

James

Lesson 4

James 3:1-18

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Lesson 4
James 3:1-18
Control the Tongue – Repeat

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. *James 3:6*

Prayers

Introduction

In the first two chapters of his letter, James addressed favoritism, discrimination, anger, and speech. These are facets of the same problem –check any social media, and you will find all of them together! In chapter 3, James addressed the issue of speech again! The problem was also with church leaders – the teachers. So, how does a church with division, discrimination, and poisonous speech find its way out of the pit? James says it takes an act of God – literally. The problem is spiritual, and only the spirit can heal it. We also have our role – it begins with recognizing that the problem begins with us and stems from our pride and selfish desires. James concludes, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10).

Taming the Tongue

Jas 3:1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Jas 3:2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

Jas 3:3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

Jas 3:4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

Jas 3:5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

Jas 3:6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

Jas 3:7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,

Jas 3:8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Jas 3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness.

Jas 3:10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

Jas 3:11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

Jas 3:12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olive, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

1. How is the tongue (speaking with favoritism, discrimination, or cursing) like a bridle, rudder, or spark?

The tongue is a small member of the body but can control and corrupt the whole person

2. In addition to three allegories, how does James describe the tongue?
 - a. Verse 6 **Set on fire by hell**
 - b. Verse 8 (1) **Untamed**
 - c. Verse 8 (2) **Evil, a deadly poison**
3. The power of words can't be overstated. How have you seen relationships damaged or built up by words?

Words are most damaging when they come from someone close or respected; spouse, children, friends, or employer. A father's disapproval can scar for a lifetime. Spouses who argue can build barriers that are difficult to break through. That is why Paul advises in Ephesians 4:26-27, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

Critical words are especially hard on children because their developing mental health depends on their parent's nurturing. Children who receive little praise or have overly critical parents are more likely to suffer from depression, anger, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes or taking risks.

4. Why does James say it is wrong to curse (lie, slander, or malign) others, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9)?

James says we cannot praise God and curse men made in God's likeness. Respect for basic human dignity is the starting point in all relationships and communication.

5. Do you think it is possible to "tame the tongue," or are we all Popeye the Sailor Man (I y'am what I y'am and that's all that I y'am)? Refer to the following verses:

- a. [Jesus spoke to the Pharisees] **“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. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned”** (Matthew 12:35-37).
- b. **“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”** (Ephesians 4:29).

Christians are born again by the Spirit and not evil, but they still may sin in their speech. Paul would not say, “Do let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,” unless it was possible to reign in the tongue. This discipline is not a matter of willpower; it is a matter of repentance, prayer, and spiritual renewal through the Spirit to respect others.

- 6. The Council of Jerusalem was held between 46 to 50 AD. Paul and Barnabas met with James, Peter and the other apostles and elders to discuss issues that divided the early church. James addressed the division with wisdom. Read Acts 15 and identify some of the ways James addressed the divisive issues.

Ac 15:4 When they [Paul and Barnabas] came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

Ac 15:5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.”

Ac 15:6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

Ac 15:7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

Ac 15:8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

Ac 15:9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

Ac 15:10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

Ac 15:11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

Ac 15:12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Ac 15:13 When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ “ ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ ¹⁸ that have been known for ages. ^{Ac 15:19} “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ^{Ac 15:21} For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

7. What was the primary issue the assembly addressed?

Whether Gentile Christians should practice Judaism in order to follow Christ, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.”

8. What was the larger issue concerning living by grace versus the law?

If Christians were to live by trying to be righteous under the law, Christ’s sacrifice would have been in vain. Christ died to institute a new covenant for the forgiveness of sin through his blood, spiritual rebirth through the holy Spirit, and God’s grace and mercy.

9. What part did each of the apostles play in resolving the issue?

- a. Paul and Barnabas – **reported everything, all the signs and miracles, that God poured out onto the Gentiles through his Holy Spirit.**
- b. Peter – **Peter said God had told him to go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel. They believed, and God gave them the Holy Spirit. He also addressed the issue of the law – righteousness through the law had not come to Israel, why would they burden the Gentiles with it?**
- c. James – **James summarized and made a proposal that the council accepted**
- d. The assembly - **They listened, considered, and discussed the issue**

10. What general lessons can you apply to effective communication and working through difficult relational problems based on the Council of Jerusalem?

1. Verse 4 (1) **Be welcoming to the other person**
2. Verse 4 (2) **Share all the factual information**
3. Verse 5 **State the problem clearly**

4. Verses 6-7 **Discuss and consider the issues and potential implications**
5. Verses 7-11, 13-18 **Share additional Insights and information**
6. Verse 12 **Listen**
7. Verse 19-21 **Summarize and propose a solution after the issues are discussed**

Two Kinds of Wisdom

Jas 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Jas 3:14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

Jas 3:15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

Jas 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Jas 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Jas 3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

11. Verse 13 starts with a question, so let’s answer it. Who is wise among you?

Answers vary, have the class discuss questions 5 and 6 together – who and why?

12. What other qualities accompany their wisdom?

The wise people I admire are good leaders. They make good decisions, are very controlled in their demeanor, treat people respectfully, handle criticism graciously – usually with clarification, and pray.

13. The wisdom James is talking about is a spiritual gift accompanied by holiness and purity. It is about character, not education. Compare the qualities that accompany earthly wisdom versus the spiritual gift of wisdom

Earthly wisdom	Spiritual Wisdom
Bitter envy	Good deeds
Selfish ambitions	Humility
Boastful	Peace-loving
Disorder	Considerate
Unspiritual	Submissive
Evil	Full of mercy
	Impartial
	Sincere

14. James uses the Greek word “eupeithes” translated here as submissive, as a mark of wisdom. It is also translated as “reasonable” or “open to reason” and does not mean “gives into every demand.” In what other ways would you describe submissive as it relates to wisdom?

Respectful of others’ viewpoints, open to discussion, not stubborn, short-tempered or autocratic. Seek to understand above seeking to be understood. A submissive person may yield to another’s viewpoint over many things but stand like a rock concerning moral principles.

15. James says to ask God for wisdom, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). What other instruction does Proverbs provide in putting on wisdom?

Pr 4:20 My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words.

Pr 4:21 Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;

Pr 4:22 for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body.

Pr 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Pr 4:24 Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

Pr 4:25 Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.

Pr 4:26 Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm.

Pr 4:27 Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Listen to wise counsel

Guard your heart – seek righteousness

Guard your eyes – eyes are the lamp of the body, don’t look at things that corrupt your mind

Guard your path – take care in the places you go and the company you keep

Put off evil things in your life; perversity, corrupt talk

Prayer, Psalm 25:4-7

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth I and my rebellious ways; according to your love, remember me, for you are good, O LORD.