wisdom sews strife. Causes jealousy and selfish ambition which ultimately leads to divisions and useless rivalries. God's wisdom brings peace and is impartial.

#### C. Gentle

Wiersbe states, "The gentle person does not deliberately cause fights, but neither does he compromise the truth in order to keep peace."

Worldly wisdom will say compromise in order to obtain peace.

Being gentle is not compromising on Biblical truths rather it is "*speaking the truth in love,*" (*Ephesians 4:15*) as Paul states. Peter also writes:

*1 Peter 3:15* but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with **gentleness** and respect.

You don't compromise, but you don't share the Word aggressively with hate, superiority and disdain—rather you share with gentleness.

#### D. Reasonable

Reasonable alludes back to Ch. 1:19 being quick to hear and slow to speak. Which means they are teachable. In the previous chapters, these would be the ones who recognized their faults and changed. Yea their faith may be dead, but they repented and turned to God for living faith.

#### E. Merciful

***Luke 6:36*** “*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*”

The believer is full of mercy. The Church James is writing to lacks mercy as we discussed last week. Which will illustrate that they have worldly wisdom and therefore are stained by the world.

Yet heavenly wisdom shows mercy because God first showed us this. We received His Spirit so we are able to do these things. As we have extensively discussed, real faith produces fruit.

#### F. Impartial

Impartial means it does not segregate nor divide. Paul tells us in Romans:

***Romans 2:11*** *For God shows no partiality.*

Therefore, James will say *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory (James 2:1).*

Jew and gentile, Rich and poor are both free to enter the Kingdom of heaven and should be treated as equals.

#### G. Sincere

It's genuine. It's not fake. It can't be pretended or modeled or copied. It is a gift from God through His grace, and then through His Spirit who guides us. As Paul writes, we walk in the Spirit to not gratify the flesh (*Gal. 5:16*).

Finally, what does heavenly wisdom produce, what you put into it.

*James 3:18* "And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

There is always that classic Dad saying of "you get out of it what you put into you." You put peace, you get peace. Ie, you put heavenly wisdom, you receive heavenly results. This is the wisdom James talks about in Ch. 1 "*If any of you lacks wisdom (IN REGARD TO TRIALS), let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*"

We need wisdom, we call God to receive Godly results. However, if you seek the world for wisdom in a spiritual situation, you receive a worldly result. You dig yourself a deeper ditch.

**ACTION STEPS:** How an we apply this message to our life?

- Examine ourselves. On a daily basis, what do the words we use reveal about our spiritual condition? Do we regularly gossip, cuss, or slander others? If so, repent and seek the Lord for guidance. Find the source of these issues and replace them with the Lord.
- Where do you feel like the Lord has called you? We are all members of the Body of Christ and in order to complete the puzzle, we need to fit in where the Lord has called us. A disciple doesn't seek the pulpit, but seeks the place they are needed.

- Do you lack in wisdom in any areas? Ask the Lord for wisdom for choosing a career, evangelizing to others, living a holy life, a place to move—wherever you need wisdom in your life, ask God.
- Read James 3 everyday this week and soak in the Word of God.