

# James 3 Commentary

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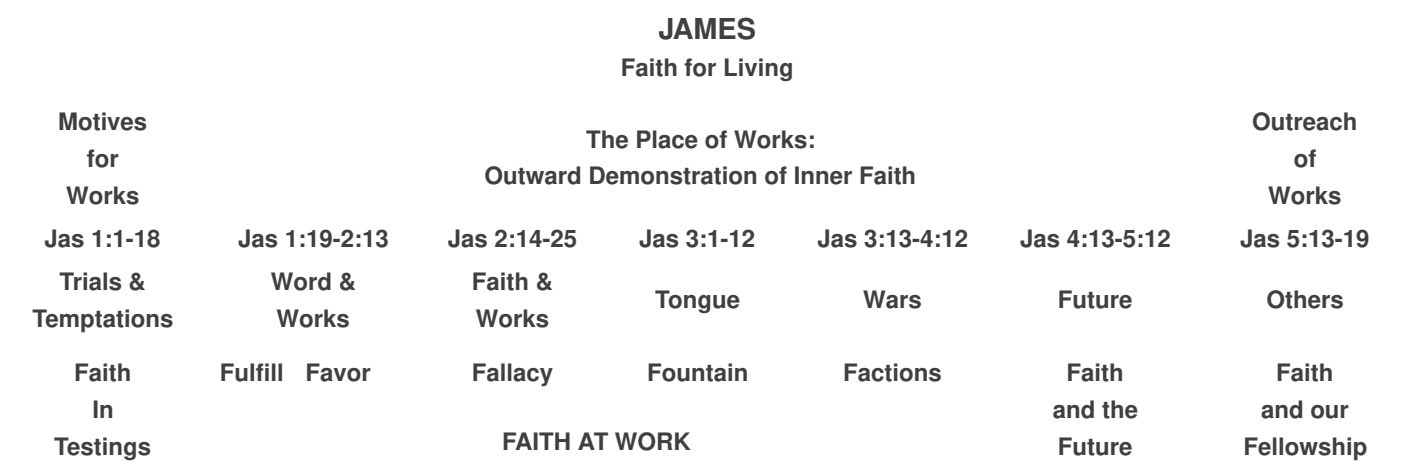
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(Hiebert - James Commentary)

**James 3:1** Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

Amplified my brethren, for you know that we [teachers] will be judged by a higher standard and with greater severity [than other people; thus we assume the greater accountability and the more condemnation].

Phillips Don't aim at adding to the number of teachers, my brothers, I beg you! Remember that we who are teachers will be judged by a much higher standard.

Wuest Stop becoming many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive a more severe sentence of condemnation,

NET James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, because you know that we will be judged more strictly.

GNT James 3:1 Μ πολλο διδ σκαλοι γ νεσθε, δελφο μου, ε δ τες τι με ζον κρ μα λημψ μεθα.

NLT James 3:1 Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.

KJV James 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

ESV James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

ASV James 3:1 Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment.

CSB James 3:1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment,

NIV James 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.

NKJ James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

NRS James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

YLT James 3:1 Many teachers become not, my brethren, having known that greater judgment we shall receive,

NAB James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you realize that we will be judged more strictly,

NJB James 3:1 Only a few of you, my brothers, should be teachers, bearing in mind that we shall receive a stricter judgement.

GWN James 3:1 Brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers. You know that we who teach will be judged more severely.

BBE James 3:1 Do not all be teachers, my brothers, because we teachers will be judged more hardly than others.

- **Let not many of you become teachers:** Mal 2:12 Mt 9:11 10:24 23:8-10,14 Joh 3:10 Ac 13:1 Ro 2:20,21 1Co 12:28 Eph 4:11 1Ti 2:7 2Ti 1:11 1Pe 5:3
- **knowing that as such** Lev 10:3 Eze 3:17,18 33:7-9 Lu 6:37 12:47,48 16:2 Ac 20:26,27 1Co 4:2-5 2Co 5:10 Heb 13:17
- **incur a stricter judgment,** Mt 7:1,2 23:14 1Co 11:29-32
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JAMES ISSUES A WARNING

I will confess that as a teacher of God's Word for over 30 years, I find this verse very disturbing (that's putting it mildly)! What Bible teacher or preacher does not "quake" a bit when reading this strong command and the companion warning which supports the command? And in the most bizarre of paradoxes, every teacher who seeks to explain this passage in a sense invites potential condemnation on himself! So at the outset, I am "treading lightly" on these passages and begging God's Spirit to direct me to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15<sup>+</sup>). In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Remember that chapter breaks are not inspired, so we do well not to forget that James has just been explaining the difference between a faith without works and a faith that has works (a "faith that really works"). Now he seems to "jump into" a discussion of the tongue, but context is always important for the most accurate interpretation. The point is that the demonstration of a genuine, living faith will be seen in the words that come from our mouth because ultimately they come from our heart. If our faith has resulted in a changed heart, a new heart (Ezek 36:26,27+, see Circumcision of the Heart), then the words we say will reflect our new birth showing that we are a new creation in Christ. And so James begins with teachers, who major in use of words to carry out their art. **A T Robertson** suggests that "there is thus a clear complaint that too many of the Jewish Christians were attempting to teach what they did not clearly comprehend." And so James begins by issuing a strong command to "Stop becoming teachers." But James does not stop with this strong command, but follows with a strong warning of greater accountability for teachers which should make anyone considering teaching to give it very serious thought.

Recall also that the **"tongue"** has been addressed in chapter 1, so this is not an unusual theme for James...

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear,**slow to speak** and slow to anger; (James 1:19<sup>+</sup>)

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not**bridle his tongue** but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. (James 1:26<sup>+</sup>)

In summary, in chapter 2 James considers the importance of **works** and in chapter 3 he considers the importance of **words** in the life of believers (note "my brethren" = addressing believers). In James 2 the the question is do your **works** match your **words** ("I believe") and in James 3 the question is do your **words** match your **words** ("I am a believer")?

**Lenski** links this section (James 3:1-12) with the preceding sections as follows - James now takes up "swift to hear, slow to speak," which were mentioned in James 1:19<sup>+</sup> and develops "slow to speak" as he developed "swift to hear" in James 1:19-27. A general connection is obvious: proper hearing of the Word will not make us respecters of persons (James 2:1-13) nor people with dead faith (James 2:14-26); proper hearing will bridle the tongue (James 1:26<sup>+</sup>) and will not put the needy off with mere words (James 2:15<sup>+</sup>, etc.). (The Interpretation of The Epistle to the Hebrews and The Epistle of James)

**Grant Osborne** agrees that "chapter 3 is closely related to chapter 1 and actually is the third section (after James 2:1-13; James 2:14-26) of examples of practical ethical issues that have grown out of chapter 1. The two parts of chapter 2 developed the command to be doers as well as listeners (James 1:19, 22-25). This section develops the commands to avoid improper speech

(James 1:19, 26). Several other parallels can be found (see Blomberg and Kamell 2008:147)—"**judged**" (James 3:1; 2:12-13); "**perfect**" (3:2; 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22); the **bit** in the horse's mouth (3:3; 1:26); the **ship** in strong winds (James 3:4; 1:6); **wickedness** (James 3:6; 1:15); **restless instability** (James 3:8; 1:8); the **curses/slander** (James 3:9-10; 2:7). In short, this section is closely interwoven into the previous material in James and continues to develop ethical themes previously introduced. (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 18: James)

**Hiebert** - James insists that a living faith must demonstrate its vitality by exercising control over the tongue. In the previous test (James 2:14-26), James insisted that a living faith must reveal itself in the production of works. In chapter 3 this demand for a productive faith is continued but with a difference. James insists that a living faith also must produce an inward result, the development of self-control. And this power of self-control is tested most readily in the matter of controlling the tongue. James agreed with Jesus (Matt. 12:34-37) that a man's words are the revelation of his character. As the organ of speech, a man's use of his tongue provides a ready revelation of his inner nature, for "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). (James Commentary)

**Ronald Blue** summarizes James 3 as follows - He appealed, however, not only for controlled tongues (James 3:1-12) but also for controlled thoughts (James 3:13-17). The mouth is, after all, connected to the mind. Winsome speech demands a wise source. Both controlled talk and cultivated thought are necessary. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

**Charles Swindoll** introduces the "tongue chapter" with some pithy thoughts - In James 2:14-26, the half brother of our Lord zoomed in on his central message—real faith produces genuine works. Throughout the book of James, a probing question holds his whole theme together: "***If you say you believe like you should, why do you behave like you shouldn't?***" In James 3:1-12, he develops this general theme in a very specific direction: controlling the tongue. No other section of the Bible speaks with greater clarity and impact on the potential destructive power of our words. We might summarize this powerful passage in the form of a question: "***If you say you believe like you should, why do you say things you shouldn't?***" (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James) (Bold added)

**Warren Wiersbe** - James has explained to us two characteristics of the mature Christian: he is patient in trouble (James 1) and he practices the truth (James 2). In this section, he shares the third characteristic of the mature believer: he has power over his tongue. (BEC)

Some suggest that James shifts from faith/works to the tongue because the relationship between faith and works is very evident in one's speech. **John MacArthur** says that "What you are will inevitably be disclosed by what you say. It might be said that a person's speech is a reliable measure of his spiritual temperature, a monitor of the inner human condition. The rabbis spoke of the tongue as an arrow rather than a dagger or sword, because it can wound and kill from a great distance. It can wreak great damage even when far from its victim." (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James)

Beloved, James is not discouraging people from becoming teachers. After all, James is himself a teacher. As discussed in this section what he is discouraging is the tendency for those who are not qualified or gifted to rush into teaching. His warning is calculated to restrain this rush, so to speak! But if God has called you to be a teacher then by all means teach as Paul says in Romans 12 "Having therefore gifts differing according to the grace given us, whether that of prophecy, prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or serving, **exercise that gift** within the sphere of service; or **teaching, within the sphere of teaching** (Ro 12:6-7 <sup>+</sup> Wuest Paraphrase) In sum, James is not prohibiting one from the use of his or her gift of teaching, but is simply warning that the ministry of teaching should not be entered into lightly.

**Let not many of you become teachers** - This is actually a command ([present imperative with a negative](#)) = Stop becoming teachers (as apparently so many were doing). At first glance James 3:1-2 may seem somewhat unrelated to James' treatment of the tongue in James 3:3-12. But which "organ" does the teacher rely on primarily? Clearly he or she makes major use of their tongue. And of course God desires teachers to articulate His Word of truth, so James is not saying one should not become a teacher. What he is saying is that one should not take on a teaching role without considering the seriousness of this position in the Church. Don't be like the old Elvis Presley song which has the line "only fools rush in." Do not foolishly rush into a teaching role! Why? Because as noted you are primarily using your tongue and you can have considerable influence. But if the words that come out of your mouth in teaching are not in line with the Word of Truth, then you are making yourself open to potential condemnation.

**Jamieson** on becoming **teachers** - The idea that faith (so called) without works (Jas 2:14-26) was all that is required, prompted "many" to set up as "teachers," as has been the case in all ages of the Church. At first all were allowed to teach in turns. Even their inspired gifts did not prevent liability to abuse, as James here implies: much more is this so when self-constituted teachers have no such miraculous gifts.

Paul has a parallel passage writing

"For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, **wanting to be teachers**

of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions." (1 Ti 1:6-7)

James' warning is also better understood if we keep in mind that teachers were highly respected in the culture of the first century, and this respect included the Greco-Roman teachers as well as Jewish teachers. Jesus was often give the highly respected titles of **Rabbi** (Mk 9:5; Jn 1:38) or Teacher (Mt 8:19; 12:38; Mk 5:35; 9:17, 38; Lk 7:40; 11:45; Jn 20:16). Similarly, the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees were both held in high esteem by the Jewish populace. And so it naturally follows that many would seek out the position of teacher even though they were not gifted or qualified.

**Teachers** (1320)(**didaskalos** from **didasko** = teach <> cp **didaskalia**) is one who provides instruction or systematically imparts truth with the goal of shaping the will of the one being taught by the content taught. As someone said "The great teacher is the one who turns our ears into eyes so that we can see the truth." Henry Brooks added that "A (Bible) teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

**MacArthur** explains that "**A faith which does not transform the tongue is no saving faith at all.** So since speech is the mark of true faith, it should be a proper measure, then, of those who articulate the faith, those who teach the faith." Is this in fact not James had stated in James 1:26 "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet **does not bridle his tongue** but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is **worthless.**"

**Spurgeon** on James 1:26 - If religion does not salt your tongue, and keep it sweet, it has done nothing for you. If the doctor wants to know the state of your health, he says, "Let me see your tongue;" and there is no better test of the health of the mind than to see what is on the tongue. When it gets furred up with unkind words, when it turns black with blasphemy, when it is spotted with lasciviousness, there is something very bad inside the heart, you may be quite sure of that.

**My brethren** (80)(**adelphos** from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means brother or near kinsman. "Adelphós generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family, specifically referring to believers. Recall the Jewishness of his audience in James 1:1<sup>+</sup> "To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad."

**So again James appeals to them  
as those who are genuine believers.**

**Adelphos** in James -

Jas. 1:2; Jas. 1:9; Jas. 1:16; Jas. 1:19; Jas. 2:1; Jas. 2:5; Jas. 2:14; Jas. 2:15; Jas. 3:1; Jas. 3:10; Jas. 3:12;  
Jas. 4:11; Jas. 5:7; Jas. 5:9; Jas. 5:10; Jas. 5:12; Jas. 5:19;

**Knowing that** - **NIV** translates this as "**because**" which is a good paraphrase for in this context the phrase **knowing that** functions essentially as a term of explanation. And so James uses this phrase to explain why individuals should stop becoming teachers. It is like putting the "pause button" on the video - he wants his readers to "pause" and "ponder" the responsibility that this position entails! If you are called by God to be a teacher (cf Eph 4:11, Ro 12:7, 1 Cor 12:29) then "Amen!" But if you are definitively called by God to be a teacher, then "O my!"

## HEAVIER JUDGMENT

Authority (to teach for God) comes with accountability (of teacher to God). Many were apparently enamored with the former, but ignorant of the latter! (Compare Lk 12:48+).

**As such we will incur a stricter** (greater) **judgment** - A "greater sentence." (cf Mk 12:40) Why? One reason is the ever present danger that we may teach something that does not square with God's Word (cf Jesus' warning in Lk 20:46-47+, Eph 4:14, Col 2:21-22, 1 Ti 4:1-4, 1 Ti 6:3, 2 Ti 4:3-4). There is an added danger if one has a glib tongue or charismatic personality, which may result in the students more enamored with the smooth technique than with sound doctrine (or lack of it! cf **Jim Jones**). Notice **James** includes himself with the first person plural pronoun "**we.**" He is fully aware that he too must appear before his earthly Half-Brother Jesus, the Righteous Judge at the Bema Seat, and that he will receive no "family favors!" Clearly a teacher's words can affect the belief and behavior (we behave the way we behave, because we believe what we believe), either positively or negatively. In addition teachers need be sure they practice what they preach (teach), and if they do not, they are hypocritical teachers (cf Mt 23:2-5). And **Swindoll** really nails this one down when he declares that "the real test of teachers isn't what they say, but what their families say. The extent of people's ministries isn't the size of their churches, it's the depth of their family life. Teachers must never forget that." (Ibid)

**Robertson** adds they will receive heavier judgment because "The reason is obvious. The pretence of knowledge adds to the

teacher's responsibility and condemnation."

**Judgment** (Condemnation) (2917) (**krima** from **krino** = to judge, the suffix **-ma** indicating the result of the judging, ie, that is, the result of making a decision) is a neutral word which can be either positive or negative. In the NT **krima** is most often used negatively (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47; 1 Tim. 5:24) which is how James uses it in this passage. For unbelievers this judgment will be the Great White Throne judgment of Rev 20:11-15, although by calling them **my brethren**, James is not addressing unbeliever. More to the point, for believers the judgment will occur at the Bema Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10, Ro 14:12, cf 1 Cor 3:13-15).

2 Corinthians 5:10+ For we must (**dei** = obligation, necessity) ALL (NO EXCEPTIONS) appear before the judgment seat (**bema**) of Christ, so that each one (**hekastos**) may be recompensed (**komizo**) for his deeds (NOT SINS) in the body (DURING OUR TIME AS BELIEVERS ON EARTH), according to what he has done, whether good or bad (**phaulos** = worthless) (NOT FOR SINS - Ro 8:1+ = "No Condemnation" = **katakrima**)..

Romans 14:10-12+ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will ALL (NO EXCEPTIONS) stand before the judgment seat (**bema**) of God. For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

**J Vernon McGee** has a pithy comment regarding the "fiery" judgment in 1 Cor 3:13-15 -- "I like to put it like this: there are going to be some people in heaven who will be there because their foundation is Christ but who will smell as if they had been bought at a fire sale! Everything they ever did will have gone up in smoke. They will not receive a reward for their works."

**Stricter judgment** - Clearly this teaches that there will be varying degrees of judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ (some stricter, some less strict).

The writer of Hebrews echoes James except his warning is addressed to the "sheep," to the "congregation"

**Obey** (**present imperative** - only possible to keep this by continually relying on the **Holy Spirit to obey**) your leaders and submit (**present imperative** relying on the **Holy Spirit**) to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account (FUTURE JUDGMENT AT BEMA SEAT). Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17+)

Paul alludes to this **stricter judgment** for teachers in his last letter

**Be diligent** (**aoist imperative** - command calling for dependence on **the Holy Spirit to obey**) to present yourself **approved** (**dokimos** = a qualification that results from trial and examination) to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15+)

**Grant Osborne** comments that Paul "restates what James is saying here. A teacher who mishandles God's truth and "shoots off their mouth" in the wrong way will stand before God in shame at the final judgment. The quality of one's teaching and preaching matters a great deal to God, and too many preachers and teachers are guilty of shallowness and irrelevance." (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – James)

**Spiros Zodhiates** sums up this section remarking that "If we teach because of the desire to show off, without living Christ before we preach Him, the judgment of God will be a severe condemnation; but if our teaching is motivated by a sincere and honest love for the Lord and the edification of those who hear us, then we can welcome this judgment, for it will mean a great reward." (**Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James**)

**Jon Courson** writes that "The longer I walk with the Lord, the more I see that the key to life is to learn to be content where God has placed you (Philippians 4:11). If you're called to teach, that's great! If you're called to listen, that's wonderful! In either place, contentment is the key." (Jon Courson's Application Commentary New Testament)

**Luke Timothy Johnson** wrote that speech by teachers before a "captive audience" "provides temptations to virtually every form of evil speech: arrogance and domination over students; anger and pettiness at contradiction or inattention; slander and meanness toward absent opponents; flattery of students for the sake of vainglory." (The Letter to James, 1995).

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**ILLUSTRATION** (similar to one mentioned by McGee) - One day a very learned preacher was met by an illiterate preacher who despised education. "Sir, you have been to college, I suppose?" "Yes, sir," was the reply. "I am thankful," replied the illiterate preacher, "that the Lord opened my mouth without any learning." "A similar event," answered the learned clergyman, "took place in Balaam's time, when his donkey spoke, but such things are of rare occurrence in the present day. Maybe you are one of the rarities." (Zodhiates)

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**J Vernon McGee** has a number of witty sayings about the tongue...

James has already indicated that he was going to come to this subject. He said back in James 1:26 "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." He also said, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19). You have two ears, and God gave them to you so that you can hear twice as much as you can say.

The tongue is the most dangerous weapon in the world. It is more deadly than the atom bomb, but no careful inspection is made of it. Some wag made the statement that it was a miracle in Balaam's day for a donkey to speak, but today it is a miracle when he keeps quiet. Someone else pointed out that it takes a baby two years to learn to talk and fifty years to learn to keep his mouth shut. The story is told of a man who had been fishing out on a pier for several hours and had not caught anything. As two women walked out on the pier, he finally pulled in a fish. It wasn't a very large fish, and one of these two women took it upon herself to rebuke this man: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself for so cruelly catching this poor little fish?" And the man, without even looking up, because he was a little discouraged anyway, said, "Maybe you are right, lady, but if the fish had kept his mouth shut he wouldn't have been caught." Another has expressed it this way:

If your lips would keep from slips,  
Five things to observe with care:  
To whom you speak, of whom you speak,  
And how, and when, and where.  
-- Author unknown

The importance of the tongue has been expressed in many different ways, and practically every nation has had something to say about it. I read this in Spurgeon's "Salt Cellars" years ago:

"The boneless tongue, so small and weak,  
Can crush and kill," declared the Greek.  
"The tongue destroys a greater hoard,  
The Turk asserts, "than does the sword."  
A Persian proverb wisely saith,  
"A lengthy tongue -- an early death";  
Or sometimes takes this form instead,  
"Don't let your tongue cut off your head."  
"The tongue can speak a word whose speed,"  
The Chinese say, "outstrips the steed";  
While Arab sages this impart,  
"The tongue's great storehouse is the heart."  
From Hebrew wit this maxim sprung,  
"Though feet should slip, ne'er let the tongue."  
The sacred writer crowns the whole,  
"Who keeps his tongue doth keep his soul!"

All of these sayings are very wise. I believe fervently that the most dangerous thing in the world is the tongue. I think the church is more harmed by the termites within than by the woodpeckers on the outside. Someone has put it like this: "Thou art master of the unspoken word, but the spoken word is master of you." In other words, my friend, once you have said it, it is beyond your control. (Thru The Bible)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Years ago I visited a college friend at his home. On campus we had enjoyed a significant sharing of personal values and philosophies, much of it through discussion of literature, history and music. When we met at his home, he wanted me to hear a certain Mahler symphony that expressed some of his aspirations toward the attainment of love and peace. We listened together in silent pleasure, caught up in the music and our high ideals—until, at a particularly moving point in the symphony, my friend's mother broke the spell by entering the room and asking a mundane question about supper. Her innocent interruption

received a fierce verbal rebuke from her son. How dare she spoil the exquisite music! Startled and embarrassed, she retreated from the room, but the damage to our mood had been done. The damage to our illusions had also been done. My friend and I talked about the incident. What good were ideals of love and aspirations to "self-actualization" if we could not control our tongues enough to speak respectfully to other human beings? The spirituality was only a feeling, an illusion, if it could not purify our behavior in the practical matter of what we said. (IVP New Testament Commentary Series – James)

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The teacher's tongue is the tool of their trade, and teachers must master this tool!

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"A slip of the foot you may soon recover, but a slip of the tongue you may never get over." Benjamin Franklin

A small slip of the tongue can launch a great avalanche of destruction!

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All of us may learn a cultural lesson from the Chinese people. They have the custom of not answering a speaker until he is completely finished speaking. They think that it is discourteous to reply immediately, for a rash reply indicates a lack of thinking and poor judgment. - Simon Kistemaker

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**TEACHERS' MISTAKES** - In New Testament times, many teachers failed and misused their positions of responsibility. Some of the teachers:

- I Introduced Judaism, Mosaic laws, and circumcision (Acts 15:24), weakening the gospel truth that we are saved by grace alone
- I Lived in contradiction to what they taught (Romans 2:17-29)
- I Taught before they knew anything themselves (1 Timothy 1:6-7)
- I Catered to people's "itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3)

**WHAT ARE MY MOTIVES FOR BEING A TEACHER?** Those who take on teaching roles should ask themselves the following questions as a way of evaluating their fitness to teach:

- Am I teaching as an act of service?
- Am I trying to advance my own status or position in the church?
- Am I teaching to discharge a duty?

Christian teachers need to be primarily models of integrity and secondarily instructors of content; therefore, they should submit both their lives and their words to God's scrutiny. Their teaching must not be frivolous or selfish. Teachers should teach God's truth, not merely their own opinions. If we teach others, we must make sure that our lives do not contradict what we teach. (Bruce Barton Life Application Bible Commentary – James)

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## TEACHERS

Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1).

Author Mark Twain was often outspoken about his bitterness toward the things of God. Sadly, church leaders were largely to blame for his becoming hostile to the Bible and the Christian faith. As Twain grew up, he knew elders and deacons who owned slaves and abused them, and he knew ministers who used the Bible to justify slavery. He heard men use foul language and saw them practice dishonesty during the week after speaking piously in church on Sunday. Although he saw genuine love for the Lord Jesus in some people, including his mother and his wife, he was never able to understand the bad teaching and poor example of certain church leaders. Leadership is a privilege, and with privilege comes responsibility. God holds teachers of His truth doubly responsible because they are in positions where they can either draw people toward Christ or drive them away from Him. Serving as an elder, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or a Bible club leader is an awesome responsibility. Those who are called to these positions are responsible to lead people to the Savior rather than away from Him. According to James 3, they can do this by exemplifying true wisdom, which is "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (v. 17). —H. V. L. ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The best kind of leadership produces fellowship.

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**Charles Swindoll** has an imaginary illustration that vividly depicts the power of our words - If you ever see a wild animal prowling your neighborhood, you can call your local animal control agency to round it up and haul it off. The dogcatcher can take stray dogs to the pound or return loose dogs to their owners. Feral cats can be caught, skunks chased off, raccoons lured away. All these wild



and roaming animals can be rounded up. Why not have a catcher and a pound for stray words? Now that's an occupation that could earn a decent living in any economy! Imagine a razor-toothed invective cornered by a couple word catchers: "Careful now, careful—that's a mean one!" "Who would let such a thing loose?" "Aw, some guy got worked up and unleashed it on his poor wife." "I'd hate to see what that gal feels like now." "Like shredded wheat, probably." "Well, let's get this pit bull of a word off the street before it bites somebody else." Now then, let's say you're home and these same word catchers suddenly ring your doorbell. "Excuse me, sir," they ask, "does this word belong to you? We caught it running loose out there, backbiting everyone where you work. Your boss said it sounded like it was one of yours." You take a long look at their catch and sure enough, you let that little gossip out on Wednesday and by Saturday it's ruined a dozen weekends. Red-faced, you claim your nasty words and send the word catchers away. Of course, word catching is an imaginary profession. But my guess is if you could find a way to round up and return people's words in time to stop their damage, it would be a lucrative business in our world of loose lips and unrestrained tongues. I know there are a few nasty ones I've let loose in my life that I would have paid almost anything to take back. I'm sure you've got your list, too. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James)

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## Loose Lips Sink Ships

On December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This sneak attack disabled much of the U.S. Pacific naval fleet and destroyed many aircraft, propelling enraged Americans to arms. World War II took place on both land and sea, but it was clear that, for the war being waged in the Pacific, aircraft carriers were the most important weapon.

The fear of enemy spies finding out key locations of U.S. naval vessels prompted the government to wage a publicity campaign. They sent advice to GIs about what to say and not say when writing letters home, when carrying on conversations, or if captured by the enemy. Posters carried the message to the home front: Loose Lips Might Sink Ships.

The epistle of James also warns those in the Lord's army that the lips can do devastating damage: our lips can make our ships sink or float! Last week James emphasized what we do—our works—not what we say. Just in case his readers got the wrong idea, James gave clear instructions to counterbalance the works-only idea: Saying and doing go hand in hand.

Modern Christians have the same problem with works, thinking, If I don't drink, smoke, or swear, I'm okay. Yet they engage in gossip, slander, and backbiting. They may build up the body of Christ with their actions while their loose lips spring leaks in the body of Christ. (Womens Bible Journal)

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## The Teacher And The Tongue Warm-up: James 3:1–12

If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man . . . James 3:2

Words, said Aristotle, are what set human beings above the lower animals. Not necessarily.

Words can bring us down: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers," writes James, "because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 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" (James 3:1–2).

I'm a teacher by trade—a vendor of words. It's a good profession—one of the "greater gifts" we're encouraged to seek (1 Corinthians 12:31)—yet there is peril in the task: Teachers are more culpable than others.

We're at risk because we multiply words, and as the wise man said, "When words are many, sin is not absent" (Proverbs 10:19), a text which, as Augustine said, "frightens me a good deal."

James indicts all of us when he says, "If anyone is not at fault in what he says, he is a perfect [mature] man, able to keep his whole body in check." Like good physicians everywhere, Dr. James invites us to stick out our tongue because that member of our body, more than any other, reveals the state of our being. Our tongues tell on us; we're only as good as our words.///

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## Don Anderson's [Summary of Study of James from chapter 1-3](#)

In our study of James, with the subject POINTERS FOR PROGRESS, we "" have noted thus far that we: 1

1. GROW TALLER THROUGH TESTING,
2. GROWTH IN STUNTED BY SIN\_,
3. GROWTH IS PRODUCED BY THE WORD,
4. MUST LEARN TO LOVE THE UNLOVELY, and
5. FAITH IS DEAD WITHOUT DEEDS.

Now we treat another very practical area of Christian maturity and that is the subject of:

6. STRIVING FOR TONGUE CONTROL.

Ways Christ can be seen in me:

1. Attitude in Test
2. Victory in Temptation
3. Intake of Word
4. Love without Partiality
5. Living Faith
6. Tongue Spiritual Maturity is reflected by a controlled tongue.

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Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds.

You can't do that when you are flying words.

Careful with fire is good advice, we know.

Careful with words is 10 times doubly so.

Thoughts unexpressed sometimes fall back dead,  
but God, Himself, can't kill them once they're said.

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Imperfect Leaders James 3:1

Spirituality does not guarantee infallible judgment. Spirit-filled people are less likely to make mistakes of judgment than their secular counterparts, but perfection eludes us all, whatever our level of spiritual development. Even the apostles made mistakes that required divine correction.

Spiritual leaders who have given such a significant share of their lives to knowing God, to prayer, and to wrestling with the problems of renewal and revival may find it difficult to concede the possibility of misjudgment or mistake. Surely leaders must be people of strength and decisiveness, to stand for what they believe. But willingness to concede error and to defer to the judgment of one's peers increases one's influence rather than diminishes it. Followers will lose confidence in leaders who appear to believe they are infallible. It is strange but true that a perception of infallibility in one area of life often coexists with great humility in other areas.

Many influential Christians have fallen before the temptation of indispensability. It seems that Christians are especially prone to it. They cling to authority long after it should have passed to younger people. I met a wonderful Christian in his nineties who was still superintendent of his church's Sunday school. Younger people were willing and available, but no one in the church had been able to approach this saint about retirement. One unfortunate consequence is that young people who have energy to fill a role are held up and stagnate.

Sometimes sincere and well-meaning followers encourage the notion of indispensability, which feeds a leader's ego and makes him or her even less objective about performance in office. And we can become less objective about our work as we get older.

Missionaries who have raised a church to believe that they are indispensable have done the church an injustice. From the earliest days of the work, missionaries should be planning on working their way out of a job. National leadership needs to learn how to depend on the Lord, how to train its own spiritual leaders, and how to take responsibility for the work. (J Oswald Sanders)

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James has been talking about the Christian and his WORKS in chapter 2 the first 12 verses of chapter 3 his WORDS, and in the last 6 verses, about the Christian's WISDOM

**Ironsides** points out - So the tongue, seemingly so weak in-itself, has power to make or break one's life and testimony. Nor can any man control it in his own strength. When the tongue is surrendered to Christ, and dominated by the Spirit, it becomes one of our most useful members. When it falls under the control of the Enemy, it works untold grief and damage.

Only a word of anger,  
but it wounded one sensitive heart.  
Only a word of sharp reproach,  
but it made the teardrops start.

Only a hasty, thoughtless word,  
sarcastic and unkind,  
but it darkened the day before so bright  
and left a stain behind.

**James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.**

Amplified For we all often stumble and fall and offend in many things. And if anyone does not offend in speech [never says the wrong things], he is a fully developed character and a perfect man, able to control his whole body and to curb his entire nature.

Phillips We all make mistakes in all kinds of ways, but the man who can claim that he never says the wrong thing can consider himself perfect, for if he can control his tongue he can control every other part of his personality!

Wuest for with reference to many things everybody stumbles [makes a mistake, goes astray, sins]. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, this one is a spiritually mature man, able to hold in check also his entire body.

NET James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect individual, able to control the entire body as well.

GNT James 3:2 πολλὰ γὰρ πταόμεν πάντες. ἐὰν τις ὁ λόγος οὐ πταίῃ, ὁ τὸς τῷ λείῳ νῦν δυνατὸς χαλινάγει καὶ τὸ σῶμα.

NLT James 3:2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

KJV James 3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

ESV James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

ASV James 3:2 For in many things we all stumble. If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.

CSB James 3:2 for we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body.

NIV James 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.

NKJ 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.

NRS James 3:2 For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle.

YLT James 3:2 for we all make many stumbles; if any one in word doth not stumble, this one is a perfect man, able to bridle also the whole body;

NAB James 3:2 for we all fall short in many respects. If anyone does not fall short in speech, he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body also.

NJB James 3:2 For we all trip up in many ways. Someone who does not trip up in speech has reached perfection and is able to keep the whole body on a tight rein.

GWN James 3:2 All of us make a lot of mistakes. If someone doesn't make any mistakes when he speaks, he would be perfect. He would be able to control everything he does.

BBE James 3:2 For we all go wrong in a number of things. If a man never makes a slip in his talk, then he is a complete man and able to keep all his body in control.

- **For we all stumble in many ways:** 1Ki 8:46 2Ch 6:36 Pr 20:9 Ec 7:20 Isa 64:6 Ro 3:10 Ro 7:21 Ga 3:22 Gal 5:17 1Jn 1:8-10
- **If anyone does not stumble in what he says** Jas 3:5,6 1:26 Ps 34:13 Pr 13:3 1Pe 3:10
- **he is a perfect man:** Jas 1:4 Mt 12:37 Col 1:28 4:12 Heb 13:21 1Pe 5:10
- **able to bridle the whole body as well:** 1Co 9:27
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**EVIDENCE OF A  
PERFECT MAN**

**For** ([gar](#)) is a term of explanation. What is James explaining here? He is explaining the teacher's responsibility is weighty because of the universal propensity to sin ("stumble"), not just teachers but everyone.

Douglas Moo adds that "The probable logic of the argument is: Teachers are more susceptible to judgment than others *because* they regularly engage in that activity which is hardest to keep from sin—one's speech." (The Pillar New Testament Commentary – The Letter of James)

**We all stumble in many ways** - **We** = James does not hesitate to include himself as a "stumbler!" Lenski says "This is James' great confession of sin."

**All** = no exceptions so now it is not only teachers but **all** believers.

**In many ways** - We don't just have "slips" of our tongue, but James says this stumbling occurs **in many ways** which would include sins of various "shapes and sizes" so to speak. So while **many ways** most likely means a variety of sins, it is worth noting that even if one restricted the many ways to the tongue, there are still many ways to sin. As **Theodore Epp** says "The tongue can be used in so many ways that dishonor the Lord. It can be used to tell an off-color story; it can be used to utter profanity in a time of anger; it can be used to pass on idle gossip; and it can be used to report dishonest half-truths."

**Stumble** = we all commit sin (even believers like James)! Why? Because the sin of Adam spread like a virulent virus to all men "and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Ro 5:12). This is an indisputable fact of life "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Ro 3:23). Solomon adds that "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins." (Ecclesiastes 7:20) And just "as it is written, 'THERE IS (absolutely) NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.'" (Ro 3:10). The verb **stumble** is in the [present tense](#) describing this as something that will occur not just once or twice but repeatedly throughout our life on earth. There is not a single day when we as believers do not stub our toe spiritually and fall short of God's perfect will for our life!

A prayer we might all consider in the morning is David's plea "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips." (Ps 141:3) In another psalm David took responsibility for guarding his mouth declaring "I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked are in my presence." (Ps 39:1).

As **Zodhiates** says "It is good as we start the day, not only to pray that the Lord may direct our steps in the path of righteousness, but also that He may direct the tongue and its movements during the day. Our tongues are apt to go to places where our steps would never dream of going." ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**Stumble** ([4417](#))([ptaio](#)) means literally to lose one's footing and so to fall, stumble or "to be tripped up" and thus to lose one's footing. **Ptaio** was used in secular Greek writings to refer to a "sure-footed as a horse that does not **stumble**" (Xenophon), and to describe a good man (Epictetus, Marcus Antoninus). All 4 NT uses of **ptaio** (Ro 11:11; Jas. 2:10; Jas. 3:2; 2 Pe 1:10) are figurative and mean to err, to wander from the right way; to miss the right way; to commit error, and ultimately to fail to keep the law of God. James has already used **ptaio** explaining that "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." (James 2:10+). In summary, to stumble means to commit any moral lapse, to fail to do what is right.

**Hiebert on stumble** - In its literal sense the term conveys the picture of the foot striking against some obstacle so as to cause the individual to trip or stumble; metaphorically it denotes the fact of a failure in duty, a mistake that is blameworthy, or a sin. (Ibid)

**Lenski** adds that "To **stumble** (iterative present) is figurative for sinning without falling from grace. One stumbles and yet goes forward on the road....This is James's great confession of sin. It includes far more than sins of teaching or even sins of the tongue. James places these sins into the class of the many sins which true Christians confess daily (Matt. 6:12)." (Ibid)

James has just generalized our stumbling as occurring in many ways, but now focuses down on our speech, what we say, what comes out of our mouth.

**J Vernon McGee** - Remember the maid who said to Simon Peter, "...thy speech betrayeth thee" (Matt. 26:73) -- he could not deny that he was from Galilee. Your speech tells who you are; your tongue gives you away. It tells where you came from. It tells whether you are ignorant or educated, cultured or crude, whether you are clean or unclean, whether you are vulgar or refined, whether you are a believer or a blasphemer, whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian, whether you are guilty or not guilty. My friend, I am of the opinion that if you had a tape-recorded message of everything you have said this past month, you would not want the world to hear it. (Thru The Bible)

**William MacDonald** - Just as an old-fashioned doctor examined a patient's tongue to assist in diagnosis, so James tests a person's spiritual health by his or her conversation. Self-diagnosis begins with sins of speech. James would agree with the modern wit who said, "Watch your tongue. It's in a wet place where it's easy to slip!" (Believer's Bible Commentary)

**If anyone does not stumble in what he says**- More literally this reads "if anyone in a word (logos) does not stumble." **Amplified** = "if anyone does not offend in speech [never says the wrong things]" **Phillips** = the man who can claim that he never says the wrong thing." **NIV** = "If anyone is never at fault in what he says." **NRSV** = "Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking."

