

**James 3:1-13**  
“Slow to Speak”  
April 12, 2026

The topic of the Epistle of James is how to handle trials in this life, and he gives the outline of the body of the letter in **1:19**; be “be swift to hear” (**1:21-2:26**); “slow to speak” (**3:1-18**); “slow to anger” (**4:1-5:6**)

**V 1** It’s best for most to not be teachers, since teachers “will receive a stricter judgement”, especially for what we say (most likely, at the Judgement Seat of Christ). The person who *teaches* a wrong doctrine is judged stricter than one who is *taught* a wrong doctrine. “we” James places himself in this group; not “You will receive a stricter judgement, but I’m good; He’s my brother.”

**V 2** “perfect” *telios* not lacking any moral quality

**Vv 3,4** The words of one teacher have a great impact on the direction of the church assembly. The teacher is responsible for the direction of the church body.

**V 5** James pivots from the potential good use of tongue to the bad use of the tongue; the tongue “boasts great things.” It’s amazing how quickly the truth gets embellished, and the conflicts get escalated, when the tongue is employed in the wrong way. Oftentimes, it is the tiniest word, in passing, that starts the greatest conflicts. It’s easy to forget that “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (**Proverbs 15:1**)

**V 6** Literally, “The tongue is fire” (There is no indefinite article, “a/an,” in Biblical Greek.) There is no iniquity in the world that cannot be expressed through the tongue. “course of nature” = pattern of your existence (nature = Gr *genesis*) For the most part, we are known BY OUR WORDS! Our words tend determine the course of our lives. “is set on fire by hell” “hell” is a metonymy for Satan. See **Job 2:4-9** “Curse God and die!” and **Matthew 16:21-23** “Get behind Me, Satan!”

**Vv 7,8** “tamed” = controlled; subdued  
Our words can literally kill someone, and each of us has the potential to be a “rattlesnake mouth.”

“no man” There is no one who does not stumble, at least a little, in what he says, except for Jesus Christ, the perfect Man. See **Psalm 106:32,33** Even Moses transgressed with his words (“So that he spoke rashly with his lips”), and it cost him entry into the land of Canaan. (Cf **Numbers 20:10,11**)

If it can happen to Peter and Moses, then it can happen to you and me.

**Vv 9,10** When we curse others, we are cursing images of God; if we curse the images of God, we are cursing God! “My brethren, these things ought not to be so.”

**Vv 11,12** “bring forth” = “gush out” Our words “gush out” of our mouths in paradoxical inconsistencies. That this should not be so is confirmed in nature, where nothing of this sort compares. You can drink fresh water, and you can drink bitter water. But, drinking salt water will kill you.

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

**V 13** If we think we are wise, it is better to show it by our conduct than by our words; Let not many of us be teachers.

These sobering teachings might discourage us from ever using our tongues, but this isn’t the point. Our words are powerful, both for good and for bad, and we must recognize that, and live accordingly. We must “be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” (**James 1:22**)

**Proverbs 15:23** A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!

**Proverbs 12:25** Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad.

**Proverbs 25:11** A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver.