

## James 3:1-12 Be Slow to Speak

Chapter three begins the second major theme that James outlined in chapter one verse 19.

This you know my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, *slow to speak* and slow to anger. James 1:19

The tongue is a dangerous instrument for showing wisdom (1-12).

This flows naturally out of chapter 2. One writer said it this way:

*In the absence of works, there is usually an abundance of words.*

### Verse 1

*A stricter judgment* – The man who uses his tongue to teach will be held to a higher standard, a stricter judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

### Verse 2

We all stumble – James included himself in this statement.

*A perfect man* – The word here is ‘*teleios*’ and does not mean specifically ‘sinless’ but ‘flawless’. James points out in verse 8 that no such person exists.

### Verses 3-4

James uses the illustration of a bridle in the mouth of a horse and the rudder of a ship as small instruments that control large objects. His point is that we can control our own actions provided that we first can control our rudder, namely, our tongue. To a large extent our actions are determined by the things we say.

### Verse 5

*It boasts of great things* – The word used carries negative overtones of proud bragging.

*How great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire* – Sometimes a casual remark can touch off a firestorm of trouble in our experience.

### Verse 6

*The world of iniquity* – A word of evil lies within the tiny confines of this member of our bodies.

*As that which defiles the entire body* – The words we speak may lead us to acts that defile the entire physical self as is the case with sins like adultery and fornication.

*Sets on fire the course of our life* – Literally the ‘*wheel*’ or cycle of our life. Our lives roll forward endangered by things our tongues may have said or may say.

*Is set on fire by hell* – This is a figure of speech (metonymy) for Satan himself. In Matthew 16:22-23 Satan is attributed the words that Peter speaks. Wrong words are often put on our lips by Satan or his world system of ungodly ideas.

### Verses 7-8

Because human beings have had success in taming and training virtually every kind of animal we think that we can train and tame our tongues.

*But no one can tame the tongue* – We never arrive at the point that we do not have to guard what we say. Even Moses, one of God’s greatest servants, spoke rashly with his lips (Psalm 106:33).

*It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison* – We must remember that we carry in our mouth what is compared to a deadly viper and we have the ability to greatly harm people with what we say.

### Verses 9-10

*We bless our Lord...we curse men* – We show horrible inconsistencies with our words.

*Made in the image of God* – The image of God still exists in fallen man even though it is terribly marred by sin.

*These things ought not be so* – The reality is that they *are so* but should become less and less frequent as we grow in Christ.

### Verses 11-12

These illustrations point out that our tongue is both *inconsistent* with nature and *contrary* to natural expectation. A fountain does not gush forth both fresh and bitter water at the same time. A tree or vine does not produce a fruit contrary to its type. Fresh water sustains life but salt water will not.

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