The **IF** is first class condition which assumes what follows is true. Notice the emphasis on **what he says**. Teachers constantly use their tongues and thus are continual danger of stumbling (sinning) by the words they speak. But James had addressed this to **ALL**, so this description would refer to the speech of all believers, not just teachers.

James is clearly depicting control of one's tongue as a significant marker of one's overall spirituality. How's your tongue control? Do curse words fly easily off of your tongue?

John has a parallel passage...

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 Jn 1:8-10+)

**Says** (3056) (**logos** - English logic, logical, etc) has the primary sense of thought and thus presupposes intelligence. And so the idea is the word by which the inner thought is expressed, the expression of thought, the coming out of that which is within one's heart. The implication of this definition of "says" would indicate that when one stumbles by what they say (logos), their stumbling (aka, sin) is not an accident but a result of thought which makes James' indictment even more pointed. In other words, the stumbling was in essence premeditated, making us even more culpable!

**He is a perfect man** - James uses an adjective (teleios) that speaks of the totality of this man. This man is not partially but completely perfect, which would literally apply to only the Man, Christ Jesus. And so one could interpret the perfect man as a hypothetical description, for no man except Christ lives a life of absolute perfection. So for example the **ESV Study Bible** says James "probably has absolute perfection in view." From my survey of a number of commentaries on James, this seems to be the minority view.

**MacArthur** - "**Perfect**" may refer to true perfection, in which case James is saying that, hypothetically, if a human being were able to perfectly control his tongue, he would be a perfect man. But, of course, no one is actually immune from sinning with his tongue. More likely, "perfect" is describing those who are spiritually mature and thus able to control their tongues. (MacArthur Study Bible)

## **TONGUE CONTROL IS SPIRIT CONTROLLED**

Most commentators feel that James uses **teleios** with its common NT meaning to describe one who is spiritually mature (see uses of this same adjective in Col 1:28+ = "**complete** in Christ" and Heb 5:14+ = "solid food is for the **mature**"). Translators also favor the interpretation that perfect conveys the sense of one who is spiritually mature (or growing in spiritual maturity). And so we see **Wuest** = "spiritually **mature** man." **Amplified** = "**fully developed character** and a perfect man." **CSB** = "he is a **mature** man." Now if Jesus is the only fully **perfect** Man, it follows that in order for us to begin to grow toward that goal of Christ-like maturity, we need to imitate walking the way Jesus walked while He was on earth. And how did He walk? Filled with, empowered by, led by the Holy Spirit (Luke summarizes Jesus' 3+ year ministry in Acts 10:37-38+, cf the very beginning of Jesus' ministry - Lk 4:1+, Lk 4:14+, Lk 4:18+, etc). Imitating Jesus' walk is the exhortation of Paul, John and Peter (see passages below). For a more thorough discussion of this vitally important truth see the article [The Holy Spirit-Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#)

**Be** ([present imperative](#) = a command, not a suggestion!) imitators of me, just as **I also am of Christ**. (1 Cor 11:1+)

The one who says he abides in Him ought ([opheilo](#) - expresses obligation, necessity to follow the example of Jesus! So this is not optional but mandatory for believers!) himself to **walk in the same manner as He walked**. (1 John 2:6+)

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, **leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps** (1 Pe 2:21+)

**John MacArthur** agrees writing "To the degree that our holiness approaches that of Christ's, to that degree we are spiritually **perfect** or mature. As in all else, He is our supreme and glorious example."

And so, dear follower of Christ, enabled by the Holy Spirit, we are called to continually **grow** ([present imperative](#)) in grace and the knowledge (aka [progressive sanctification](#)) of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pe 3:18+), and as we take in the Word of Truth (cf Lk 4:4+, Jn 17:17, 1 Pe 2:2+), we "are being ([passive voice](#) = subject acted upon from Source without = the Spirit) transformed

([metamorphoo](#) = [present tense](#) continually) into the same image (CHRIST-LIKENESS) from glory to glory, just as from **the Lord, the Spirit.**" (2 Cor 3:18+).

**Perfect** (5046) ([teleios](#) from [telos](#) = end, purpose, aim, goal) means complete, mature, fully developed, full grown, brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness. **Teleios** signifies consummate soundness, includes the idea of being whole and in the context of the Bible refers to the goal that has been set by God for men. Interestingly the Gnostics used **teleios** of the one fully initiated into their mysteries. **Teleious** is found only 17x in the NT and the short epistle of James has 3 of the uses - James 1:4+ = "And let endurance have its **perfect** ([teleios](#)) result, so that you may be **perfect** ([teleios](#)) and complete, lacking in nothing." So James sees Christian "perfection" or better spiritual maturity, as a goal for all believers and emphasizes trials aid us on our journey to Christian maturity. James 1:17+ speaking of every gift God gives as "perfect" and here in James 3:2.

**Robert Johnstone** explains perfect as "a maturity of religious life, a ripeness and richness of knowledge and character, such as may be supposed to mark the full-grown man, as contrasted with the babe in Christ." ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#))

**Wiersbe** explains that James links the tongue with the whole body "because *words* usually lead to *deeds*. During World War II we were accustomed to seeing posters that read LOOSE LIPS SINK SHIPS! But loose lips also wreck lives."

**Roy Gingrich** quips "If we can make the lion (the tongue) behave, surely we can make the cats and the dogs (the body's other members) behave." (The Book of James)

**Able to bridle the whole body as well - NIV** = "able to keep his whole body in check." **Amplified** = "able to control his whole body and to curb his entire nature." James explains how the spiritual state of the **perfect man** can be most easily discerned -- by listening to what/how he speaks! Since he is able to bridle and control his tongue, he is able to control his whole body, most likely referring to the passions of his body, not just his words. In other words, he is able to control the old self, the fallen flesh. How is this even possible? There is only one way to curb or check the flesh and that is to "**Walk** ([present imperative](#)) **by the Spirit** and you will (ABSOLUTELY) not fulfill the desires of the flesh (DOES NOT SAY WON'T HAVE DESIRES BUT WON'T ACT ON THEM)." (Gal 5:16+ - NOTE ORDER - SPIRIT FIRST, THEN FLESH IS SUPPRESSED, NOT VICE VERSA) And if one is walking by the supernatural power of the Spirit, he or she brings forth fruit, one component being **self-control** (Gal 5:23+ [egkrateia](#) = It is self-control proceeding out from within oneself, but not by oneself, and for the believer is only possible by depending on the power of the indwelling Spirit ). Spirit enabled "victory" over one's tongue is intimately related to "victory" over one's whole body!

**THOUGHT** - As an aside, if what comes out of our mouths as believers is one of the most accurate "[barometers](#)" (so to speak, pun intended!) of our state of spiritual maturity, I would submit it is also a measure of the man or woman who is most consistently filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit. Why? Because Ephesians 5:18+ which describes the filling is IMMEDIATELY followed in the Greek text with the verb **lalountes** which is the verb [laleo](#) and in [present tense](#) could be translated "**continuously speaking**" (it is also a participle). In other words, the first notable "fruit" of a Spirit filled believer is their **speech**, what comes out of their mouth. Applying this observation, it would seem theologically reasonable to state that one of the best ways to be a **perfect** man or woman is to be one who is continually being filled with the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, Who frankly is the only Power stronger than the power of the tongue! Conversely, if one is not continually filled with the Spirit, the chances of stumbling in what one says (and not being able to bridle the whole body) is considerably greater, in fact is very likely! Upshot? **Be continually filled** ([present imperative](#) - command not a suggestion) with the Spirit!

**Another Thought** - Notice the context of Paul's charge "**do not grieve** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) the Holy Spirit of God" in Eph 4:30+. What command has he just issued in Eph 4:29+? "**Let** no unwholesome ([saprois](#) = rotten, putrid) word **proceed** ([present imperative with a negative](#) - either stop doing this or do not begin doing it - and only way to keep this command is to depend on [the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." So clearly "rotten words" will grieve the Holy Spirit. This is a slippery slope, for when we grieve the Spirit, we short-circuit the power to control our tongue! Rotten words need to be quickly confessed and repented, lest a downward spiral begins!

**Another Thought** - How do you know when the Spirit is truly controlling your tongue? (1) Praise to God (2) Speaking words of gratitude and thanksgiving (3) Love to sing godly choruses, hymns or spiritual songs (4) Speak words of love and edification.

**A Final Thought** - This subject of "tongue control" brings to mind the radical transformation that took place in Peter. Before Pentecost, he was open his mouth primarily to "exchange feet" (so to speak)! After Pentecost, after receiving the gift of the Spirit and His power (Acts 1:8), his speech was supernaturally transformed! One



one hand in the Gospels, as an immature disciple, he often lost control of his tongue and had to be either reproved or taught by the Lord, but after Pentecost, his spiritual discipline was evident by his controlled speech, now possible because He was controlled by the Spirit giving us a good illustration of a "perfect" (mature) believer.

**Able** (1415)(**dunatos** from **dunamai** = referring to power one has by virtue of inherent ability and resources; cf **dunamis**) means powerful, able, strong, describing that which has sufficient or necessary power to not stumble and to bridle the whole body. As Jesus said "The things that are impossible with people (ED: LIKE CONTROLLING OUR TONGUE!) are **possible** (SAME WORD - **dunatos**) with God." (Lk. 18:27+) Paul gives us a clue as to how we can tap into God's supernatural strength (**dunatos**) when he asked Jesus three times to remove the thorn in the flesh "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power (**dunamis**) is perfected (**teleo**) in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power (**dunamis**) of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am (**present tense**) **strong** (**dunatos**). (2 Cor 12:9+, 2 Cor 12:10+)

And so the only man or woman who can possibly achieve this objective of "Christian maturity" is the one who is learning more and more to jettison self reliance and to rely more wholly on the Holy Spirit for the supernatural power (the **dunamis**) to kill sins of the tongue and body (See [Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)). In Romans 8:13+ Paul gives us one of the most important passages in the NT in regard to progressive sanctification (growth into a mature man or woman, more like Christ) declaring that "if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

**Dunatos** in NT - able (6), could (1), impossible\*(1), influential men(1), man of power(1), mighty(3), mighty one(1), possible(12), power(1), powerful(1), strong(3), strong enough(1).

Mt. 19:26; Mt. 24:24; Mt. 26:39; Mk. 9:23; Mk. 10:27; Mk. 13:22; Mk. 14:35; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 1:49; Lk. 14:31; Lk. 18:27; Lk. 24:19; Acts 2:24; Acts 7:22; Acts 11:17; Acts 18:24; Acts 20:16; Acts 25:5; Ro 4:21; Ro 9:22; Ro 11:23; Ro 12:18; Ro 15:1; 1 Co. 1:26; 2 Co. 10:4; 2 Co. 12:10; 2 Co. 13:9; Gal. 4:15; 2 Ti 1:12; Titus 1:9; Heb. 11:19; Jas. 3:2

Given the evil propensity of a tongue not controlled by the Spirit, we might all do well to ponder Isaiah's words from time to time -- "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isa. 6:5)

**Bridle** (5468)(**chalinagogeo** from **chalinos** = bridle + **ago** = lead) means to guide with a bit and bridle and figuratively to hold in check, to restrain, to control. Only other use is James 1:26+ "does not **bridle** his tongue." The picture James paints is one with which all his readers were familiar - so just as a huge horse was led by the mouth, a perfect man follows the "bit and bridle" of his own mouth. **Hiebert** adds "The picturesque term "to keep... in check" (**chalinagōgēsai**) denotes that he is able to restrain his whole body effectively to prevent its use by sin, as well as to guide and direct its activities in desirable ways. He exercises self-mastery over his whole body, so that, like a horse under a stiff rein, it does his bidding." (Ibid)

**MacArthur** writes that "if we can control our tongues—which respond so readily and limitlessly to sin—then controlling everything else will follow. If the Holy Spirit has control of this most volatile and intractable part of our being, how much more susceptible to His control will the rest of our lives be? That principle also supports the second meaning of **perfect** (mature, complete), which, if it carried the idea of absolute perfection, would have no practical significance here. When a person's speech is Christ-exalting, God-honoring, and edifying, one can be sure the rest of his life is spiritually healthy—and vice versa."

**Hiebert** adds that "Barclay notes that "James is not for a moment saying that silence is better than speech. He is not pleading for... a cowardly silence, but for a wise use of speech." Nor does James hint that men must subject themselves to prolonged periods of enforced silence in order to gain mastery over their tongues. **The ability to check and guide the tongue effectively only comes through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.**" ([James 3 Commentary](#)) (Bold added)

**Max Anders** - One method of complying with the biblical warning about the tongue would be enforced silence. The Bible does not call for silence but for a tongue empowered by the Holy Spirit and used for the glory of God. Silence would not bring complete control of our thoughts. James wanted us to use divine power in bringing our thoughts into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5+). (Holman New Testament Commentary – Hebrews & James)

**Douglas Moo** - So difficult is the mouth to control, so given is it to utter the false, the biting, the slanderous word, so prone to stay open when it were more profitably closed, that the person who has it in control surely has the ability to "keep in check" other, less unruly, members of the body. (Ibid)

**Kurt A Richardson** adds an interesting comment - The tongue has its way much like the human will without the bridle of the Word

of God and the anticipation of judgment. But with these instruments, Christians will be enabled to stand accepted by God." (New American Commentary – Volume 36: James)

**Osborne** - Stulac ([1993:123](#)) says, "If you control what you say, you can control the rest of what you do." The desire is "to motivate us to diligence in speech because it is so influential over the rest of our lives." "Control" ("BRIDLE") is the same verb as in James 1:26 that uses the image of a horse's bridle that "reins in" the tongue (see James 3:3) and therefore the rest of, literally, "the whole body," meaning every other area of one's life. The idea of keeping the tongue in check is found often in Proverbs (Pr 9:8-9; 10:8, 14, 19; 11:9; 12:18; 13:13; 15:1; 16:21; 17:7; 18:6-7; 21:23) (ED: SEE LIST BELOW), so the control of the tongue as the key to the rest of one's being is a common emphasis in Wisdom Literature.(Ibid)

**Zodhiates** - There was an old man who often complained of pain and weariness in the evening, as many of us do. A friend asked him why he complained so. The old man replied, "Alas! I have every day so much to do. I have two falcons to tame, two hares to keep from running away, two hawks to manage, a serpent to confine, a lion to chain, and a sick man to tend and wait upon." "Why, you must be joking," said his friend. "Surely no man can have all these things to do at once." "Indeed, I am not joking," said the old man, "but what I have told you is the sad, sober truth; for the two falcons are my two eyes, which I must diligently guard; the two hares are my feet, which I must keep from walking in the ways of sin; the two hawks are my two hands, which I must train to work, that I may be able to provide for myself and for my brethren in need; the serpent is my tongue, which I always bridle, lest it speak unseemly; the lion is my heart, with which I have a continued fight, lest evil things come out of it; and the sick man is my whole body, which is always needing my watchfulness and care. All this daily work wears out my strength." The old man was certainly frank about the struggle the believer has in this life. He very aptly described the tongue as a serpent, for it can spread deadly poison around. ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

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The depth of a person's freedom is revealed in and through **his ability to hold his silence and to use it discerningly. The most famous Christian I know is a man who remains silent on any subject that might lead to self-congratulations.** Whenever conversation reaches a point where he might need to comment on his latest writings, honors, speech makings~ experiences with other important people, he grows strangely silent or attempts to change the subject. There is a great power and freedom in him because there is much that runs deep in his soul, unarticulated and secret. **I cannot imagine this man name dropping or relating his most recent prayer experience or exclaiming for all to hear how wonderfully the Lord is using him. A man like this is rooted and grounded in God's presence and is free of the external need to be babbling like a shallow brook.** (Don Gilmore - Freedom to Fail) (ED: I read those words and simply shudder. How far short I fall! Help me Holy Spirit for the glory of the Lamb. Amen)

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F B Meyer - James 3:2

If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.

Think of the sins of speech! How innumerable they are! When we see them in the light of this chapter, we can understand the holy Isaiah saying, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King."

The sins of speech about ourselves. — The tongue boasteth great things. We are all apt to be vain, boastful, exaggerated. We tell stories that redound to our own credit; contrive to focus attention on our own words and deeds; and even in delivering God's messages manage to let it be seen that we have a clearer insight into truth or a closer familiarity with God than our fellows.

The sins of speech about others. — "We break the law of courtesy, and become harsh, insolent, and uncivil; or the law of purity, and repeat stories that leave a stain; or the law of truth, and practise insincerity, equivocation, and dissimulation; or the law of kindness, and are harsh and implacable to those who are beneath us in station. Or in our desire to stand well with others we are guilty of flattery, servility, time-serving, and the like."

The sins of speech in connection with God's work. — We disparage other workers; compliment them to their faces on addresses they have delivered, and disparage them behind their backs; pass criticisms which take away the effect which their words had otherwise exercised over others; contrive to indicate one defect in which was otherwise a perfect achievement. Alas for us! How greatly we need to offer the prayer of the psalmist: Set a watch, O God, upon our lips!

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**Criswell:** "Do you remember those three little monkeys? One has his eyes covered--see no evil. One has his mouth covered--speak no evil. And one has his ears covered--hear no evil. The whole body.

A gossip tongue is a dangerous thing

If its owner is evil at heart.

He can give whom he chooses many a sting

That will woefully linger and smart.

But the gossip tongue would be balked in its plan

For causing heartburning and tears,  
If it weren't helped out by the misguided man  
Who possesses two gossipy ears...

If I am not to be a talebearer and a whisperer and a defamer and a slanderer then what am I to do? This is what I am to do. I am to speak beautifully, graciously, and kindly. The apostle Paul writes, 'Speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another ... Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.'

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## A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH! BY THEODORE EPP

James 3:1-6

Consider four parallels that a fire has with words spoken by the tongue: It hurts, it spreads, it consumes, but it can have a good use under control.

It only takes one false or bitter word to hurt deeply. In fact, the hurt may be so deep that recovery is impossible.

Just as fire spreads, so do spoken words. Some people are always willing to listen to destructive words about others, and they spread the words further so the damage becomes even more extensive.

Just as fire consumes, so do words spoken by a tongue that is out of control. Fire will destroy anything combustible that lies within its path. Words, too, have been known to destroy careers and lives. This is especially seen in the news media when political viewpoints are at stake.

We who know Jesus Christ as Saviour need to think solemnly about this matter so our tongues are not used to the disadvantage of others. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (NASB).

Think of it! The power of death and life reside in the tongue. And the last phrase of this verse especially applies to those who spread gossip: "Those who love it will eat its fruit."

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21:23).

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**Brian Bell** - James still helping us to discover a "genuine faith" or a Functioning Faith (Active Faith; Intentional; Authentic; Real; Expressive; Demonstrative; Gushing; Friendly; Affectionate Faith) He now adds a more specific manifestation of faith expressed through the self-control of our speech & the origin of our wisdom. Question - Can you name the muscle in your body that receives more exercise & less control than any other? The tongue weighs only 2 oz.; it has 8 muscles to change its position; approx 4" long. It helps us to chew, taste, swallow, & articulate words. It also is used for deceit, destruction, it devours, it is sharp sword, it breaks bones (Pr 25:15), backbites, flatters, & poisons. 3. So it also is known as, "**The 2 oz. Beast!**" It's this beastly nature that James address in this passage. **But is it our literal tongues that are the real problem?** Read Mt.15:11;17-19 The tongue is neither friend nor foe. It's merely a *messenger* that delivers the dictates of a desperately sick heart. So when James uses tongue, think heart. Quaker Proverb, "Of your unspoken words, you are the master; of your spoken words, the servant; of your written words, the slave." ([Sermon](#))

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## THE TONGUE James Smith JAMES 1:19, 26; James 3:1-12

In the early Christian Church there evidently was great freedom of speech, and that liberty was abused. From the severity with which James deals with the tongue it is clear that there had been a great deal of ill-considered, ill-natured, self-assertive and violent speech amongst the Jewish Christians.

Probably this had taken the form of angry debating and bitter strife in the Assembly. At any rate verse 1 of chapter 3 seems to hint at this. The verse clearly shows that there were many who aspired to leadership and public ministry, without taking in mind the serious responsibilities of that position. In this verse James refers to the danger associated with too great a readiness to put forward one's opinions on matters of religion.

Associated here with warning are bright Gospel lessons, and the reminder that one proof of our justified state is seen in our words; that our speech will reveal what and whose we are.

A young man was sent to Socrates to learn oratory. On being introduced to the philosopher he talked so incessantly that Socrates asked for double fees. "Why charge me double?" asked the young fellow. "Because," replied the orator, "I must teach you two sciences, the one how to hold your tongue, the other how to speak."

I. An Awakening Statement (James 3:2). Who is a perfect man? James informs us: "If any man offend not in Word." Having mastery

of that difficult member, the tongue, the rest is easy. "Able to curb his whole nature" (W.). "The same is a perfect man" is in W.: "That man has reached maturity of character." This then is the mark of a mature Christian.

II. A Sobering Description. Note the suggestive descriptions James gives of the tongue.

1. A FIRE (James 3:6). Setting the whole being on fire as from Hell.
2. "A WORLD OF INIQUITY" (James 3:6). Defiling the whole being of each individual.
3. "FULL OF DEADLY POISON" (James 3:8).
4. "UNRULY EVIL" (James 3:8).

III. A Dread Possibility (James 3:9, 10). That the same tongue can:

1. Bless and curse (James 3:9, 10).
2. A fountain sending forth two kinds of water (James 3:11).

IV. A Wise Admonition (James 1:19; 3:13–18). Notice how affectionately James addresses his readers. "Swift to hear, slow to speak"—what wise words! A wise man will seek only to produce "Good conversation."

V. A Sad Confession (James 3:7, 8). Most living things can be tamed, yet "the tongue can no man tame," save the Man, Christ Jesus.

VI. A Glorious Possibility (James 1:26; James 3:3–6). This point forces itself upon us as we ponder the figures used by James for the tongue.

1. BIT AND BRIDLE (James 3:2, 3). To turn the whole body of the horse a firm hand on the bridle is required. The hand of the Man, Christ Jesus, can grip and firmly use the bit and bridle on our tongues.
2. SMALL HELM (James 3:4). The pierced Hand can firmly control and wisely use the helm of our lives—our tongue.

## WISE WORDS FROM PROVERBS ON SPEECH - BAD AND GOOD

**NOTE:** These are quoted from KJV but hold pointer over reference for NASB.

**APPLICATION** - Here's an exercise that might just help you get a hold on your words. Observe the wise words from Proverbs (bad and good) noting what the Word says about words. As you do, make a simple list of the positive and negative effects of Words spoken. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into all Truth and enable you to obey what you learn, even as He transforms you from glory to glory into the image of Jesus the Living Word. Amen (2 Cor 3:18).

### **SPEECH** (Bad Speech)

- "Violence covereth the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 10:6).
- "Violence covereth the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 10:11).
- "The mouth of the foolish is a present destruction" (Proverbs 10:14).
- "He that hideth hatred is of lying lips" (Proverbs 10:18).
- "He that uttereth a slander is a fool" (Proverbs 10:18).
- "In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression" (Proverbs 10:19).
- "The perverse tongue shall be cut off" (Proverbs 10:31).
- "The mouth of the wicked speaketh perverseness" (Proverbs 10:32).
- "The words of the wicked are of lying in wait for blood" (Proverbs 12:6).
- "In the transgression of the lips is a snare to the evil man" (Proverbs 12:13).
- "A false witness, deceit" (Proverbs 12:17).
- "There is that speaketh rashly like the piercings of a sword" (Proverbs 12:18).
- "A lying tongue is but for a moment" (Proverbs 12:19).
- "Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah" :12:22).
- "The heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness" (Proverbs 12:23).
- "He that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction" (Proverbs 13:3).
- "A righteous man hateth lying" (Proverbs 13:5).
- "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his pride" (Proverbs 14:3).
- "A grievous word stirreth up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).
- "The mouth of fools poureth out folly" (Proverbs 15:2).

- "Perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4).
- "The mouth of fools feedeth on folly" (Proverbs 15:14).
- "The mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things" (Proverbs 15:28).
- "A worthless man deviseth mischief; And in his lips there is as a scorching fire" (Proverbs 16:27).
- "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 16:28).
- "He that compresseth his lips bringeth evil to pass" (Proverbs 16:30).
- "An evil-doer giveth heed to wicked lips" (Proverbs 17:4).
- "A liar giveth ear to a mischievous tongue" (Proverbs 17:4).
- "Excellent speech becometh not a fool: Much less do lying lips a prince" (Proverbs 17:7).
- "He that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 17:9).
- "He that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief" (Proverbs 17:20).
- "A fool's lips enter into contention, And his mouth calleth for stripes" (Proverbs 18:6).
- "A fool's mouth is his destruction, And his lips are the snare of his soul" (Proverbs 18:7).
- "The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels. And they go down into the innermost parts" (Proverbs 18:8).
- "He that giveth answer before he heareth, It is folly and shame unto him" (Proverbs 18:13).
- "A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth" (Proverbs 18:20).
- "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21).
- "The rich answereth roughly" (Proverbs 18:23).
- "Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity Than he that is perverse in his lips and is a fool" (Proverbs 19:1).
- "A false witness shall not be unpunished; And he that uttereth lies shall not escape" (Proverbs 19:5).
- "A false witness shall not be unpunished; And he that uttereth lies shall perish" (Proverbs 19:9).
- "The contentions of a wife are a continual dropping" (Proverbs 19:13).
- "A poor man is better than a liar" (Proverbs 19:22).
- "A worthless witness mocketh at justice" (Proverbs 19:28).
- "The mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity" (Proverbs 19:28).
- "Most men will proclaim every one his own kindness; But a faithful man who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6).
- "He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets" (Proverbs 20:19).
- "Company not with him that openeth wide his lips" (Proverbs 20:19).
- "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, His lamp shall be put out in blackness of darkness" (Proverbs 20:20).
- "It is a snare to a man rashly to say, It is holy, And after vows to make inquiry" (Proverbs 20:25).
- "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue Is a vapor driven to and fro by them that seek death" (Proverbs 21:6).
- "A false witness shall perish" (Proverbs 21:28).
- "The scoffer is an abomination to men" (Proverbs 24:9).
- "Be not a witness against thy neighbor without cause" (Proverbs 24:28).
- "Deceive not with thy lips" (Proverbs 24:28).
- "As clouds and wind without rain, So is he that boasteth himself of his gifts falsely" (Proverbs 25:14).
- "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor Is a maul, and a sword, and sharp arrow" (Proverbs 25:18).
- "The north wind bringeth forth rain; So doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance" (Proverbs 25:23).
- "The legs of the lame hang loose; So is a parable in the mouth of fools" (Proverbs 26:7).
- "As a thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, So is a parable in the mouth of fools" (Proverbs 26:9).
- "Where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth" (Proverbs 26:20). "The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts" (Proverbs 26:22).
- "Fervent lips and a wicked heart Are like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross" (Proverbs 26:23).
- "He that hateth dissembleth with his lips; But he layeth up deceit within him: When he speaketh fair, believe him not; For there are seven abominations in his heart: Though his hatred cover itself with guile, His wickedness shall be openly showed before the assembly" (Proverbs 26:24-26).
- "A lying tongue hateth those whom it hath wounded; And a flattering mouth worketh ruin" (Proverbs 26:28).
- "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; A stranger, and not thine own lips" (Proverbs 27:2).
- "A man is tried by his praise" (Proverbs 27:21).
- "A man that flattereth his neighbor Spreadeth a net for his steps" (Proverbs 29:5).
- "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him" (Proverbs 29:20).

#### **SPEECH (Good Speech)**

- "In the lips of him that hath discernment wisdom is found" (Proverbs 10:13).
- "He that refraineth his lips doeth wisely" (Proverbs 10:19).
- "The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver" (Proverbs 10:20).

- "The lips of the righteous feed many" (Proverbs 10:21).
- "The mouth of the righteous bringeth forth wisdom" (Proverbs 10:31),
- "The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable" (Proverbs 10:32),
- "The mouth of the righteous shall deliver them" (Proverbs 12:6).
- "A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth" (Proverbs 12:14).
- "He that uttereth truth sheweth forth righteousness" (Proverbs 12:17).
- "The tongue of the wise is health" (Proverbs 12:18).
- "The lip of truth shall be established for ever" (Proverbs 12:19).
- "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; But a good word maketh it glad" (Proverbs 12:25).
- "A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth" (Proverbs 13:2).
- "He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his life" (Proverbs 13:3).
- "The lips of the wise shall preserve them" (Proverbs 14:3).
- "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).
- "The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright" (Proverbs 15:2).
- "A gentle tongue is a tree of life" (Proverbs 15:4).
- "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge" (Proverbs 15:7).
- "A man hath joy in the answer of his mouth" (Proverbs 15:23).
- "A word in due season, how good is it!" (Proverbs 15:23).
- "Pleasant words are pure" (Proverbs 15:26).
- "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer" (Proverbs 15:28).
- "The answer of the tongue is from Jehovah" (Proverbs 16:1).
- "A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; His mouth shall not transgress in judgment" (Proverbs 16:10).
- "Righteous lips are the delight of kings; And they love him that speaketh right" (Proverbs 16:13).
- "The sweetness of the lips increaseth learning" (Proverbs 16:21).
- "The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth, And addeth learning to his lips" (Proverbs 16:23).
- "Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24).
- "The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters; The wellspring of wisdom is as a flowing brook" (Proverbs 18:4).
- "With the increase of his lips shall he be satisfied" (Proverbs 18:20).
- "Death and life are in the power of the tongue; And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Proverbs 18:21).
- "The poor useth entreaties" (Proverbs 18:23).
- "The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel" (Proverbs 20:15).
- "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue Keepeth his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23).
- "The man that heareth shall speak so as to endure" (Proverbs 21:28).
- "He kisseth the lips Who giveth a right answer" (Proverbs 24:26).
- "Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself" (Proverbs 25:9).
- "A word fitly spoken Is like apples of gold in network of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).
- "As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, So is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear" (Proverbs 25:12).
- "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, So is a faithful messenger to them that send him; For he refresheth the soul of his masters" (Proverbs 25:13).
- "A soft tongue breaketh the bone" (Proverbs 25:15).
- "Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own conceit" (Proverbs 26:5).
- "The rod and reproof give wisdom" (Proverbs 29:15).

## QUOTES ON SPEECH

- It is easier to look wise than to talk wisely. Ambrose
- God has given us teeth and a mouth—teeth to cage in that deadly weapon, and a mouth to close it in. The most ferocious monster in the world has his den just behind the teeth.
- No part of us is in a more slippery place than the tongue.
- There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. - German proverb
- A lengthy tongue and early death. - Persian saying
- The boneless tongue, small and weak, can crush and kill.
- A bird is known by his note, a man by his talk. Anon.
- A sharp tongue is no evidence of a keen mind. Anon.



- There are many messages that would have been twice as effective with half the words!
- It's when you feel like you have to say something that you end up saying the dumbest things.
- Talk is cheap.
- A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use. Washington Irving
- Actions don't always speak louder than words—your tongue can undo everything you do. Anon.
- His heart cannot be pure whose tongue is not clean. Anon.
- In company, guard your tongue—in solitude, your thoughts. Anon.
- Lord, make my words gracious and tender, for tomorrow I may have to eat them! Anon.
- No physician can heal the wounds inflicted by the tongue. Anon.
- Nothing is so opened more by mistake than the mouth. Anon.
- One thing you can give and still keep is your word. Anon.
- The Christian should learn two things about his tongue: how to hold it and how to use it. Anon.
- The tongue is but three inches long, yet it can kill a man six feet high. Anon.
- There are two sciences which every person ought to learn: the science of speech and the more difficult one of silence. Anon.
- What is in the well of your heart will show up in the bucket of your speech. Anon.
- When you speak, remember God is one of your listeners. Anon.
- Words are leaves—deeds are fruit. Anon.
- Words are our thoughts going public! Anon
- The tongue is the hinge on which everything in the personality turns. T. C. Baird
- It is a sad fact that the tongues of professing Christians are often all too busy doing the devil's work. Donald Grey Barnhouse
- One of the first things that happens when a man is really filled with the Spirit is not that he speaks with tongues, but that he learns to hold the one tongue he already has. J. Sidlow Baxter
- Gentle words fall lightly, but they have great weight. Derick Bingham
- A sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue. Thomas Brooks
- Of all the members in the body, there is none so serviceable to Satan as the tongue. Thomas Brooks
- We know metals by their tinkling and men by their talking. Thomas Brooks
- A word spoken is physically transient but morally permanent. Francis Burkitt
- The vice of the tongue spreads and prevails over every part of life. It is as active and potent for evil in old age as ever it was in the days of our youth. John Calvin
- There is nothing more slippery or loose than the tongue. John Calvin
- During a long life I have had to eat my own words many times and I have found it a very nourishing diet. Winston Churchill
- When you have nothing to say, say nothing. C. C. Colton
- Think all you speak but speak not all you think. Patrick Delaney
- The worst of speaking without thinking is that you say what you think. James Denney
- Let thy speech be better than silence, or be silent. Dionysius the Elder
- Nothing is often a good thing to say. Will Durant
- Kind words are the music of the world. Frederick W. Faber
- The heart of a fool is in his mouth, but the mouth of a wise man is in his heart. Benjamin Franklin
- If I speak what is false, I must answer for it; if truth, it will answer for me. Thomas Fuller
- The jawbone of an ass was a killer in Samson's time. It still is. Morris Gilber
- A sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue. Thomas Goodwin
- If the mouth be bad, the mind is not good. Matthew Henry
- It is bad to think ill, but it is worse to speak it. Matthew Henry
- If nobody said anything unless he knew what he was talking about, what a ghastly hush would descend upon the earth! A. P. Herbert
- There will come a time when three words, uttered with charity and meekness, shall receive a far more blessed reward than three thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit. Richard Hooker
- Many people would be more truthful were it not for their uncontrollable desire to talk. Edgar Watson Howe
- There is a time for saying nothing; there is occasionally a time for saying something; there is never a time for saying everything. Hugh of St Victor
- A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use. Washington Irving
- A fool is hardly discerned when silent; his picture is best taken when he is speaking. William Jenkyn
- An evil speaker is his own scourge. William Jenkyn
- If you can hold your tongue you can hold anything. E. Stanley Jones
- Sharp tongues have a way of sharpening other tongues. E. Stanley Jones
- Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt. Abraham Lincoln
- Blessed are they who have nothing to say and who cannot be persuaded to say it. James Russell Lowell

- The tongue is the ambassador of the heart. John Lyly
- When the hands are idle, the tongue is usually very active. Henry T. Mahan
- A tongue that is set on fire from hell shall be set on fire in hell. Thomas Manton
- Evil words show a wicked heart, and idle words a vain mind. Thomas Manton
- Most of a man's sins are in his words. Thomas Manton
- If you think twice before you talk once, you will speak twice the better for it. William Penn
- Man's speech is like his life. Plato
- A word spoken is physically transient but morally permanent. J. C. Ryle
- Our words are the evidence of the state of our hearts as surely as the taste of the water is an evidence of the state of the spring. J. C. Ryle
- By the striking of the clapper we guess at the metal of the bell. William Secker
- Speech is the index of the mind. Seneca
- When I think over what I have said, I envy dumb people. Seneca
- Speech is ... only good when it is better than silence. Richard Sibbes
- If we cannot be believed on our word, we are surely not to be trusted on our oath. C. H. Spurgeon
- The word of a man is as powerful as himself. Richard Sibbes
- Some men's tongues bite more than their teeth. C. H. Spurgeon
- Tongues are more terrible instruments than can be made with hammers and anvils, and the evil which they inflict cuts deeper and spreads wider. C. H. Spurgeon
- Whatever moves the heart wags the tongue. C. T. Studd
- The heart is the metal of the bell, the tongue but the clapper. George Swinnock
- Speech is the mirror of the soul; as a man speaks, so he is. Publilius Syrus
- Evil tongues are the devil's bellows. John Trapp
- A ready tongue without an informed mind, a devout character and a holy life will hinder rather than advance the cause of Christ. Curtis Vaughan
- How can Christ be in the heart when the devil has taken possession of the tongue? Thomas Watson
- Words are the looking-glass of the mind. Thomas Watson

**James 3:3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.**

Amplified If we set bits in the horses' mouths to make them obey us, we can turn their whole bodies about.

Phillips Men control the movements of a large animal like the horse with a tiny bit placed in its mouth.

Wuest Now if, as is the case, we put bridles in the mouths of the horses in order that they may be obeying us, we also guide their entire body.

NET James 3:3 And if we put bits into the mouths of horses to get them to obey us, then we guide their entire bodies.

GNT James 3:3 ε ὁ τ ν ππων το ς χαλινος ε ς τ σματα βλλομεν ε ς τ πεθεσθαι α το ς μ ν, κα λον τ σμα α τ ν μετγομεν.

NLT James 3:3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth.

KJV James 3:3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

ESV James 3:3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

ASV James 3:3 Now if we put the horses' bridles into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn about their whole body also.

CSB James 3:3 Now when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide the whole animal.

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

NKJ James 3:3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.

NRS James 3:3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies.

YLT James 3:3 lo, the bits we put into the mouths of the horses for their obeying us, and their whole body we turn about;

NAB James 3:3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide their whole bodies.

NJB James 3:3 Once we put a bit in the horse's mouth, to make it do what we want, we have the whole animal under our control.

GWN James 3:3 We put bits in the mouths of horses to make them obey us, and we have control over everything they do.

