

# James Chapter 3

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## Introduction:

James has proven that faith must be accompanied by good works. Some believers might see this as an opportunity to become a teacher in the church. But there are dangers here that are discussed next.

**(James 3:1) Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.**

### A. This Verse Is Not Addressing Ladies Teaching

- The translators created the problem by translating **brothers** as **brothers and sisters**. The role of ladies in teaching in the church assembly is a worthy subject, but James does not address it.

### B. The Role Of Teachers

- **William Barclay** gives the background about teachers:

In the early church the teachers were of first-rate importance. Wherever they are mentioned, they are mentioned with honor. In the Church at Antioch they are ranked with the prophets who sent out Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1). In Paul's list of those who hold great gifts within the Church they come second only to the apostles and to the prophets (1 Corinthians 12:28; compare Ephesians 4:11). The apostles and the prophets were forever on the move. Their field was the whole Church; and they did not stay long in any one congregation. But the teachers worked within a congregation, and their supreme importance was that it must have been to

them that the converts were handed over for instruction in the facts of the Christian gospel and for edification in the Christian faith. It was the teacher's awe-inspiring responsibility that he could put the stamp of his own faith and knowledge on those who were entering the Church for the first time.

### C. **Teachers Will Be Judged More Strictly**

- A teacher needs a written teaching objective for each class session. “My purpose in this session is to . . .” The objective is for his personal use.
- Every teacher must bear in mind the amount of time being used. When there is one student, one hour is used. When there are 20 students, 20 hours of time are being used in a one hour class.
- **The unprepared teacher.**
  - This writer attended the Sunday morning session of a small-town congregation in Oregon and was ushered in to the adult class. The elder who led the class was impressive in his demeanor, but could not pronounce some of the words in the lesson guide that he was using. It appeared that he had not read the guide before class and had not read the Luke passage being studied. As a teacher, he was close to being a total failure.
  - Another unprepared teacher may have a Scripture read and then ask the class, “What do you feel that this means?” Someone equally uninformed may answer, “It means just what it says.” They agree and go on to the next verse. They have not progressed beyond simply reading the verse. No background, no definitions, no application to life. A teacher of God's word needs to be more than prepared. He

needs to be over-prepared by learning backgrounds that he may never use in class.

- **The rabbit trail teacher.** “That reminds me of . . . .” Having a lesson objective and sticking to it stops this common practice among teachers. Instead, the teacher must develop the skill of bringing the participants back to the subject. Notice how Jesus used interruption to reinforce His subject:

**As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, His mother and brothers stood outside, asking to speak to Him. Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and Your brothers are outside, and they want to speak to You." Jesus asked, "Who is My mother? Who are My brothers?"**

**Then He pointed to His disciples and said, "Look, these are My mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother!"** Matthew

12:46-50

- **The teacher who needs to demonstrate his Bible knowledge.** “Back here in Ezekiel . . .” This sidetrack to the lesson actually destroys small groups. One or two class members find interest, the rest decide to use their time in some other way and don't return. The teacher **must** stay relevant to the entire class.
- **The entertaining teacher.** Humor is a wonderful asset in teaching when it is not an end in itself. Several men were being trained to teach and one used his time to keep the audience laughing. But no worthwhile information about the Bible was communicated to the audience. The teacher did not have a teaching objective.

(2) Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

A. **Making Mistakes Is Common**

- James is speaking in the context of teaching.
- **Donald Fream** observes:  
Overeagerness to be teachers might tempt some to assume the responsibility carelessly. Sober preparation is as necessary in teaching as for a doctor approaching an operation.

B. **Tongue Control Tops The Self-Control Pyramid**

- If a person can **control** what they say, they will have no problem **controlling** what they do. **Controlling** our words is the hardest.

(3) We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. (4) And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.

A. **The Horse Example**

- **Donald Fream** makes an observation here:  
Little girls, in particular, seem to like **horses**. The horse's body is very muscular and magnificent in comparison to the little girl's frail body. Yet all this power and magnificence can be controlled by a little girl with reins in her hands.

B. **The Ship Example**

- The large ship is under control of its **pilot** and his **choices**, even though the **winds** may not agree on the direction the **huge ship** takes. So we must control our comparatively small tongues.

**William Barclay** comments:

James is not for a moment saying that silence is better than speech. He is not pleading for a Trappist life where speech is forbidden. He is pleading for the

control of the tongue. Aristippus the Greek had a wise saying, "The conqueror of pleasure is not the man who never uses it. He is the man who uses pleasure as a rider guides a horse or a steersman directs a ship, and so directs them wherever he wishes." James is not pleading for a cowardly silence but for a wise use of speech.

**(5) In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.**

**A. The Tongue Talks Big**

- Jotham, in the Old Testament, told this parable.

Notice the big talk of the worthless thornbush:

**Once upon a time the trees decided to choose a king. First they said to the olive tree, 'Be our king!' But the olive tree refused, saying, 'Should I quit producing the olive oil that blesses both God and people, just to wave back and forth over the trees?'**

**"Then they said to the fig tree, 'You be our king!' But the fig tree also refused, saying, 'Should I quit producing my sweet fruit just to wave back and forth over the trees?'**

**"Then they said to the grapevine, 'You be our king!' But the grapevine also refused, saying, 'Should I quit producing the wine that cheers both God and people, just to wave back and forth over the trees?'**

**"Then all the trees finally turned to the thornbush and said, 'Come, you be our king!' And the thornbush replied to the trees, 'If you truly want to make me your king, come and take shelter in my shade. If not, let fire come out from me and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'" Judges 9:8-15**

Big talk is easy, but worthless. Politicians may offer great benefits in order to be elected, but change when they take office.

