

James 3:1-12
Consistently Maintain God-honoring Speech

Introduction:

1) I alone am responsible for the use of my tongue—3:1-5a

a) **Specifically**, publicly: the command related to the congregation—3:1-2

i) The command—3:1a ¹ **Not** many of you **should become** teachers, my brothers,

(1) Note well the letter **M**. He doesn't say "not any" but "not **many**".

(2) A teacher is one who helps others to learn skills and knowledge, in this case, from the Scriptures.

(a) Teachers were distinct from pastors. (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28)

(i) Though all pastors are teachers, not all teachers are pastors.

(b) Teachers are necessary in a synagogue or a church. (Heb. 5:12)

(c) Teachers, because they bear so much responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those to whom they minister, will be scrutinized by the Lord more carefully than others. (Douglas Moo)

ii) Reasons for not becoming a teacher—3:1b-2

(1) The evaluation: *for you know that we who teach* (including James himself) *will be judged/evaluated with greater strictness*.

(a) The need for evaluation: ² *For we all* (including James himself) *stumble/trip in many ways*.

(b) Remember Paul's warning to Titus. (Titus 1:11)

(2) Maturity:

(a) **If**: *And if* (1st class condition, assumed true for the sake of argument) *anyone does not stumble/trip in what he says*,

(b) **Then**: *he is a perfect* [te,leioj] *man, able also to bridle* (cf. 1:27) *his whole* [o[loj] *body*.

(i) Spiritual maturity requires the self-discipline of a tamed tongue.

iii) Teachers are particularly vulnerable to errors of speech. (FSB) Remember Prov. 10:19.

b) **Generally**, positively: our speech manifests our heart/will—3:3-5a

i) The will of the rider controls the horse: ³ *If* [or better, *Behold!*] *we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole* [o[loj] *bodies as well*.

(1) Today we use a metaphor about dogs: put a muzzle on it.

ii) The will of the pilot/captain controls the ships: ⁴ *Look at the ships also: though they are so large* [thlikou/toj] *and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small* [evla,cisto] *rudder wherever the will* [o`rmh,] *of the pilot directs*.

iii) The principle of contrast: ⁵ *So also the tongue is a small* [mikro,j] *member, yet it boasts of great* [me,gaj] *things*.

(1) Perhaps an echo of Psalm 12:2-5.

**2) I alone am responsible for the harm caused by my inconsistent speech—
3:5b-12**

- a) The harm from inconsistent speech is real—3:5b
 - i) [or better, *Behold!*] *How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!*
 - ii) Broken friendships, marriages, churches, international relations, etc.
 - iii) Remember Proverbs 16:27.
- b) Illustrations of potential harm on inconsistent speech—3:6-8
 - i) Fire: ⁶ *And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.*
 - (1) *The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body (spoils one's integrity and morally defiles oneself), setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell (Gehenna).*
 - (a) Remember pure religion (1:27) was to keep oneself unstained by the world.
 - (2) We know from bitter experience that the childhood taunt, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," reverses the truth of the matter. Far easier to heal are the wounds caused by sticks and stones than the damage caused by words. (Douglas Moo)
 - ii) Animals: ⁷ *For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed/subdued, restrained by mankind (part of subduing the earth, Gen. 1:26), ⁸ but no human being (i.e. only God) can tame the tongue.*
 - (1) *It is a restless/unstable [most MSS read "uncontrollable"] evil, full of deadly poison. (cf. Psalm 58:4; 140:3)*
- c) Contrasts in our inconsistent speech—3:9-10a
 - i) Current habits:
 - (1) Respect: ⁹ *With it we bless [euvloge,w] our Lord [most MSS read "God"] and Father,*
 - (a) Privately, in church, in prayer, in singing, etc.
 - (2) Disrespect: *and with it we curse [katara,omia] (seek injury for) people who are made in the likeness of God.*
 - (a) James embraces Gen. 1:26-27.
 - ii) Observation: ¹⁰ *From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.*
 - (1) This is logically inconsistent.
- d) Evaluation of our inconsistent speech—3:10b *My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*
- e) Illustrations/rhetorical questions of our inconsistent speech—3:11-12
 - i) Springs: ¹¹ *Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh (our English word "glucose") and salt water?*
 - (1) The Jews would remember fresh and saltwater springs side by side near the Dead Sea.
 - (2) If the spring alternated between salt and fresh, it could be dangerous.
 - ii) Fruits and vegetables: ¹² *Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs?*

- (1) It is unnatural for this to happen.
- iii) Ponds: *Neither can a salt pond yield fresh ("glucose") water.*
- f) There is a consistency in nature. God's people should be consistent with their new nature.

3) Things I need to remember:

- a) Don't blame others for your own speech.
- b) Remember Psalm 19:14. Ask God for grace that your speech would be consistent with His will.