BBE James 3:3 Now if we put bits of iron into horses' mouths so that they may be guided by us, we have complete control of their bodies.

- Jas 1:26 2Ki 19:28 Ps 32:9 39:1 Isa 37:29
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BIT ENLARGED - SITS ON TONGUE

## ILLUSTRATION #1 HORSE AND BRIDLE

The reader might be thinking that James is exaggerating on the potential of the tongue to affect one's **whole body** (James 3:2). He will now give illustrations of the power of the tongue to control by describing relatively small things that were well known to exert control over something much larger. Note that in each of these "little things," when they are controlled or directed, the larger, much more powerful things are controlled. Winkler phrases it this way

"That the mastery of the tongue  
aids the mastery of the whole body  
is illustrated by comparison."

**Calvin** - By these two comparisons he proves that a great part of true perfection is in the tongue, and that it exercises dominion, as he has just said, over the whole life.

**Simon Kistemaker** introduces the illustrations commenting on the significance of our "**words**" - "Let no one ever say that words are insignificant. Martin Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" mentions the prince of darkness, whose

Rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure,  
**One little Word shall fell him.**

One word can alter the course of human history. For example, Jesus spoke the words ***It is finished***, which in the Greek is only one word ([tetelestai](#)). (Baker New Testament Commentary – Exposition of James)

**McCartney** writes that "Leading a large animal by putting a bit in its mouth is a common metaphor for speech control in many languages. Wisdom literature the world over knows of the problems that uncontrolled speech generates and therefore sees that the control of one's own speech must be as rigorous and unremittent as the control of a recalcitrant and unruly large animal.....Horses and ships are large things of great power that are nevertheless controlled by human will and by means of very small items. The controlling verb is the same ([metago](#)); they are directed or steered. The horse example is interesting because the literal mouth is the means of control; the ship is interesting because it harnesses great powers outside of itself (strong winds) that are then directed by means of the small rudder. Both examples emphatically illustrate the power of speech: if it is controlled well, its effect is wonderful, but if uncontrolled or controlled poorly, the disaster can be enormous (ED: See James 3:5b+)." (BECNT-James)

**Now if** - With this "**IF**" James presents another first class conditional statement (assumed to be true).

As **Hiebert** explains "since common experience shows that the application of control at the proper point is effective in dealing with horses, effective control also can be applied to the human tongue." (Ibid)

**Brian Bell** quips that "The tongue is a bit, a small, 2 ounce **bit** nestled in our mouths that controls the direction of our lives....The **rudder** of the human body is that small slab of muscle called the tongue."

**We put the bits into the horses' mouths**- The picture of bridling the whole body in James 3:2 is a natural [segue](#) to the illustration of bridling a horse. **Horse's mouths** - notice this connects with the tongue in the mouth of a person. And where does the bit lie in the horse's mouth? The bit actually sets upon the horse's tongue. The bit must be in the proper place to function, for if we place it under the tail it does not work!

The words of the psalmist are apropos -

Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, Otherwise they will not come near to you. (Ps 32:9)

**So that they will obey us** - **So that** expresses [purpose](#). And so the purpose or goal of the bit in the mouth is to make the whole horse obey, not just its mouth! **Obey** is in the [present tense](#) depicting the horse's continual obedience. So with just the small bits in their mouths, one can direct the horse's head to the right or to the left and with this movement can cause the entire horse to go in the direction we desire.

**Hiebert** writes that "James is not interested merely in a "tamed tongue" but in a properly controlled tongue manifesting itself in all areas of human life." (Ibid)

**Guzik** has somewhat of an applicational comment - "A small bit in the mouth controls a strong horse. A small rudder turns a large ship. Even so, if we have control over our tongue it is an indication that we have control over our self. Whoever can control the tongue can bridle **the whole body** (James 3:2). The bit and the rudder are small but extremely important. If they are not controlled the entire horse is out of control and the entire ship is out of control. It is possible for something as small as the tongue to have tremendous power for either good or evil. You don't solve the problem of an unruly horse by keeping it in the barn, or the problem of a hard-to-steer ship by keeping it tied to the dock. In the same way, even a **vow of silence** (ED: OR ["BITE YOUR TONGUE"](#)) is not the ultimate answer for the misuse of our tongue.. If the tongue is like a bit in the mouth of a horse or the rudder on a ship, it leaves us with the question: **Who or what holds the reigns, or who or what directs the rudder?** Some people have no hand on the reigns or rudder, and therefore say whatever comes into mind. Others direct their tongue from their emotions or from aspects of [their carnal nature](#). James points us towards having the Spirit of God ([SEE PRECEDING NOTE ON ROLE OF SPIRIT CONTROLLING THE TONGUE](#)), working through the new man, setting (His) directing hands on the reigns and rudder of our tongue." (Ibid) (Bold and editorial notes added)

**John Phillips** writes that "It is an evidence of man's lordship over nature that he has been able to tame and harness the mighty horse, a creature bigger and stronger and swifter than he." (Exploring the Epistle of James: An Expository Commentary)

**Obey** ([3982](#))([peitho](#)) literally means to persuade or induce by words to believe, but clearly in this context means to obey, to follow the commands or guidance of the one leading or commanding. **Peitho** is used with this same nuance in Gal 5:7+, Heb 13:17<sup>±</sup>.

**We direct their entire body as well** - James is painting a dramatic contrast between the horse's small mouth and their massive, powerful body. The horse's body follows his mouth which in turn is guided by the bridle. So just as the a bit can make a large horse go where one wants, the tongue controls the whole body. **Osborne** comments "The thrust is that the tongue, like a small bit in a horse's mouth, turns one's whole life around and directs the way it will go."

**MacArthur** points out that "Even gentle horses, which have been ridden for many years, are not controllable without bits in their mouths. As long as they are expected to perform service, whether for riding or for pulling a wagon or plow, they require that control. So it is with believers. To be useful to God, we will need our tongues controlled (ED: [SEE NOTE ON TONGUE CONTROL](#)), with everything else following in submission." (Ibid)

**Douglas Moo** writes that "as the bit determines the direction of the horse, so the tongue can determine the destiny of the individual. Believers who exercise careful control of the tongue (ED: ONLY POSSIBLE BY THE [SPIRIT'S TONGUE CONTROL](#)) are able also to direct their whole life in its proper, divinely charted course: they are "perfect" (James 3:2). But when that tongue is not restrained, small though it is, the rest of the body is likely (ED: ALMOST GUARANTEED!) to be uncontrolled and undisciplined also." (Ibid)

**Donald Burdick** - A very small bit "can turn the whole animal." So a man who controls his tongue can control his whole being (ED: [SEE NOTE ON TONGUE CONTROL](#)). (Expositor's Bible Commentary, 1976).

**Gary Holloway** - Not just control, but restraint is pictured by the horse's bit. (ED: ENABLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT - SEE Php 2:13NLT<sup>±</sup>) We must say "*whoa*" to our words before we speak them too hastily. (College Press NIV Commentary - James)

**To bridle your tongue,  
Give God the reins of your heart.**

**Barton** applies this illustration - If a person's impulsive speech is uncontrolled, his or her whole life is headed in the wrong

direction....We should let Christ (**ED**: VIA [INDWELLING SPIRIT OF CHRST'S POWER](#)) bridle our mouths instead of speaking out every time a thoughtless word comes to mind. (Ibid)

**Simon Kistemaker** applies this illustration - If, then, man controls powerful horses with small bits placed in their mouths, he certainly should be able to control his own tongue. The points of comparison are mouth and body. (Ibid)

**ED COMMENT:** The only way he is "**able to control his own tongue**" is by continual submission to the Spirit Who enables this fruit of self-control [See preceding note](#). The alternative is fleshly "self-control" which can work for a while as we "[bite our tongue](#)" to keep from sounding off! But eventually your flesh will fail and give sway to the lusts of the flesh which can result in all manner of negative communication!"

**Direct** ([3329](#)) (**metago** from **meta** = change of place/position + **ago** = lead) means to change the direction, to move from one side to another, to turn about, guide in another direction. **Louw-Nida** - to cause to move from one place to another by bringing or leading - 'to direct, to steer, to guide' Only used by James to describe horse's bit (James 3:3) and the ship's rudder (James 3:4) which though small were able to effectively "turn about" large things. The meaning in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) the meaning is to convey from one place or person to another, to carry into captivity (1 Ki 8:47, 48, 2 Chr 36:3).

**Metago** in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) - 1 Ki. 8:47; 1 Ki. 8:48; 2 Chr. 6:37; 2 Chr. 36:3; Est. 8:12

**THOUGHT** - (This has been alluded to above) There is one other interesting application of James' illustrations (of bridle and rudder). Just as the bit/bridle is guided by a rider of the horse and the rudder is guided by a pilot, so too the tongue is guided by either the Spirit or the flesh! And as a corollary thought, one can get a good sense of whether or not he or she is filled with/controlled by the Spirit by the words that fly off of their tongues! (See preceding discussion of [tongue control](#)).

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#### Let's apply this illustration - the bridle guiding the horse...

If we would permit the Spirit of God to put His bridle in our mouths (resting on our tongues) in order that we might obey Him, He like the horse back rider, would be able to guide our whole body!

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**Prayer of a young lady** - Lord, of all patience and understanding, I confess unto you today the wild and untamed nature of my tongue. It slips the leash of my will and goes off on paths of its own choosing. It has wounded my parents, scarred my friends and sent my little brother crying upstairs to bed. When it has calmed down I am surprised at the wild chase it had and the strange things it did. Yet, Oh God, I know that it is mine and in sorrow I confess my ownership. The hate of its words was the hate of my heart. The gossip that it carried was but my own innermost self brought out into the open. Its falsehood grew out of my own fears. Teach me, my Father God, something of the patient understanding of Jesus when He looked at the faults of other people. Save me from foolish anxiety and thoughtless plans, thus put Thou a bridle on my tongue.

**James 3:4** **Look** at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

Amplified Likewise, look at the ships: though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the impulse of the helmsman determines.

Phillips Ships too, for all their size and the momentum they have with a strong wind behind them, are controlled by a very small rudder according to the course chosen by the helmsman.

Wuest Behold also the ships, though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, are guided by a very small rudder wherever the impulse of the steersman leads him.

NET James 3:4 Look at ships too: Though they are so large and driven by harsh winds, they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the pilot's inclination directs.

GNT James 3:4 ὁ κατὰ πλοῦς πηλικά τα ντα κατὰ πῶν μων σκληρὴν λαυνμένα, μετὰ γὰρ πῶν λαχστοῦ πηδάλου που ῥητοῦ εὐνοῦτος βολεῖται,

NLT James 3:4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.

KJV James 3:4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

ESV James 3:4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

ASV James 3:4 Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, are yet turned about by a very small rudder, whither the impulse of the steersman willeth.

CSB James 3:4 And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

NIV James 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.

NKJ James 3:4 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.

NRS James 3:4 Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

YLT James 3:4 Io, also the ships, being so great, and by fierce winds being driven, are led about by a very small helm, whithersoever the impulse of the helmsman doth counsel,

NAB James 3:4 It is the same with ships: even though they are so large and driven by fierce winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot's inclination wishes.

NJB James 3:4 Or think of ships: no matter how big they are, even if a gale is driving them, they are directed by a tiny rudder wherever the whim of the helmsman decides.

GWN James 3:4 The same thing is true for ships. They are very big and are driven by strong winds. Yet, by using small rudders, pilots steer ships wherever they want them to go.

BBE James 3:4 And again ships, though they are so great and are moved by violent winds, are turned by a very small guiding-blade, at the impulse of the man who is using it.

- **are driven by strong winds:** Ps 107:25-27 Jon 1:4 Mt 8:24 Ac 27:14-38
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ILLUSTRATION #2 SHIP AND RUDDER

**Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder-** Again James presents the striking contrast between a small component that has the power to control a huge structure. He is building his case for the power of the relatively small member of our body, the tongue.

**Robertson on ships...so great** - If James had only seen the modern mammoth ships. But the ship on which Paul went to Malta carried 276 persons (Acts 27:37+).

**Look** (BEHOLD)([2400](#))([idou](#)) is the second person singular aorist middle imperative of eidon which means to see, perceive, look at. In the NT [idou](#) is used as a demonstrative particle that draws attention to what follows. [idou](#) in the [middle voice](#) means "you yourself look, see, perceive!" The [aorist imperative](#) is a command emphasizing "Do it now! Don't delay!" [idou](#) is used by the Biblical writers to (1) prompt or arouse the reader's attention (introducing something new or unusual), (2) to mark a strong emphasis ("Indeed!" Lk 13:16) and (3) to call the reader to pay close attention (very similar to #1) so that one will listen, remember or consider.

**Spurgeon** reminds us that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

**Driven** ([1643](#))([elauno](#)) means to urge, drive or propel along, to drive (of ships - Jas 3:4, of "mists **driven** by a storm" = 2 Pe 2:17+). **BDAG** has a more figurative meaning = "Of a spirit who drives a possessed person." (Lk 8:29+ of the man who would "be **driven** by the demon into the desert.") In John 6:19 [elauno](#) means "**rowed**" (the boat) (cf similar sense in Mk 6:48 = "straining at the **oars**," where **oars** is the verb [elauno](#) - so they were propelling the boat by rowing with oars; cf similar use in Isa 33:21).



**Gilbrant** - Outside the New Testament it is used in the sense of driving chariots, driving off stolen horses, and persecution (driving to extremes). Sometimes *elaunō* describes the act of striking with a weapon and forging metal. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Elauno** - 5x in NT - driven(3), oars(1), rowed(1).

Mk. 6:48; Lk. 8:29; Jn. 6:19; Jas. 3:4; 2 Pet. 2:17. In [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) 4x - Exod. 25:12; 1 Ki. 9:27; Isa. 33:21; Isa. 41:7;

**Gary Holloway** - **Strong winds** are mentioned to show the danger of misusing a rudder. One small slip can sink the ship. One small slip of the tongue can also destroy lives. (College Press NIV Commentary - James)

**Strong** (harsh, difficult) ([4642](#))([skleros](#)) means hard, stiff, unyielding, all good descriptions of the powerful winds that frequently arise at sea.

**Robertson** - "There is more imagery drawn from mere natural phenomena in the one short Epistle of James than in all St. Paul's epistles put together" (Howson).

**Directed** ([3329](#)) see preceding discussion of [metago](#), the only other use of this verb in the NT.

**Gilbrant** - What is in the heart determines speech content and attitude (Matthew 12:34). If there is genuine faith in the heart, the accompanying works will be both appropriate speech and conduct. (**ED**: Yes, "genuine faith" is important but there must also be [reliance on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit](#), not the fallen flesh.)

**A very small rudder** - Ancient rudders were more like blades and not like single rudders we see on ships today.

**Rudder** ([4079](#))([pedalion](#) from **pedon** = blade of an oar) was a large plank at the stern of a ship used to direct its course or steering the ship. See [ancient steering oars](#). These were blades of oars and refers to paddle rudders extending from the sides of the ship and were tied while the ship was at anchor. **BDAG** adds that "each ship had two rudders, connected by a crossbar and operated by one man."

**Jon Courson** - Just as surely as an insignificant-looking rudder controls an entire ship, or a little piece of metal controls a powerful horse, so the tongue, weighing a mere twenty ounces, can either bring direction or destruction—for truly the power of life and death is in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). (Jon Courson's Application Commentary New Testament)

**Roy Gingrich** - In the two illustrations, men use a small thing to control a big thing to do a lot of good. In the application, the [body's evil passions](#) use a small thing, the tongue, to unloose a big thing, the body, to do a lot of evil (damage). The one point in common in the illustrations and the application is the great effect brought about by a small thing. (Book of James)

**MacArthur** - James provided several analogies that show how the tongue, even though small, has the power to control one's whole person and influence everything in his life. (The MacArthur Study Bible)

**Wherever the inclination of the pilot desires** - Wuest "wherever the impulse of the steersman leads him." One application is that the "impulsive" use of a little human tongue can result in great evils.

**Inclination** ([3730](#))(**horme**) refers to a rapid motion forwards, onrush, violent impulse, assault. **Zodhiates** adds that "**Hormé** often times has in view motion toward an object with the purpose of propelling and repelling it still further from oneself." **BDAG** describes the figurative means - "a psychological state of strong tendency = impulse, inclination, desire." In the use in Acts 14:5 we read of swift and capricious mob action, Luke writing "an **attempt** (**horme**) was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them." So here **horme** describes an assault of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, with the leaders of the city of Iconium, against the synagogue where Paul was preaching and so depicts a violent quick attack.

**Horme** a wide range of meanings, usually involving motion, but it could also express such ideas as impulse or eagerness (*Liddell-Scott*). The Leipzig collection of inscriptions read, "He stopped the force of the Barbarian **rush**" (cf. *Moulton-Milligan*). Likewise, the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (Fourth Century A.D.) speak of "two pigs making a **rush** into our piece of land" (ibid.).

**Wiersbe** - "Both the bit and the rudder must overcome contrary forces. The bit must overcome the wild nature of the horse, and the rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off its course. The human tongue also must overcome contrary forces. We have an old nature that wants to control us and make us sin."

**Pilot** ([2116](#))(**euthuno** from [euthus](#) = straight) means literally to cause something to be (or to make) straight and was used here by James 3:4+ in his metaphorical description of the tongue to speak of a ship that was kept on a straight course, something done by the **pilot**. In the only other NT use in John 1:23+ **euthuno** speaks of a "road" (THE WAY) that is to be made straight. In context John

was using euthuno figuratively and in fact commanded ([aorist imperative](#)) his Jewish listeners to remove any and all obstacles that would impede or prevent the Lord from entering into a personal relationship with them!

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**ILLUSTRATION** - On May 21, 1941, the “unsinkable” German battleship, the Bismarck, was sighted in the North Atlantic. Immediately planes and ships from the Royal British Navy sped to the scene. As the Bismarck headed toward the German-controlled French coast where it would be safe from attack, to the astonishment of all the massive battleship suddenly swung around and reentered the area where the British ships were massed in greatest strength. At the same time, she began to steer an erratic zigzag course, which made it much easier for the British to overtake her. You see, a torpedo had damaged her rudder and without its control the “unsinkable” Bismarck was sunk. As the rudder controls a ship, so the tongue controls a person.

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### Let's Apply this Illustration of a rudder and a ship

- We all need to ask ourselves - Who is the pilot?
- Are we? Or is the Lord, the Holy Spirit?

**James 3:5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!**

Amplified Even so the tongue is a little member, and it can boast of great things. See how much wood or how great a forest a tiny spark can set ablaze!

Phillips The human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of! A whole forest can be set ablaze by a tiny spark of fire

Wuest Even so the tongue also is a small member [of the human body] and boasts great things. Behold, how great a forest a little fire sets ablaze.

NET James 3:5 So too the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it has great pretensions. Think how small a flame sets a huge forest ablaze.

GNT James 3:5 ο τως κα γλ σσα μικρ ν μ λος στ ν κα μεγ λα α χε . δο λ κον π ρ λ κην λην ν πτει·

NLT James 3:5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.

KJV James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

ESV James 3:5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

ASV James 3:5 So the tongue also is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire!

CSB James 3:5 So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites.

NIV James 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.

NKJ James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

NRS James 3:5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!

YLT James 3:5 so also the tongue is a little member, and doth boast greatly; lo, a little fire how much wood it doth kindle!

NAB James 3:5 In the same way the tongue is a small member and yet has great pretensions. Consider how small a fire can set a huge forest ablaze.

NJB James 3:5 So the tongue is only a tiny part of the body, but its boasts are great. Think how small a flame

can set fire to a huge forest;

GWN James 3:5 In the same way the tongue is a small part of the body, but it can brag about doing important things. A large forest can be set on fire by a little flame.

BBE James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a small part of the body, but it takes credit for great things. How much wood may be lighted by a very little fire!

- **So also the tongue is a small part of the body** Ex 5:2 15:9 2Ki 19:22-24 Job 21:14,15 22:17 Ps 10:3 12:2-4 Ps 17:10 52:1,2 73:8,9 Pr 12:18 15:2 18:21 Jer 9:3-8 18:18 Eze 28:2 29:3 Da 3:15 4:30 2Pe 2:18 Jude 1:16 Rev 13:5,6
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE TONGUE "PLUMES ITSELF"

For explanation of "plumes itself" [see note below](#).

**So also** - In the same manner (as a small bridle, as a small rudder).

**The tongue is a small part of the body** - The tongue is physically small, a "small member." "The tongue is petite but powerful!" (Blue)

I lost a very little word,  
only the other day.  
It was a very naughty word,  
I had not meant to say.

But then, it was not really lost,  
when from my lips it flew.  
My little brother picked it up  
and now he says it too.

**Tongue** (100) ([glossa](#)) means literal tongue, the organ of the body (Rev 16:10).

**Part** (member) (3196) ([melos](#)) is literally any part of the human body. In this passage melos is singular (most of us have only one tongue, although some of us do often speak with a "forked tongue!") In the plural melos was used to describe the members of the body as the seat of the desires and passions (Ro 6:13, 19; Ro 7:5, 23; 1 Cor. 6:15; Col. 3:5; James 4:1). Figuratively **melos** of one who belongs to the Christian community as the body of Christ (Ro 12:5; 1 Cor 6:15; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 5:30). In classical Greek the primary meaning of **melos** is "limb" or "part" of the body.

**And yet it boasts of great things** - Some (John Butler - Analytical Bible Expositor) interpret 'great things' in a positive sense, stating that the "tongue has the capability of being a great and wonderful influence for good." That may be true (especially if it is a [Spirit-controlled tongue](#)!), but that is not what James is saying here. Notice his choice of words ('boasts' a negative word) and secondly the contextual description of the destructive effect of the tongue (great forest fire). The **NET Bible** renders it "yet it has great pretensions" which emphasizes the evil or negative sense. Similarly the **NLT** says it "makes grand speeches." So clearly this refers to the naturally self-centered tongue which, energized by the fallen flesh, ultimately results in a wake of destruction (like a fire destroying a great forest).

**Puritan Thomas Manton** agrees this is a negative statement by James, paraphrasing it as "*The tongue witnesses for itself; for by it people trumpet their presumptions and boast that they can do great things.*" He gives the example of boasting because: (1) It is the usual sin of the tongue. This is the part of the body that most serves pride (INTERESTING THOUGHT!). (2) It is usually the sin of those who have no control over their spirits and actions. Hypocrites and vain men are proud boasters. "Flattering lips" and "every boastful tongue" are linked together (Psalm 12:3). And in Proverbs 14:3 we read, "A fool's talk brings a rod to his back." True grace humbles; false "grace" puffs up.

**Monty Mills** on **boasts of great things** - We do well to remember that Jas 1:26+ indicates it is possible for a man's tongue to be bridled, so the epistle has already indicated that the 'implanted word' (James 1:21+ [i.e., the power of [regeneration](#)]) has the ability to bridle the tongue (**ED**: BECAUSE EVERY REGENERATED PERSON HAS THE SPIRIT INDWELLING THEM TO ENABLE THEM).....The 'boasts great things' of James 3:5a indicates any kind of haughty speech which stirs up strife or provokes others.....The passage thus talks not of the commitment which boasting establishes, but rather the malicious strife engendered by the tongue; and this harmonizes with James 3:5b. However, it is also true that when the tongue makes a boast it sets a goal for the person to fulfill (have not we all said something we wished we had not, and yet felt obliged to live up to our word?). So, the tongue

exercises a bewildering control over the course of our lives, and demonstrates when a person's life is not under the [control of the Holy Spirit](#). Besides the marvel of the smallness of the controlling force and instrument, the two illustrations have in common the fact that both controlling media are under the control of the will of the rider, helmsman, or rider. The question thus is, "Who is in control of the tongue? God or Satan (**ED**: I WOULD SAY "[THE FALLEN FLESH](#)" BECAUSE OF James 1:14-15<sup>+</sup>)?" **How the tongue is employed, then, is an indication of the person in control of the whole body of the individual.** (James, A Study Guide)

**THOUGHT** - This is very convicting! How easy it is to "boast" and not think we are boasting. I do it with just a little exaggeration of the truth. Or with a statement of some spiritual success (that puts me in a good light). And the list goes on and on!

**Boasts** (**aucheo**) occurs only here in the Bible and describes speaking with much confidence about great things, focusing on pride towards oneself. It means to "show off" verbally. The [present tense](#) indicates that the **tongue** continually declares boastfully. There is an old idiom which would be apropos - **plume oneself** (Liddell-Scott list "plume oneself" as a definition of **aucheo**) which means to congratulate oneself. This idiomatic picture comes from a bird's habit of dressing its feathers which in turn is seen as a picture of men expressing self-satisfaction over their "feathers!" In short to **plume oneself** is to pride oneself on something in a manner which is vain, boastful, or showy.

**TECHNICAL NOTE:** The Textus Receptus has the verb **megalaucheo** which is actually a combination of **megas** = big and **aucheo** = to boast and means to brag exceedingly, to be a braggart. In the Nestle-Aland the words are separate "megala auchei."

Great Chicago Fire, 1871

**See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire-** James gives a third picture of the tongue comparing it to how a small fire produces a big flame!

**Guzik** - The fire of the tongue has been used to burn many. 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 of a word spoken against us can hurt us for a lifetime, long after a broken bone has healed. What others say to us and what we say to others can last a long time, for good or for evil. The casual sarcastic or critical remark can inflict a lasting injury on another person. The well-timed encouragement or compliment can inspire someone for the rest of their life.

Now imagine a horse running out of control; a ship out of control; a fire out of control; someone's mouth out of control.

**See** (BEHOLD)([2400](#)) see preceding discussion on [idou](#). This is like James is issuing a command to "Behold," for he clearly does not want his readers to miss this next point about the destructive power of the tongue controlled by our fallen flesh. As we have repeatedly seen especially in the forests of the western United States, a small spark can initiate a huge, raging destructive fire that has the natural propensity to spread and expand. Small words spoken by a tongue are like this spark that spreads, for evil, harmful speech can spread like wildfire in churches, families, nations, etc. The sparks of evil words are like [Mrs. O'Leary's cow](#) who many think kicked over a lantern in the barn and ignited the great Chicago fire that killed 300 people and left 100,000 homeless. Similarly the tongue though only a small spark at first can produce a veritable "[firestorm](#)" of destruction, especially in people's lives!

**Hiebert** on set aflame (set on fire) - The verb "set on fire," rather than "consumed," points to the setting of the fire; it is so devastating because it is not controlled. An uncontrolled tongue can initiate forces and movements that are just as destructive. "The inflammable wood is always and everywhere, in natural humanity, prepared for the sparks of falsehood and sin."

You have a little prisoner.  
He is nimble, sharp, and clever.  
He's sure to get away from you,  
unless you watch him ever.

And when he once gets out,  
he makes more trouble in an hour  
than you can stop in many a day  
at work with all your power.

He gets your playmates by the ears.  
He says what isn't so  
and uses many ugly words,  
no good for you to know.

Quick, fasten tight the ivory gates

and chain him while he's young.  
For this same, dangerous prisoner  
is just your little tongue.

**Set aflame** (381)(**anapto** from **aná** = an intensifier + **hapto** = touch, fasten or bind to) means "to cause the process of burning to begin - 'to ignite, to kindle, to set ablaze, to start a fire, to light a lamp.'" (Louw-Nida). The meaning comes from the fact that it was through fastening and rubbing things together that fire was produced. Three uses in NT - To produce fire or kindle in (Luke 12:49+; Acts 28:2+). Used figuratively in James 3:5

**Fire** (4442)(**pur**) refers to literal fire (Mt 13:40; 17:15; Mk 9:22; Lk 17:29; Acts 2:3; Acts 7:30; Acts 28:5; 1 Cor 3:15; Jas 5:3; Heb 12:18; 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 1:14; 4:5; 8:7; 17:16; 19:20. **Pur** is used figuratively of God inflicting punishment (Heb 12:29), of disunion (Lk 12:49), of the tongue that kindles strife and discord (James 3:5-6), of trials (1 Pe 1:7, Rev 3:18), at Pentecost (Acts 2:3 = "tongues as of **fire**"), of burning up useless works (1 Cor 3:10-15), as a description of doing something with great difficulty in Jude 1:23 ("snatching them out of the **fire**"). Fire in the context of judgment, the eternal fire, the place of punishment (Mt. 13:42, 50; Mt. 5:22; 18:9; Mk 9:4 Mt. 18:8; 25:41; Jude 1:7 Rev. 14:10); the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; Rev 20:10, 14, 15; Rev 21:8).

**Gilbrant** - The Greeks used **pur** extensively in both literal and figurative ways. It can refer to fire, burning, or lightning, but it can also denote violence, anarchy, or the fury of battle. In Greek philosophy fire was one of the four or five basic elements of life; some regarded fire as the source of everything. Stoic thought contained the idea that the present world would one day perish in a giant conflagration. Almost 500 instances of **pur** can be found in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#); of these about 350 translate the Hebrew term 'ēsh. The Old Testament understands fire to be both a cleansing, purifying agent and an agent of destruction. God demonstrated His pleasure with fire upon the altar (Genesis 15:17; Lev 9:23f.; Judges 6:21; 1 Kings 18:38; 1 Chr 21:26; 2 Chronicles 7:1). But fire also demonstrated God's displeasure and was a sign of His wrath and judgment (Genesis 19:24; Exodus 9:24; Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 11:1; 16:35; 2 Kings 1:10; Amos 1:4,7). In addition, the Lord God is described as a "consuming fire, even a jealous God" (Dt 4:24; 9:3; Isa 33:14). The **New Testament** reads **pur** on almost 75 occasions. In addition to the literal sense of the term, there are many other usages. Positively, **pur** describes the fire of the Spirit that John the Baptist said Jesus would bring to the earth (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; cf. Acts 2:3). Fire, furthermore, depicts trials and adversities that cleanse and purify the believer's faith (1 Peter 1:7). Elsewhere, however, fire denotes the turmoil caused by an uncontrolled, evil tongue (James 3:5,6). Paul spoke of "burning" in the sense of passion's force (1 Corinthians 7:9). **God's judgment is often symbolized by fire.** Fire will be the standard of **testing for everyone's deeds in life** (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). If his works stand the test he will receive a reward, but if they are consumed by the fire the reward is lost, although he is "saved, but only as through fire" (RSV). Fire, moreover, describes **God's judgment upon the ungodly at the end of the age**. Christ will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God" (2 Th 1:7-9). Jesus referred to **hell as a place of fire, of unquenchable flame** (Mt 5:22; 13:42,50; 18:8,9; 25:41; Mk 9:43,48; Lk 3:17). No less horrible is the idea of being eternally lost in the **lake of fire** (Rev 14:9-11; 19:20; 20:14,15; 21:8). God's two witnesses in the last days call fire down to consume their opponents (Rev 11:5). The false prophet causes fire to fall from heaven (Rev 13:13), and fire consumes Babylon the Great (Rev 17:16; 18:8). God reveals His glory in fire. The glorified Son of Man is shown having eyes like the flame of a fire and feet like burnished brass (Rev 1:14,15). Seven lamps of fire burn in front of the heavenly throne (Rev 4:5), and the sea of glass is mingled with fire (Rev 15:2). ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Pur** in NT - burning(2), fiery(2), fire(69).

Matt. 3:10; Matt. 3:11; Matt. 3:12; Matt. 5:22; Matt. 7:19; Matt. 13:40; Matt. 13:42; Matt. 13:50; Matt. 17:15; Matt. 18:8; Matt. 18:9; Matt. 25:41; Mk. 9:22; Mk. 9:43; Mk. 9:44; Mk. 9:46; Mk. 9:48; Mk. 9:49; Lk. 3:9; Lk. 3:16; Lk. 3:17; Lk. 9:54; Lk. 12:49; Lk. 17:29; Lk. 22:55; Jn. 15:6; Acts 2:3; Acts 2:19; Acts 7:30; Acts 28:5; Rom. 12:20; 1 Co. 3:13; 1 Co. 3:15; 2 Thess. 1:7; Heb. 1:7; Heb. 10:27; Heb. 11:34; Heb. 12:18; Heb. 12:29; Jas. 3:5; Jas. 3:6; Jas. 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:7; Jude 1:7; Jude 1:23; Rev. 1:14; Rev. 2:18; Rev. 3:18; Rev. 4:5; Rev. 8:5; Rev. 8:7; Rev. 8:8; Rev. 9:17; Rev. 9:18; Rev. 10:1; Rev. 11:5; Rev. 13:13; Rev. 14:10; Rev. 14:18; Rev. 15:2; Rev. 16:8; Rev. 17:16; Rev. 18:8; Rev. 19:12; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:9; Rev. 20:10; Rev. 20:14; Rev. 20:15; Rev. 21:8

#### Related Resources:

- American Tract Society [Fire](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Fire](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Fire](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Fire](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Fire](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Fire](#)

- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Fire](#)
- ISBE - [Fire](#)
- [Is hell literally a place of fire and brimstone?](#)

This figure of small fire causing a large fire was well known in ancient literature - Stobæus says: "A little torch can burn the summit of Ida." Homer speaks of "a spark, scarce seen, which fires a boundless forest." And Virgil draws an animated picture of the desolation resulting from fire dropped by a careless shepherd, which at length reaches the tree tops, "and wraps the forest in a robe of flame."

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#### **There are THREE THINGS / ou can never get back:**

1. A spent arrow
  2. A spoken word
  3. A lost opportunity (Eph 5:16+, [Redeem the Time](#))
- 

**Life Application Study Bible.** What you say and what you *don't* say are both important. To use proper speech you must not only say the right words at the right time but also not say what you shouldn't. Examples of an untamed tongue include gossiping, putting others down, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering, and lying. Before you speak, ask, Is what I want to say true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?

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**HUMOROUS ILLUSTRATION** - A pastor friend told me about a member of his church who was a notorious gossip. She would "hang on the phone" most of the day, sharing tidbits with any and all who would listen. She came to the pastor one day and said, "Pastor, the Lord has convicted me of my sin of gossip. My tongue is getting me and others into trouble." My friend knew she was not sincere because she had gone through that routine before. Guardedly he asked, "Well, what do you plan to do?" "I want to put my tongue on the altar," she replied with pious fervor. Calmly my friend replied, "There isn't an altar big enough," and he left her to think it over. - Warren Wiersbe - BEC

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#### **Robert Morgan - A Tiny Spark November 26**

The power of simple words is immense, as James 3:5 indicates: "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark." Never was this truer than on November 26, 1095, the date of the most effective sermon ever preached by pope, preacher, or prince. It was Pope Urban II's sermon in Clermont, France, launching the Crusades.

For many years, the Christian world had fretted over the capture of Palestine by the Muslim Turks. Finally Pope Urban addressed the subject at the church council in Clermont. He spoke in an open field to both clerics and the general public, passionately describing how the Turks, an "accursed race," had devastated the kingdom of God by fire, pillage, and sword. Jerusalem, the "navel of the world," was laid waste. Antioch was ruined. The Holy Land was in the hands of barbarians. It must be liberated.

The crowd, whipped into a frenzy, began chanting, "God wills it! God wills it!" Urban II replied, "It is the will of God. Let these words be your war cry when you unsheathe the sword. You are soldiers of the cross. Wear on your breasts or shoulders the blood-red sign of the cross."

Thousands immediately sewed the cross on their clothing or had it branded with flaming irons to bare skin. The fervor swept across the Continent. A new era in European history began as the crusading passion, inspired by its pope, took hold of its people. The era of the Crusades stretched from 1096 to 1291, and in the light of history is seen as a horrible mistake. The kingdom of God cannot be furthered militarily. The Crusades, only partially and temporarily successful in "liberating" Palestine, produced 200 years of abuses, excesses, deaths, diseases, violence, cruelty, and reproach.

It takes only a spark to start a forest fire! The tongue is like a spark. It is an evil power that dirties the rest of the body and sets a person's entire life on fire with flames that come from hell itself. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be tamed and have been tamed. But our tongues get out of control. James 3:5b-8a (On This Day)

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#### **Exaggeration**

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. —Proverbs 28:13

Today's Scripture: James 3:1-13

A woman said to a preacher, "I have a habit that I know is hurting my testimony—the habit of exaggeration. I start to tell something and I go on and on enlarging the story. People suspect that it's not true, and they lose confidence in me. I'm trying to get over it. Could you help me?"

He responded, "Let's talk to the Lord about it."



She prayed, “Lord, You know I have this habit of exaggeration . . .” At this point the preacher interrupted, “Call it lying and you may get over it!” The woman was deeply convicted and confessed her wrong.

We often excuse our pet sins by giving them more acceptable names. Our bad temper we call “nerves”; our untruthfulness, “exaggeration”; our dishonesty we call “good business.” In seeking to overcome these sins, we need to bring them out in the open, call them honestly by name, and sincerely repent (Proverbs 28:13).

A man entered a dentist’s office and sat down to have his teeth fixed. “I can feel a huge cavity with my tongue,” he said. The dentist examined the man’s teeth and said, “It’ll only be a small filling.” “But why does it feel so large?” asked the patient. “Just the natural tendency of the tongue to exaggerate,” replied the dentist with a twinkle in his eye. We may smile, but aren’t we all prone to blow things out of proportion? Indeed, “the tongue is a little member and boasts great things” (James 3:5). By: Henry G. Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, forgive us for misusing our tongues. - Henry Bosch

To stretch the truth is to tell a lie.

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### **A Small Fire**

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. James 3:5

Today’s Scripture & Insight: James 3:3–12

It was a Sunday night in September and most people were sleeping when a small fire broke out in Thomas Farriner’s bakery on Pudding Lane. Soon the flames spread from house to house and London was engulfed in the Great Fire of 1666. Over 70,000 people were left homeless by the blaze that leveled four-fifths of the city. So much destruction from such a small fire!

The Bible warns us of another small but destructive fire. James was concerned about lives and relationships, not buildings, when he wrote, “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” (James 3:5).

But our words can also be constructive. Proverbs 16:24 reminds us, “Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” The apostle Paul says, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6). As salt flavors our food, grace flavors our words for building up others.