## B. The Forest Example

- This little tongue can set all nature on **fire**, and when unleashed is beyond all mankind's ability to tame.

**(6) And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.**

- **Donald Fream** writes:

The small match that has the potential of igniting a heating stove and warming the occupants also has the potential of igniting the house and consuming the occupants.

So the tongue which has the capacity of warming men's hearts with the Spirit of God may work havoc and destruction with the spirit of the devil. With fire, given by God for a blessing, comes also the responsibility for its proper use.

- The true source of wicked talk is **hell itself**. It is one of the devil's tools. Most sin includes the tongue.



**(7) People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, (8) but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.**

## A. Creatures Can Be Tamed

- **Taming** the creation has always been acceptable to God the Maker.

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." Genesis 1:28

Or consider:

You gave them charge of everything You made, putting all things under their authority--the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.

Psalms 8:6-8

## B. Taming The Tongue

- But **taming** the tongue is a greater challenge than **taming** wild **animals**. Man's ingenuity has **tamed** every wild creature in the sense of controlling and making useful; that, says James, is what no man by his own unaided efforts has ever been able to do with the **tongue**.
- James himself was once an illustration of this weakness:

... and Jesus' brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where Your followers can see Your miracles! You can't become famous if You hide like this! If You can do such wonderful things, show Yourself to the world!" John 7:3-4

And the leader of the Twelve - Peter - had a problem with his words:

A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally she said, "This man was one of Jesus' followers!" But Peter denied it. "Woman," he said, "I don't even know him!" After a while someone else looked at him and said, "You must be one of them!" "No, man, I'm not!" Peter retorted. Luke 22:56-58

Both men corrected their course with the help of the Spirit.

**(9) Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. (10) And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!**

**A. The Tongue Praising God**

- We know only too well from experience that there is a division in human nature. In man there is something of the ape and something of the angel, something of the hero and something of the villain, something of the saint and much of the sinner. It is James' conviction that nowhere is this contradiction more evident than in the tongue.

**B. The Tongue Cursing God's Creatures**

- **Donald Fream** expresses this colorfully:  
How many times men are tempted to climb the ladder of success by stepping upon the rungs of the spoiled reputations of their fellow men. Although we can never get ourselves out of the pit of guilt in this fashion, we sometimes attempt to feel elevated by trampling underfoot our fellow man. While we trample our neighbor into the mire of sin and shame, our own feet become stained with his blood, and the stench of our murderous action causes all mankind to withdraw from us in horror!

**(11) Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? (12) Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.**

**A. The Unnatural**

To James there was something unnatural about this; it was as unnatural as for a **spring** to gush out both fresh



and **salt water** or a **fig tree** to **bear olives** or a **grapevine** to **produce figs**.

**B. The Road To Restoring The Natural**

Next, James points the way out of this unnatural conundrum.

**(13) If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. (14) But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.**

**A. How To Demonstrate Wisdom**

- Anyone knowing how to pronounce "wisdom" could claim to have it, but the real proof is by **humbly doing good works**, as formerly discussed.

**B. The Contrast of Boasting and Lying**

- **Jealousy. Donald Fream:**

"Jealousy," here linked with bitterness or harshness, has the evil sense of being filled with envy. This is self-love extended to the point of wishing deprivation of another. "I wish I had his Cadillac and he had a wart on his nose instead!"

- **Ambition. William Barclay** says of this kind of wisdom:

It is, in the end, more eager to display itself than to display the truth; and it is interested more in the victory of its own opinions than in the victory of the truth.

- Diversion tactics. **Boasting** and **lying** are outcomes of this fake wisdom that a teacher can slip into.

C. Discuss the Graphic



(15) For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.  
 (16) For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

A. Demonic Wisdom

- God never approves of **jealousy** and **selfishness** in those who speak the word on His behalf.

B. Disorder Reigns

- Lack of peace among the believers will be apparent to all.

(16) 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 good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.

### A. God's Wisdom Described

It is interesting to note that there are nine fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Eight Christian graces in 2 Peter 1:5-9 and eight virtues of Godly wisdom here.

- **Pure.** The **wisdom** from God is always **pure** and must not be contaminated to achieve **peace**.
- **Peace loving.** The desire for harmony and unity leaves no room for pleasure in division. Contention is to be avoided where it is possible and still preserve **purity**.
- **Gentle.** No threatening force used. Usually the attribute of one who is in a superior position.
- **Willing to Yield.** Some matters allow for the other party to have their way. Do that when possible. Includes being willing to listen.
- **Merciful.** Mercy does not push the use of the law to the maximum.
- Filled with **Good Deeds.** James has already stressed the requirement of **good deeds** for us. God leads an existence of **good deeds**.
- **No Favoritism.** **Favoritism** has been discussed in the previous chapter and is not part of God's wisdom. We might use the word *unbiased* today.
- **Sincere.** One translation says: "It doesn't pretend to be what it is not." Several say "without hypocrisy."

**(18) And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.**

### A. The Outcome For Peacemakers

- **Planting seeds of peace.** When there is anger and hatred, peace does not come quickly. It takes time to grow and produce a crop.

- **Reaping the harvest.** The growing **seeds of peace** will eventually bear **a harvest of righteousness.**
- A robust congregation had a difference arise between its members. The anger boiled until the members divided into two groups, meeting separately. Years passed. Then the desire to fix the division began to change minds. It was no longer possible to reunite the groups, but a document of peace was drawn up and leading members from both groups came together and signed it. Those who had moved away, but were part of the original division, heard about the signing of peace and asked to be include on the document. This settlement was a great example of the wisdom of God at work in the hearts of His people.  
Following this, members of each group could feel confident when they met at the grocery store or sent out invitations to parties. Peace had been restored.