

## Daily Bible Study

### *“Your Heart’s Tattletale”*

*James 3: 1-5*

*October 23–27, 2023*

**MONDAY** –As we return to our study of James this week we take as our text, **James 3:1-5**: *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles.”* This week we begin to look at one of the most serious matters concerning the maturity level of a believer and a major key to Holy living; the tongue and our use and discipline of it. What effect do your words have on those who hear you? Do you speak the truth in love? Do you control your anger and restrain your tongue? It’s a really big deal beloved. David knew that alone he could not restrain his and therefore he asked God, to help him. He prayed, *“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips”* (**Psalm 141:3**). James has already introduced us to this topic in Chapter 1. *“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;”* (**James 1:19**) And, *“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.”* (**James 1:26**) This subject is obviously extremely important to James. More than any other writer of the Scriptures, James clearly warns against the dangers of an unruly tongue. Most of this **Chapter 3** he devotes to speak concerning taming the tongue. Talk is cheap, we say but the truth is we express ourselves in words that are a direct reflection of what we treasure and hold dear in our thoughts, intentions, and desires. Our words are a tattletale to the REAL you and it discloses your heart to others. The words we speak also influence those who listen to us, and with these words we teach others. Therefore, we must know what to say and be careful what we say. Jesus put it this way, *“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.”* (**Matthew 12:36**).

*(Meditate & Apply) What does my tongue tell others about me? How is it tattling on my real loves and passions? Are my words building others up and glorifying Jesus?*

*(Pray): Father, help me in this serious matter concerning my tongue. Like David, may I seek You and ask for help in controlling it and using it to glorify You and build up others.*

**TUESDAY** – **James 3:1**: *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that*

*we shall receive a stricter judgment.”* As we mentioned yesterday by way of introduction, if you ask what James 3 is about and there is only one possible answer is, the tongue. There are many, many ways in which we can misuse our tongues—blasphemy, lying, gossiping, profanity—but none could possibly be more serious than using them to misrepresent and distort the Word of God! It is a warning given to those who would teach and declare God’s Word that is now in focus. It is certainly true today that we tend to over-value the more extroverted and people who possess and exercise outward gifts of speaking and leading. We would not be characterized as those who find precious *“a gentle and quiet spirit”* as Peter reminds us is what God values as a mark of beauty in ladies. Today, we like the loudmouths both men and women and we as teachers need to be reminded again as Peter says, that when we speak, we speak the very words of God. Talking for God is a serious matter. Our heavenly Father made us his children by *“the word of truth”* (**1:18**) and His children should be characterized by their careful, controlled speech (**1:26**). James admonishes his readers by saying, *“let not many of you become teachers...”* We know however the New Testament encourages believers to become teachers of the good news. For example, Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations and to teach them (**Matthew 28:19–20**). And the writer of Hebrews rebukes his readers for not being teachers already (**5:12**). Both the Jews of Jesus’ day (**Matthew 23:7**), and the early church placed great respect and prominence to the office of teacher. Teachers had authority and influence and many people sought the position. But James warns his readers not to fill the role of a teacher unless they are fully qualified. He humbly and accurately includes himself in the discussion calling attention to the fact *that we shall receive a stricter judgment*. Jesus said, *“Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven”* (**Matthew 5:19**). Teaching about God and speaking for God is a huge responsibility with lasting consequences and on the day of judgment we will all appear and give account to Him (**Romans 14:10–12**). James warns teachers that they have chosen to enter into a special position and are, therefore, under greater condemnation if they fail in their task. People coveted the prestige given to teachers but James demanded that they should never forget the responsibility.

*(Meditate & Apply) Do I understand the seriousness of speaking and teaching about God and His word? Do I pray for my teachers and also for myself when I have an opportunity and share something concerning God or His truth?*

*(Pray): God, help me to think about what I say concerning You to others. Help my teachers to speak truth about you and proclaim Your Word and let The Holy Spirit work in hearts.*