Through the help of the Holy Spirit our words can encourage people who are hurting, who want to grow in their faith, or who need to come to the Savior. Our words can put out fires instead of starting them. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, I can always use help with the way I talk. For this day, help me to speak words of hope and encouragement to build up others.

What will our words be like today?

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### **Small Thing, Big Impact**

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification. —Ephesians 4:29

Today’s Scripture: James 3:1-12

Are most people truth-tellers? Can what they say be taken at face value? Or are they like the ancient Cretans, whose reputation was that they were “always liars”? (Titus 1:12).

Lies, of course, are communicated by the tongue. That small part of the human body can make a powerful impact. It can ruin a reputation. It can destroy a friendship. It can cause lasting heartache.

On the other hand, the tongue can give comfort and hope in time of bereavement. It can shine the light of saving truth into the mind of someone wandering in spiritual darkness. It can praise and glorify God.

We shouldn’t be surprised, then, that Scripture repeatedly urges us to exercise great wisdom and care in how we use this small part of the body. Proverbs 18:21 is not exaggerating when it warns us that “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” David was not

indulging in pointless poetry when he denounced “men . . . whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword” (Psalm 57:4). And the apostle James said that the tongue can be as destructive as a fire (James 3:1-12).

By the Holy Spirit’s power, may we use our tongues to bless our hearers, build up one another, and glorify our Creator in prayer and praise. By: Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,  
My tongue control today;  
Help me evaluate each thought  
And guard each word I say.  
—Hess

The tongue is a small organ that creates either discord or harmony.

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**Bubbagate** - It seemed like a harmless statement. A city councilman in Ft. Worth, Texas, was making a public announcement that a world-famous pianist would perform at the opening of the \$110 million Texas Motor Speedway. A group of auto-racing fans would have an opportunity to hear renowned pianist Van Cliburn at the NASCAR Winston Cup race April 6, 1997. So, the city councilman notified the Ft. Worth Star-Telegram about the proposed event by saying, "Van Cliburn is going to play for Bubba."

The general manager of the Texas Motor Speedway, Eddie Gossage, took umbrage at the councilman's words and fired off a letter to him, saying, "Please do not refer to race fans as 'bubbas' or 'rednecks.' Race fans are supposedly tourists valued by the city of Fort Worth. The use of the term 'bubba' or 'redneck' can be considered a racial epithet."

The city councilman apologized by saying, "I'm sorry I called all those race fans Bubbas. I certainly didn't mean to offend them. These are valued people. I represent the Bubbas and the rednecks. They're good folks. They're not elite at all."

People who expressed their opinions lined up for and against the verbal choices of the councilman. Fort Worth's mayor said, "I wish he'd used a different set of words." The lieutenant governor of Texas described **Bubbas** as decent, hard-working Americans. A representative of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture in Oxford, Mississippi, shared the opinion, "**Bubba** is a Southern diminutive of brother, sort of like mama, papa, and bubba and sista. Within the working-class white world, 'Bubba' is a term of affection." The owner of a convenience store in Crowley Texas, named "Bubba's No. 3" explained his choice of name for the store by saying, "We wanted them to know we were nice people. Bubba's nice, friendly, drives a pickup."

The councilman meant no harm, but the manager of a facility that will draw huge numbers of tourists to Fort Worth was irritated by his choice of words. What was humorous to the councilman was an insult to some of his constituency. People who talk need a warning. Our improperly chosen words can offend, wound, anger, and repel. Our tongues are powerful, potentially vicious, and woefully inconsistent.(Max Anders - Holman New Testament Commentary – Hebrews & James)

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## Careless Words

The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. James 3:5

Today's Scripture & Insight: James 3:1-12

My daughter has had a lot of ill health recently, and her husband has been wonderfully caring and supportive. “You have a real treasure there!” I said.

“You didn’t think that when I first knew him,” she said with a grin.

She was quite right. When Icilda and Philip got engaged, I was concerned. They were such different personalities. We have a large and noisy family, and Philip is more reserved. And I had shared my misgivings with my daughter quite bluntly.

I was horrified to realize that the critical things I said so casually 15 years ago had stayed in her memory and could possibly have destroyed a relationship that has proved to be so right and happy. It reminded me how much we need to guard what we say to others. So many of us are quick to point out what we consider to be weaknesses in family, friends, or work colleagues, or to focus on their mistakes rather than their successes. “The tongue is a small part of the body,” says James (3:5), yet the words it shapes can either destroy relationships or bring peace and harmony to a situation in the workplace, the church, or the family.

Perhaps we should make David's prayer our own as we start each day: “Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door

of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). By: Marion Stroud ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Father, please curb my careless speech and put a guard on my tongue today and every day.

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Proverbs 25:11 nkjv

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### **The Dangerous Tongue**

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! James 3:5

John Wesley was known to be a colorful dresser in his day. On one Sunday, an elderly lady in his church took exception to the length of his bow tie. After the service, she approached the preacher and said with a degree of indignation, "Brother Wesley, would you admit a word of criticism?" Wesley readily agreed.

The bold saint continued, "Your bow tie is much too long and it is an evidence of worldliness to me."

Rather than being offended, Wesley responded, "Does anybody have a pair of scissors around here?" Minutes later the tools were supplied. "Why don't you cut the tie to suit yourself?" he said.

The lady eagerly trimmed the preacher's neckpiece to her liking and then cheerfully added, "There! That is much better."

But, Wesley wasn't finished. "Thank you, ma'am." he said, "Now may I use those on you?"

"For what?" replied the critical saint.

"To trim your tongue. It's much too long."

Most of us would agree that if we had the option, we would gladly "trim" our tongue. Not to avoid inhaling that second helping of chocolate pie, but for a far more serious reason. Plainly put, this tiny member of our anatomy frequently gets us into more trouble than we've bargained for.

Walking close to the Lord will help us to "trim" our tongues. It will give us a greater consciousness of the words we say and the effect they have on people. A fool's tongue is always long enough to cut his throat (James Scudder - Living Water)

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### **A War Of Words**

Read: Proverbs 15:1-23

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. — Proverbs 15:1

On July 28, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia in response to the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie. Within 90 days, other European countries had taken sides to honor their military alliances and pursue their own ambitions. A single event escalated into World War I, one of the most destructive military conflicts of modern time. The tragedy of war is staggering, yet our relationships and families can begin to fracture with only a few hateful words. James wrote, "See how great a forest a little fire kindles!" (James 3:5). A key to avoiding verbal conflict is found in Proverbs: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (15:1). A small comment can start a large fight. When we, by God's grace, choose not to retaliate with our words, we honor Jesus our Savior. When He was abused and insulted, He fulfilled the prophetic words of Isaiah, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7). Proverbs urges us to speak the truth and seek peace through our words. "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, . . . and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (15:4,23). — David McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

A careless word may kindle strife,

A cruel word may wreck a life;

A timely word may lessen stress,

A loving word may heal and bless. — Anon.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

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### **THAT DRAGON IN OUR DENTURES**

THE TONGUE IS A SMALL PART OF THE BODY, BUT IT MAKES GREAT BOASTS. . . . THE TONGUE ALSO IS A FIRE, A WORLD OF EVIL AMONG THE PARTS OF THE BODY. —James 3:5–6

James tells us that our tongue "is a fire," small but able to set a whole forest ablaze! To make his point clear, he concludes that the tongue is "set on fire by hell" (3:6). If Satan has a scorched-earth policy in his warfare against the Christians, then the tongue is the front line of attack. James rings a clear warning. A transformed tongue must be a top priority for those on the growing edge of discipleship.

James's warning takes on added weight when we realize that many of us are desensitized to the problems of destructive speech. Sins of the tongue are like stealth sins that fly under the radar of our consciences. Just listen to us excuse one another with rationalizations like "Well, it's the truth, isn't it?" or, "If they didn't want people to talk, they never should have done it." The most subtle excuse among Christians is "Let me share this with you that we might pray more intelligently." This desensitization has opened the floodgates to verbal destruction of reputations and trusted relationships.

Sins like deceit, lying, and false witness need to be understood from God's point of view. Social sins of the tongue, such as gossip and slander, must be checked. Verbal ego trips, such as boasting, flattery, and exaggeration, are clearly out of bounds. The cancer of a murmuring, contentious tongue needs to be removed.

By making careless speech an acceptable part of our lives, we assume that a carnal tongue is par for the spiritual course. When that happens, our churches, schools, homes, friendships, and relationships with God are all victimized. We should remind each other that Satan is "the father of lies" (John 8:44) and "the accuser of our brethren" (Revelation 12:10 KJV). Jesus is not only truth, but also our advocate, and defender. Whose work will you do? (Joseph Stowell - Strength for the Journey)

Put your tongue in check. Don't say it until the Spirit approves it!

**James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.**

Amplified And the tongue is a fire. [The tongue is a] world of wickedness set among our members, contaminating and depraving the whole body and setting on fire the wheel of birth (the cycle of man's nature), being itself ignited by hell (Gehenna).

Phillips and the tongue is as dangerous as any fire, with vast potentialities for evil. It can poison the whole body, it can make the whole of life a blazing hell.

Wuest And the tongue is a fire, the sum total of iniquity. The tongue is so constituted in our members that it defiles the entire body and sets on fire the round of existence and is constantly being set on fire by Gehenna [hell].

NET James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire! The tongue represents the world of wrongdoing among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the entire body and sets fire to the course of human existence— and is set on fire by hell.

GNT James 3:6 καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα πῦρ· κόσμος τῆς δικῆς γλῶσσης καθίσταται ἵνα τὸ σῶμα λεσθῇ ὡς σπυλὸν σάρον· τὸ σῶμα καὶ φλογίζουσα τὸν τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως καὶ φλογιζομένη πῦρ τῆς γεννῆς.

NLT James 3:6 And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

KJV James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

ESV James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

ASV James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire: the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell.

CSB James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell.

NIV James 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.

NKJ James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

NRS James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell.

YLT James 3:6 and the tongue is a fire, the world of the unrighteousness, so the tongue is set in our members, which is spotting our whole body, and is setting on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire by the gehenna.

NAB James 3:6 The tongue is also a fire. It exists among our members as a world of malice, defiling the whole body and setting the entire course of our lives on fire, itself set on fire by Gehenna.

NJB James 3:6 The tongue is a flame too. Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a whole wicked world: it infects the whole body; catching fire itself from hell, it sets fire to the whole wheel of creation.

GWN James 3:6 The tongue is that kind of flame. It is a world of evil among the parts of our bodies, and it completely contaminates our bodies. The tongue sets our lives on fire, and is itself set on fire from hell.

BBE James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire; it is the power of evil placed in our bodies, making all the body unclean, putting the wheel of life on fire, and getting its fire from hell.

- **And the tongue is a fire:** Judg 12:4-6 2Sa 19:43 20:1 2Ch 10:13-16 13:17 Ps 64:3 140:3 Pr 15:1 16:27 26:20,21 Isa 30:27
- **the very world of iniquity:** Jas 2:7 Ge 3:4-6 Lev 24:11 Nu 25:2 31:16 De 13:6 Jud 16:15-20 1Sa 22:9-17 2Sa 13:26-29 15:2-6 16:20-23 17:1,2 1Ki 21:5-15 Pr 1:10-14 6:19 7:5,21-23 Jer 20:10 28:16 Mt 12:24,32-36 Mt 15:11-20 Mk 7:15,20-22 14:55-57 Ac 6:13 20:30 Ro 3:13,14 Ro 16:17,18 Eph 5:3,4 Col 3:8,9 2Th 2:10-12 Tit 1:11 2Pe 2:1,2 2Pe 3:3 3Jn 1:10 Jude 1:8-10,15-18 Rev 2:14,15 13:1-5,14 18:23 Rev 19:20
- **is set on fire by hell:** Lu 16:24 Ac 5:3 2Co 11:13-15 2Th 2:9 Rev 12:9
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## HELL ON FIRE!

Inspired by the Spirit, James is showing with strong words how much damage can be caused by an unbridled tongue, a "rudderless" tongue whipped around by strong winds of our fallen flesh. **Lenski** comments, "Nothing stronger was ever said about the tongue."

**And the tongue is a fire-** Phillips paraphrases it "the tongue is as dangerous as any fire." Here James [metaphorically](#) equates the **tongue** directly with **a fire**. He has just portrayed how destructive a fire can be, spreading rapidly, destroying everything in its path. And while James does not say anything about smoke, obviously fire is always accompanied by smoke and if you have ever had a house fire that you were able to put out, you were still left with the ruinous effects of the smoke, so that everything smelled like smoke. Beloved, that's the power of our unbridled, unruddered tongue, unless it is continually surrendered to the [guarding, guiding power of the Holy Spirit!](#)

The [metaphor](#) of speech (tongue) as **fire** is found in Proverbs...

Proverbs 16:27 A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are like scorching fire.

Proverbs 26:18-22 Like a madman who throws Firebrands, arrows and death, 19 So is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, "Was I not joking?" 20 For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. 21 Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

**Life Application Study Bible** - James compares the damage the tongue can do to a raging fire....Idle and hateful words are damaging because they spread destruction quickly, and no one can stop the results once they are spoken. We dare not be careless with what we say, thinking we can apologize later, because even if we do, the scars remain. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build. Before you speak, remember that words are like fire—you can neither control nor reverse the damage they can do.

**John Phillips** - The tongue is as dangerous as any **fire**. It has a vast potential for evil. It can speak falsehood and filth. It can be smooth as butter or as sharp as a knife. It can curse or cajole. It can criticize and complain. It can castigate and corrupt. There is no evil to which the unregenerate heart of man is heir that the tongue cannot promote. Sin entered this world, in the first place, by means of a forked tongue, the tongue of "that old serpent." The moment that Adam was confronted with his sin, he used his tongue to blame God and accuse Eve. When Eve was faced with her sin, she employed her tongue to blame the Evil One and his beguiling words. Adam blamed both Eve and God for what he, himself, had done. The first recorded words of Cain were insolent words wrapped around a lie and addressed to God: "I know not: [where he is]: Am I my brother's keeper?" The first recorded words of an organized human society were words of rebellion against God, humanistic and self-centered: "Let us... Let us... Let us" (Ge 11:3-4). Thus, the building of the Tower of Babel and a world capital city was begun. God's response was to confound human speech so that every man spoke to his neighbor in a foreign tongue. The proliferation of tongues has continued down the centuries so that now, according to the Wycliffe Bible Translators International Linguistic Center in Dallas, Texas, there are more than five thousand language groups known to exist in the world. Even some of God's greatest saints have revealed the evil power of the tongue.

Abraham lied about his wife twice (Ge 2:10-20; 20:1-7). In a fit of temper, Moses called God's people rebels (Num. 20:10), and, for so doing, God kept him out of the Promised Land. David lied to Ahimelech the priest and occasioned his murder by King Saul (1 Sam. 21:1-10; 22:9-23). (Exploring the Epistle of James: An Expository Commentary)

**The very world of iniquity** - Continuing his [lurid](#) description of the tongue, James adds the unusual phrase **the very world of iniquity**. I think Wuest has an accurate paraphrase **"the sum total of iniquity."** NLT has **"a whole world of wickedness."** There is an English idiom **"a world of trouble,"** which means "very much trouble." Indeed, this smallest member of our body is also far too often the cause of the largest trouble, "very much trouble!" The tongue is the sum total of iniquity/sin, where "sum total" is defined as the whole amount of something taken into consideration, especially that which cannot be calculated numerically. That's not a bad description of our tongue which is capable of such evil that it cannot be "calculated numerically!" Think of the potential of the tongue which James is depicting with this phrase the very world of iniquity -- it has the power to affect the entire unrighteous, sinful world! If you don't believe this watch some of the current news shows (which really are no longer truly news), the popular fare on television or the box office hits. There is iniquity of all shapes and sizes in these various venues (just another reason I have "fasted from news" for over 2 years, and have subscribed to Vidangel to filter the gratuitous sex, blasphemy of Jesus' great Name and a sewer of curse words). In short, the entire unrighteous world system can find expression through the **tongue**.

The following psalms echo the words of James...

Psalm 10:7 His **mouth** (Whose mouth? see Ps 10:4) is full of curses and deceit and oppression. Under his **tongue** is mischief and wickedness.

Psalm 12:3 May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The **tongue** that speaks great things (cf James 3:5+); Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"

**Donald Burdick on world of iniquity** - It is as though all the wickedness in the whole world were wrapped up in that little piece of flesh. There are few sins people commit in which the tongue is not involved. (Expositor's Bible Commentary, 1976)

**Swindoll on very world of iniquity** - What harsh words! James is saying that the full range of **iniquity** finds an outlet through the tongue. Think about that. It's virtually impossible to seethe with anger without expressing our rage in words. Bitterness sours our speech. Pride prattles on and on. Hate explodes from the lips. The tongue can suddenly turn an otherwise gentle person into a monster. It's a "world of iniquity." (Ibid)

**Hiebert on world of iniquity** - From the context it seems best to accept that James thinks of the tongue as a vast system of iniquity." (Ibid)

**ESV Study Bible on world of iniquity** - The tongue represents and puts into expression all the wickedness of the world.

**John Calvin** - This slender portion of flesh contains the whole world of iniquity.

**Wiersbe** - When the Spirit came at Pentecost, there were tongues of **fire** from heaven to enable the Christians to witness; but it is also possible for the tongue to be "set on fire from hell!"

**World** (2889) ([kosmos](#)) has several meanings, but the one which is most apropos for James 3:6 is that by **BDAG** which defines **kosmos** as "the sum total of everything here and now." In addition **kosmos** is a system or arrangement (in context a system of evil). The tongue is the totality or sum total of iniquity, which John defines clearly as "sin" writing that "All unrighteousness ([adikia](#)) is sin." (1 Jn 5:17). James' other uses of **kosmos** - Jas. 1:27; Jas. 2:5; Jas. 3:6; Jas. 4:4;

**Iniquity** (unrighteousness, wickedness) (93) ([adikia](#) from **a** = not + **dikê** = right) is an activity which is unjust, a condition of not being right, whether with God, according to the standard of His holiness and righteousness or with man, according to the standard of what man knows to be right by his conscience.

**The tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body** - **Phillips** paraphrases it "It can poison the whole body." **Amplified** has "The tongue is so constituted in our members." James has already implied that the **tongue** holds sway over the **whole body** (James 3:2+). Now James says that when the unbridled tongue begins to spew forth evil, this evil stains and pollutes the entire personality (the [soma](#) - a few commentators say **soma** may also refer to the Church which is often called a body)! James is echoing his half-brother Jesus Who taught "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the **mouth**, this **defiles** ([koinoo](#) in the [present tense](#)) the man." (Mt 15:11, see also Mt 15:18-20, Mt 12:34, 35, cf Mk 7:15). And here in James defiles is in the [present tense](#) signifying an ongoing evil, polluting effect on one's body! Woe! These pictures make me want to cry out to the Holy Spirit to make Psalm 141:3 my continual protection! It's probably not a bad prayer to frequently pray!

**Burdick** thinks that "In reality, he is not referring to the tongue of flesh but to the intelligent, communicating mind that uses the tongue as its instrument. So the mind corrupts the whole person."



**THOUGHT** - That makes sense because similarly Jesus said out of the mouth comes that which fills the heart (the control center of men, which would include the mind). Words come from the physical brain which is why a stroke makes a person aphasic (unable to speak). But the spiritual aspect that oversees the physical brain is usually referred to as the "heart" (not the physical heart of course). Now are you really confused? The point is that the tongue is [composed of four muscles](#), but the motor input to those muscles comes from the brain and this is what Burdick is referring to.

**J Vernon McGee's** comment also alludes to the **heart** - It is interesting to note that Paul said, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Ro 10:9, italics mine). In other words, we are to sing a duet, the **tongue** and the **heart** are to be in tune. The Lord Jesus said, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mt 12:34) -- what is in the **heart** will come out. Someone has said, "What is in the well of the **heart** will come out through the bucket of the mouth." If it is in your **heart**, you are going to say it sooner or later. It is interesting that when our Lord came to that dumb man, the Gospel writer is very careful to say, "He touched his mouth!" My friend, if He has touched you, He has touched your mouth also.

**Set** (2525) ([kathistemi](#) from *kata* = down + *hístēmi* = to set or stand) means literally "to stand or set down". In this context it means to take a position, to come forward, to appear. James used this same verb in James 4:4+ "**makes** himself an enemy of God." Wuest says "The tongue is so **constituted** in our members."

**Members** (3196) see preceding discussion on [melos](#). The parts of our body.

**Defiles** (stains, pollutes, corrupts, infects) (4695) ([spiloo](#) from [spilos](#)) means stained, defiled, contaminated or soiled. See the contrasting word [aspilos](#) in James 1:27 ("unstained"). The only other NT use is Jude 1:23+ "save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment **polluted** (spiloo in [perfect tense](#)) by the flesh." James uses the antonym of [spilos](#) describing "Pure and undefiled religion" as he who keeps (enabled by the Holy Spirit) "oneself **unstained** ([aspilos](#)) by the (unholy) world." (James 1:27+) This would imply he also keeps himself unstained by his words which are a world of iniquity.

**And sets on fire the course of our life** - NET translates it as the tongue is that which "sets fire to the course of human existence." Literally "the wheel of birth ("wheel of existence")." This is a difficult phrase to decipher but probably refers to the entire sphere of human existence, the unending span of life stretching from birth to death. The idea seems to be that the tongue's evil effects can extend beyond the individual to affect everything in a person's sphere ("wheel") of influence. James has just said the evil effects of the tongue can permeate our personality, but now widens the sphere of influence to our entire life. In short, the tongue is capable of disrupting everything!

**Ronald Blue** has a picturesque interpretation of **the course of our life** - It is as though the tongue is at the center or hub of the wheel of nature and, like a fireworks display, the wheel is **set on fire** at the center. The more it burns, the faster it revolves until the whole wheel spins in a blaze, spitting fire in all directions. (BKC)

**Max Anders** on **the course of our life** - A misused tongue may affect the cycle of life from birth onward!

**Grant Osborne** on **the course of our life** - Most recent studies (Blomberg and Kamell, Martin, Moo) realize that the phrase had become a more popular idea by James's time, simply meaning the ups and downs of life. Since the tongue is at the center of our life, it sets in motion a conflagration that will destroy "the entire course of your life." (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 18: James)

**MacArthur** explains this as "Like physical **fire**, the destructive effects of evil speech expand, not only contaminating ourselves but also everything we influence throughout **the course of our life**. To a large extent, we are known by the way we talk. Over the long haul, what we say gives others a pretty good idea of who and what we really are. That principle applies to good things as well as sinful, but James's emphasis here is entirely on the negative aspects of our speaking—such as gossip, slander, false accusations, lying, filthy language and stories, and other sins of the tongue—that can destroy individual lives, families, schools, churches, and communities. (Ibid)

**Jon Courson** has an application to help us guard our tongues - When you hear gossip, pray silently in the Spirit to keep your tongue busy lest you join in the hellish discussion. If I listen to gossip, to put-downs, I am actually an accomplice in that fire ignited by hell. But if I refuse to listen and pray instead, the water of the Spirit douses the fire of hell, and the conversation dies. (Ibid) Courson is basing this application on the proverb which says "For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down." (Pr 26:20) So if there is no "wood" (no gossip, put downs, derogatory statements, etc, made by others in your hearing), the tongue is not **set on fire**!

**And is set on fire by hell** - Not **Hades** (the temporary holding place), but **Gehenna**, the everlasting place of all evil demons and humans. It comes from the devil. **Burdick** says this is "a way of saying that it comes from the devil." (EBC)

**MacArthur** - **Hell** is Satan's place, prepared for him and his demons (Matt. 25:41). As such, it is used here as a synonym for Satan and the demons.

**ESV Study Bible** - Evil speech destroys because it comes from Satan himself.

**Max Anders** on **set on fire by hell** - "This describes Satan's influence on the tongue." (Holman New Testament Commentary)

**Osborne** on **set on fire by hell** - ".....would mean the tongue becomes a tool of Satan to destroy the individual and the church. False teachers are often portrayed as controlled by Satan, and their teachings are demonic in nature (2 Cor 11:13-15; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Pet 2:10; Jude 8-10)." (Ibid)

**Phillips** - Some of the lies that the tongue tells are diabolically wicked. Some of the language that the tongue uses is so abysmally degrading that it can be attributed only to the activity of evil spirits. The Bible abounds with illustrations of such use. We think of the curses that Shimei directed against David, the Lord's anointed (2 Sam. 16:5-7). We think of the depraved advice that Ahithophel gave to Absalom (2 Sam. 16:20-23). We think of the wicked lie that the backslidden old prophet of Bethel told to the bright, young prophet from Judah (1 Kings 13:1-32). (Ibid)

**Barton** adds that "Flames of hate, prejudice, slander, jealousy, and envy seem to come from the very lake of fire where Satan will be punished (see Revelation 20:10, 14-15)

**Kent Hughes** - The uncontrolled tongue has a direct pipeline to Hell! This pipeline is reciprocal. Fueled by Hell, it burns our lives with its filthy fires. But it is also, as Calvin says, an "... instrument for catching, encouraging, and increasing the fires of hell." (Ibid)

**Wiersbe** - The tongue cannot be tamed by man, but it can be tamed by God. Your tongue need not be "set on fire of hell" (James 3:6). Like the Apostles at Pentecost, it can be set on fire from heaven! If God lights the fire and controls it, then the tongue can be a mighty tool for the winning of the lost and the building up of the church. The important thing, of course, is the heart; for it is "out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). If the heart is filled with hatred, Satan will light the fire. But if the heart is filled with love, God will light the fire. (BEC)

**Brian Bell** has an interesting thought that "All the filth of the city accumulated there (Gehenna), so too the evil of our sinful hearts seems to accumulate on our tongues."

**Hell** (only use outside synoptic Gospels all others spoken by the Lord Jesus)(**Gehenna**) ([1067](#))([geenna](#) from Hebrew **gay** = valley + **Hinnom**) is literally the **valley of Hinnom**, the ravine or valley southwest of Jerusalem where the refuse and filth, human excrement, bodies of dead animals, and bodies of criminals were cast and burned. This same location was also the ancient site of Canaanite (and even some Israelite) rituals in which they sacrificed children to the pagan god [Molech](#) (who was of course not a god even with a little "g")! (see 2 Ki 23:10, Jer 7:31; Jer 19:5-6; Jer 32:35) These fires in the "Valley of Hinnom" were continually burning, which is an apt symbol of the future home of all unrepentant, unregenerate wicked men and women (cf "eternal fire" in Mt 25:41). In the intertestamental period, it came to be used symbolically as the place of divine punishment (cf. 1 En. 27:2, 90:26; 4 Ezra 7:36). **Gehenna** was a maggot infested, foul, forbidding place where the fire, smoke, and stench never ceased. It is thus fitting that **geenna** is where sin and unrepentant sinners will one day find their "resting place". And the reality of it should prompt all of us to pray for open hearts to the Gospel and to proclaim the Gospel whenever we have opportunity (for often "opportunity only knocks once.")

**Gehenna** - all 12 uses -

Matt. 5:22; Matt. 5:29; Matt. 5:30; Matt. 10:28; Matt. 18:9; Matt. 23:15; Matt. 23:33; Mk. 9:43; Mk. 9:45; Mk. 9:47; Lk. 12:5; Jas. 3:6

**Related Resources** -

- Eternal Punishment
- [Gehenna - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Hell - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Hades \(Sheol\) - to be differentiated from Gehenna](#) (See also [Sheol](#))
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Gehenna](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Gehenna](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Gehenna](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Gehenna](#)

JAMES 3:6—Does the “course of nature” refer to reincarnation?

MISINTERPRETATION: James refers to the “course of nature,” which has been translated “wheel of beginning.” Some take this to be a reference to reincarnation, since they believe life goes around in cycles of birth, death, and rebirth (into another body), and so forth.

CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION: The subject James is writing about is the power and persuasiveness of the human tongue, with its far-reaching effects. The “course of nature” refers to ongoing of life in general, not the recycling of individual souls.

Beyond this text, James affirmed forgiveness of sins (cf. 5:20) and petitionary prayer (5:15–18), both of which are contrary to the doctrine of karma behind reincarnation, which affirms that whatever is sown in this life must be reaped in the next life (no exceptions).

Finally, even if there were some question as to how this verse should be interpreted, an unclear passage should always be understood in the light of a clear one. And the Bible clearly opposes reincarnation (see John 9:3; Heb. 9:27). (Norman Geisler - When Cultists Ask)

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### The Tongue That Defiles

He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. —Proverbs 13:3

Today's Scripture: James 3:5-12

My words have an effect on others; they also have an effect on me. When I speak evil, I not only reveal the sin in my own heart (Luke 6:45), I also reinforce that evil and cause it to grow. Jesus said it's not what goes into my mouth that defiles me, but what comes out. James put it another way: “The tongue . . . defiles the whole body” (James 3:6). My untamed tongue corrupts me.

On the other hand, when I refuse to give expression to impure, unkind, ungodly thoughts, I begin to choke and strangle the evil in my soul.

That's why the wise man said in Proverbs 13:3 that we must guard our mouth. When we do that, we starve the evil that is gnawing insidiously at the root of our soul. Do we want to put an end to the evil that so easily rises within us? With God's help, we must learn to control our tongue.

You may say, “I've tried to, but I have no power to subdue it.” James agreed: “No man can tame the tongue” (James 3:8). But Jesus can. Ask Him to “keep watch” over your mouth (Psalm 141:3), and hand the bridle of your tongue to Him.

Let's echo the prayer of the hymn by Frances Havergal: “Take my lips and let them be filled with messages for Thee.” By: David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, set a guard upon my lips,  
My tongue control today;  
Help me evaluate each thought  
And watch each word I say.  
—Hess

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles. —Proverbs 21:23

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### Greek Fire

The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. —James 3:6

Today's Scripture: James 3:1-12

Greek fire was a chemical solution that was used in ancient warfare by the Byzantine Empire against its enemies. According to one online source, it was developed around ad 672 and was used with devastating effect, especially in sea warfare because it could burn on water. What was Greek fire? Its actual chemical composition remains a mystery. It was such a valuable military weapon that the formula was kept an absolute secret—and was lost to the ravages of history. Today, researchers continue to try to replicate that

ancient formula, but without success.

One source of catastrophic destruction among believers in Christ, however, is not a mystery. James tells us that the source of ruin in our relationships is often a very different kind of fire. He wrote, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body” (James 3:6). Those strong words remind us how damaging unguarded words can be to those around us.

Instead of creating the kind of verbal “Greek fire” that can destroy relationships, families, and churches, let’s yield our tongue to the Holy Spirit’s control and allow our words to glorify the Lord. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

It seems, Father, that sometimes we are our own worst enemies. Forgive us for speaking destructively to fellow Christians, and teach us to use wise words that can encourage and build their walk with You.

To bridle your tongue, give God the reins of your heart.

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### **Small Spark, Big Fire**

The tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! —James 3:5

Today's Scripture: James 3

In June 2002, the Hayman fire destroyed more than 137,000 acres of beautiful mountain forest in Colorado. Smoke darkened the skies, choking residents of cities 40 miles away. Thousands of people evacuated their homes, and millions of dollars were spent fighting a blaze that began with a single match.

Small spark, big fire. That’s the way James described the damage done by our reckless and careless words. “See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. . . . It defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (3:5-6).

The Bible urges us not to underestimate the destructive potential of what we say. One incendiary remark can kindle an inferno of emotional harm. The best way to avert the flames of anger is to keep from striking that first match. We must let the wisdom of God check our thoughts before they leave our tongues. “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” (v.17).

As we draw on God’s wisdom through His Word, we can smother the sparks of dissension and instead speak words of peace. By: David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

One careless word can be a spark  
Igniting anger into flame;  
It can destroy relationships  
And bring reproach to Jesus' name.  
—Sper

Words can't break bones, but they can break hearts.

---

### **The Point of No Return**

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body. James 3:6

Today's Scripture & Insight: James 3:1–12

It wasn’t as simple as just crossing another river. By law, no Roman general could lead armed troops into Rome. So when Julius Caesar led his Thirteenth Legion across the Rubicon River and into Italy in 49 bc, it was an act of treason. The impact of Caesar’s decision was irreversible, generating years of civil war before Rome’s great general became absolute ruler. Still today, the phrase “crossing the Rubicon” is a metaphor for “passing the point of no return.”

Sometimes we can cross a relational Rubicon with the words we say to others. Once spoken, words can’t be taken back. They can

either offer help and comfort or do damage that feels just as irreversible as Caesar's march on Rome. James gave us another word picture about words when he said, "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:6).

When we fear we have crossed a Rubicon with someone, we can seek their forgiveness—and God's (Matthew 5:23–24; 1 John 1:9). But even better is to daily rest in God's Spirit, hearing Paul's challenge, "Let your conversation be always full of grace" (Colossians 4:6), so that our words will not only honor our Lord, but lift up and encourage those around us. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, please guard my heart and my words today. May I speak only words that please You and bring health and healing to others.

Read [What Do You Do with a Broken Relationship?](#) at [discoveryseries.org/q0703](http://discoveryseries.org/q0703).

When words become weapons, our relationships soon become casualties.

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## THE SECRET OF A CONTROLLED TONGUE BY THEODORE EPP

James 3:7-12

Is it not strange that the tongue can be praising God one moment and be slandering some person the next moment, often right in the church where the tongue had been used to praise God?

We may even hear the preacher talk about not slandering others, but before we leave we will say things concerning others that amount to slander.

Such inconsistencies are not found in nature, but out of the human being can come both bitter and sweet words. Remember that the tongue speaks only what is in the heart. Godly words can come only from a godly heart.

To have a godly heart we must follow the instructions found in Romans 6. We must know what our position is in Christ; we must reckon, or count, upon it as being true because it is true; and we must yield ourselves completely to Christ (see vv. 6,7,11-13). This involves our intellect, emotions and will.

Words come from our thoughts, and thoughts come from the mind; therefore, it is possible to control our words by controlling our minds.

We who know Jesus Christ as Saviour can have our minds controlled by "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). He alone is worthy and is able to give us victory.

"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3).

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## The Silent Pen

The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. — James 3:18

Today's Scripture & Insight: James 3:1-12

Former US President Harry Truman had a rule: Any letters written in anger had to sit on his desk for 24 hours before they could be mailed. If at the end of that "cooling off" period, he still felt the same sentiments, he would send the letter. By the end of his life, Truman's unmailed letters filled a large desk drawer.

How often in this age of immediate communication would even 24 minutes of wise restraint spare us embarrassment! In his epistle, James addressed a universal theme in human history when he wrote about the damage an uncontrolled tongue can bring. "No man can tame the tongue," he wrote. "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8).

When we're gossiping or speaking in anger, we find ourselves outside the lines of what God desires. Our tongues, our pens, and even our keyboards should more often fall silent with thanks in our hearts for the restraint God provides. All too often, when we speak we remind everyone of our brokenness as human beings.

When we want to surprise others with the difference Christ makes, we may need to look no further than restraining our tongue. Others can't help but notice when we honor God with what we say—or don't say. By: Randy Kilgore ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Help me, Lord, to use my words not to tear down others or build up my own reputation, but to seek the good of others first, and in so doing to serve You and Your kingdom.

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles. —Proverbs 21:23

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#### Thoughts from Don Anderson on James 3:6 ([source](#))

It is a "FIRE." It can consume and turn to ashes the character of a person in a moment. It burns in the following ways.

**(1) SPEAKING IDLE WORD** - not according to the truth. ~ You don't know all the details, but to have something to talk about, you fill in your own.

Psalm 34:13 Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.

Psalm 120:2 Deliver my soul, Oh Jehovah, from lying lips.

**(2) INSINUATING EVILS** - You don't really know if this juicy little morsel is true or not, but it sure makes an exciting conversation.

Psalm 52:2 Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.

Proverbs 4:24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth And put devious speech far from you

**(3) SPEAKING OF THINGS WHICH REFLECT ON THE CHARACTER** of another child of God. -

Proverbs 18:8 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

**(4) MAGNIFYING FAULTS**

"You can't hold a fellow down in the ditch unless you stay there with him." Booker T Washington

**(5) WORDS THAT BELITTLE**

Psalm 64:3 Who whet their tongues like a sword and have aimed the arrows, even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the innocent. (Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow)

It is human nature to speak of FAULTS rather than VIRTUES.

It is so easy to point out weaknesses.

It is so easy to be critical.

It is hard to say words of affirmation.

The tongue is not only a "FIRE" but it is: "THE SUM TOTAL OF INIQUITY". It is "THE SUM TOTAL OF INIQUITY" in that it:

- SUGGESTS SIN to us and to others<sup>1</sup>
- COMMITS SIN by LYING and GOSSIP, and
- EXCUSES and DEFENDS SIN in justifying itself.

**Barclay** wrote "An uncontrolled tongue is like a world hostile to and ignorant of God. It is the part of us which disobeys, defies, and rebels against God." ([James 3 Commentary](#))

What James is saying is that the tongue can kindle a destructive fire which can destroy all life. The tongue itself is kindled with the very "FIRE OF HELL." From birth to the grave this fire in our mouths burns and destroys.

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A careless word may kindle strife;

A cruel word may wreck a life.

A bitter word may hate instill;

A brutal word may smite and kill.

A gracious word may smooth the way;

A joyous word may light the day.



A timely word may lessen stress;  
A loving word may heal and bless.  
-- Author unknown

**James 3:7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.**

Amplified For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea animal, can be tamed and has been tamed by human genius (nature).

Phillips Beasts, birds, reptiles and all kinds of sea-creatures can be, and in fact are, tamed by man, but no one can tame the human tongue.

Wuest For every creature, quadrupeds and birds and reptiles and marine life, is controlled and has been controlled by mankind. But the tongue no one in the human race is able to control.

