

Who can tame the tongue? James 3:1-12 Part 2

1) James starts this section on the proper use of the tongue with an admonition to would-be teachers. How does the proper use of the tongue relate to maturity (growing or being perfected) in Christ?

2) James mentions the tongue several times in this passage (in very negative terms) is he indicating that it is our actual tongue that is the problem?

a) Should we all schedule a “tongue removal” procedure this week?

b) Why would that not solve our problem?

c) What then is the answer?

3) Read Psalm 141:3, Proverbs 21:23, Romans 6:6, 1 Corinthians 10:13. How do we reconcile these verses with James’s claim that no man can tame the tongue?

4) The word fire (Greek, *pur*) is used variously in Scripture. The sacrifices offered under the Mosaic Law were offered by fire. John the Baptist identified Jesus by saying He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Lu. 3:16). The lost will face the eternal torment of the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14) and the believer's works will be judged by fire (1 Cor. 3:10-17). The heavens and the elements will be destroyed by intense heat and the earth and its works will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10). Even God Himself is called a consuming fire (Dt. 4:24; Heb. 12:29).

a) Fire can be used productively (to cleanse and purify) and destructively (to destroy and kill). In what way do you think the word fire is used in v. 5-6?

b) What do you think is meant by the phrase, See how great a forest a little fire kindles! (v.5)?

c) Have you used your tongue recently to “burn” anyone?

d) Like fire, your tongue can be used for good (v.9a). What are some ways you can use words for good instead of destruction?

e) If you have burned someone recently (sinned against them with words) what do you need to do?

f) What *will* you do?

5) The tongue is not evil in its self. Communication is a gift from God. We can use words to help, build-up, tell people about Jesus and praise God (v. 9-10). Think about how you use God’s gift.

a) How often do you use your tongue to praise God?

b) How often do you use your words to encourage or build someone up?

c) How often do you use your tongue to tell or teach someone about Jesus?

d) How often do you use your tongue to tear others down or cause hurt?

e) What does James say about using God’s gift improperly (v.10b)?

6) Discuss the “Four Rules of Communication” and how they relate to James 3

Rule One: Be Honest! Ephesians 4:25

Rule Two: Keep Current! Ephesians 4:26-27

Rule Three: Attack the Problem, Not the Person! Ephesians 4:29

Rule Four: Act: Don’t React! Ephesians 4:31-32

Ask yourself the six questions whenever you are trying to solve a problem:

1. Do I have the facts right (Proverbs 18:13)? (If not, you need to admit that you are not sure.)
2. Should love cover it? (1 Peter 4:8)
3. Is the timing right (Proverbs 15:23b)?
4. Is my attitude right (Ephesians 4:15)?
5. Are my words loving (Ephesians 4:15)?
6. Have I prayed for God's help (Proverbs 3:5b)?
- 7) Write out a strategy to avoiding sinning with your tongue.

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Looking Ahead – *James 3:13-18* True Wisdom

Monday James 3:13 “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” Be a doer of the word...seems to be a recurring theme throughout the book of James doesn't it? If you are truly wise it will show. I also want you to consider this; is wisdom really wisdom if you never put it into practice? It would be like saying; I know the right thing to do, I know the wise path to take, I know God's will for me but I am going to do some thing else. That would not be wisdom but pure folly! That kind of thinking is worse than the fool who doesn't know right from wrong.

Tuesday James 3:14 “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.” Interesting...now we get to the point of this passage; pride. If your heart is filled with pride (bitter envy & self-seeking) it shows that you do not understand true wisdom. This verse says that you boast and lie (another reference to how we use our tongues) against God's Truth. So basically if you are prideful you are telling God that you know better than Him.

Wednesday James 3:15 “This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.” The first thing that sticks out to me in this verse is that it contains yet another reference to evil spirits. This time the reference is not to demonic faith but to demonic wisdom. The thought goes something like this... if you are self-seeking and envious you do not understand God's wisdom you have become a doer of demonic wisdom. Now think about this; what caused Satan to fall (you can read about this in Ezekiel 28 & Isaiah 14)? Satan fell because of pride! He wanted to exalt his throne & become like God. So then when you are prideful and seeking your own you are going down the path of the devil; clearly not what you want to do. Notice also that James makes reference to our three main enemies 1) the world, 2) the flesh and 3) the devil (demonic). Pride is the opposite of doing God's will; it makes you a toy of God's enemies.

Thursday James 3:16 “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” Do you really want wisdom? How about this question; do you want to know God's will? Really? You will never know God's will if you are always seeking your own. It's not really all that complicated is it? If you have self-seeking (you want your will to be done) what makes you think you will ever understand true wisdom or God's will? You wont! Instead your life will be characterized by total confusion! You will not understand life, you will not know how to please God, all you will have is “every evil thing.”

Friday James 3:17 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” In contrast (to worldly, fleshly & demonic wisdom v.16) God's wisdom is totally different. Read through those different descriptors again; “peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” First all of those things remind me of the general teaching from James up to this point (partiality, hypocrisy, mercy etc.). Secondly ask yourself this question; in what ways are those characteristics “wisdom”? Let me give you a hint; who do you know that is peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy?

Saturday James 3:18 “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” The question has been asked (something like) “How do you sow fruit? Fruit comes at harvest time.” Well we live in Iowa; that's not a hard question to answer is it? If you have no fruit you won't be doing much “sowing,” seeds come from or are the fruit. In other words, I pick corn in the fall and then I dry some out to plant the next year (we don't really do that too often anymore because of hybrids, but it was all they had in James' day). So then think about this with me; I will reap more (fruit) righteousness if I am sowing righteousness. Not hard to understand is it? If I plant 100 acres of corn seed (the fruit of corn) I will generally get more ears of corn (the fruit of corn) next fall than if I had only planted 2 acres. If you want to reap a life of righteousness you need to be sowing peace (which is the fruit of a life characterized by peace or righteousness). Simply; peace breeds peace, righteousness produces righteousness.