**WEDNESDAY** – **James 3:2**: *“For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.”* Having given us a

warning and word of caution about jumping into being teachers of God's Word, James now proceeds to tell us *we all stumble in many things*. James wants us to know that teaching is a serious business, but he reminds us we are imperfect sinners and we must not go to the opposite extreme and use that as an excuse from doing the work God has called us to. In all of human history, there has only been one person who did the work of God perfectly, and that was James brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. James saw it firsthand in his own home as he was raised with the perfect brother Jesus who as Peter describes was one who "*committed no sin; nor was deceit found in His mouth*". (1 Peter 2:22) Instead of shying away from teaching we agree with the apostle Paul in his understanding that we are mere *earthen vessels* (2 Corinthians 4:7) and we also say with him, "*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant...*" (2 Corinthians 3:5). So there is a note of hope in James words as he says, *If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body*. The word *perfect* refers to maturity and James is saying that those who control their speech are well on the way to spiritual maturity. As Roger Ellsworth puts it, "No one can be a Christian and not be interested in growing in the things of the Lord." Do you want to achieve spiritual maturity? Concentrate on your mouth. If you get this under control, the rest will be relatively easy for you. Notice he does NOT say that spiritual maturity is impossible. It is not easy but it is possible. The way to begin is by giving effort and attention to our speech.

*(Meditate & Apply) Would I call myself a mature Christian? Do I want to be a mature Christian? Do I consciously put forth effort in changing my speech to honor the Lord?*

*(Pray): Father, help me by Your Holy Spirit to work on my mouth. Convict me and help me change every time I stumble and sin with my mouth.*

**THURSDAY – James 3:2-3:** "*If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.*" James' purpose here is to make the point that control of the tongue leads to a master-control of ourselves and our lives. This matter of controlling one's tongue is a key to holy living. The man who doesn't *stumble* is the one who does not *patio* in the Greek (trip, stumble) or momentarily lose one's balance (Oxford English Dictionary). How many times have we heard, "I just tripped up", or something similar? It is the man who doesn't play of his sin with an excuse like that who is on his way to maturity. He is heading to maturity because he is disciplined and able to control and bridle, not only his mouth but his entire body. He is able to "hold in check" his entire body. James tells us that the tongue, although it is very small, is extremely powerful. The horse is a very large and powerful animal, but it is easily controlled by a very small thing—the bit in its mouth. The connection between these two verses is obvious. The *perfect man*, who is never at fault in speech, is "able to keep his whole body in check". It is interesting that James uses three illustrations taken from God's natural world. This guy lives right down in the dirt with us and gives us common

sense illustrations. The main point for us to be aware of is that a relatively small bit controls a large animal. If, then, man controls powerful horses with small bits placed in their mouths, he certainly should be able to control his own tongue.

*(Meditate & Apply) Do I think about how my speech and what comes out of my mouth reveals whether or not I have self-control? Am I aware how much this little member of my body actually dictates in my behavior, attitude and actions?*

*(Pray): Lord, help me to control my tongue and therefore have control of my entire person.*

**FRIDAY– James 3:4-5** "*Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles.*" The second example is one that the Jewish readers of James letter would understand thoroughly. The Jewish people of that day held the sea and ocean in such fear and awe. Although Israel borders the Mediterranean Sea, the Jews were never a seafaring people. These great ships and the sea travel were impressive to them. So James, says, *Look also at ships...* These large sailing vessels, driven by strong winds, are controlled and steered by very small rudders. Men control the direction of the ships travel by harnessing the force of the wind to his advantage and by turning the rudder of the ship. That rudder is a very small part of the ship's structure and yet it is instrumental in setting the course the *pilot* has in mind. It is necessary to notice it is not the *fierce winds* that determine the direction of the ship, rather, *wherever the pilot desires*. The contrast is between the small size of the rudder and the immense size of the ship. If, then, man is able to direct the course of ocean vessels with a rudder, he certainly should be able to control his own tongue. He adds the comment that though the *tongue is a little member* it also *boasts great things*. Now he closes with a final illustration speaking of a small spark and a great forest. Although our tongue is such a small part of the body it has massive implications on our entire person. It can be used for much good, it can be controlled guiding our lives in a Godly manner, or as this illustration tells us, it can bring devastation, here shown by a forest fire. Remember Smoky Bear and his warning about matches and putting out small campfires? As tiny as a spark is, once it is fanned into flame and the fire takes hold, it will keep on spreading until everything is burning. This is the power of our little tongues. Next time, we will see where the tongue actually gets it fire from. The answer is horrifying, pointing us to our need of Jesus.

*(Meditate & Apply) Do I think of how impactful my speech is to both my life and to the lives of others? Am I aware how much impact I have for either good or evil with my tongue?*

*(Pray): Father God, help me to not only understand but also take action by Your Holy Spirit to bridle my tongue and use it for building up and glorifying You rather than tearing down.*