NET James 3:7 For every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and sea creature is subdued and has been subdued by humankind.

GNT James 3:7 π σ α γ ρ φ σ ι ς θ η ρ ω ν τ ε κ α π ε τ ε ι ν ν , ρ π ε τ ν τ ε κ α ν α λ ω ν δ α μ ζ ε τ α ι κ α δ ε δ μ α σ τ α ι τ φ σ ε ι τ ν θ ρ ω π ν ,

NLT James 3:7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish,

KJV James 3:7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

ESV James 3:7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,

ASV James 3:7 For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind.

CSB James 3:7 Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man,

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

NKJ James 3:7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

NRS James 3:7 For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species,

YLT James 3:7 For every nature, both of beasts and of fowls, both of creeping things and things of the sea, is subdued, and hath been subdued, by the human nature,

NAB James 3:7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species,

NJB James 3:7 Wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish of every kind can all be tamed, and have been tamed, by humans;

GWN James 3:7 People have tamed all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures.

BBE James 3:7 For every sort of beast and bird and every living thing on earth and in the sea has been controlled by man and is under his authority;

- **is tamed:** Mk 5:4
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**WILD BEASTS HAVE  
BEEN TAMED**

James presents the picture of the possibility of taming wild animals of all sorts in preparation (v8) to accentuate the impossibility of

taming the tongue.

**Burdick** observes that "James shifts almost unnoticeably from discussing the power of the tongue (James 3:3-6) to a discussion of its perversity (James 3:7-12). Actually James 3:6, in depicting the tongue's influence, is already describing its perversity." (Expositor's Bible Commentary, 1976)

**For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race** - We can tame animals, animals that walk, fly, crawl and swim and animals from each of these groups has been tamed. **Every species** is a generalization, for no one has ever trained a crocodile or a hippopotamus.

**Species...race** (5449)([phusis](#) from **phuo** = to bring forth) means natural condition, nature, natural order, being, essence, kind, species. **Phusis** is "that which belongs to a person or thing by virtue of its origin," then, "its essential character." Nature speaks of the inherent character or basic constitution of a person or thing. Notice **phusis** is used twice, first for **species**, then for (human) **race**.

This statement hearkens back to the description in Genesis where we read "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and **let them rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.... God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and **rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Ge 1:26, 28).

**Hiebert** - The ancient world took pride in mankind's ability to subdue, tame, and control the animal kingdom.

**MacArthur** makes the pithy pronouncement that in light of the fact that animals have been tamed, "they are less primitive and more civilized and controllable than the unregenerate, unsanctified tongues of their masters."

**Is tamed...has been tamed** (1150) see below on [damazo](#). The word does not necessarily mean domesticate, but to subdue or subjugate. James uses the [present tense](#) and the [perfect tense](#). Hiebert explains "The [present tense](#) pictures human nature's domination of animal nature as a fact repeatedly being observed. As Kistemaker remarks, "We see this displayed in a circus performance where wild animals obey their trainer who merely cracks a whip, snaps his fingers, or claps his hands." The use of the [perfect tense](#) "have been tamed" adds that history is replete with such examples....It is standing proof of the inherent superiority of human nature over animal nature."

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Brian Bell - You see this truth at any Ringling Bros. & Barnum & Bailey Circus. Over the years we've been able to train Gentle Ben, Lassie, Flipper, Shamu, even Barney! a) But there's one beast not even PT Barnum could tame...the tongue!

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**Barnhouse** from his book **Let Me Illustrate** - At the trainer's signal a 16-foot whale, weighing 34,000 lbs., leaped straight out of the water until his tale was a foot above the surface; he opened his mouth to receive the handful of fish and fell back into the pool with a splash. A second whale took one end of a rope from another trainer and carried it 100 feet down the pool to the first trainer. When the two trainers pulled the rope so that it was six feet above the surface, the second whale broke the water and jumped the mpe. For an hour whales, porpoises, sea lions and seals went through their paces at Marineland, near Pacific Palisades. Here before our eyes was a striking illustration of James 3:7: "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind." When I saw this truth, I was forced to admit the truth of the next line: "But the tongue can no man tame ... " I asked the Lord to keep mine cleansed so that it might praise the Lord in holiness. (AMEN!)

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My friend is a Texas Aggie and has a little Dachshund dog ("weiner dog") and when you ask him "Do you want to be a Texas Longhorn," he rolls over and plays dead! (Aggies and Longhorns have a longstanding rivalry in the state of Texas).

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## COMMUNICATING WITH CARE

I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue. --Psalm 39:1

Human beings are more than mere animals; we have been made in God's image. As persons we can communicate with one another with words -- something animals cannot do. We use words like love and patriotism to share our ideas and emotions. Think of the hours we spend talking, whether in casual conversations about trivia or deep discussions about important issues. We have all kinds of devices to help us communicate. We have telephones, fax machines, computer bulletin boards, voice mail, radios, TV sets, and of course, printed materials of every kind. The Bible recognizes that communication, a central component of our lives, needs to be monitored with great care. For example, Paul urged that our "speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:6). And James cautioned, "No man can tame

the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). We need to guard our lips, making David's prayer in Psalm 19:14 our daily prayer: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." Author: Vernon C. Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages for Thee;  
Take my voice and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King.  
--Havergal

Mind what you say, or you may say whatever comes to mind.

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## Taming the Wild Beast

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. James 3:7-8

Deep in the jungles of India, a serious threat looms over the native missionaries and their people as they lay asleep in their thatched huts. Very little warning precedes the sudden attack of the dangerous Bengal tiger. The animal has a very menacing presence, stretching 500 lbs. over a ten foot frame. Its natural killer instinct having been honed since the tender age of six months, this beast is fearful of no one. Upon approaching its unsuspecting victim, it quickly chooses between two methods of capture. It may leap upon the back of the prey or pin it down with its powerful claws. The tiger employs one weapon of destruction: its razor-sharp teeth set in a vice-like jaw. Cunningly, the Bengal may drag the victim 1,500 feet to hide the evidence of his dastardly deed. An attack by one of these dangerous animals would fulfill every person's worst nightmare.

Amazingly, God compares a seemingly harmless member of the human body to a ferocious beast like the Bengal: the tongue. James chapter three even declares this tiniest instrument of speech to be harder to tame than the most ravaging creatures in nature. Its propensity for destruction is much greater.

Few people recognize the sinister capabilities of the tongue. Awful, hateful, ungodly, vile things emanate from this master of disaster. Only when we allow God to control the content that proceeds out of our mouths can the violent tongue be truly tamed. (James Scudder - Living Water)

The first screw to get loose in a person's head is usually the tongue.

### James 3:8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

Amplified But the human tongue can be tamed by no man. It is a restless (undisciplined, irreconcilable) evil, full of deadly poison.

Phillips It is an evil always liable to break out, and the poison it spreads is deadly.

Wuest It is a restless, unstable evil, full of lethal poison.

NET James 3:8 But no human being can subdue the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

GNT James 3:8 τ ν δ γλ σσαν ο δε ς δαμ σαι δ ναι νθρ πων, κατ στατον κακ ν, μεστ ο θανατηφ ρου.

NLT James 3:8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.

KJV James 3:8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

ESV James 3:8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

ASV James 3:8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison.

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

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

NKJ James 3:8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

NRS James 3:8 but no one can tame the tongue-- a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

YLT James 3:8 and the tongue no one of men is able to subdue, it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison,

NAB James 3:8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

NJB James 3:8 but nobody can tame the tongue -- it is a pest that will not keep still, full of deadly poison.

GWN James 3:8 Yet, no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil filled with deadly poison.

BBE James 3:8 But the tongue may not be controlled by man; it is an unresting evil, it is full of the poison of death.

- **it is a restless evil:** Jas 3:6 Ps 55:21 57:4 59:7 64:3,4
- **full of deadly poison:** De 32:33 Ps 58:4 140:3 Ec 10:11 Ro 3:13 Rev 12:9
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE UNTAMABLE NATURE OF THE TONGUE

James almost seems to paint himself into a corner (so to speak). On one hand he says a religious man must "keep a tight reign on his tongue" (James 1:26) and now he says, "No man can tame the tongue" (James 3:8). We might be inclined to throw up our hands and cry "Which is it James?"

**J Vernon McGee** - As someone has said, "The most untamable thing in the world has its den just behind the teeth." That's one little animal which no zoo has in captivity, no circus can make it perform, no man can tame it. Only a regenerate tongue in a redeemed body, a tongue that God has tamed, can be used for Him. (Thru The Bible)

**But - Term of contrast.** Sad contrast between wild animals that can be tamed and mankind's wild tongue which cannot be tamed.

**Tasker** quips that "man has lost dominion over himself." Supposedly, he had it in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world, but not thereafter.

**Lenski** - Although the tongue is so small and is caged in man's own mouth, which man needs only to shut in order to master the tongue completely, "no one of men" is able to subdue it by any power belonging to his [phusis](#) (nature). (The Interpretation of The Epistle to the Hebrews and The Epistle of James)

**Augustine** - He does not say no one can tame the tongue, but no one of men: so that when it is tamed we confess that this is brought about by the pity, the help, and the grace of God. (ED: Augustine makes a great point - no man can naturally tame their tongue, but the Holy Spirit can supernaturally "tame" our tongue. See "[Tongue Control](#)")

**Barton** - No person can tame the tongue, but Christ can. To do it, he goes straight for the heart (Mk 7:14-15; Ps 51:10) and the mind (Ro 12:1-2). We should not try to control our tongue with our own strength; we should rely on the Holy Spirit (ED: [SEE TONGUE CONTROL](#)). He will give us increasing power to monitor and control what we say. For when we feel offended or unjustly criticized, the Spirit will remind us of God's love and keep us from reacting. The Holy Spirit will heal the hurt and keep us from lashing out. We can make sure we are in the Spirit's control by incorporating Scripture into our life and by asking the Spirit to direct our thoughts and actions each day. (ED: AND BY BEGINNING EACH DAY "filled with the Spirit" - Eph 5:18+) (Ibid)

**Guzik** has an interesting comment - The human spirit has incredible capacity for sacrifice and self-control. Sometimes we hear a desperate survival story of someone who cuts off their own leg to get free from a tree that has fallen on them, and then they make it to a hospital for medical treatment. Yet that same man can't tame the tongue perfectly. (Ibid)

**No one can tame the tongue** - **Tongue** is placed emphatically forward as if to emphasize the "animal," is one of kind creature and is untameable. **No one** ([oudeis](#)) means absolutely no one (absolutely no exceptions) in reliance on his or her own natural power. Of course the tongue of Jesus was **tame**, but not one tongue of all those born [in Adam](#) and with his propensity to commit sin (Ro 5:12+). There is only one way to "**tame**" it and that is by relying on the supernatural power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It follows that only believers can truly **tame** their **tongue**. Unbelievers lack the supernatural power to **tame** this vicious beast.

**THOUGHT** - Just from this simple analysis of who can and cannot tame their tongue, can you see why it is dangerous for a believer to knowingly marry an unbeliever? That is of course a rhetorical question. Even for believers the battle of taming a tongue by the power of the Spirit rages daily as our fallen flesh seeks to usurp control of our tongue (cf Eph 4:29+). As Paul taught "**the (sinful) flesh** sets its desire ([present tense](#) = continually) **against the Spirit**, and the **Spirit against the flesh**; for these are (continually) in opposition ([antikeimai](#) in [present tense](#) = continually) to one another, so that you may not do ([poieo](#) in [present tense](#)) the things that you please ([thelo](#) in [present tense](#)).\" (Gal 5:17+). So while taming one's tongue by natural means is impossible, taming it by the Spirit is possible. As Jesus said (in a different context but still true in principle)

"With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26) even the taming of the human tongue!

Lord, help us to control our tongues,  
To clean up what we say,  
To use words that will edify,  
To honor You today.  
—Sper

**John Phillips** - Try as we might, we cannot prevent the tongue from lashing out at times. Even the greatest and most gifted and gracious of men have said things that they later regretted. They could have bitten their tongue the moment they said them. No apology can undo the damage. The innermost secret thought has been bared. Sometimes we, ourselves, do not know what made us say such things. (Ibid)

**Tame** (1150)(**damazo**) means to subdue (used in Mk 5:4+ - see below) "To reduce from an uncontrolled to a controlled state of persons and animals: a possessed person, uncontrollable debtors...of a part of the body (tongue)." (BDAG) The only other 2 uses of **damazo** are in James 3:7,8 to "**tame** the tongue." This verb is widely used in classical Greek for gaining control of animals, people, nature, or anything requiring effort to master. The **-azō** ending in the verb indicates action and causation, hence to "make tame, to get control over, to subdue."

**Liddell-Scott** - I. of animals, to tame, break in, to bring under the yoke: Med. to do so for oneself, Hom., Xen. II. of maidens, to make subject to a husband, II.: Pass. to be forced or seduced, Hom. III. to subdue or conquer, Id.: Pass. to be subject to another, Id. 2. to strike dead, kill, Od. 3. of wine and the like, to overcome, overpower, Hom.: Pass. to be overcome

The picture James paints of the tongue is similar to the wild man in Mark 5 who was demon-possessed

When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, 3 and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; 4 because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to **subdue** (damazo) him. (Mark 5:2-4)

**Comment** - The English word **subdue** means "to establish ascendancy over by force | to overcome and bring under control, as by intimidation or persuasion | to hold in check or repress." Isn't it interesting that the Spirit uses the same verb to describe a demon possessed man and the tongue of men which he has already described as set on fire by hell. Obviously he is not saying we are demon possessed but the comparison is worth noting. We don't need to be demon possessed because we have the indwelling, unredeemed, depraved flesh to "animate" our tongue, undoubtedly aided from time to time by "flaming arrows of the evil one." (Eph 6:16+).

**Wiersbe** - As it spreads, fire destroys; and the words we speak have the power to destroy. For every word in Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, 125 lives were lost in World War II. Our own words may not have caused wars or wrecked cities, but they can break hearts and ruin reputations. (BEC)

**MacArthur** quips that "Even in believers, **the tongue** can easily slip out of its sanctified cage, as it were, and do great harm. Its work can be so subtle that it sometimes escapes notice until the damage is done."

Words are like dynamite.  
Don't let them blow up in your face.

**It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison** - Notice the two reasons the tongue is so dangerous - (1) it never rests and (2) it is deadly. Have you ever looked closely at a snake's face (I hate snakes and won't even watch on television!)? Have you noticed their tongues is "restless?" (Pix - **Warning** - Don't look if you are frightened by snakes!) Interesting! The best way to be forearmed (**controlled by the Spirit** - only One Who can tame our tongue) is to be forewarned and these two aspects of that small member in our mouth should cause us to continually seek to be empowered by the Spirit.

**THOUGHT** - PRAY - Lord, help me to think before I speak, to check my heart. Help me to control my tongue and to express myself clearly so that I won't cause dissension. And we should daily pray asking God by His Spirit to "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips." (Ps 141:3). Words spoken rashly do more harm than good.

**Gilbrant** on **restless evil** - The tongue is an "unruly evil," **literally, an evil which cannot be held back**. It is like a wild animal restlessly wanting to make an attack. It is like an enemy that cannot be contained by military force. Phillips translates it, "It is an evil always liable to break out." (Ibid)

**Hiebert** says **restless** ([akatastatos](#)) "characterizes the tongue as being fickle and inconstant; it cannot be trusted to stay submissively in its proper place. It is notoriously unreliable, constantly prone to break out in vicious words. The adjective suggests the picture of "some caged but unsubdued wild animal, ever pacing uneasily up and down its den." (Ibid)

**MacArthur** says that **restless** suggests "the idea of a wild animal fighting fiercely against the restraints of captivity. This **evil** chafes at confinement, always seeking a way to escape and to spread its **deadly poison**. Its "venom" is more deadly than a snake's because it can destroy morally, socially, economically, and spiritually. (Ibid)

**Osborne** on **restless** - The connotation is of something without a secure foundation; like an unstable building in the midst of an earthquake, the tongue can never be controlled. Here the basis for that disorderly conduct of the tongue is its "evil" nature. (Ibid)

**Walter Martin** on **restless** - "In the present context it forms the picture of a caged animal pacing back and forth and seeking an opportunity to escape." (Word Biblical Commentary)

This makes me think of the passage in Genesis 4 when Cain was downcast because God did not accept his offering...

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door (IS NOT SIN THE DRIVING FORCE OF ANGRY WORDS THAT COME FLYING OUT OF OUR MOUTH); and its desire is for you (LIKE A WILD ENEMY READY TO POUNCE), but you must master it. (THIS IS AMAZING - HE DID NOT HAVE THE INDWELLING SPIRIT BUT GOD TELLS HIM HE MUST MASTER IT - SOMEHOW THE SPIRIT WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE POWER NECESSARY HAD HE WANTED TO "KILL SIN")" Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (Ge 4:6-8)

**Restless** (182)([akatastatos](#) from **a** = not + **kathistemi** = to settle from **kata** = down + **histemi** = to stand) means unsettled, unsteady, unstable. It cannot be made to stay down in its proper place. Used in the Nestle-Aland text is James 1:8+ of the doubting man who is **unstable** in all areas of life and here in James 3:8, describing the tongue as incapable of restraint. It is unstable, elusive, restless! In other words, the tongue is **ALWAYS** capable of springing forth out of its "cage" and inflicting vicious wounds!

**TECHNICAL NOTE** - The Textus Receptus has the word [akataschetos](#) (from **a** = without + **katecho** = hold back or control) which means that which cannot be restrained, uncontrollable, untameable, unruly.

**Evil** (bad, harm) (2556)([kakos](#)) related word = [kakia](#) is a word which basically denotes a lack of something so that it is "bad" or "not as it ought to be. **Kakos** means not meeting accepted standards of behavior, and thus worthless, bad or inferior. **Kakos** then speaks of lack of goodness, of a bad nature. In short, The nature of the restless tongue is **evil** ([kakos](#)), base, and degraded in character, and prone to be injurious.

## "VERBAL CYANIDE"

**Full of deadly** is the combination word **thanatephoros** (from **thánatos** = death + **phérō** = to bring) is literally death bearing or death bringing and is used only here in the NT. **Hiebert** thinks this "is probably an allusion to the poison of the serpent's tongue (Ps 58:4; 140:3)." James pictures the tongue as a death bringing king cobra always ready to strike. **Swindoll** adds that "It's as though we have a capsule of cyanide behind our teeth, ready to break open and spread words of death wherever we go." (Ibid)

Paul has a description of the wretched condition of the tongue of the unsaved man in Romans 3

Their talk is foul and filthy like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are loaded with lies. Everything they say has in it the sting and poison of deadly snakes ([aspis](#)). Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.(Ro 3:13-14+ TLB)

**Winkler** writes "A word of evil from the old Serpent consigned our race to death, and, like Satan's tongue, are in a degree the tongues of all his children." (cf John 8:44).

**Matthew Poole** - The poison of the tongue is no less deadly, it murders men's reputations by the slanders it utters, their souls by the lusts and passions it stirs up in them, and many times their bodies too by the contentions and quarrels it raiseth against men.

**Guzik** - A woman once came to John Wesley and said she knew what her talent was and she said, "I think my talent from God is to speak my mind." Wesley replied, "I don't think God would mind if you buried that talent." Speaking forth everything that comes to mind is unwise, poisonous speech. (Ibid)



**Wiersbe** - The deceptive thing about poison is that it works secretly and slowly, and then kills. How many times has some malicious person injected a bit of poison into the conversation, hoping it would spread and finally get to the person he or she wanted to hurt? As a pastor, I have seen poisonous tongues do great damage to individuals, families, classes, and entire churches. Would you turn hungry lions or angry snakes loose in your Sunday morning service? Of course not! But unruly tongues accomplish the same results. (BEC)

**Poison** (2447) (**ios** from **hiemi** = to send) is something sent out and one Greek meaning is thus arrow, a meaning not found in the NT. **ios** is used in the NT to mean **poison** or **venom**. The idea is something that is emitted since venom is ejected or emitted from a serpent's fangs. **ios** also means **rust** as if emitted by metals (James 5:3 = "Your gold and your silver have **rust**")

**Solomon** records

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit. (Proverbs 18:21)

In the psalms we read..

"The **wicked** are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth. **They have venom like the venom of a serpent**; Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear." (Ps 58:3-4)

Your **tongue** devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit. You love evil more than good, **Falsehood** more than **speaking what is right**. Selah. **You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue**. (Ps 52:2-4)

Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, From the tumult of those who do iniquity, **3 Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword**. They **aimed bitter speech as their arrow**, **4** To shoot from concealment at the blameless; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear. **5** They hold fast to themselves an evil purpose; They talk of laying snares secretly; They say, "Who can see them?" Psalm 64:2-5)

They ("Evil men" Ps 140:1) **sharpen their tongues as a serpent**; b Selah. (Psalm 140:3)

Lord, set a guard upon my lips,  
My tongue control today;  
Help me evaluate each thought  
And watch each word I say.  
—Hess

Bite your tongue before your tongue bites others.

**Adrian Rogers** - Watch the words of your mouth. One of the marks that a man has been born again is that his tongue is now controlled. You see, when we're talking, we can't be listening. And so, the same Bible that says, "Be ready to hear," says, "Be slow to speak." You see, the two are mutually incompatible:

A wise old owl lived in an oak  
The more he saw the less he spoke  
The less he spoke the more he heard.  
Why can't we all be like that wise old bird?  
(Author Unknown)

A wise owl indeed, because he learned to listen.

Most of us would be amazed, if we just knew how much we rattle on. Most of us would be amazed, if somebody were to follow us around with a tape recorder, and tape everything we say in entire day, and then reduce it to print, and make us read it back at the end of the day. And,

If all that we say  
In a single day,  
With never a word left out,  
Were printed each night  
In clear black and white  
T'would make [strange] reading no doubt.  
And then just suppose  
Ere one's eyes he could close  
He must read the day's record through;

Then wouldn't one sigh,  
And wouldn't he try  
A great deal less talking to do?  
And I more than half think  
That many a kink  
Would be smoothed in life's tangled thread  
If one-half that we say  
In a single day  
Were just left forever unsaid.  
(Author Unknown)

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## LIFE APPLICATION - EXCUSES FOR SPEAKING YOUR MIND

Contemporary wisdom says that people should assert themselves and say what they really feel; speak out, rather than stifle. There are many rationalizations for the unrestrained use of the tongue. We say:

- "Somebody had to tell him off."
- "It was good to get it off my chest."
- "I sure gave her a piece of my mind."
- "Maybe what I said will do him some good."
- "I felt better for saying it."

Instead of making excuses for sounding off, we can exercise restraint and allow God's peace and wisdom to guide what we say. Our society encourages us to speak out in a thoughtless way, totally disregarding the deadly impact our words may have. Christ's attitude is for us to deal with our anger and frustration honestly and maturely but to use restraint in how we reveal these feelings to others. (Life Application Bible Commentary – James)

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Ron Mehl who is a pastor in Portland, Oregon has written a great little book called Right With God. In this book he talks like James when it comes to the matter of the tongue: REALIZE THAT ONLY GOD CAN CHANGE THE WAY YOU SPEAK. Every now and then you read a horrible story of a child mauled by some wild animal that had supposedly been domesticated. "It was tame!" the keepers protest. "It never hurt anyone else." But somehow, this "tamed" cougar, leopard or wolf suddenly reverted back to an old instinct—to lash out, to maim, to kill. Our tongue has that same awful potential. Just when we think we have our mouths under control, something will set us off, and we will maul someone with angry or bitter words. You'll never be able to train your tongue to bring life instead of death. Only God can turn bitter water sweet.

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## Hold Your Tongue

Read: James 3:1-12

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

When Bernard Baruch was an ambitious young businessman, he asked the wealthy J. P. Morgan to partner with him in a Texas sulfur mining venture. Geologists had given the project a favorable report, but there was still some risk. Morgan was interested until Baruch said, "You've taken bigger gambles than this."

Morgan glared at him and then replied in an icy tone, "I never gamble." The word gambles had killed the deal. Morgan thought that investing was respectable but that gambling was a sin.

If one word, innocently misspoken, can cost millions, think of how much damage malicious words can cause. They can ruin a person's reputation and destroy the closest relationships.

James minced no words in warning about the power of the tongue. He said it's easier to control a horse, guide a mighty ship, and tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures than to control the tongue (James 3:3-8). He called it a "fire" ignited by hell itself (James 3:6), and "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8).

**We all would be wise to pray daily, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips"(Ps. 141:3).**

By Haddon W. Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,  
My tongue control today;  
Help me evaluate each thought  
And guard each word I say.  
—Hess

Speaking without thinking is like shooting without taking aim.

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[Daniel Akin Sermon](#) - Steve Stephens drives home the importance of our words in our marriage. He writes,

“There is nothing more painful than having unhealthy communication with the one you love. It is through communication that we connect and our spirits touch. If that connection becomes contaminated, it is only a matter of time before the whole relationship is poisoned. . . . I have gathered together some close friends and asked them what not to say to your spouse. Here is their list:

- “I told you so.”
- I can talk to you until I am blue in the “face and it doesn’t do any good.”
- “You’re just like your mother.”
- “I can do whatever I like.”
- “You’re always in a bad mood.”
- “If you don’t like it, you can just leave.”
- “It’s your fault.”
- “Can’t you do anything right?”
- “What’s wrong with you?”
- “That was stupid.”
- “All you ever do is complain.”
- “All you ever do is think of yourself.”
- “I can’t do anything to please you.”
- “If you really loved me, you’d do this.”
- “You get what you deserve.”
- “You’re such a baby.”
- “Why don’t you ever listen to me?”
- “Turnabout’s fair play.”
- “Can’t you be more responsible?”
- “You deserve a taste of your own “medicine.”
- What were you thinking?”
- “What’s your problem?”
- “You’re impossible.”
- “I can never understand you.”
- “I don’t know why I put up with you.”
- “Do you always have to be right?”

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## A Battle Over Words

Read: James 3:1-12

Every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. —Matthew 12:36

Dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster recently came under attack. According to company president John M. Morse, protesters demanded that a specific word be deleted because it is derogatory and offensive. Morse pointed out that dictionary publishers don’t invent words or decide the meanings that words will have. A dictionary merely lists and defines the words of our language. Society does the inventing and reinventing of words.

Morse concluded by suggesting that rather than protesting the dictionary’s treatment of words, “We can choose our own words responsibly and protest the use of the word by those around us and by influential people in the media, the entertainment industry, and elsewhere.” That’s good advice!

Words are important to God. Jesus said that we will be judged for “every idle word” we speak (Mt. 12:36).

**And in the book of James,**

**15 of the 108 verses are devoted  
to the use of the tongue and the words we speak.**

We are in a war over words. Let's be on the defensive against any offensive or unloving terms in our own dictionary of usage. Remember, if God takes our words seriously, so should we. It's a battle worth waging. By Dennis J. DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Lord, guard our tongues so what we say  
Won't hurt and carelessly offend;  
Give us the gracious speech of love,  
With words that soothe and heal and mend.  
—Sper

A well-chosen word can speak volumes.

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### **THE TONGUE, SPEECH**

A Malaysian court has ruled that using derogatory and vulgar language about your superiors at work is acceptable, as long as you do it behind their backs. The Industrial Court ruled in the case of a secretary who was fired because she sent e-mail from the office computer to several friends, griping about her superiors. In a twelve-page statement, the court said, "The court agrees that if derogatory, insolent, and impertinent (words) are used toward the superior officers directly it would construe a serious misconduct on the part of (the woman)". The court added, "But if those words or language are only used behind their backs and only between a few friends it would not be a misconduct. Those words are not meant to be heard by the senior officers." The court compared the woman's comments about her superiors to tea room chitchat. Though the court awarded back wages and compensation, the court said the company did not have to give the woman her job back because the trust between her and her employers had been broken. (Jim Wilson - Fresh Illustrations)

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**Warren Wiersbe** - My wife and I once drove through a safari park, admiring the animals as they moved about in their natural habitat. But there were warning signs posted all over the park: DO NOT LEAVE YOUR CAR! DO NOT OPEN YOUR WINDOWS! Those "peaceful" animals were capable of doing great damage, and even killing. Some animals are poisonous, and some tongues spread poison. The deceptive thing about a poison is that it works secretly and slowly, and then it kills. How many times has some malicious person injected a bit of poison into the conversation, hoping it would spread and finally get to the person he or she wanted to hurt? As a pastor, I have seen poisonous tongues do great damage to individuals, families, classes, and entire churches. Would you turn hungry lions or angry snakes loose in your Sunday morning service? Of course not! But unruly tongues accomplish the same results. James reminds us that animals can be tamed; and, for that matter, fire can be tamed. When you tame an animal, you get a worker instead of a destroyer. When you control fire, you generate power. The tongue cannot be tamed by man, but it can be tamed by God. (Pause for Power)

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### **The Power of Words - Woodrow Kroll**

In regions of Southeast Asia there is a snake called the **two-step**. If it bites you, you take two steps and die ([BUT SEE NOTE](#)). Its venom swiftly paralyzes your nervous system, which stops your heart. But even if you don't visit Southeast Asia, you're in peril of something else that is just as deadly (James 3:8). Words have the potential to **kill** relationships, **paralyze** love, **poison** minds, **destroy** faith, **stain** purity and **deface** reputations.

Job recognized the capability of words to destroy when he exclaimed to his friends, "How forceful are right words!" After bearing up under the onslaught of Eliphaz the Temanite (Job 4:1–5:27), he was brought to the point of frustration. Instead of helping, his well-meaning companion only served to undermine his friend with his words (v. 27).

**It is no small matter when we open our mouths.** When our words are right, they can be a powerful force for good. But when they are wrong, they work like a deadly venom. Instead of being helpful, they are destructive. Rather than building up our friends, our words can tear them down. Those who are weak and helpless (Job's reference to the "fatherless" refers to these kinds of people) can be blown away by what we say.

Be careful today how you speak to others. Consider your words before you say them. Especially in times of crisis, the right word can bring healing and encouragement, while the wrong word can destroy your relationship with another person. Be sensitive to God's Spirit. Seek His guidance before you express yourself. And ask God to set a guard over your mouth to keep you from saying the wrong thing (Ps. 141:3).

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## On Listening

Read: Exodus 16:1-8

Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. — Ecclesiastes 5:2

God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason," the saying goes. The ability to listen is an essential life skill. Counselors tell us to listen to each other. Spiritual leaders tell us to listen to God. But hardly anyone says, "Listen to yourself." I'm not suggesting that we have an inner voice that always knows the right thing to say. Nor am I saying we should listen to ourselves instead of to God and others. I'm suggesting that we need to listen to ourselves in order to learn how others might be receiving our words. The Israelites could have used this advice when Moses was leading them out of Egypt. Within days of their miraculous deliverance, they were complaining (Ex. 16:2). Although their need for food was legitimate, their way of expressing the need was not (v.3).

Whenever we speak out of fear, anger, ignorance, or pride—even if what we say is true—those who listen will hear more than our words. They hear emotion. But they don't know whether the emotion comes from love and concern or disdain and disrespect, so we risk misunderstanding. If we listen to ourselves before speaking out loud, we can judge our hearts before our careless words harm others or sadden our God. — Julie Ackerman Link

Lord, help me to think before I speak, to check my heart. Help me to control my tongue and to express myself clearly so that I won't cause dissension. Set a guard on my lips. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Words spoken rashly do more harm than good

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## Taming A Tiger

Read: James 3:1-8

No man can tame the tongue. —James 3:8

My granddaughter Bree loved the circus, but she was afraid of the tiger. She had no reason to be, however, because the huge old cat had been tamed and was caged. It was hopelessly overweight, and I suspect it no longer had any teeth. Along with its lion friends, the striped beauty went through its routine in meek subjection.

You can tame a tiger, a lion, a leopard, a cheetah, and other wild animals, especially if you work with them from birth. But according to the apostle James, you cannot tame the human tongue. He wrote, "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (3:8).

James used other vivid analogies to illustrate the enormous power of this little member of the body. A bit in a horse's mouth can turn the animal to the right or to the left (v.3). A ship's rudder can steer a huge vessel in a raging storm (v.4). A single match or even a small spark can start a fire that can destroy an entire forest (v.5). So too, though the tongue is a small organ, it can do great harm.

Even under the strictest self-discipline and constant monitoring, the tongue's unruly nature lurks dangerously below the surface. You can tame a tiger, but only by prayer and watchfulness can you control your tongue. —D C Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,  
My tongue control today;  
Help me evaluate each thought  
And guard each word I say.  
—Hess

He cannot speak well who cannot hold his tongue.

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## JAMES 3:8

READ: James 3:1-12

AN uncontrolled tongue can get us into a ton of trouble. For many of us, the problem started early. We became aware of it when we took home a report card with this note from the teacher: "Good student, but he talks too much." As adults, the problem reveals itself in other situations, such as when we're on the phone and our mind says, "Don't spread gossip about Jane," but our mouth says, "You wouldn't believe what I heard about Jane!" Or after we've spoken harsh words to the kids. The struggle to control our tongues can seem like a losing battle. No wonder James called the tongue "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8).

Given our natural tendency to get into trouble with our tongues, what can we do to control them? James said that "no man can tame the tongue," but God can, and He offers help from several sources. Consider these principles:

- Don't let your tongue speak evil (Psalm 34:13).
- Use your tongue to praise God (Psalm 51:14-15).
- Promote health with wise words (Proverbs 12:18).
- Don't bad-mouth others (James 4:11).
- Instead of boasting, trust God (James 4:13-16).

For these biblical principles to work, we need to acknowledge that only Christ can keep us from saying things we'll be sorry for. Then we need to ask Him to do just that. —J D Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, make me conscious today of the words I choose and the way I use them. May my lips be so full of praise for You and encouragement for others that they have no opportunity to do any harm.

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## **Taming The Untamable**

No man can tame the tongue. — James 3:8

Today's Scripture & Insight: James 3:1-12

From Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs to Siberian foxes, humans have learned to tame wild animals. People enjoy teaching monkeys to “act” in commercials or training deer to eat out of their hands. As the apostle James put it, “Every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind” (James 3:7).

But there is something we cannot tame. All of us have trouble getting a little thing called the tongue under control. “No man can tame the tongue,” James tells us (James 3:8).

Why? Because while our words may be on the tip of our tongue, they originate from deep within us. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). And thus the tongue can be used for both good and evil (James 3:9). Or, as scholar Peter Davids put it, “On the one hand, [the tongue] is very religious, but, on the other, it can be most profane.”

If we cannot tame this unruly tongue of ours, is it destined to be a daily problem for us, always prone to speak evil? (v.10). By God's grace, no. We are not left to our own devices. The Lord will “set a guard” over my mouth; He will “keep watch over the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3). He can tame the untamable. By: Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, my mouth sometimes speaks words that don't honor You. Thank You that by Your Spirit my untamed tongue can be brought under divine control. Please guard my mouth today.

To rule your tongue, let Christ rule in your heart.

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## **Careless Speech**

He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. —Proverbs 17:27

Today's Scripture: James 3:1-12

When my wife and I were visiting a church for a special musical program, we arrived early to get a good seat. Before the program began, we overheard two members seated behind us complaining about their church. They criticized the pastoral staff, leadership, music, ministry priorities, and several other things that made them unhappy. They were either unconcerned about or oblivious to the presence of two visitors in their midst.

It occurred to me that their unfortunate conversation could have pushed us away if we were there looking for a new church home. Worse, what if we were seeking God and their disgruntled opinions had driven us away? Their careless speech was not just a matter of the words they used or attitudes they displayed, it also demonstrated their lack of concern for the impact those words could have on others.

A better approach to the use of words is reflected in Proverbs 17:27, where Solomon said, “He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.” Most often, we would do better not to say all we think or know (or thinkwe



know), but instead seek to use words that promote calm and peace. You never know who may be listening. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, I need Your help that I might control my thoughts and words today. I want to be a blessing to others, to lift them up that they might see Your goodness. Amen.

Discretion of speech is better than eloquence with words.

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## **Taming The Tongue**

He who restrains his lips is wise. —Proverbs 10:19

Today's Scripture: Proverbs 10:18-32

At amusement parks, the bumper-car ride is always popular. People enjoy driving recklessly for a few minutes, bumping deliberately but harmlessly into other people's cars.

Some people have a bumper-car mentality in their relationships with others. Using blunt words, they deliberately bump into others' feelings, which is anything but harmless.

Solomon wrote, "He who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). But James said, "No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). He said that with the tongue we bless our God who created us, but we also curse those whom He has created (v.9). Lest we think that Christians do the blessing and non-Christians do the cursing, we need to remember that James was writing to Christians.

To tame our tongues, we need God's help. In Romans 6:13, Paul said that we need to make a choice—to present the parts of our body "as instruments of righteousness to God," not "as instruments of unrighteousness to sin."

Today and every day, choose to present your body—including your unruly tongue—as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:2) to be used by Him as an instrument of blessing. By: Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,  
My tongue control today;  
Help me evaluate each thought  
And guard each word I say.  
—Hess

To bridle your tongue, give God the reins of your heart.

---

## **SOME TALK ABOUT TALK**

"Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." -- Psalm 141:3

A man attended a meeting where the guest lecturer was extremely long-winded. When the listener could stand it no longer, he got up and slipped out a side door. In the corridor he met a friend who asked, "Has he finished yet?" "Yes," the man replied, "he's been through for a long time, but he's not aware of it. He simply won't stop!"

The idea of coming to the point and saying something worthwhile is also good counsel for us as we talk with others each day. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that much of our conversation is nothing more than empty talk. The Lord Jesus warned, "For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Mt. 12:36).

Pause a minute and think about what your usual conversation is like. What is the subject of most of your discussions? Do you talk too much and not give opportunity for others to speak? Is your speech profitable to others? And above all, do your words glorify God?

