

James 3:1-12

Maturity in the Christian Life

A believer's speech is a reliable measure of spiritual maturity. It is an example of pure religion (chapter 1), and an evidence of living faith (chapter 2).

Warning. Why should we hesitate before becoming a teacher? There is a greater degree of accountability for teachers because they should have a greater knowledge of the truth. As leaders they are able to influence, shape lives, and point others down the right or wrong path. They are under greater scrutiny. There is added responsibility before God and man. A teacher must be prepared to obey. His/her walk must match his/her talk.

On the flip side: Don't be immobilized (*i.e.* think that you can't start or lead a Bible study) because you don't feel qualified to teach. Your job is to facilitate, lead, get the group going, ask questions, and get them thinking. You don't have to have all the answers to facilitate.

It is interesting to note that James says that all of us stumble in many ways, but he doesn't use it as an excuse. Often people say, "Well, no one's perfect" or "I'm only human." Both are feeble excuses to rationalize behavior. James states it as a fact of life.

Note: the Greek word for *perfect* in 3:2 is the same as *mature* in 1:4 and *complete* in 2:22.

Why is the man who can control his tongue considered perfect? He has a measure of control over every aspect of his body/life. This is something we will never attain in this life but something we should strive for and have increasing control over.

The rabbis of ancient days said that the tongue was an arrow. And the reason they said the tongue was an arrow, rather than a knife, is because an arrow kills at a distance. And the deadliness of the tongue is such that it can kill without being anywhere near the victim. The tongue is a deadly arrow! In fact, every one of us is carrying around a concealed weapon. All we have to do is open our mouths and it's unconcealed.

What point is James trying to make with the horse and bit illustration and the ship and rudder illustration? Small things have a great and powerful effect. Don't misjudge the power of the tongue by its size.

Verse 6 indicates that a problem with the tongue can be linked to a problem with the heart.

"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:34-36).

Application: Peter struggled to control of his tongue, especially when he denied Jesus three times. What are some specific areas of your life or speech over which you would like to have more control?

Animals can be tamed because God gave man control over them at creation. Why is man unable to control his tongue? Because of the fall. Sinful nature.

Why is it wrong to curse or verbally abuse another human being? They are made in the image of God. God loves them and cares for them. They are His creation.

Children are told "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." But that child's rhyme isn't really true. The bitter pain and lasting consequences of a critical or demeaning word spoken against us can hurt for a lifetime, long after a broken bone would have healed.

James talked about double mindedness in chapter one. How is that principle seen here in verses 9-12? Contrast between praising and cursing, fresh water and salt water.

What is the point of 3:9-12? The tongue should not be an instrument of inconsistency.

Application: What kinds of things can we do on a practical level to become more godly in what we say? How can we have an increasing degree of control over our tongues? Since no man can control the tongue, God has to bring it under control. Pray daily that God will do exactly that. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23).

Reflect on these verses:

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3).

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

Before you speak, ask the questions: “Is what I’m about to say true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?”

Application: What are some examples of improper use of the tongue that we see in the military? Complaining, negativity, cursing, gossip, criticism, exaggeration, boasting, etc.

Application: We’ve been presented with a lot of negatives about the use of the tongue. What are some positive uses of the tongue? Praise, recognition, compliment, encouragement.

MEMORIZE: James 2:12-13

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