

The Tongue: Part 1
James 3:1-3
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Teaching Notes

James has been speaking about faith and works.
...Faith w/o works is useless, dead, even demonic.

But...Saving faith has works that follow...
...And one of those works is our words.

James begins chapter 3 with a strong teaching on the tongue.

The tongue is the physical representation for our words.
Words cannot be seen, but the tongue is what forms our words.
So James points to the tongue in discussing our words.

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James starts off pointing at me!
...And anyone else who is a teacher.

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

1. To whom much is given, much is required.

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

Teachers have position, influence, a captive audience ...
...and a lot of words!
(In the multitude of words sin is not lacking...)

Parents, coaches, mentors, small group leaders...
...All of these people have tremendous power...
... and tremendous responsibility.

There is a stricter judgment not just because God judges us...
...but also there are more people judging our words...
...and our words have more weight.

We are all called to disciple people to walk with and obey Christ.
...And some of us are specifically called to teach.
...And if that is you...don't rush into it, be prepared.

The words you use, the doctrine you teach, the direction you lead impacts people's understanding of God and His word.

Countless **atrocities and sins** have been committed by people because of incorrect teaching!

With all of the words that we use as we teach...
...some are going to be off.

**It is our responsibility to be as clear as possible...
...and as close as possible to God's word.**

This is why it is important to actually read God's word.
We must be careful not to teach assumptions or logical theories.

We must be careful not to put words in God's mouth...
...that He hasn't said, because we are not like God...
...our words will rarely be His words.

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.

If you listen long enough, you will hear someone say something they wish you wouldn't have heard!

We all stumble in many things...

Our attitude, eating, guilt, people pleasing, identity, relationships, parenting, dating, singleness, life decisions, work life balance.

...I like that James just admits it up front...

Trying to be a **perfect** person is not the goal.

Trying to get it **all right** all the time is not the goal.

Trying to **make everyone happy** is not the goal.

...But trying to follow Jesus every day is a great goal.

We love teachers who are challenging but understanding.

...They know you are in class to learn and...

...you are going to make mistakes because you are **still learning**.

There is freedom and acceptance in that kind of teacher.

...And that's how Jesus was...and is.

Jesus knows you.

He knows your weaknesses.

He knows your struggles.

...But He doesn't leave you there either.

...He still challenges you to learn and grow.

When we talk about works and stumbling...

...one of the key areas is obviously with our words.

...If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a **perfect** man, able also to bridle the whole body.

I thought he just said, everyone stumbles in many things?!

...Yes, but we don't want to KEEP stumbling in the same places...

...Hopefully we are growing and maturing!

Perfect = complete/mature

A mark of true Christian maturity is the ability to control your tongue.

2. A tongue needs to be controlled.

It is a fool who says all that is in their heart.

Just because it comes in our head...

... doesn't mean it should come out of our mouth.

— **Controlling could be talking too much OR not enough.**

We don't listen to other people when we talk too much...

...We need to share the air.

— **But...Some people don't talk enough.**

They don't speak up, they don't participate, they don't engage.

Both of these things hinder real and right relationships.

Our tongue needs to be controlled.

James makes three analogies regarding controlling the tongue.

...We will just look at one today...

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

A tongue has great power...

...but a little control goes a long way.

Controlling your tongue is like bridling a horse.

Horses: around 900 lbs, the record being 3,300 lbs. (Corolla!)

A horse can do great good or no good.

It can be fast and free or wild and dangerous.

But a good rider can control this giant, muscular animal with just a little bit and bridle.

You and I are meant to be that rider.

We control our mouth like a rider controls their horse.

What is that bit and bridle? Wisdom and God's Word

3. Use Wisdom and the Word to control your tongue.

Wisdom and God's Word can be like the bit and bridle.

...But a bit & bridle takes training...

Deuteronomy 4:5 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess. 6 Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.'

Wisdom is a theme of James.

1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach,

Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge well.

When I learn & apply things about life, relationships or business...

...I grow in wisdom.

You can get wisdom thru experience, thru the Word, and thru the Holy Spirit...and use it to control your tongue.

I learn how to speak to people in a way that they will listen.

I learn how to speak to my friends in a way that keeps them.