The Lord can enable you to speak words that build up others and don't just fill the air. Today, make these words of David your

prayer: "Set a guard,

O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). -- Richard W. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

How easy it is to use many words  
And give little thought to the things you say!  
So, willingly yield your lips to the Lord  
And hearts will be blest by them every day.  
-- Dennis J. De Haan

If your mind goes blank don't forget to turn off the sound

**James 3:9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;**

Amplified With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who were made in God's likeness!

Phillips We use the tongue to bless our Father, God, and we use the same tongue to curse our fellow-men, who are all created in God's likeness.

Wuest By means of it we eulogize the Lord, even the Father, and by means of it we curse men who have been made in the image of God.

NET James 3:9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people made in God's image.

GNT James 3:9 ν α τ ε λογο μεν τ ν κ ρ ι ο ν κα πατ ρ α κα ν α τ καταρ μεθα το ς ν θ ρ π ου ς το ς καθ μο ω σ ι ν θε ο γε γ ο ν τ α ς,

NLT James 3:9 Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God.

KJV James 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

ESV James 3:9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

ASV James 3:9 Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the likeness of God:

CSB James 3:9 We praise our Lord and Father with it, and we curse men who are made in God's likeness with it.

NIV James 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.

NKJ James 3:9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

NRS James 3:9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

YLT James 3:9 with it we do bless the God and Father, and with it we do curse the men made according to the similitude of God;

NAB James 3:9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God.

NJB James 3:9 We use it to bless the Lord and Father, but we also use it to curse people who are made in God's image:

GWN James 3:9 With our tongues we praise our Lord and Father. Yet, with the same tongues we curse people, who were created in God's likeness.

BBE James 3:9 With it we give praise to our Lord and Father; and with it we put a curse on men who are made in God's image.

- **With it:** Ps 16:9 Ps 30:12 Ps 35:28 Ps 51:14 Ps 57:8 Ps 62:4 Ps 71:24 Ps 108:1 Ac 2:26
- **we bless our Lord and Father:** 1Ch 29:10,20 Ps 34:1 63:4 145:1,21 Isa 29:13 Eph 1:3 1Pe 1:3
- **with it we curse men:** Jud 9:27 2Sa 16:5 19:21 Ps 10:7 59:12 109:17,18 Ec 7:22 Mt 5:44 26:74 Ro 3:14
- **who have been made in the likeness of God:** Ge 1:26,27 5:1 9:6 1Co 11:7
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SPEAKING WITH A "FORKED TONGUE"

Having mentioned the tongue being filled with **deadly poison** congeners up the image of a deadly viper and here we see the image of a [forked tongue](#) which such a viper would possess! (cf the first lie from a forked tongue Ge 3:1, 4) Presumably James had first hand experience with this incongruous speech among believers because in verse 10 with continues the thought of blessing and cursing he addresses them as my brethren and then explains that such duplicitous speech was not right in the body of Christ.

**Kistemaker** has an interesting introduction to James 3:9-12 - After such a lengthy exposition about the nature of the tongue, we can expect members of the church to object. They believe that those whom the grace of God has touched are able to control their tongues. But do Christians who praise the name of God the Father act differently from persons who refuse to praise his name? Do Christians speak with the tongues of angels? Hardly. (BNTC – Exposition of James)

**MacArthur** introduces this passage explaining that "the tongue is characterized by what might be called its perfidy to compromise. [Perfidy](#) refers to deliberate breach of trust, or treachery, and the unbridled tongue is frequently guilty of such evil. The tongue is not just wild and raging like an animal, but clever, plotting, and subtly deceptive. It is hypocritical and duplicitous, eagerly willing to deceive in order to achieve its own advantage." (Ibid)

**With it** - With our mouth, our tongue.

**We bless our Lord and Father** - To **bless** God is the highest use of our tongue (cf Ps 33:1, Ps 147:1). On one hand our tongue can praise God, speaking a good word about Him. **Lord and Father** - Surprisingly, this is the only place we find this specific title for God.

The writers of the NT frequently recorded blessing God the **Father**...

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify **the God and Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5-6)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father** of mercies and God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3 )

Blessed be **the God and Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (Ephesians 1:3).

Blessed be **the God and Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3)

**We bless** ([present tense](#) = indicating this is what one usually does) ([2127](#))([eulogeo](#) from **eu** = good + **lógos** = word) means speak good or well, to praise, to extol. When eulogeo is used by men toward men it means to speak well of with praise and thanksgiving (English "[Eulogy](#)" = an address in praise for one deceased ). To say good or positive things. **Eulogeo** can be from men to God, from men to men, and from God to men.

**McGee** - When a man can sing like an angel on Sunday and then talk like a demon during the week -- you label him as you want to - the Bible calls that man a hypocrite. (Ibid)

For fallen men to **curse** is **NATURAL**, but for fallen men to **bless** is **SUPERNATURAL**! You must be born again in order to bless in those circumstances and situations in which you formerly would curse.

## THE HOLY ONE BLESSED IS HE

**Barton** - "The Holy One, Blessed is He" is one of the most frequent descriptions of God in rabbinic literature. The [Eighteen](#)

**Benedictions**, a liturgical formula used daily by righteous Jews, concluded each of its parts with the blessing of God." (LAC)

**NOTE** - The typical weekday **Amidah** actually consists of nineteen blessings, though it originally had eighteen (hence the alternative name Shemoneh Esreh, meaning "Eighteen"). And since James was writing to Jewish believers, they would be very familiar with these traditional Jewish blessings to God. Imagine them walking out of the place of worship and encountering a situation that angered them (someone pulls in front of you on the freeway-- that never happens to you after Sunday worship does it?) and out of their mouth that had just blessed God came vile curse words! Perhaps we would do well as we leave the worship service after blessing God to pray "God by Your Spirit control my tongue the rest of this Lord's day and even the rest of this week, all for Your glory and honor. Amen")

**Kent Hughes** adds that "Jewish Christians were perpetuating the beautiful old Hebrew custom of saying, "Blessed be He" after each utterance of God's name, so that their worship times were continually punctuated by choruses of praise. Yet these same people, with the blessings still on their lips, would sometimes, after leaving worship, actually curse someone who had angered them! This was a shameful sin, and James would not tolerate it!" (Ibid)

**Gilbrant** comments that "it is absolutely inconsistent for the Christian to bless God and then curse man made in the **likeness of God**. Believers should not only refrain from cursing but also bless those who curse and persecute them (Luke 6:28; Romans 12:14). The **likeness** was natural, consisting of intelligence, emotions, and will; and moral, a tendency toward God, though accompanied with the power to make wrong choices. The tendency of fallen man is now away from God, to go his own way. When man sinned in Eden, the **likeness to God** was severely marred but not lost. Because man retains **likeness to God**, human life is sacred. To curse man is to curse the **likeness of God** in man." (Ibid)

**And with it** - That is with the very same mouth that uttered blessings to God. It is as if the "fresh water" of praise is polluted by the poison water of cursing.

**We curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God**(Ge 1:26, 27; Ge 9:6) - James spoke of "double minded" in James 1:6 and here speaks of "double mouthed," or "fork tongued!" James is showing that the reason cursing men is evil is because they are made in the **likeness of God**, the One we bless. So yes people still reflect God's image, albeit badly marred by sin. Thus ultimately to curse a fellow human being is to show contempt for God.

**Have been made** (**ginomai**) is in the **perfect tense** which speaks of a past completed act and ongoing effect.**Rienecker** says "Perfect looks at the completed action or state of man being in the image of God." In short, the **likeness of God** in man is enduring. Marred by sin yes, but still retaining elements of the **imago dei**!

When we experience bless/curse inconsistency (but you never have this problem do you beloved?) it is a clear witness to the truth of Paul's teaching of the **ongoing war** in our mortal bodies between the Spirit and the flesh...

For the **flesh** sets its desire (CONTINUALLY) against the **Spirit**, and the **Spirit** against the **flesh**; for these are in opposition (CONTINUALLY) to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please (LIKE WANTING TO GIVE SOMEONE "A PIECE OF YOUR MIND" FOR INSULTING YOU VERBALLY, ETC). (Gal 5:17+)

**Likeness** (only NT use)(3669)(**homoiosis** from **homoioo** = to make like) describes a state of similarity likeness, resemblance, a becoming like. TDNT says "It means "making similar or like"... It also means "being like," "correspondence"...He who curses man turns against God Himself, who created man after His own similitude." There are 7 uses in the **Septuagint (Lxx)** where it most often means something like "similarity."

**Zodhiates** - Although theologians continue to debate about the precise nature of the imago Dei in man, variously defining it as ontological, sociological, functional or moral, one thing is certain from this passage, namely, that even fallen man retains some semblance (however badly marred by sin) of the divine impress given him at the original creation. (Complete Word Study Dictionary)

**Homoiosis** in the **Septuagint (Lxx)** - Ge 1:26; Ps. 58:4; Ezek. 1:10; Ezek. 10:22; Ezek. 28:12; Dan. 7:5; Dan. 10:16

**Nelson's NKJV Study Bible** has an interesting note (but be a Berean Acts 17:11+) - Although human beings have lost much of Godlikeness, there is still enough in our make-up to hint at what we once were like and what we can become again through the work of Christ. It is interesting how the ancient Alexandrian Christians understood Gen. 1:26, where man and woman are created in the "image" (**eikon**) and "likeness" (**homoiosis**) of God. The "image" was that Godlike part of us that we never lost in the Fall, while the "likeness" was that Godlike part of human being that we have yet to acquire. By "image" they meant a person's physical and intellectual nature; by "likeness" they meant a person's moral being.

## Related Resource:

- [What does it mean that humanity is made in the image of God \(imago dei\)? | GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/What-does-it-mean-that-humanity-is-made-in-the-image-of-God-imago-dei/)

**John Bunyan** says such a person is "**a saint abroad, but a devil at home**" (See [below](#)) The harsh reality is that many a man speaks with perfect courtesy to strangers and preaches love and gentleness and yet snaps with ungracious and impatient anger at his family. There are women who will speak sweet and gracious words at a religious meeting and then go outside and murder someone's reputation with a malicious gossiping tongue.

**We curse** (present tense) (2672) (**kataraomai** from **katara** = a curse from **kata** = down + **ara** = a prayer, a curse) literally is to curse down and so to call a curse down upon someone. The idea is to imprecate (= to invoke) evil on someone saying that a supernatural power will cause harm to someone or something. To pray or wish evil or ruin toward someone or some thing.

The psalmist describes this hypocritical "forked tongue"..

They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high position;  
They delight in falsehood;  
They bless with their mouth, But inwardly they curse. Selah. (Psalm 62:4 )

Milton's Paradise Lost:

"According to his Doom: He would have spoke,  
But Hiss for Hiss return'd with forked Tongue  
To forked Tongue, for now were all transform'd...

We see the description of this dual nature of the tongue in Proverbs...notice the contrasts all dealing with the tongue, words or speech...

(Pr 10:11) The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

(Pr 10:19) When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

(Pr 10:31) The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, But the perverted tongue will be cut out.

(Pr 10:32) The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.

(Pr 18:21) Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - After a long Sunday morning service, a family sat down to eat lunch. The father bowed his head and led the children in the blessing. He thanked the Lord for the food, for the day, and for their home. Shortly after saying "Amen," he proceeded to fuss about the preacher, the church, his job. Nothing but complaints poured from his lips. Following all that, his little daughter tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Daddy, did God hear you when you said the blessing?"

Switching to theological authority, Dad answered, "Yes, darling, He did."

"Well," asked his daughter, "did God hear you when you fussed right after you prayed?"

"Well . . . uh, yes, honey, I suppose He did."

"Then, Daddy," she said, "which one did God believe?" (Swindoll's Living Insights)

Of course the answer is both, because both reveal the real condition of the heart.

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**Brian Bell - "Open your mouth & say ahhh!" - a doctor often looks behind the tongue.**

We need to look all the way down to the heart!

Again, the tongue isn't the real problem; it is the heart. (Mt.12:34-37)

Who is in control?

If your tongue is under God's control, you will take what you say seriously and your whole body will be under His discipline

Just as a horse needs a rider holding its reins, & a ship needs a pilot at the rudder, so your tongue needs a master; & God is the only one who can do the job.

Ps.141:3,4 Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil.

More people have been slain by the tongue than the sword.

Bridle our tongues today and we'll be able to handle the rest of the horse.

A short intellect usually has a long tongue. ([Sermon](#))

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## What Comes out of Your Mouth?

But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a man.—Matthew 15:18

The Bible stresses that what you say is an accurate indicator of what is in your heart. If your words bless and encourage others, they give evidence of a compassionate heart. If you often share the good news about Christ, you demonstrate a heart that is grateful for your own salvation. When others are in a crisis, do they know they will find peace and comfort in your words? Do you frequently and spontaneously offer prayers for others? Do your words and the manner in which you say them reveal a patient heart? All of these behaviors indicate a heart that is like the heart of the Father.

Or do you often regret your words? Are there people even now who are hurt or angry because of something you have said? Do you enjoy gossip? Do you tend to criticize others? Do you feel that you are not responsible for what comes out of your mouth when you are angry? Does your mouth spew grumbling and complaints? These behaviors come from a heart that is unlike God's heart.

You may say, "Oh, but that's just the way I am! I'm always saying the wrong thing!" Yet Scripture clearly states that an abusive tongue is not under the control of the Spirit (James 3:3–10). A sanctified mouth is a wonderful instrument for the Lord. A heart like the Father's heart will produce only pure and loving words. Without making any excuses for your words, ask the Holy Spirit to forgive you for any words that have brought harm. Then ask Him to discipline your mouth so that every word you speak is used by God to encourage and edify others. (Experiencing God)

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## Twice Is Once Too Many

With [our tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men. —James 3:9

Today's Scripture: James 3:1-12

When I begin to grade the papers from the students in my college freshman writing class, I'm rather lenient about correcting their mistakes, hoping I won't see the same errors again.

But when the next paper contains the identical mistakes, I begin to get a little irritated. I expect the students to learn from their errors and avoid them the next time. Usually, though, it doesn't quite work that way.

Sounds like our Christian life. The Lord patiently reminds us through the Holy Spirit's presence, for example, that we shouldn't say negative things about others. He tells us to be kind and compassionate instead of fault-finding and vindictive (Ephesians 4:31-32). But we sometimes slip back into our old habit of letting both "fresh" and "bitter" words come from our lips in our conversations about others (James 3:8-12).

With my students, I go back to the basics to erase old habits. We train. We review. We practice. We eliminate the errors.

The Lord patiently continues to work with us about the way we speak of other people. As we listen to His training, learn from our mistakes, and depend on His power, we'll grow and change. By: Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

To be like Jesus—that's our goal,  
Though it doesn't happen fast;  
We trust the Spirit—He's our Guide,  
Till we're glorified at last.  
—Branon

To put failure behind you, face up to it.

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## Language of Love

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. James



Today's Scripture & Insight: James 3:1–12

When my grandmother came to Mexico as a missionary, she had a hard time learning Spanish. One day she went to the market. She showed her shopping list to the girl helping her and said, “It’s in two tongues (lenguas).” But she meant to say that she had written it in two languages (idiomas). The butcher overheard them and assumed she wanted to purchase two cow tongues. My grandmother didn’t realize it until she got home. She had never cooked beef tongue before!

Mistakes are inevitable when we are learning a second language, including learning the new language of God’s love. At times our speech is contradictory because we praise the Lord but then speak badly of others. Our old sinful nature opposes our new life in Christ. What comes out of our mouths shows us how much we need God’s help.

Our old “tongue” must go away. The only way to learn the new language of love is by making Jesus the Lord of our speech. When the Holy Spirit works in us, He gives us self-control to speak words that please the Father. May we surrender every word to Him! “Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3). By: Keila Ochoa ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord Jesus, take control of my mouth today. Forgive me for careless, thoughtless, and angry words. Let my words bless You and others.

May the words we speak point others to Jesus.

### It’s All About The Heart

Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart. —Matthew 15:18

Today's Scripture: Matthew 15:7-20

Every time Susan opens her mouth, it sounds like the blare of an ambulance siren. This TV commercial uses humor to indicate that a dental problem could reveal a more serious physical ailment. So she’d better see her dentist soon!

The commercial made me think about what comes out of my mouth when I open it. Jesus said that our words come from our heart (Matt. 15:18). He offended the Pharisees when He said, “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man” (vv.11-12). They thought they were right with God because they followed strict rules, including ritual cleansing of their hands before eating and eating only “clean” foods. Jesus upset their pride.

Jesus upsets our pride too. We may think we’re godly people because we go to church regularly or pray, but then we gossip or talk about people behind their backs. James 3:9-10 says, “With [our tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men . . . . Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. . . . These things ought not to be so.”

If a siren blares from our mouth when we open it, we need to examine our heart and ask the Lord to forgive us and to help us be a blessing to others. By: Anne Cetas ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, cleanse our hearts so what we speak  
Will be reflective of Your grace;  
And help us to control our tongues  
So we’ll not bring on You disgrace.  
—Sper

Every time you speak, your mind is on parade.

**A SAINT ABROAD  
AND  
A DEVIL AT HOME!**

## John Bunyan's character "[Talkative](#)"

**Faithful:** Now did Faithful begin to wonder; and stepping to Christian, (for he walked all this while by himself), he said to him, (but softly), What a brave companion have we got! Surely this man will make a very excellent pilgrim.

**Christian:** At this Christian modestly smiled, and said: This man, with whom you are so taken, will beguile, with that tongue of his, twenty of them that know him not.

**Faithful:** Do you know him, then?

**Christian:** Know him! Yes, better than he knows himself.

**Faithful:** Pray, what is he?

**Christian:** His name is **Talkative**; he dwells in our town. I wonder that you should be a stranger to him, only I consider that our town is large.

**Faithful:** Whose son is he? And whereabout does he dwell?

**Christian:** He is the son of one Say-well; he dwelt in Prating Row; and is known of all that are acquainted with him, by the name of Talkative in Prating Row; and notwithstanding his fine tongue, he is but a sorry fellow.

**Faithful:** Well, he seems to be a very pretty man.

**Christian:** That is, to them who have not thorough acquaintance with him; for **he is best abroad; near home, he is ugly enough. Your saying that he is a pretty man, brings to my mind what I have observed in the work of the painter, whose pictures show best at a distance, but, very near, more displeasing.**

**Faithful:** But I am ready to think you do but jest, because you smiled.

**Christian:** God forbid that I should jest (although I smiled) in this matter, or that I should accuse any falsely! I will give you a further discovery of him. This man is for any company, and for any talk; as he talks now with you, so will he talk when he is on the ale-bench; and the more drink he has in his crown, the more of these things he has in his mouth; religion has no place in his heart, or house, or conversation; all he has lies in his tongue, and his religion is, to make a noise therewith.

**Faithful:** Say you so! then am I in this man greatly deceived.

**Christian:** Deceived! you may be sure of it; remember the proverb, **"They say and do not."** But the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. He talks of prayer, of repentance, of faith, and of the new birth; but he knows but only to talk of them. I have been in his family, and have observed him both at home and abroad; and I know what I say of him is the truth. His house is as empty of religion as the white of an egg is of savor. There is there neither prayer nor sign of repentance for sin; yea, the brute in his kind serves God far better than he. He is the very stain, reproach, and shame of religion, to all that know him; it can hardly have a good word in all that end of the town where he dwells, through him. Thus say the common people that know him, **A saint abroad, and a devil at home.** His poor family finds it so; he is such a churl, such a railer at and so unreasonable with his servants, that they neither know how to do for or speak to him. Men that have any dealings with him say it is better to deal with a Turk than with him; for fairer dealing they shall have at their hands. This Talkative (if it be possible) will go beyond them, defraud, beguile, and overreach them. Besides, he brings up his sons to follow his steps; and if he finds in any of them a foolish timorousness, (for so he calls the first appearance of a tender conscience,) he calls them fools and blockheads, and by no means will employ them in much, or speak to their commendations before others. For my part, I am of opinion, that he has, by his wicked life, caused many to stumble and fall; and will be, if God prevent not, the ruin of many more.

**Faithful:** Well, my brother, I am bound to believe you; not only because you say you know him, but also because, like a Christian, you make your reports of men. For I cannot think that you speak these things of ill-will, but because it is even so as you say.

**Christian:** Had I known him no more than you, I might perhaps have thought of him, as, at the first, you did; yea, had he received this report at their hands only that are enemies to religion, I should have thought it had been a slander—a lot that often falls from bad men's mouths upon good men's names and professions; but all these things, yea, and a great many more as bad, of my own knowledge, I can prove him guilty of. Besides, good men are ashamed of him; they can neither call him brother, nor friend; the very naming of him among them makes them blush, if they know him.

## Related Resources:

- [Click for commentary](#) on the preceding dialogue between Christian and Faithful
- Continue reading [The Fallacy of Talkative](#)
- Return to [Conversation with Talkative](#)

**James 3:10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.**

Amplified Out of the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. These things, my brethren, ought not to be so.

Phillips Blessing and curses come out of the same mouth - surely, my brothers, this is the sort of thing that never ought to happen!

Wuest Out of the same mouth there proceeds eulogies and cursings. My brethren, these things ought not thus inappropriately to keep on taking place.

NET James 3:10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. These things should not be so, my brothers and sisters.

GNT James 3:10 κ το α το στ ματος ξ ρχεται ε λογ α κα κατ ρα. ο χρ , δελφο μου, τα τα ο τως γ νεσθαι.

NLT James 3:10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

KJV James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

ESV James 3:10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

ASV James 3:10 out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

CSB James 3:10 Praising and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way.

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

NKJ James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

NRS James 3:10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

YLT James 3:10 out of the same mouth doth come forth blessing and cursing; it doth not need, my brethren, these things so to happen;

NAB James 3:10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. This need not be so, my brothers.

NJB James 3:10 the blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. My brothers, this must be wrong-

GWN James 3:10 Praise and curses come from the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, this should not happen!

BBE James 3:10 Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, it is not right for these things to be so.

- **from the same mouth:** Ps 50:16-20 Jer 7:4-10 Mic 3:11 Ro 12:14 Luke 6:28 1 Peter 2:21-23 1Pe 3:9
- **these things ought not to be this way:** Ge 20:9 2Sa 13:12 1Co 3:3 1Ti 5:13
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DOUBLE-SPEAK

**Double-speak** is defined as language that deliberately obscures, disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words.

**Constable** writes that "Not only is this phenomenon contrary to the will of God, it is also contrary to the natural order of things."

**From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing** - James is saying that believers were speaking blessing and cursing. This is sad because believers have the Holy Spirit to enable holy speech, but failure to appropriate His supernatural power and instead rely on our own natural power can yield unholy speech.

**MacArthur** illustrates how we all have been guilty of blessing and cursing - Peter confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16); but while his Lord was on trial before the high priest, "he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!' And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, 'Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:74-75) (Ibid)

**Brian Bell** - In these verses James illustrates the Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde tongues tendency. 1. The 1931 horror film where a man who takes a potion which turns him from a mild-mannered man of science into a crude homicidal maniac.

**Blessing** (2129)([eulogia](#)) is literally a good word, good speaking, fine speech or praise.

Scripture speaks of believers blessing with their tongue and not cursing. Of course the way to accomplish this unnatural response is by continual reliance on the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit (See [Tongue Control](#)).

**Bless** ([present imperative](#) - [Need for the Holy Spirit](#)) those who persecute you; **bless** ([present imperative](#) - [Need for the Holy Spirit](#)) and do not curse ([present imperative with a negative](#)). (Ro 12:14<sup>+</sup>)

**Bless** ([present imperative](#) - [Need for the Holy Spirit](#)) those who curse you, **pray** ([present imperative](#) - [Need for the Holy Spirit](#)) for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:28<sup>+</sup>)

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:21-23<sup>+</sup>)

Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (1 Pe 3:9<sup>+</sup>)

**Curse** (accursed) (2671)([katara](#) from **katá** = down, against [intensifies meaning] + **ara** = a curse) means a [malediction](#) (literally to speak evil), [imprecation](#) (calling down a curse) on these men. Here in James **katara** describes human utterance which desires evil on someone ([imprecation](#)) (

**My brethren** - Once again identifying himself with them as fellow believers, members of the same family, the family of God. So James is addressing this to believers, those who had the Holy Spirit Who Alone could enable them to bring forth words of blessing and not words of cursing.

**Matthew Henry** - How absurd is it that those who use their tongues in prayer and praise should ever use them in cursing, slandering, and the like! If we bless God as our Father, it should teach us to speak well of, and kindly to, all who bear his image. That tongue which addresses with reverence the divine Being cannot, without the greatest inconsistency, turn upon fellow-creatures with reviling brawling language. It is said of the seraphim that praise God, they dare not bring a railing accusation. And for men to reproach those who have not only the image of God in their natural faculties, but are renewed after the image of God by the grace of the gospel: this is a most shameful contradiction to all their pretensions of honouring the great Original. These things ought not so to be; and, if such considerations were always at hand, surely they would not be. **Piety is disgraced in all the shows of it, if there be not charity.** That tongue [confutes](#) itself (proves itself to be false) which one while pretends to adore the perfections of God, and to refer all things to him, and another while will condemn even good men if they do not just come up to the same words or expressions used by it.

**These things ought not to be this way** - **Vine** says literally "it is not befitting, these things so to be." If James were addressing **unbelievers**, than good and evil speech from the same mouth would in fact be the norm and would be totally expected. But as noted with **my brethren** James is clearly addressing **believers** among whom it is not fitting or right for their tongue to exhibit such untamed speech. James is emphatic that such "[dichotomous dialogue](#)" is completely unnatural for those who are new creatures in Christ, and among whom old things have passed away (good and evil speech natural from same mouth) and new things have come (holy speech) (cf 2 Cor 5:17<sup>+</sup>). Jesus alluded to this principle in His Sermon on the Mount when he said

"But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil. (Mt 5:37<sup>+</sup>)

Comment - Jesus' point is that both our yes and our no should be an honest reply. We are to not to say "yes" and then out of the same mouth say "no." This is what unregenerate people do, not those who have

been born again and are called to live a life of truth and righteousness.

**Robertson** - It is a moral incongruity for blessing and cursing to come out of the same mouth.

**Ought not** - Greek uses the strongest negative to modify **chre** (*ou chre*) signifying that this absolutely **ought not to be this way**. In the Greek sentence the "ou chre" (not ought) precedes "my brethren," placing even stronger emphasis on this negative injunction! In other words "**dichotomous dialogue**" has absolutely no place in the life of a believer in Jesus Christ.

Paul writes to the believers at Corinth who were not acting as they ought to act in Christ, enabled by His Spirit...

you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men (TO WHOM CURSING COMES NATURALLY)? (1Co 3:3)

**Ought** (5534) (**chre** from **chreia** = need, necessity) is an impersonal verb meaning it is necessary, it needs to be, that which must be, that which should happen (with the implication of propriety). The necessity expressed by this word signifies a need resulting from time or circumstances or from the fitness of things. Here it denotes the incongruity of blessing and cursing coming out of the same mouth. **Chre** was a common term in classical Greek literature, but as time passed it was almost totally replaced by its synonym **dei**. **Dei** is used over 100x but this is the only NT use of **chre**.

**Barton** - The deceitful, dual use of the tongue is the result of double-mindedness, fickleness, and the instability of a life that is ruled by impulse rather than by the love of God. The tongue reveals either maturity or immaturity. It gives a picture of our basic human nature, made in God's image but fallen into sin. God works to change us from the inside out. As the Holy Spirit purifies our heart, he gives us self-control so that we will speak words that please God. Instead of fighting, we need to be helpful, positive, and encouraging toward others. (Ibid)

**George M Stulac** concludes this section on the tongue writing that "To the person who speaks praise to God in the worship service and then abuses people verbally at home or at work, James commands, 'Purify your speech through the week.' With the person who says, 'Oh, I know I talk too much,' and laughs it off, James is not amused. He insists, 'Be quick to listen, slow to speak.' (James 1:19) By the person who boasts, 'I always speak my mind, no matter who gets hurt,' James is not impressed. He commands, 'Discipline your speaking.' Of the person who says, 'I know I gossip too much, but I just can't help it,' James still requires, 'Control your tongue.' Of the person who is in the habit of speaking with insults, ridicule or sarcasm, James demands, 'Change your speech habits.' He expects discipline to be happening in the life of a Christian. Any Christian can ask for the grace needed, for God gives good gifts (James 1:17) and gives them generously (James 1:5). There is, then, no justification for corrupt habits of speech in our churches today." ([James 3](#) - IVP Commentary) (**ED**: See related discussion on "[Tongue Control](#).")

**ILLUSTRATION** - When I announced in the bank where I worked as a young man that I was going to study for the ministry, one of the vice-presidents of the bank called me into his office. He had been a good friend of mine, and he knew something of my life and how I had lived. He said to me, "Vernon, I hope you are going to be a genuine preacher and a genuine servant of God." He said, "The reason I am not a Christian today is because of an experience I had during the war." (He was referring to World War I.) He went on to tell me how the bank had set up a branch bank at the powder plant at Old Hickory outside of Nashville, Tennessee. One of the tellers there was also a soloist in a church in downtown Nashville. One Sunday as that teller came out of church, the bank vice-president overheard one of the ladies say, "You know, that man is one of the most wonderful men in the world. He sings just like an angel!" This vice-president made no comment at the time. But that woman owned property, and she had business at the bank out at Old Hickory. She came in one day and was talking to him when suddenly they heard the vilest language imaginable. It came from the teller who had attempted to balance and he hadn't balanced. (I was a teller for several years, and I know that this is one of the most discouraging things that can happen.) Well, when this man didn't balance, he began to explode with blasphemies, and the lady said, "Who in the world is that?" The bank vice-president said, "That's your soloist who sings like an angel on Sunday!" A man can bless God with his mouth, and he can blaspheme God. You can do both with the mouth you have. The Lord Jesus said that what is in the heart will come up through the mouth; you can be sure your tongue is going to say it. (Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee)

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## Word Watch

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. —James 3:10

Today's Scripture: James 3:1-12

Good grammar matters to me. As a writer and former English teacher, I'm bothered when I hear the wrong word used by people I think should know better. For instance, using "I" instead of "me" or "who" instead of "whom." There's a proper way to use the language, and it makes me cringe when the standard is violated.

There's another kind of incorrect word usage that is far worse. It happens when Christians utter words that fall short of the standard

God expects. Whenever we use words that are considered crude, profane, or obscene, we violate God's clear standards.

Anytime we speak any form of God's name irreverently or in a way that doesn't honor Him, we displease Him (Exodus 20:7). If we joke about sinful practices, we are speaking in a way we shouldn't (Ephesians 5:12). Or if we participate in coarse talk (5:4), we bring dishonor to the name of Christ.

James said, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. . . . These things ought not to be so" (James 3:10). Such speech is hypocritical.

Controlling our tongue is difficult because it is an "unruly evil" (v.8). For the glory of God, and with respect for His standards, let's watch our words. By: Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

A wise old owl sat on an oak;  
The more he saw, the less he spoke;  
The less he spoke, the more he heard—  
Why aren't we like that wise old bird?  
—Richards

Every time you speak, your mind is on parade.

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### Warren Wiersbe - MIXED MESSAGES

If you and I are going to have tongues that delight, then we must meet with the Lord each day and learn from Him. We must get our "spiritual roots" deep into His Word. We must pray and meditate and permit the Spirit of God to fill our hearts with God's love and truth.

But James issued a warning: a fountain cannot give forth two kinds of water, and a tree cannot bear two different kinds of fruit. We expect the fountain to flow with sweet water at all times, and we expect the fig tree to bear figs and the olive tree to bear olives. Nature reproduces after its own kind.

If the tongue is inconsistent, there is something radically wrong with the heart. I heard about a professing Christian who got angry on the job and let loose with some oaths. Embarrassed, he turned to his partner and said, "I don't know why I said that. It really isn't in me." His partner wisely replied, "It had to be in you or it couldn't have come out of you."

The tongue that blessed the Father, and then turns around and curses men made in God's image, is in desperate need of spiritual medicine! How easy it is to sing the hymns during the worship service, then after the service, get into the family car and argue and fight all the way home! "My brothers, this should not be." (Pause for Power)

### James 3:11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?

Amplified Does a fountain send forth [simultaneously] from the same opening fresh water and bitter?

Phillips Have you ever known a spring to give sweet and bitter water simultaneously?

Wuest The spring does not pour forth out of the same opening the sweet and the bitter [water], does it?

NET James 3:11 A spring does not pour out fresh water and bitter water from the same opening, does it?

GNT James 3:11 μ π π η γ κ τ ς α τ ς π ς β ρ ει τ γ λ υ κ κα τ πικρ ν;

NLT James 3:11 Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water?

KJV James 3:11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

ESV James 3:11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

ASV James 3:11 Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter?

CSB James 3:11 Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening?

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

NKJ James 3:11 Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?

NRS James 3:11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water?



YLT James 3:11 doth the fountain out of the same opening pour forth the sweet and the bitter?

NAB James 3:11 Does a spring gush forth from the same opening both pure and brackish water?

NJB James 3:11 does any water supply give a flow of fresh water and salt water out of the same pipe?

GWN James 3:11 Do clean and polluted water flow out of the same spring?

BBE James 3:11 Does the fountain send from the same outlet sweet and bitter water?

- **from the same opening**, Jas 3:11
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## FRESH AND SALTY?

James asks two sets of rhetorical questions (James 3:11-12) as a means of explaining and illustrating how unnatural it is for cursing and blessing to come out of the same mouth of a born again believer (James 3:9-10). As new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17<sup>±</sup>) believers have a new source of supernatural power to replace natural negative speech with positive God glorifying speech. In this life of course, no believer will reach perfection in the area of "[tongue control](#)", but our daily goal should be steady progression toward greater and greater degrees of Christ-likeness as we learn to rely wholly on His Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught in Matthew 12:34-37 that a man's words are a reliable indicator of the state of his heart. What we say indicates who we are, whether we are still in Adam (unregenerate) or in Christ (regenerate)...

"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? (THEY COULD NOT BRING FORTH "FRESH WATER"!) For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. 36 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 "For by your words you will be justified (YOUR SPEECH WILL SPEAK OF WHO YOU REALLY ARE - LOST OR BORN AGAIN!), and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:34-37)

**Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?**- The rhetorical question expects a strong negative reply. Fresh and bitter water cannot come from a fountain at the same time. The impossibility of this occurring should cause believers to realize how vital it is to learn to submit our tongue to the control of the Spirit.

**THOUGHT** - So think of your heart as a **fountain** and examine your own heart by examining what comes out of your mouth. When we are filled with the Spirit and under His control our speech will most likely be "fresh water," that which honors God. But if we do not heed Paul's command (only possible as we are [empowered by the Spirit](#)) to "not **let sin reign** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts" (Ro 6:13<sup>±</sup>), then we are giving our [fallen, sinful flesh](#) an opening from which to spew forth "bitter water." We have a choice (and responsibility) regarding how we can respond, but it a mysterious truth that while we are 100% responsible, we are also 100% dependent on the Spirit to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. For more discussion on this principle see "[Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)" ([100/100](#)).

**Zodhiates** adds "The tongue is only an instrument of the mind and heart and is appropriately located in between the two. It is the faculty of the external manifestation of the thoughts of man and the will of man. Without a command from the mind and permission from the will, the tongue cannot speak either good or evil." ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**Oswald Chambers** - If a cup is filled only with good water, it cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, no matter how badly it is jarred.

**THOUGHT:** What Chambers states would seem to be a picture of a man or woman who is "filled with" the Spirit and under His control, so that when the "pop test" occurs, what comes out of us is what fills us. Of course, this presupposes that we are "prepared" for the "pop test." If we have not walked out of the house "filled with the Spirit," then clearly our "vessel" is vulnerable and if "bumped" by adverse words or deeds, is far more likely to "spill" bitter water, so to speak.

**John Phillips** adds that "We were born with a nature that can do nothing right (Ro 7:18<sup>±</sup>), and we have been born again, heirs to a nature that can do nothing wrong (1 Jn 3:9<sup>±</sup>). All of our conduct and conversation stems from either the one nature or the other. We either exhibit the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21+) or display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23+). Paul tells us to crucify the flesh and to walk in the Spirit. (Gal 5:24+, Gal 5:16+) **The tongue does not have a life of its own, even though James uses the figure**

**of speech of personification to describe its activities. It is controlled by either the flesh—by the old, fallen Adamic nature** (ED: SEE "OLD MAN")—**or the indwelling Spirit of God.** It cannot be controlled by both at the same time. If the [flesh](#) is reigning, then out comes **bitter water**. If the Holy Spirit is on the throne, then out of our innermost being flows that river of living water of which the Lord Himself spoke (John 7:37-39<sup>+</sup>). (Exploring James)

**Guzik** - James points to the ultimate impossibility of such a contradiction. If bad fruit and bitter water continue to come forth, it means that there is no contradiction. The tree is bad and the spring is bad. (Ibid)

**POSB** - It is contrary to the nature of believers to have an untamed tongue. A believer is just like a fig tree. Does the fig tree bear olives? Or a vine, figs? No fountain yields both salt and fresh water. No good tongue yields both words of blessing and words of cursing. Only an evil tongue could do this. (Ibid)

**Hiebert** - The importance of a spring of water would be assumed by all the readers familiar with conditions in dry Palestine. The existence of many of its villages depended on the availability of such a source for its water. It was important that the water from it continued to be fresh and usable. The verb "flow from" (bruei), used only here in the New Testament, denotes something that is full to bursting; it indicates that the spring copiously gushes forth its water. But a traveler, or a resident of the village dependent upon its water, in coming for water does not expect that it will alternate in providing "fresh water" (to gluku), clear, drinkable water, and "salt water" (to pikron), [brackish](#), salty, undrinkable water, from the same opening in the cliff. (Ibid)

**Dave Roper** - How odd—that blessing and cursing pour from the same aperture! But therein lies the solution. If it's true that a spring emits brackish water one moment and fresh water the next, we must consider the source. And so it is with the tongue. The heart is the fountainhead of every word, either corrupting it or correcting it. Jesus said, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Apt words come from a heart that is governed by God. The message is the heart of the messenger. Communication courses are useful and homiletics helps, but no amount of discipline and training can quell the wayward tongue. James is right—"No man can tame the tongue"—but there's plenty of help from Another.

**What the Bible teaches** – a cleft rock becomes a fountain—the water flows and is either sweet or bitter depending on the nature of its source. The Promised Land was described as a land of springs of water. The rock from which they sprang determined the quality of the water, such as at Elim or conversely at Marah. The waters of Marah were bitter, unhealthy and poisonous but the water from the cleft rock different: wholesome, sweet and plentiful. The characteristics of the water reflect the nature of the rock. By the constituents of the water a judgment can be made as to its source.

**Luck:** "Remember, as indicated earlier, that no man can tame the tongue, but there is One who can. Bitter waters were made sweet at Marah when a divinely revealed tree was cast into them (Exod. 15:23-26). So as the tree--the cross of Christ--becomes real in our lives, as we trust in the Lord Jesus and walk in faith with Him, the bitter waters of Marah will become sweet, and our tongues instead of producing evil will be a blessing to all about us."

**Ron Blue** - Small and influential, the tongue must be controlled; satanic and infectious, the tongue must be corralled; salty and inconsistent, the tongue must be cleansed. (Ibid)

**NLT Study Bible** - Such [brackish](#) springs could not support a town. Similarly, if a person's speech mixes foul with sweet, it will not build up the community.

**Fountain** (4077) ([pege](#)) refers to a source that is not stagnant (like a well) but a source that gushes out or flows like a spring (James 3:11, 12) or a fountain "living" and leaping forth out of the ground. Jesus used [pege](#) figuratively to refer to a spiritual well or source of inner nourishment (Jn 4:14<sup>+</sup>, cp Jn 7:37-39) even as He was sitting by a literal well (Jn 4:6).

**Opening** (3692) ([ope](#)) means a hole, a cleft (as in a rock - see Lxx use in Ex 33:22), a hole in the ground either large or small. "A hole, referring to a hole or cavern because of the light which shines in; therefore, a hole or cavern in the earth (Heb. 11:38). A hole or opening from which a spring of water issues (James 3:11)" (Zodhiates)

**Ope** in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) - Ex 33:22; Jdg. 15:11; Eccl. 12:3; Song 5:4; Obad. 1:3; Zech. 14:12

**Gilbrant** - **Opē** is a general word for a hole or opening of any kind, whether in the ground, in a rock, in the roof or wall of a house (i.e., chimneys, doors, windows), or in the human body (i.e., ears, mouth, etc.). In the New Testament it occurs only twice, both times in reference to holes or openings in the ground. In Hebrews 11:38 faithful saints of the past are said to have sought refuge from a hateful world in "caves (**opē**) of the earth," which were really just '**holes** in the ground.'" In James 3:11 **opē** refers to a smaller opening or hole from which a fountain or spring sends forth water. Unlike the human mouth (James 3:10), a fountain will not send forth sweet and bitter from the same opening. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Send** (only here in NT)([1032](#))(**bruo**) means to be full to bursting, to abound, to overflow, to gush forth or "emit voluminously". **Bruo** is ordinarily used of the swelling buds of plants and so figuratively of various kinds of fullness. Here the is used of the gushing forth of water

**Fresh** ([1099](#))(**glukus**) literally means sweet (opposite of pikros), literally in James 3:11, 12. Figuratively refers to a book that is delightful to read ("sweet as honey")(Rev 10:9, 10<sup>+</sup>). Water that is sweet (James 3:11-12) is [potable](#).

**Glukus** in the NT - fresh(2), sweet(2). Jas. 3:11; Jas. 3:12; Rev. 10:9<sup>+</sup>; Rev. 10:10<sup>+</sup>

**Glukus** in the **Septuagint** - Jdg 14:14; Jdg 14:18; Ps 19:10; Ps 119:103; Pr 16:21; Pr 27:7; Eccl 5:12; Eccl. 11:7; Song 2:3; Isa. 5:20

**Bitter** ([4089](#))(**pikros** from root **pik** = to cup or prick) means sharp, pointed, piercing, pungent as that which sharply "pierces" or penetrates one's senses. Used literally in James 3:11 as the opposite of what which is sweet, and in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) of Ex 15:23 describing the waters of Marah which "were **bitter**" and could not be drunk by Israel. In James 3:14 it is used figuratively to describe jealousy as **bitter**, which speaks of resentful attitude (harsh, cruel).

**Gilbrant** - In classical literature this word means "keen, sharp, pointed," but it has specific meanings when associated with different nouns. For example, pikros suggests a "spiteful, vindictive" person as well as "bitter, unpleasant" taste (see Exodus 15:23), "piercing" sound, "sorrowful" feelings, and "painful" disappointment. The term occurs about 40 times in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) (e.g., Ruth 1:20; Habakkuk 1:6). It is found only twice in the New Testament. In the Epistle of James this adjective means "bitter" in the metaphoric passage describing the unruly tongue (James 3:11) and in the subsequent passage about true wisdom (James 3:14).

Psalms 64:3 Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed **bitter** (**pikros**) speech as their arrow,

Isa 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute **bitter** for sweet and sweet for **bitter**!

Zeph 1:14 Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out **bitterly**.

**Pikros** in [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) -

Gen. 27:34 = **bitter** cry Exod. 15:23; Jdg. 18:25; 1 Sa 15:32 = Surely the **bitterness** of death is past.; 2 Sa. 2:26; 2 Ki. 14:26 = "the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, which was very **bitter**"; Ps. 64:3; Pr 5:4 = "in the end she is **bitter** as wormwood"; Pr 27:7 = to a famished man any **bitter** thing is sweet.; Eccl. 7:26 = I discovered more **bitter** than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets; Isa. 5:20; Isa. 24:9; Jer. 2:19 = it is evil and **bitter** For you to forsake the LORD your God ; Jer. 4:18; Jer. 20:8; Jer. 23:15; Ezek. 27:30; Hab. 1:6; Zeph. 1:14

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Bitter water also can destroy our spiritual lives. James asks, "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?" (James 3:11). The sweet spirit God wants for us cannot exist in a heart polluted by bitterness. Bitterness on the inside will eventually manifest itself on the outside. No matter how carefully we think we have concealed it, bitterness will contaminate all we are, all we say, and all we do. The only solution is to apply the healing balm of God's Spirit to the bitterness of our lives. If you are being polluted by bitterness, isn't it time for God's freshness? Confess that your bitterness is a sin that is keeping you miserably distant from God. Ask for His forgiveness and begin to enjoy a renewed sweetness. A bitter spirit will keep you from being a better person.

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**Johnny Hunt Devotional** - Words of encouragement are priceless: "You can do it!" "You are a winner." "Great job!" Words of blessing are powerful. Regrettably, out of the same mouth that blesses can come words of cursing. This is an incredible inconsistency for a believer. James lamented that in one breath we can worship God, and in the next, curse the apple of His eye. James must have had in mind all harsh, cutting, slanderous, hurtful, unedifying, or wicked words. He said to believers, "These things ought not to be so."

One sure way of becoming a blessing is allowing God to control our tongues. We cannot overvalue the blessing of godly speech at all times. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). Conversely, we must not undervalue the damage harsh words bring. Contrary to old clichés, words do hurt—often deeply.

The heart controls the mouth and tongue (Luke 6:45). Our tongues are unruly, and frankly, we cannot tame them ourselves (James 3:8). People can tame tigers, dolphins, and falcons, but God must tame our tongues by transforming our hearts. The words we speak reveal our hearts, especially when we are under pressure. A change of heart is needed when our words of blessing are waning. Heart transformation begins with confession and repentance. It is followed by obedience to God's Word. Confess and remove unedifying words from your vocabulary regularly. Replace those words with blessings. Today, bless as many people as

possible with your words. We have been blessed by our Lord's words, so let us in return be a blessing for His glory.

EVENING "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). Amen.

**James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.**

Amplified Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine figs? Neither can a salt spring furnish fresh water.

Phillips Have you ever seen a fig-tree with a crop of olives, or seen figs growing on a vine? It is just as impossible for a spring to give fresh and salt water at the same time.

Wuest A fig tree, my brethren, is not able to produce olives, is it, or a vine, figs?

NET James 3:12 Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers and sisters, or a vine produce figs? Neither can a salt water spring produce fresh water.

GNT James 3:12 μ ὁ νάται, ὁ ἐλφοῦ μου, σὺκ ἑλᾶς ποί σοι μπελὸς σκα; ὁ τε λυκὴν γλυκὴ ποί σοι ὄωρ.

NLT James 3:12 Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

KJV James 3:12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

ESV James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

ASV James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine figs? Neither can salt water yield sweet.

CSB James 3:12 Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

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

NKJ James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

NRS James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

YLT James 3:12 is a fig-tree able, my brethren, olives to make? or a vine figs? so no fountain salt and sweet water is able to make.

NAB James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, produce olives, or a grapevine figs? Neither can salt water yield fresh.

NJB James 3:12 Can a fig tree yield olives, my brothers, or a vine yield figs? No more can sea water yield fresh water.

GWN James 3:12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree produce olives? Can a grapevine produce figs? In the same way, a pool of salt water can't produce fresh water.

BBE James 3:12 Is a fig-tree able to give us olives, my brothers, or do we get figs from a vine, or sweet water from the salt sea?

- **Can a fig tree:** Isa 5:2-4 Jer 2:21 Mt 7:16-20 Mt 12:33 Lu 6:43,44 Ro 11:16-18
- **Nor can salt water produce fresh.:** Ex 15:23-25 2Ki 2:19-22 Eze 47:8-11
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs?** - The rhetorical question calls for a reply of "Absolutely not!" Fig trees do not yield olives or vines figs. The point is that the type of fruit produced is determined by the species of tree. The type of "*fruit*" from one's mouth is determined by the condition of one's **heart**, good fruit of blessing from a redeemed, regenerate heart (See circumcision of heart), but rotten fruit of cursing from an unregenerate evil heart.

**Spurgeon** - It would be a monstrosity, a thing to be wondered at, and stared at as unnatural and absurd if a fig tree started bearing olive berries and it is just as unnatural for a Christian to live in sin. Can he so live as to bear the fruits of iniquity instead of the fruits of righteousness? God forbid that it should be so!

**Douglas Moo** - "As the fig tree cannot produce olives or the grapevine figs, so the pure heart cannot produce false, bitter, harmful speech."

**Can** (1410)(**dunamai**) means able to do something.

**Nor can salt water produce fresh** - James gives another impossibility. In spiritual terms, the only heart that can produce "pure" speech is one that is regenerated (born again) and "regulated" so to speak (filled with the Spirit).

Jesus gives us a good commentary on the illustrations of James declaring that...

A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit....So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Matt. 7:18, 20)

Similarly He said

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. (Mt 12:33)

What is James' point? He is implying that if we are genuine believers we should bring forth fruit or water (so to speak) that is consistent with our new birth and the new power of the indwelling Spirit to produce "good fruit" or "fresh water."

**Spurgeon** - Unless you are regenerated, born from above by a new and heavenly birth, you are not Christians, whatever you may be called, and you cannot, produce the fruit which is acceptable to God any more than a fig tree can produce olive berries

**Hiebert** observes that "James draws no stated conclusion from these illustrations. But the examples cited so obviously condemn man's inconsistency that no application is needed."

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**Warren Wiersbe** - The problem, of course, is not the **tongue**; it is the **heart**. It is easy to have "bitter envying and strife" in our hearts (James 3:14). "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man" (Matt. 15:18). "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). As we fill our hearts with God's Word, and yield to the Holy Spirit, He can use us to bring delight to others, and we will be refreshing fountains and trees. As I close this chapter, let me suggest that you start using the "Twelve Words That Can Transform Your Life." If you use these words and sincerely mean what you say from your heart, you will find that God will use you to be a blessing and encouragement to others. There are only twelve of them, but they work.

- **"Please" and "Thank you."** When you use these three words, you are treating others like people and not things. You are showing appreciation.
- **"I'm sorry."** These two words have a way of breaking down walls and building bridges.
- **"I love you."** Too many people read "romance" into these words, but they go much deeper than that. As Christians, we should love the brethren and even love our enemies. "I love you" is a statement that can carry tremendous power.
- **"I'm praying for you."** And be sure that you are. When you talk to God about people, then you can talk to people about God. Our private praying for people helps us in our public meeting with people. Of course, we never say "I'm praying for you" in a boastful way, as though we are more spiritual than others. We say it in an encouraging way, to let others know that we care enough for them to meet them at the throne of grace.

Yes, the smallest but largest troublemaker in all the world is the tongue. But it does not have to be a troublemaker! God can use our tongues to direct others into the way of life, and to delight them in the trials of life. The tongue is a little member, but it has great power. Give God your tongue and your heart each day and ask Him to use you to be a blessing to others. (Bible Exposition Commentary)

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**Don Anderson** - If our lives are under the control of the HOLY SPIRIT, the Spirit will produce within us TONGUE CONTROL as one

of the EVIDENCES OF HIS WORK. This truth is true throughout the epistle. If we are ever going to move forward toward MATURITY IN THE FAITH, it is going to be the HOLY SPIRIT...

- Who teaches us how to GROW TALLER THROUGH TESTING,
- Who is going to GIVE US VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION so that our growth is not stunted by sin,
- Who will GUIDE US INTO ALL TRUTH so growth will be produced by the Word,
- PRODUCING His fruitage of LOVE IN OUR LIVES that knows no discrimination
- working in lives that will PRODUCE DEEDS THAT MANIFEST A LIVING FAITH,
- and who ALONE CAN CONTROL THE TONGUE.

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#### Don Anderson's lessons from James 3:1-12

1. Our spiritual maturity is reflected by a controlled tongue.
2. We will be held accountable for our words at the Judgment seat of Christ.
3. The tongue can only reflect one nature at a time.
4. The Holy Spirit is the only One who can control the tongue.
5. Though little, the tongue can do extensive damage.

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**Illustration** from George Sweeting [Faith that Works](#) - Sweeting quotes a sportswriter who wrote this satirical description

I am more deadly than the screaming shell from the howitzer. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me, no purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea, and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is Gossip.

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#### Olives On A Fig Tree

Read: James 3:1-12

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. —James 3:10

When I became a Christian as a young teenager, I remember watching closely the men of our church. Most of them lived solid, consistent lives. They were good examples to a young person saved out of a non-Christian environment, and I owe them a debt of gratitude.

But one man in our church did not set a good Christian example, and he caused me great confusion. He was probably the most outspoken in expressing his commitment to the Lord. Not only did he give glowing testimonies, but he also collared people in the church and challenged them to a deeper spirituality and commitment.

Yet his speech was inconsistent. I remember that when he was a counselor at our youth camp he sometimes made off-color remarks. And on more than one occasion, as my Sunday school teacher, he made degrading comments about the pastor and others in the church. Once I even heard him use the Lord's name in vain.

The apostle James said that cursing is out of place in a Christian's life—like salt water in a freshwater spring or olives on a fig tree (Jas. 3:11-12). So let's control our tongues. Then we can be sure that what we say will be consistent and will bless others. By David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I do not ask for mighty words  
To leave the crowd impressed,  
But grant my life may ring so true  
My neighbor may be blessed.  
—Anon.

Children of the King should use the language of the court.

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**WHEN THE FIRE GOES OUT** - (Read Pr 26:17-28, 26:20) - When a fire finishes burning through the material it feeds on, it goes out. Similarly, when gossip reaches the ear of someone who will not repeat it, it dies. Gossip, like other sins, is like "dainty morsels" (Pr 26:22). We like to hear it and share it with others because it "tastes" good. **Gossip is rooted in our need to feel good about**



**ourselves.** As we bring others down, we gain the illusion that we are moving upward. That's why spreading gossip is so difficult to resist. It takes prayer and God's grace (**ED**: SEE [TONGUE CONTROL](#)) to bring us to the point where we refuse to pass it on or even hear it-even under the guise of personal concern or a request to pray for a sinning friend in trouble. We must ask God for the wisdom to know when to speak, what to speak, and when to simply keep our mouths shut. For "in the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). It is often wise to be quiet and speak few words. But if we must speak, let's talk of those things that encourage and move others closer to God, not those things that will discourage and hurt them. "The tongue of the wise promotes health" (Proverbs 12:18). -David Roper ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The tongue can spread suspicion,  
And reputations steal;  
But when the Lord controls our tongue,  
Its words will soothe and heal.  
-Sper

Destroy gossip by ignoring it.

**James 3:13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.**

Amplified Who is there among you who is wise and intelligent? Then let him by his noble living show forth his [good] works with the [unobtrusive] humility [which is the proper attribute] of true wisdom.

Phillips Are there some wise and understanding men among you? Then your lives will be an example of the humility that is born of true wisdom.

Wuest Who is wise and well informed among you? Let him demonstrate from the source of a good and beautiful manner of life his works in meekness, which [meekness] is characterized by wisdom.

NET James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct he should show his works done in the gentleness that wisdom brings.

GNT James 3:13 Τς σοφς κα πιστμων ν μν; δειξτω κ τς καλς ναστροφς τργα ατο ν πρατηι σοφας.

NLT James 3:13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.

KJV James 3:13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

ESV James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

ASV James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom.

CSB James 3:13 Who is wise and has understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness.

NIV James 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.

NKJ 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.

NRS James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.

YLT James 3:13 Who is wise and intelligent among you? let him shew out of the good behaviour his works in meekness of wisdom,

NAB James 3:13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show his works by a good life in the humility that comes from wisdom.

NJB James 3:13 Anyone who is wise or understanding among you should from a good life give evidence of deeds done in the gentleness of wisdom.

GWN James 3:13 Do any of you have wisdom and insight? Show this by living the right way with the humility that comes from wisdom.

BBE James 3:13 Who has wisdom and good sense among you? let him make his works clear by a life of gentle wisdom.

- **Who among you is wise** Jas 3:1 Ps 107:43 Ec 8:1,5 Jer 9:12,23 Mt 7:24 1Co 6:5 Ga 6:4
- **understanding**: 2Ch 2:12,13 Job 28:28 Isa 11:3 Da 2:21
- **Let him show**: Jas 2:18 Isa 60:6 2Co 8:24 1Pe 2:9
- **by his good behavior** : Php 1:27 1Ti 4:12 Heb 13:5 1Pe 2:12 3:1,2,16
- **gentleness of wisdom**: Jas 3:17 1:21 Nu 12:3 Ps 25:9 45:4 149:4 Isa 11:4 29:19 61:1 Zep 2:3 Mt 5:5 11:29 21:5 2Co 10:1 Ga 5:23 6:1 Eph 4:2 Col 3:12 1Ti 6:11 2Ti 2:25 Tit 3:2 1Pe 3:4,15
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### **The wisdom controlling the tongue (James 3:13–18)**

- 1. The challenge to the wise to show his wisdom** (James 3:13)
- 2. The evidence of false wisdom in control** (James 3:14–16)
  - a. The manifestation of this wisdom (James 3:14)
  - b. The character of this wisdom (James 3:15)
  - c. The outcome of this wisdom (James 3:16)
- 3. The evidence of the true wisdom in control** (James 3:17–18)
  - a. The characteristics of this wisdom (James 3:17)
  - b. The fruit of this wisdom (James 3:18) (Hiebert - James Commentary)

### **DEMONSTRATE THE WORKS OR FRUIT OF WISDOM**

Demonstrate your living faith by living with godly wisdom. Faith is demonstrated by works, and wisdom is demonstrated by **good behavior** and **gentleness**. In the preceding section James spoke of the importance of controlling one's tongue and now in James 3:13-18 speaks of the importance of controlling one's mind so to speak. And clearly what and how we think will influence what and how we speak.

While some writers feel James is speaking primarily to teachers (James 3:1), there is nothing in this section which indicates it would not also be applicable to all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. And so I agree with **John MacArthur's** analysis of James 3:13-18 - "Some interpreters believe the phrase who among you refers only to the teachers, or would-be teachers, addressed in James 3:1. But it seems more probable that, like the intervening section on the tongue (James 3:2-12), this section on wisdom (James 3:13-18) applies to everyone in the churches to whom James was writing, true believers and mere professed believers. James is seeking to identify who is truly skilled in the art of righteous living. "In what way are you **wise**?" he is saying, in effect, "and in what way are you **understanding**? **The answer will reveal not only your inner character but the spiritual condition of your soul.**" (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James) (Bold added)

**Ron Blue** ties James 3:13-18 with the section on the tongue James 3:1-12 - A key to right talk is right thought. The tongue is contained in a cage of teeth and lips, but it still escapes. It is not intelligence that keeps the lock on that cage; it is **wisdom**—a wisdom that is characterized by humility, grace, and peace. (BKC) (**ED**: wisdom and the "Restrainer," the Holy Spirit!)

**Stulac** explains James' question "For those who do not care about true wisdom but only want the status of being thought wise, the question is a challenge; James's answer will expose them for what they are. For those who honestly aspire to being wise, the question is an invitation; James's answer will divulge the way to attain their aspirations. James is saying, "I am about to tell you the nature of true wisdom; treasure this." Let all readers, then, first examine their own hearts before reading beyond the question posed in James 3:13. **Do you really want to be wise?** ([James 3](#) - IVP Commentary)

**Hiebert** on beginning with a question - The interrogative approach, with its personal appeal, aims at the conscience of each of his readers. His question does not imply that none is wise but challenges to self-examination those who rashly assume that they are. (Ibid)

**Steven Cole** says that in James 3:13-18 he is "showing us God's wisdom that will lead to harmonious relationships. He contrasts it

with worldly "wisdom" that inevitably leads to conflict. The things he writes here apply to harmonious relationships in the church, but also in our homes and in all of life. James is saying, For harmonious relationships, behave with godly wisdom, not with worldly "wisdom."...In typical fashion, James sets his trap and then springs it! He asks (3:13a), "Who among you is wise and understanding?" Perhaps some of the self-appointed teachers were thinking, "I'm glad that you recognize my talents!" Then in his no-nonsense style, James springs the trap (3:13b): "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." ([James 3:13-18 Wisdom for Harmonious Relationships](#))

**Who among you is wise and understanding?** - Robertson calls this a "rhetorical interrogative" (like Lk 11:11+). It is interesting that wisdom and understanding are a lot like faith which James described in James 2:14-26, because all three are basically invisible inner qualities which show themselves or prove themselves in one's actions or **behavior**. So even as James instructed us in how to discern whether one has genuine faith (by his works), in this section he tells us how to discern whether a person is truly **wise and understanding** by listing (and thereby contrasting) the traits one would expect to see associated with heavenly wisdom versus with earthly wisdom.

**Zodhiates** amplifies and interpretatively paraphrases James' question "Who among you has the Spirit of Christ in all His perfection? Who among you has the complete mind of God? Who among you has no will of his own, but has made God's will his very own? Who among you has made this attribute of God, wisdom, your attribute?" Is there any among us who can stand up and say, "Yes, James, I am wise"? No, at best we can only be philosophers, friends of wisdom. Wisdom, the wisdom of God, is not something that is acquired by man, but something that is bestowed by God upon His elect. **It is a divine endowment and not a human acquisition....**Therefore we Christians, who have accepted Christ as our Savior and who have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, are the only ones who can say that we are wise—not of ourselves, but because of the presence of God within us. We are wise because we have Him who is wise, and only in that sense can we answer James affirmatively. If the Lord Jesus Christ is a stranger to you, the best that you can hope for is to become a philosopher, like Socrates of old. But apart from Christ there is no wisdom. By accepting Him, however, you automatically perform an act of wisdom, and from that moment on you can be counted as wise, but be careful always to be conscious of the fact that it is not because of your merit or worthiness." ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**Wise** (4680)(**sophos**) is the practical application of acquired knowledge. Friberg says sophos generally describes "acquired intelligence characterized by the ability to use knowledge for correct behavior (1Cor 6:5)." **Sophos** is the opposite of **anoetos** which means without understanding or foolish. The Hebrew word **chokmah** corresponds to the Greek **sophos**. **Sophos** describes the ability to use knowledge for correct behavior (1Co 6:5). **Sophos** describes understanding that which results in wise conduct. Jesus uses **sophos** to describe worldly wisdom (Mt 11:25, cp Lk 10:21+, 1Cor 1:19-20), emphasizing that what the world refers to as "**wise**" does not allow one to see spiritual truth. In Ro 1:14+, Paul refers to the Greeks as the "**wise**" (although not in spiritual matters). Paul then refers to those who profess to be **wise**, (Ro 1:22+), who have jettisoned the clear evidence (Ro 1:19-20+) of the natural revelation of God (mocking the truth of a Creator and substituting the theory of Evolution). In contrast to the wisdom of fools, Paul exhorts believers at Rome to be **wise** in a godly sense, wise about spiritual truth and how to live in an evil world opposed to God (Ro 16:19+), referring to God Himself as **wise**. In First Corinthians Paul repeatedly denounces man's natural wisdom which is really not wisdom in spiritual and eternal matters. And so we see that "sophía, "wisdom," is never ascribed to anyone other than God or good men, except in an ironical sense, as for instance in 1 Corinthians 1:20." (Zodhiates) Paul writes

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the **wisdom of men**, but on the power of God. 6 Yet we do speak **wisdom** among those who are mature; a **wisdom**, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 **but we speak God's wisdom** in a mystery (THIS SPEAKS OF THE GOSPEL - THE FIRST DIVINE "WISDOM" THAT ONE MUST RECEIVE BEFORE HE CAN RECEIVE FURTHER DIVINE WISDOM! HAVE YOU BELIEVED IN **JESUS THE PERSONIFICATION OF WISDOM?** IF NOT YOU DO NOT KNOW TRUE WISDOM AND CAN NEVER ATTAIN IT!), the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; (1 Cor 2:3-7)

**Sophos** was a technical term for the teacher; in Jewish usage one who has a knowledge of practical moral wisdom resting on a knowledge of God and it was because of this association some commentators feel James is addressing primarily teachers, the ones who would be purveyors of wisdom. While this is possible, as noted above, these comments would be just a appropriate for all believers, whether they are teacher or not.

James 3:13 shows the practical aspect of wisdom by describing the one who is **wise** (godly wisdom) as demonstrating he is **wise** by his **good behavior**. And in Ephesians 5:15-16+ we see that the **wise** walk is a behavior that **redeems the time**, "buying up" every (spiritual) opportunity presented by God (Eph 5:16+). And as Paul goes on to explain in the following context (of Ephesians 5:15-18), God pleasing and God glorifying **wisdom** is revealed by godly living which is possible only in a person not be controlled by wine but continually controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18+).

**Understanding** (only here in NT)(1990)(**epistemon** from **epistamai** = to know thoroughly) means to be endowed with expert knowledge, understanding, expertise, knowledgeable, well-instructed, skilled (especially one having the knowledge of an expert). BDAG says **epistemon** pertains "to being knowledgeable in a way that makes one effectual in the exercise of such knowledge." In short **epistemon** describes one "who is expert, who has special knowledge and training." (Burdick)

**Zodhiates** adds that "The verb **epistamai** from which this participle is derived does not refer only to theoretical knowledge, but also to the doing of things. It is both the knowledge and practice of it. It is "to know how to do, to be able to do, to be capable of doing. James here refers to that which is learned from our fellowmen. After he has spoken of wisdom which comes from God, he wants to impress us with the fact that there are things that we can learn from others and put into practice. That makes up the total personality of the Christian....Let us not for one minute think that the wisdom of God and the knowledge of man, which of course has its origin in the mind which God created, cannot live harmoniously and that they are contradictory." ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**Gilbrant** - In both classical and Septuagintal usage *epistēmōn* means "knowing, wise, prudent," especially being acquainted with an area of skill. It was used of those versed in the sea, skilled in the building craft, or expert in evil. Doerksen says that it refers to a specialist, one possessing professional knowledge of a field (James, p.86). It is coupled with **sophia**, "wisdom," in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) in Deut 1:13,15; 4:6. The same pair appears in the only NT use of the word in James 3:13, where the writer exhorted those who claim the status of being wise and expert to display their virtues in behavior. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Epistemon** in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) - Deut. 1:13; Deut. 1:15; Deut. 4:6; Isa. 5:21; Dan. 1:4; Dan. 5:11; Dan. 6:3;

## ACTIONS AUTHENTICATE WORDS

**Robert Johnstone** - In substance the meaning is evidently this: **If there be truly wise and instructed men among you, they will prove their wisdom by a holy life—a life distinguished by Christian meekness (GENTLENESS).** But the first part of the sentence is thrown into the form of a question, the construction of the whole being similar to what we find, for example, in the thirty-fourth Psalm: **'Who is the man who desires life and loves length of days that he may see good?** (THE ANSWER = ) Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it. (Ps. 34:12–14). You feel that the interrogative mode of stating a [supposition](#) has a peculiar force in the discussion of morals, from its directness of appeal. ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#))

The true test of wisdom is works, not words.  
Curtis Vaughan

**Let him show** - If you claim to be wise, prove it! This recalls James 2:14-26 where one's "works"**show** or authenticate one's "faith" to be genuine. And so even in this section, James is insisting on proof of one's profession of belief in Christ. Through faith in Christ one gains access (so to speak) to divine wisdom, yea, even to "the Mind of Christ." (1 Cor 2:16+) So if you say you are wise and understanding, let's see it in your actions and attitude. And so James issues a command in [aorist imperative](#) which means "Do this now!" "Do not delay!" "Prove it now!" "Bring it to light, display it, exhibit it!" Not in a boastful sense of course, but in fact with a show of gentleness (many versions render it humility)!

**THOUGHT** - It is undoubtedly no coincidence that James uses the same verb (**Show** - **deiknuo** in [aorist imperative](#)) as well as **ergon** (works) in making a similar statement in James 2:18+ "**show** me your faith without the works (**ergon**), and I will show you my faith by my works(**ergon**)."  
So just as **works show faith** to be genuine, **good behavior shows wisdom** to be from above, heavenly, godly. If you have genuine faith and genuine heavenly wisdom, both will show forth in how you live! Too often we think of wisdom as something we simply possess in our minds, but James teaches us that wisdom is practical and is shown in our daily conduct. The begs the question - Does my daily conduct demonstrate that I am living my life energized by heavenly wisdom or earthly wisdom?

And as we have learned, none of the over 1600 NT commands can be successfully carried out in reliance on our own **natural** strength, but only in reliance on the **supernatural** strength provided by the Holy Spirit. It follows that James is addressing this to believers, for unbelievers lack the supernatural power to obey this command. Of course James may also be speaking to some individual who professed belief, but they would not be able to carry out this command (evidence that they were "professors" and not "possessors" of Christ). But how can believers carry out this command to show **good behavior**? The answer is the same way a believer is able to control their tongue -- it is by continually being **filled with** (controlled by) **the Spirit** (Eph 5:18+), continually **walking by the Spirit** (Gal 5:16+). If we attempt to accomplish this relying on our own natural strength, we are guaranteed to

experience futility and failure ("Why doesn't my Christian life work the way it should?"). In addition, if we deceptively think we can do this in our own strength, we end up putting a burden on ourselves, in effect falling into the subtle trap of **legalism**. And of course legalism will short circuit the flow of grace in our lives.

**Zodhiates** on **let him show** - Now do not merely say you are wise, but act it. Knowledge consisting of words is an earthen vessel full of holes. The visitor to an insane asylum will hear many professions of wisdom and knowledge. When one speaks of his wisdom and knowledge, it is a sure sign that he has little of either. As an Eastern proverb has it, "A gold vessel does not sound; a brass one does." And as Solomon says, "Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain" (Prov. 25:14). ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**Steven Cole** - True wisdom is based on knowledge, but it is more than knowledge. It is the ability to live in a manner pleasing to God because you understand His truth and you live in constant submission to His Spirit, applying that truth to all of life. ([James 3:13-18 Wisdom for Harmonious Relationships](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Discussion of the Need for the Holy Spirit to obey NT commands](#) ("How to Keep All 1642 Commandments in the New Testament!")
- [Filled with His Spirit/Richly Indwelt with His Word](#) - Chart Comparing

**By his good behavior** - Wuest has "a good and beautiful manner of life." As explained above, **good behavior** is ultimately **behavior** enabled by the Spirit of God (notice *God* is one letter short of *good*). And the fruit of this supernaturally enabled **good behavior** is **gentleness** one aspect of the **fruit of the Spirit** (Gal 5:23+), which further supports the premise that the only way to daily obey the command to **let him show** is by daily dependence on the Spirit. James makes the point that heavenly **wisdom** is not just what one **knows** (intellectual) but how one **lives** (behavioral).

**His deeds in the gentleness of wisdom** - NET renders it "**the gentleness that wisdom brings**." Thus we see that **gentleness** is a defining quality of godly **wisdom**, the "fruit" so to speak. It is **ironic** that James uses **gentleness** as a fruit of godly **wisdom** because the Greeks, who prized philosophical worldly wisdom (1 Cor 1:22), despised **gentleness** which they considered a weakness. Greeks and men in general who consider themselves to **be wise in their own eyes** (Pr 3:7, Pr 12:15, Pr 26:12, Pr 28:11, Isa 5:21), generally let you know it and thus show their "**wisdom**" by their arrogance, the **antithesis** of **gentleness**!

**Deeds** is **ergon** which is used 12x in James, most concentrated in the discussion of faith and works (ergon) - Jas. 1:4; Jas. 1:25; Jas. 2:14; Jas. 2:17; Jas. 2:18; Jas. 2:20; Jas. 2:21; Jas. 2:22; Jas. 2:24; Jas. 2:25; Jas. 2:26; Jas. 3:13;

So James gives us a practical description of a person who is **wise and understanding** -- he demonstrates it by his **good behavior and gentleness**.

**Robert Johnstone** says "'**Let him show**,' then, what? We expect 'his wisdom,' but the apostle expresses himself differently. He says, '**his works**,'—that is, '**his works as a wise man**,' or, substantially, '**the works or fruits of his wisdom**.' We have here again what may be described as **the central thought of this Epistle, that where religion has real saving hold of a mind and heart, it cannot from its nature but powerfully influence the outward life**; and that the more a Christian has of true wisdom and spiritual knowledge, the more manifestly will his life at all points be governed by his religion. **Talk of orthodoxy and Christian experience, however fluent and animated and clever, does not of itself prove wisdom; the really wise man will 'show his works.'** 'Out of a good conversation [CONDUCT],' James continues. ...'**Out of**' [BY - Greek = "ek"] here represents the same original particle which is rendered '**by**,' in '**I will show thee my faith by** [Greek = "ek"] **my works**' (James 2:18). The meaning seems to be similar, and the same translation would be clearer here: 'Let him show by a good course of life his works.' The '**works**' (**ergon**) here spoken of, and the '**good** (beautiful, noble)(**kalos**) **course of life**,' are the same, but looked at in different lights. The '**works**' are the separate acts of holiness, of godly earnestness and godly patience, which constitute the 'noble life,' and each such act, when we know it to be not isolated, but consistent with the whole life, is to be regarded as a new fruit and evidence of **wisdom**. We have here, you observe, the truth brought before us, that **genuine Christian wisdom**, whether it lead a man to become a teacher in the church or not, will, at all events, in all cases find expression through giving spiritual loveliness to the whole daily life. He is the wisest Christian, whether he occupy the **pulpit** or the **pew**,—he exhibits the most knowledge of God, and of himself, and of Christianity,—he shows the broadest and profoundest views of the philosophy of religion, of the chief end of man, and the way to obtain happiness,—who walks most closely with God, and is most perfectly changed into His likeness ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#)) (Bold added)

**Ronald Blue** succinctly states that **let him show** "is an original *"show and tell."* Wisdom is not measured by *degrees* but by *deeds*. It is not a matter of *acquiring truth* in lectures but of *applying truth* to life." (BKC)



**Let...show** (1166)(**deiknuo**) in this context means to show so as to prove something is true or to make clear by evidence or reasoning. To exhibit or present to the view of others. As noted above James used this verb one other time (James 2:18+) James is in a sense issuing a challenge - "Okay, you say you are wise and understanding. Now prove it to me by how you live" **MacArthur** adds that "As with faith (James 2:17+), **wisdom** and **understanding** that are not demonstrated in righteous, godly living are devoid of spiritual value."

**Zodhiates** amplifies what it means to **Let him show**, "If we tell people to try something that we have found wonderful and helpful, they may hesitate to do it unless they see it work in our lives. Then, even if we do not tell them to try it, they may want to do so anyway. The show window is important, but the storehouse is even more so. What use is it to attract people by word of mouth, if when they examine the heart they find it empty? A country merchant once visited New York. The thing that impressed him most was the magnificent and spotless show windows. On his return home he immediately cleaned up his unused show window and made it so attractive that he was soon doing nearly all the business in his town. Instead of failing in business, as he had at one time feared, he became the richest merchant of his country. The show window of the Christian is most important. It has to be attractive, but it must represent the truth; it must show that which can be produced in the storehouse. One of the hardest things for the Christian to do is to be truthful and honest in his showmanship, to let his tongue represent that which is in his heart. Thus the argument of James runs: Now you have stated to the world that you are wise, that you possess wisdom, namely, Jesus Christ and His Spirit. Then show it by your good conduct. A little girl in a Chinese village watched a missionary as he went about the Master's work. She saw him go to the homes where there were sickness, death, and sorrow, and she watched him as he moved about the village, though she never heard him speak in public. One day she went to another village and followed some girls into a mission school. There she heard a lady talking to them, in Chinese, about someone to whom little children came. One of the little girls asked the visitor, "Do you know who it was?" "Yes," she replied, "she was talking about the missionary who lives in our village." She had never heard about Jesus Christ, and when the teacher described the beautiful life of Jesus Christ, she thought she was describing the missionary. That is what the second meaning of the Greek word *deixátō*—"to show"—is, "to prove." James says, "prove" your wisdom and knowledge by exhibiting it without giving any credit to yourself. ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**THOUGHT** - This reminds me of Jesus' command to let our light shine in Matthew 5 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "**Let** your light **shine** ([aorist imperative](#)) before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Mt 5:14-16<sub>+</sub>) How is that little light of yours? Are you letting it shine? Are you living wisely before a foolish world? Can others see Jesus in you because of the gentleness and wisdom with which you conduct your life? May God's Spirit give you the desire and the power to redeem the time, the short time you have left to show forth the wisdom of Christ, for His glory, in His Name. Amen

**Good** (2570)(**kalos**) describes that which is inherently excellent or intrinsically good, providing some special or superior benefit. **Kalos** is good with emphasis on that which is beautiful, excellent, commendable, admirable. **Kalos** referred to that which was "morally beautiful" or noble and hence virtue was called "the good" (to kalon). James has 2 other uses of **kalos** - James 2:7 (**fair** name) and James 4:17 (**right thing**).