...to my family in a way that is healthy.

...to people different than I am

...to people who don't know Christ. (Tactics by Greg Koukl)

Wisdom evaluates and considers conversations...

...What worked, what didn't, what helped, what didn't?

Wisdom from God's word:

Take time to read God's word on your own...(Proverbs!)

Make a **spiritual discipline** of regular reading of God's word.

Personal disciplines can help us grow and be more effective...

...when done right, spiritual disciplines can do the same.

The last way to gain wisdom is listening to the Holy Spirit.

This takes time and practice, because we make mistakes.

Discerning and trusting the Holy Spirit is to be practiced.

- Apologize when you get it wrong.
- Stay away from “thus says the Lord.”
- Look for fruit from the conversation.
- Do not contradict God’s written word.

But... not all horses like to have a bit and bridle.

3 reasons Horses Reject the Bit...

...and why people are like horses.

1. Operator error:

...Some people put it on wrong or it is not the right fit.

Some people don’t use wisdom or God’s word correctly...

...and it just doesn’t fit.

Be careful with this...but it should feel right.

...Maybe it won’t feel good, but it should feel right.

If what someone is telling you doesn’t feel right...check it.

Jesus said my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

...If what someone is trying to put on you is burdensome...

...evaluate it.

People love to put burdens on people.

People love to have control and authority.

Be careful with people whose spiritual counsel always sounds like **they speak for God**, or they tell you what they think you **must** do

Is it true? Helpful? For safety, share with the right person

If it is sinful or selfish, confess it to the Lord, and ask God to help.

Some people are taught to never complain/say anything bad.

...They stay hurt or run away or never help others.

There are ways and times to express complaints/problems.

Israel was famous for their problem with complaining

They were always complaining about God and their problems

If we are **always** complaining about our problems...
...we're probably the problem.

But there were times that they had real problems.

Typically...People are not problems, people have problems.

The issue is not just complaining... it is who and how.

If you are complaining to someone who can actually do something about it...that is not complaining that is informing.

You want things to be done well or you care about people or you want to see God honored: speak up to the right people.

So we need to use the bit and bridle correctly. It needs to fit.

Proverbs 25:11

A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in settings of silver.

12 *Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold

Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.

2nd reason horses reject a bit and bridle...

The horse is hurt.

This is pretty simple, but hurt people hurt people.

If someone has been hurt.

They are in pain.

They are going through trauma

They need a gentle hand and compassion.

There are times when you need a little time and space before you continue the conversation.

Be careful about teaching or leading when you're hurt.

When your child is hurt, they are going to cry.

When your friend is in pain, they may say hurtful things.

When you are struggling, find a safe person that can handle it.

And remember, God can handle it—your anger, your frustration, your questions, your fears, your cussing, and your doubt.

...What do you think unconditional love is about?

...**He is not going to leave you there...**

...but He is going to love you there.

Last reason horses reject the bit and bridle...

Stubbornness.

A bit and bridle is not natural for a horse.

And they don't like it.

And some of us know it is right and good, but we don't like it.

We want our own way.

What you do with a stubborn horse is teach them to lower their head and then reward them...

The key to our stubbornness is humility...

...And the result of humility is grace.

God humbles us, life humbles us, or we humble ourselves...

...And God meets us with grace.

Hopefully we realize a mouth with self control is powerful...

...But a mouth without self control is dangerous.

The words we use can **heal and help and change** a life.

Or the words we use can **harm and hurt and damage** a life.

- Lives are blessed or damaged.
- Relationships are renewed or cut off.
- Careers grow or end.
- Families are close or divide.

All because of the power of our tongue.

And you and I are the ones with the power to control it and use it for good and God's glory.

Discussion Questions

1. Share a teacher that you had in school that you remember? How did they use their words? Was it good or bad?
2. What benefit is it for James to say that we all stumble in many things?

3. When you think of controlling your tongue, what comes to mind, speaking less or speaking more? Why?
4. How do you think godly wisdom and God's word can work together? How might earthly or man's wisdom work against God's word?
5. Which do you identify with most when struggling to apply God's word to your mouth? Operator error, being hurt, or stubbornness? Can you think of any examples?