**Behavior** (conduct, lifestyle) (391)(**anastrophe** from **ana** = again + **strephe** = to turn) literally describes a turning around or turning back and is used figuratively of a turning here and there in the daily affairs of life, and thus refers to one's conduct, especially focusing on our daily behavior and our general deportment. **Anastrophe** is used of public activity, life in relation to others. Peter uses **anastrophe** to encourage the saints "keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your **good** (**agathos**) **behavior** (anastrophe) in Christ will be put to shame." (1 Pe 3:16<sub>+</sub>) Notice that the "good behavior" Peter describes is "**in Christ**," in His pattern, in His power, ultimately enabled by His Spirit, for there is no other way to carry out good behavior except to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16<sub>+</sub>).

**Hiebert** on **behavior** - His winsome daily conduct should demonstrate his possession of the needed practical insight and understanding to deal with the daily problems of life. "Not one's orthodoxy (right preaching) but one's orthopraxis (right living) is the mark of true wisdom." (Ibid)

**Max Anders** says the person with gentleness "is not a doormat for the desires of others, but (ED: ENABLED BY THE SPIRIT) controls and overpowers the natural human tendency to be arrogant and self-assertive....Even when you are involved in a disagreement, you must demonstrate a gentleness and kindness of attitude. You must banish all contentiousness and mutual accusation."

**Stulac** on **gentleness** (humility in the NIV) - The *personality* of wisdom should be taken to heart: the wise deeds will be done in **humility**. (**GENTLENESS**) Humility is the character trait underlying the Christian behavior described in the entire letter; this is the trait to cultivate if one would take James's teaching deeply into one's life (cf James 1:21<sub>+</sub>). James would have approved of what



Calvin wrote quoting Augustine, "When a certain rhetorician was asked what was the chief rule in eloquence, he replied, 'Delivery'; what was the second rule, 'Delivery'; what was the third rule, 'Delivery'; so if you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, 'Humility'" (*Institutes* 2. 2. 11). ([James 3](#) - IVP Commentary)

**Hiebert on gentleness** (meekness) - The meek man does not feel a need to contend for the recognition of his rights or acceptance of his personal views. His life will be characterized by modesty and unobtrusiveness. "This Christian meekness," Moo notes, "involves a healthy understanding of our own unworthiness before God and a corresponding humility and lack of pride in our dealings with our fellowmen." (Ibid)

Modesty is the badge of wisdom.

Matthew Henry

**Gentleness** (meekness, humility)([4240](#))([prautes](#) of closely related word [praus](#)) describes the quality of **NOT** being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance. It is not the modern concept of gentleness or meekness which associates a touch of passivity and weakness with these words! **Prautes** is a quality of gentle friendliness - strength under control (specifically the Holy Spirit's supernatural control), meekness (as strength that accommodates to another's weakness), restrained patience, patient trust in the midst of difficult circumstances. As discussed above **prautes** is one aspect of the **fruit of the Spirit** (Gal 5:23+). Here are all 11 uses of **prautes** in the NT - 1 Co. 4:21; 2 Co. 10:1; Gal. 5:23; Gal. 6:1+; Eph. 4:2+; Col. 3:12+; 2 Tim. 2:25+; Titus 3:2+; Jas. 1:21+; Jas. 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:15+. Notice that many of these passages describe gentleness as the virtue that should be exhibited by believers to other people and are thus good illustrations of "living wisely."

Of course the ultimate example of **gentleness** is Jesus Christ as Paul alluded to in 2 Cor 10:1 speaking of "the meekness ([prautes](#)) and gentleness ([epieikeia](#)) of Christ." Jesus Himself declared "I am **gentle** (related word [praus](#)) and humble in heart." (Mt. 11:29+) **Praus** is also used in the beatitude Mt 5:5+ "Blessed are the **gentle** ([praus](#)), for they shall inherit the earth." **Praus**, is also used in the Septuagint rendering of Numbers 12:3 "Now the man Moses was very **humble** ([praus](#)), more than any man who was on the face of the earth." Practically speaking, believers need to imitate Jesus' example of gentleness (cf 1 Cor 11:1) and the only way we can manifest gentleness like He being enabled by the Holy Spirit. For more on how to "imitate" Jesus see related discussion of [Walking Like Jesus Walked](#).

James used [prautes](#) earlier to describe "teachability"

"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in **humility** ([prautes](#)) receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." (James 1:21+)

The **Amplified Bible** has an interesting rendering of **prautes** as "[unobtrusive] humility [which is the proper attribute] of true wisdom."

**Robert Johnstone** - The apostle, having before his mind the angry, and turbulent, and arrogant spirit often exhibited by **professing Christians** who fancied themselves wise, and because they fancied themselves wise, gives prominence to that characteristic of true wisdom which is most directly opposed to this: '**Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom**,' or more exactly, **in wisdom's meekness**. **Meekness** is thus set before us as the disposition of heart in which alone men can show works of real Christian wisdom,—the element or atmosphere in which alone a truly good, noble, beautiful course of life can be maintained. This grace of '**meekness**'—freedom from the spirit of wrathfulness, revenge, sullenness, under any kind of trouble, and this with relation both to God and man—is **closely allied to humility, and patience, and love**. **I do not know that at any point the opposition between the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christ is more marked, more obviously diametrical, than with regard to this feature of character**. That 'the meek' should 'inherit the earth' (Mt 5:5+)—they that bear wrongs, and exemplify the love which 'seeketh not her own,' (1 Cor 13:5+)—to a world that believes in high-handedness and self-assertion, and pushing the weakest to the wall, a statement like this of the Lord from heaven cannot but appear an utter paradox. **The man of the world desires to be counted anything but 'meek' or 'poor in spirit,' and would deem such a description of him equivalent to a charge of unmanliness**. Ah, brethren, this is because we have taken in Satan's conception of manliness instead of God's. One Man has been shown us by God, in Whom His ideal of man was embodied; and He, 'when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously:' (1 Peter 2:23+) He for those who nailed Him to the tree prayed, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' (Lk 23:34+) The world's spirit of wrath, then, must be folly; whilst than a **spirit of meekness** (gentleness) like His (JESUS), in the midst of controversy, oppositions, trials of whatever kind, there can be no surer evidence that 'Jesus is made of God to His people wisdom.'[\(Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James\)](#)(Bold added)

**Zodhiates** - When everything goes wrong and troubles abound and the Christian can still go about his duties in life without revolting against God, against Wisdom, then he *is* possessed with this wonderful meekness of wisdom. Meekness of wisdom is accepting Wisdom's dealings with us without a murmur and without a sigh. It is that temper of spirit which at all times says, "Yes, Lord, Thou

knowest best." ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**Wisdom** (4678)(**sophia**) is the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. **Sophia** emphasizes understanding of ultimate things—such as life and death, God and man, righteousness and sin, heaven and hell, eternity and time. **Sophia** is mental excellence in its highest and fullest sense (Vincent, M. R. Word studies). **Sophia** is used frequently in the New Testament to describe the ability to discern and conform to God's will. James uses **sophia** 4x - Jas. 1:5+ - But if any of you lacks **wisdom**, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.; Jas. 3:13; Jas. 3:15; Jas. 3:17. A philosophy professor ended his letter with "*It just beats me. A doctor of philosophy and unable to solve my own troubles!*" May God enable all of His children to be *philósophos*, "**philosophers, lovers of wisdom**," not lovers of the world's wisdom but of God's heavenly wisdom, in Jesus' Name. Amen

#### Related Resource:

- [Wisdom - Chokmah - Hebrew Word Study](#)
- [Click for Commentaries on Proverbs](#)

Obviously for more on **wisdom** we would be wise to carefully read the "Wisdom Literature" especially Proverbs from which we have the following [hors d'oeuvres](#), so to speak (and as you read make a list of the advantages of wisdom)....

Proverbs 1:2-4 To know **wisdom** and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, 3 To receive instruction in **wise behavior**, Righteousness, justice and equity; 4 To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,

Proverbs 2:10-15 For **wisdom** will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, 12 To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; 13 From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness; 14 Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil; 15 Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways;

Proverbs 4:5-9 Acquire **wisdom**! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 "Do not forsake her, and she will **guard** you; Love her, and she will **watch** over you. 7 "The **beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom**; And with all your acquiring, get understanding. 8 "Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her. 9 "She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty."

Proverbs 9:10-12 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of **wisdom**, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 11 For by me your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you. 12 If you are **wise**, you are wise for yourself, And if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

## QUOTES ON WISDOM

Someone once quipped that "Wisdom is the quality that keeps you from getting into situations where you need it."

**J. I. Packer** said that "Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it."

**John Calvin** wrote that "True wisdom consists principally of two parts: the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves!

**Vance Havner** said "If you lack knowledge, go to school. If you lack wisdom, get on your knees! Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is proper use of knowledge."

**Adrian Rogers** said "Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's point of view."

"Wise people know how to learn; they never seek knowledge for their own sake. They know how to talk; they speak the truth in love. They know how to act; they pursue justice and evade evil. Perceptive people balance their words and actions. They say and do the right things at the right time for the right reasons. The discerning person soon realizes that biblical wisdom is more about practice than philosophy. Wise people live skillfully. They apply heavenly counsel to earthly conduct." (Today in the Word)

Wisdom and knowledge are two elements of human life which, though immaterial, are real and determine the use of the material tongue. Zodiaates

Wisdom is knowing when to speak your mind and when to mind your speech.

Knowledge leads us from the simple to the complex; wisdom leads us from the complex to the simple. Anon.

True wisdom is a divine revelation. George Barlow

Wisdom has never made a bigot, but learning has. Josh Billings

Wisdom gives a balance to character. John Blanchard

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. John Calvin

This is our wisdom, to be learners to the end. John Calvin

Wisdom is not the growth of human genius. It must be sought from above. John Calvin

The only way to know is to will to do God's will. Oswald Chambers

Knowledge is the fountain of wisdom. Stephen Charnock

Wisdom must be from God, because it can be found only in relation to him. Edmund P. Clowney

Humility is the hallmark of wisdom. Jeremy Collier

There is no solid wisdom but in true piety. John Evelyn

Wisdom and the will of God are intimately related ... Nothing is more vital for practical knowledge of the purpose of God than wisdom. Sinclair Ferguson

True wisdom is always humble. Richard Fuller

No man is really wise unless he lives in the will and for the glory of God. Geoffrey Grogan

It is better to get wisdom than gold. Gold is another's, wisdom is our own; gold is for the body and time, wisdom for the soul and eternity. Matthew Henry

Such is the degeneracy of human nature that there is no true wisdom to be found with any but those who are born again and who, through grace, partake of the divine nature. Matthew Henry

Unaided wisdom, with its strongest wing, can only flutter in the vale of vanity. No earth-born eye can catch a glimpse of God. Henry Law

The next best thing to being wise is to live in a circle of those who are. C. S. Lewis

Surely the essence of wisdom is that before we begin to act at all, or attempt to please God, we should discover what it is that God has to say about the matter. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones

Wisdom opens the eyes both to the glories of heaven and to the hollowness of earth. J. A. Motyer

Not until we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty ... acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours. J. I. Packer

The kind of wisdom that God waits to give to those who ask him is a wisdom that will bind us to himself. J. I. Packer

Wisdom is God-centred. Michael Parsons

Wisdom is always an overmatch for strength. Phaedrus

The greatest wisdom on this earth is holiness. William S. Plumer

Wisdom is the knowledge which sees into the heart of things, which knows them as they really are. J. Armitage Robinson

The desire of appearing to be wise often prevents our becoming so. Francois Rochefoucauld

Wisdom is to the mind what health is to the body. Francois Rochefoucauld

The wisest mind has something yet to learn. George Santanaya

If ... our wisdom has been acquired without any of that eagerness and painful diligence with which the covetous man desires and seeks for his riches, it is a shrewd conjecture that it is not of the genuine sort. Thomas Scott

Wisdom in ruling is justice; wisdom in speech is discretion; wisdom in conduct is prudence; wisdom in evaluation is discernment. George SeEVERS

Wisdom is easy to him that will understand. Richard Sibbes

To know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, is the highest principle and perfection of man. This attainment, infinitely above all others, constitutes true wisdom. Charles Simeon

Wisdom outweighs any wealth. Sophocles

We can be certain that God wants us to be wise, just as we are sure that he wants us not to sin. R. C. Sproul

Conviction of ignorance is the doorstep to the temple of wisdom. C. H. Spurgeon

The sublimity of wisdom is to do those things living which are to be desired when dying. Jeremy Taylor

The wisest person in the world is the person who knows the most about God. A. W. Tozer

It is a fact that those whose lives are daily being conformed to the Word and purposes of God will be given the ability to see issues more plainly. Malcolm Watts

If the Lord Jesus Christ is a stranger to you, the best you can hope for is to become a philosopher, like Socrates of old. But apart from Christ there is no wisdom. Spiros Zodhiates

The one who has wisdom in his head and heart does not need to shout at others. Spiros Zodhiates

Wisdom, the wisdom of God, is not something that is acquired by man, but something that is bestowed by God upon his elect. It is a divine endowment and not a human acquisition. Spiros Zodhiates

## WISDOM AND WISE IN PROVERBS

Note - These are in KJV but hold pointer over reference for NASB

Because of the length of some of the sections, some have merely been introduced (Proverbs 1:20-33 below).

- "To know wisdom" (Proverbs 1:2).
- "To receive instruction in wise dealing" (Proverbs 1:3).
- "That the wise man may hear, and increase in learning" (Proverbs 1:5).
- "To understand... the words of the wise, and their dark sayings" (Proverbs 1:6).
- "The foolish despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7).
- "Wisdom crieth aloud in the street..." (Proverbs 1:20-33).
- "Incline thine ear unto wisdom" (Proverbs 2:2).
- "Jehovah giveth wisdom" (Proverbs 2:6).
- "He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright" (Proverbs 2:7).
- "Wisdom shall enter into thy heart... To deliver thee from the way of evil... To deliver thee from the strange woman (Proverbs 2:10-16).
- "Be not wise in thine own eyes" (Proverbs 3:7).
- "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom..." (Proverbs 3:13-18).
- "Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth..." (Proverbs 3:19,20).
- "Keep sound wisdom and discretion" (Proverbs 3:21).
- "The wise shall inherit glory" (Proverbs 3:35).
- "Get wisdom... Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom... Exalt her, and she will promote thee..." (Proverbs 4:5-9).
- "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom" (Proverbs 4:11).
- "My son, attend unto my wisdom..." (Proverbs 5:1,2).

- "Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister" (Proverbs 7:4).
- "Doth not wisdom cry, And understanding put forth her voice?... " (Proverbs 8:1-12).
- "Wisdom hath builded her house..." (Proverbs 9:1-5).
- "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser" (Proverbs 9:9).
- "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10).
- "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself" (Proverbs 9:12).
- "A wise man maketh a glad father" (Proverbs 10:1).
- "The wise in heart will receive commandments" (Proverbs 10:8).
- "In the lips of him that hath discernment wisdom is found" (Proverbs 10:13).
- "Wise men lay up knowledge" (Proverbs 10:14).
- "The mouth of the righteous bringeth forth wisdom" (Proverbs 10:31).
- "He that is wise winneth souls" (Proverbs 11:30).
- "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom" (Proverbs 12:8).
- "He that is wise hearkeneth unto counsel" (Proverbs 12:15).
- "The tongue of the wise is health" (Proverbs 12:18).
- "A wise son heareth his father's instruction" (Proverbs 13:1).
- "With the well-advised is wisdom" (Proverbs 13:10).
- "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, That one may depart from the snares of death" (Proverbs 13:14).
- "Walk with wise men, and thou shalt be wise" (Proverbs 13:20).
- "Every wise woman buildeth her house" (Proverbs 14:1).
- "The lips of the wise shall preserve them" (Proverbs 14:3).
- "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way" (Proverbs 14:8).
- "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil" (Proverbs 14:16).
- "The crown of the wise is their riches" (Proverbs 14:24).
- "Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding" (Proverbs 14:33).
- "The king's favor is toward a servant that dealeth wisely" (Proverbs 14:35).
- "The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright" (Proverbs 15:2).
- "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge" (Proverbs 15:7).
- "A wise son maketh a glad father" (Proverbs 15:20).
- "To the wise the way of life goeth upward, That he may depart from Sheol beneath" (Proverbs 15:24).
- "The ear that hearkeneth to the reproof of life Shall abide among the wise" (Proverbs 15:31).
- "A servant that dealeth wisely shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, And shall have part in the inheritance among the brethren" (Proverbs 17:2).
- "Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding" (Proverbs 17:24).
- "The wellspring of wisdom is as a flowing brook" (Proverbs 18:4).
- "He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul" (Proverbs 19:8).
- "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, That thou mayest be wise in thy latter end" (Proverbs 19:20).
- "When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise" (Proverbs 21:11).
- "When the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge" (Proverbs 21:11).
- "There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise" (Proverbs 21:20).
- "A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, And bringeth down the strength of the confidence thereof" (Proverbs 21:22).
- "Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise" (Proverbs 22:17).
- "Buy the truth, and sell it not; Yea, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23).
- "Through wisdom is a house builded" (Proverbs 24:3).
- "A wise man is strong" (Proverbs 24:5).
- "By wise guidance thou shalt make thy war" (Proverbs 24:6).
- "Wisdom is too high for a fool: He openeth not his mouth in the gate" (Proverbs 24:7).
- "So shalt thou know wisdom to be unto thy soul; If thou hast found it, then shall there be a reward, And thy hope shall not be cut off" (Proverbs 24:14).
- "Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father" (Proverbs 29:3).
- "Scoffers set a city in a flame; But wise men turn away wrath" (Proverbs 29:8).
- "If a wise man hath a controversy with a foolish man, Whether he be angry or laugh, there will be no rest" (Proverbs 29:9).
- "A fool uttereth all his anger; But a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it" (Proverbs 29:11).
- "The rod and reproof give wisdom" (Proverbs 29:15).

William James Sidis was born in 1898 with an IQ of 250. He could read by the age of 2 and was composing original works in French by age 4. At age 12, he entered Harvard University in a program for gifted students. However, Sidis lived the remainder of his life quietly in a series of obscure mechanical jobs. Newspapers reported that the boy genius “did not want to think.” Some say Sidis’s retreat from public attention was intentional—he wanted to live a normal life.

James begins this section by asking a rhetorical question: “Who is wise and understanding among you?” (v. 13). The passage goes on to expound on this challenging question, for who among us would go so far as to label themselves as a “genius” like Sidis or “wise” according to James?

It is important to note, though, that James is distinguishing between two different types of wisdom: earthly and heavenly. Earthly wisdom is often associated with qualities like mental ability. In Scripture, the “wise” (from the Greek word *sophia*) were often teachers.

Intellectual ability, in and of itself, is of course not inherently evil. But relying on our own intelligence, uninformed by God, can lead to “selfish ambition” and “bitter envy” (v. 14). James warns that such so-called “wisdom” is not from God, but rather is earthly and unspiritual (v. 15).

Heavenly wisdom distinguishes itself by a discretion and sensitivity that comes from God. It is distinguished by a life well lived. It has an attitude of humility (v. 13). Such wise people will surely know how to control their tongue (as noted earlier in this chapter). They will not boast (v. 14).

A host of positive qualities follow true heavenly wisdom. It is pure. The word pure here denotes purity of heart and intent. It arises from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. True wisdom loves peace. It is “considerate, submissive, full of mercy, and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (v. 17). This wisdom does not require a high IQ or a great SAT score. It comes from a rebirth of our hearts and spirit to a life truly taken captive by God.

**APPLY THE WORD** - It is easy to turn to “smart” friends to solve problems or to rely on our own know-how. We have a tendency to solve our problems on our own. Today’s passage encourages us to turn to the only source of true wisdom: God. On this day of Thanksgiving, pray to the God of all wisdom. Thank Him for His heavenly wisdom that seeks truth and promotes peace. Thank Him for His help in all times of need.

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### **Wisdom From Heaven - Theodore Epp**

James 3:13-18

It is significant that the characteristics James first listed for godly wisdom are purity and peaceableness. These two have an important relationship. An individual is made pure through faith in Jesus Christ, and this establishes peace between God and himself. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Once this peace has been established through a vertical relationship between the believer and God, the believer will then have a basis on which to establish peaceful horizontal relationships with his fellowmen.

James also said that the wisdom that is from above is “gentle” (James 3:17), so each believer should reflect this gentleness in his life. Paul told Timothy--and all believers “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men” (2 Tim. 2:24). Titus 3:2 sounds a similar note: “To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.”

A wise person is tender and full of mercy and sympathy. Such a person shows compassion, or pity, for the less fortunate. This was emphasized by James when he said, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever” (Ps. 111:10).

**James 3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.**



Amplified But if you have bitter jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry, selfish ambition) in your hearts, do not pride yourselves on it and thus be in defiance of and false to the Truth.

Phillips But if your heart is full of rivalry and bitter jealousy, then do not boast of your wisdom - don't deny the truth that you must recognise in your inmost heart.

Wuest But if, as is the case, you are having bitter jealousy and contentiousness in your heart, stop boasting and lying against the truth.

NET James 3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfishness in your hearts, do not boast and tell lies against the truth.

GNT James 3:14 ε ὁ ζῶν πικρὸν χετέ καὶ ριθεῖν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ κατακαυχῶσθε καὶ ψεῦδεσθε κατὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

NLT James 3:14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.

KJV James 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

ESV James 3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

ASV James 3:14 But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not and lie not against the truth.

CSB James 3:14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and deny the truth.

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

NKJ James 3:14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

NRS James 3:14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.

YLT James 3:14 and if bitter zeal ye have, and rivalry in your heart, glory not, nor lie against the truth;

NAB James 3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

NJB James 3:14 But if at heart you have the bitterness of jealousy, or selfish ambition, do not be boastful or hide the truth with lies;

GWN James 3:14 But if you are bitterly jealous and filled with self-centered ambition, don't brag. Don't say that you are wise when it isn't true.

BBE James 3:14 But if you have bitter envy in your heart and the desire to get the better of others, have no pride in this, talking falsely against what is true.

- **if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition:** Jas 3:16 4:1-5 Ge 30:1,2 37:11 Job 5:2 Pr 14:30 27:4 Isa 11:13 Hab 1:3 Mt 27:18 Ac 5:17 7:9 13:45 Ro 1:29 13:13 1Co 3:3 13:4 2Co 12:20 Ga 5:15,21,26 Php 1:15 2:3 1Ti 6:4 Tit 3:3 1Pe 2:1,2
- **do not be arrogant:** Ro 2:17,23-29 1Co 4:7,8 5:2,6 Ga 6:13
- **and so lie against the truth** 2Ki 10:16,31 Joh 16:2 Ac 26:9
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## WORLDLY WISDOM IDENTIFIED BY...

**But** - Term of contrast. Now James contrasts false wisdom (James 3:14-16) with true (godly) wisdom he has just exhorted his readers to demonstrate through his works out of good behavior and gentleness of wisdom. He will conclude his discussion of true wisdom in James 3:17-18. **John Phillips** adds that "the negative accentuates the positive. A dark piece of velvet best reveals the glory of the diamond. The bad behavior of Judah enhances the good behavior of Joseph (Gen. 38-39). Similarly, James produces four exhibits of things that negate wisdom." (Ibid)

**MacArthur** - The wisdom that is of the world, that is based on man's own understanding, standards, and objectives, is false and ungodly. In false wisdom, man is supreme. False wisdom does not recognize God's sovereignty, God's will, or God's truth. In these

three verses James briefly discusses the motivation (James 3:14), the characteristics (James 3:15), and the results (James 3:16) of false wisdom. (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James)

**If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart** - Recall that godly wisdom is associated with **gentleness** or meekness, but now James presents a diametrically opposite picture of the attitudes in the hearts of those with ungodly wisdom. It is interesting that powerthesaurus.org lists the following words as the antonyms of **gentleness** - [acrimony](#) (rough and bitter manner), harshness, bitterness, sharpness, narcissism, unkindness, animosity, anger. This is some of the rotten fruit of worldly wisdom. So in this sentence James uses a first class conditional statement which assumes that some of his readers were harboring **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** in their **heart**. James was not addressing a hypothetical situation that might arise in the future, but rather a real situation that already existed. **Have** ([echo](#)) is in the [present tense](#) indicating they were doing so as their habitual practice (even believers wrestle with these sins from time to time but not all the time). Notice the source of the sins - it is the **heart**. Jesus taught that "**out of the heart** come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." (Mt 15:19) The sinful traits of **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** are sure marks of a life dominated by worldly wisdom.

**Swindoll** says **bitter jealousy** "likely refers to jealousy that harbors hard feelings. A jealous person has full hands but feels his or her own belongings or accomplishments are threatened by another's success. This first vice usually accompanies the second: **selfish ambition**. The heart of an unwise person carries an insatiable hunger to push himself or herself to the top."

**Tommy Hagle** says **bitter jealousy** "refers to an envy that leads to anger and resentment. People with *bitter envying* may be intelligent, talented, and educated, but they resent anyone who appears to threaten their territories or careers (Journey into Faith That Works: A Study of James)

**John Phillips** on **bitter jealousy** - To have "bitter envying" in one's heart toward a wiser, more gifted, and more successful brother is the very opposite of wisdom. It leads the envious person to do and say things that are mean-spirited and contrary to the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. (Ibid)

**Master's Bible Church** - "Bitter jealousy" is the mindset that this world is all there is, so I covet as much of it as I can get. And if you get more of it than I do, I'm going to resent you w/ feelings that are cruelly uncaring. While the truly wise set their minds on the things above, not on thing of the earth (Col 3:2), the earthly wise "set their minds on earthly things" (Phil 3:19). But ultimately, their minds are set on themselves, & the things they want are really just offerings to the false god of self. So, there is no room in their hearts to love others, nor for the gentleness of true wisdom. And woe to anyone who accumulates more of this world's things than they have.

**Bitter** ([4089](#)) (see above for [pikros](#)) means sharp, prickly, pointed, piercing, pungent as that which sharply "pierces" or penetrates one's senses, used literally in James 3:11 of bitter water. A disposition described as **bitter** leaves one's heart with an unpleasant sensation, as our tastebuds react to a bitter substance in the mouth. **Pikros** is used here to describe **jealousy** as **bitter**. "In James 3:11 the adjective was used literally of "salt" or bitter water; here the usage is figurative, to denote a bitter or harsh attitude." (Hiebert) **Jealousy** would be bad enough, but here James says this **jealousy** is bitter which gives us the picture of resentful, harsh, sharp, cutting, piercing. Stulac says "The adjective **pikros** ("bitter") describes a harsh stance of demanding to be recognized as wise, instead of being willing to learn." **Courson** - Come to terms with the fact that if your words are **bitter**, it's because your heart is bitter. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Bitter words come from a bitter heart. (Jon Courson's Application Commentary New Testament)

**MacArthur** explains that "Those whose lives are based on and motivated by human, ungodly wisdom are inevitably self-centered, living in a world in which their own personal ideas, desires, and standards are the measure of everything. Whatever and whoever serves those ends is considered good and friendly; whatever and whoever threatens those ends is considered bad and an enemy. Those who are engulfed in self-serving worldly wisdom resent anyone or anything that comes between them and their own objectives." (Ibid)

**Rod Mattoon** - The word "**bitter**" is from the Greek word **pikros** which can also mean "harsh." It is derived from a Greek root word which means "to cut, prick, pierce, or fasten together." When someone gets bitter, they pierce themselves and build up or fasten together hate for someone else. The biggest loser of your hatred and jealousy is you. Two men were envious and covetous. Their ruler summoned them to grant them one wish. The first man to choose would get his wish, but the other man would get double of the first wish. The envious man spoke up first and asked that one of his eyes be put out. The other man lost both of his eyes. Envy and bitterness hurts you as well as others....**Do you rejoice when others succeed or do you have a secret envy, bitterness, and criticalness in your heart? If so, you have the wits of a withering world.** (Treasures from James)

**Hiebert** - Since the reference seems to be to a religiously motivated feeling, "bitter zeal" or "harsh zeal" seems the best rendering. Religious zeal or "enthusiasm" for God and truth is a commendable attitude, but the subtleties of sinful human nature can readily pervert it into bitter antagonism against those who do not express their adherence to God and His truth in the same way we do. (Ibid)

**Jealousy** (2205)(**zelos** from **zeo** = to be hot, boil) was originally a good word which described fervour or zeal in advancing a cause (cf Ro 10:2) or in rendering service. Notice that "zeal" is related to fire (to be hot, to boil), so if the fire (zeal) burns under control, the results are good and God honoring. But if zeal gets out of control, it can reduce everything to ashes (so to speak). Clearly in James 3:14 **zelos** is used with the negative nuance describing an unholy zeal (as in Acts 5:17+, Acts 13:45, Ro 13:13, 1 Co. 3:3, 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20). This negative connotation describes envy of someone else's possessions, achievements, or advantages. It describes the spirit which cannot be content with what it has and looks with a jealous eye on every blessing given to someone else and denied to itself. **Zelos** describes wanting what belongs to someone else without regard for their rights. **Ropes** defines it as "a fierce desire to promote one's own opinion to the exclusion of those of others."

**Lenski** adds that **zelos** "is not as narrow as our "jealousy" but as broad as *overzealousness* in any matter for which one contends; hence "**bitter**" is appended and is to be understood in the sense in which **pikros** is used in James 3:11, offensive, unpalatable to all who come in contact with this fanatic zeal. "**Bitter**" indicates the effect produced on others."

**THOUGHT** - Wiersbe applies the ruth about jealousy (zeal) with several pithy questions - Is our zeal for the Lord spiritual or carnal? Do we rejoice when others succeed, or do we have secret envy and criticism? Do we feel burdened when others fail, or are we glad? When the wisdom of the world gets into the church, there is a great deal of fleshly promotion and human glorification. Beware!

**Douglas Moo** - Some who pride themselves on their wisdom and understanding are displaying a jealous, bitter partisanship that is the antithesis of the meekness produced by true wisdom. (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – James)

**Burdick** says **selfish ambition** speaks "of a self-seeking attitude bent on gaining advantage and prestige for oneself or one's group." It is a desire for personal glory.

**Selfish ambition** ("party spirit" - used again in James 3:16)(2052)(**eritheia** from **eritheuō** = to spin wool thus working for personal gain) means self seeking, strife, contentiousness, extreme selfishness, rivalry, one who seeks only his/her own. In its only pre-New Testament occurrences (in Aristotle), **eritheia** refers to the selfish ambition, the narrow partisan zeal of factional, greedy politicians, so this word may also convey the notion of rivalry, party-spirit, or factiousness. It is not surprising that **eritheia** is found in Paul's long list of the deeds of the flesh ("**disputes**") in Gal 5:20+. **Eritheia** describes personal gratification and self-fulfillment at any cost, which are the ultimate goals of all fleshly endeavors. The word suggests the vice of a leader who creates a party for his own pride: it is partly ambition, partly rivalry. **Eritheia** has no room for others, much less genuine humility. It is that ultimate self-elevation rampant in the world today which is the antithesis of what the gentle, humble, selfless, giving, loving, and obedient child of God is called to be in Christ and only possible in the power of His Spirit.

**Hiebert** adds that "The basic thought of **eritheia** seems to be that of one who, for personal advantage, works to promote a definite cause in an unethical manner. It thus denotes a party spirit, or factiousness....Thus it denotes a willingness "to use unworthy and divisive means" to promote one's own views or interest. It is a temper tragically injurious to Christian fellowship." (Ibid)

**Mattoon** on **eritheia** - The Greeks used this word to describe a politician that was out canvassing for votes at any cost. He would do anything to get people on his side. Unfortunately, there are people that creep into the church and do this among God's people in order to have their way in the church. The spirit of self-seeking creates rivalry and division in the church and the home. When a person is concerned about demoting others, understand he is also concerned with the promotion of himself. He has the wits of a withering world. Paul tells us what attitude we are supposed to have in our lives. - "Do nothing from **selfishness** (**eritheia**) or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." (Php 2:3+) Paul used **eritheia** again in Philippians writing "The former (Php 1:15+ "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife") proclaim Christ out of **selfish ambition** (**eritheia**) rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. (Php 1:17+)"

**Lenski** adds that **eritheia** "derived from **eritheuō**, to work for wages as a mercenary, and hence = *Lohnsucht*, the selfish spirit that seeks its own will and advantage. "Selfishness" seems to be the best translation or "self-interest," which terms bring out the personal motive of the heart.

**Vincent** says **eritheia** can "be applied to those who serve in official positions for their own selfish interest, and who, to that end, promote *party spirit and faction*."

**ESV Study Bible** on **selfish ambition** - "Selfish ambition" is a divisive willingness to split the group in order to achieve personal power and prestige (it is translated "rivalry" in Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:17; 2:3).

**MacArthur** on **selfish ambition** - It was used of personal gratification and self-fulfillment at any cost, which are the ultimate goals of all fleshly endeavors. It has no room for others, much less genuine humility. It is that ultimate self-elevation rampant in the world today which is the antithesis of what the humble, selfless, giving, loving, and obedient child of God is called to be. (Ibid)

**Utley** on **selfish ambition** - It refers to an egotistical, jealous ambition—"my way or no way"—among leaders.

**Life Application Study Bible**. - **Bitter jealousy** and **selfish ambition** are inspired by the devil. It is easy for us to be drawn into wrong desires by the pressures of society and sometimes even by well-meaning Christians. By listening to the advice: "Assert yourself," "Go for it," "Set high goals," we can be drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness. Seeking God's wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves to others and to want what they have.

**New Testament for Everyone** – What he is talking about is 'bitter jealousy and contention', a spirit which is always carping and criticizing, which cannot let a nice word go by without adding a nasty one, to take the taste away (as it were). (The Early Christian Letters for Everyone)

**In your heart** (**kardia** - used in Jas. 1:26; Jas. 3:14; Jas. 4:8; Jas. 5:5; Jas. 5:8)- James is reminding his readers the problem is not external but internal. The **heart** is a person's "control center" so to speak. The **heart** is the "real" fountain of James 3:11 that brings forth bitter water! The heart of the problem is the heart. "James reminds his readers that "no loud and pretentious claim to the possession of 'wisdom' could avail while 'out of the heart proceeded evil things.'" (cf. Mt. 15:19-20)." (Hiebert)

For believers we need to heed the command from Solomon (which he himself did NOT heed!)

**Watch** over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life. (Pr 4:23)

**Robert Johnstone** - James probes here to the quick for the patient's good. He tears off the tissue of plausibilities (zeal for God's glory, ardour on behalf of truth, and the like), in which an envenomed, arrogant, bigoted spirit often enwraps itself, and lays bare the moral deformity and defilement—"bitter envying and strife." We have not here the pleasant 'water of life' (the image of the twelfth verse is perhaps still in the apostle's mind), but 'bitter waters' of hatred. 'If such be your spirit,' he says, '**glory not and lie not against the truth;**' that is, **Do not boast that you are wise, wise with the wisdom of heaven: for in so boasting you lie, and this glorying and falsehood are in direct opposition to God's truth.** The Gospel of Christ' (for this is what is here, as so often in the New Testament, meant by '**the truth**') 'has for its spirit love, meekness, longsuffering; and thus the wisdom which Christ gives through that truth reveals itself in these graces: if ye, then, have in your hearts envy, and self-seeking, and contentiousness, to boast of these as being His wisdom is to lie against Him and His truth.' The statement that to give the name of Christian wisdom to a condition of mind and heart such as has been described in the first clause of the fourteenth verse, is 'to boast and lie against God's truth,' is supported and illustrated in the two verses that follow. (James 3:15, 16) ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#))(Bold added)

**Do not be arrogant...lie** - James issues two commands both [present imperative with a negative](#), which means stop an action already in progress or do not let it begin. And if one is unable to obey this command and instead continually exhibits a persistent attitude of arrogance, this person is not a believer!

**Zodhiates** - We all know that this business of pushing oneself forward in the political arena has as its by-product pushing down someone else, someone who is running the race with us. That is the real meaning of the word in the original Greek, *katakauchásthē*. It is glorying that one has been able to get up to the top in a manner that is not exactly honest, boasting that one is there because he deserves to be there and that he is enjoying the favor of God, but also that his opponent was defeated because he is not as good as oneself. During the political race, this politician has really brought out everything that he could to convey a bad impression in the minds of others about his rival, and now that he has succeeded, he is giving him a bath in muck. Such behavior is unthinkable to the wise Christian. If a man claims he is wise and acts in this manner described by James, he is surely not living up to his profession of faith, nor is he wise. A United States President asked a certain general a question about another officer. Overhearing his reply (which praised the other), a friend approached him afterwards and said, "General, do you know that the man of whom you spoke is one of your bitterest enemies and misses no opportunity to malign you?" "Yes," replied the officer, "but the President asked my opinion of him; he did not ask for his opinion of me." We Christians will do very well to imitate this large-hearted general. ([Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James](#))

**Hiebert** says **be arrogant** (*katakauchaomai*) "conveys the picture of gloating over another on the ground of assumed superiority. It thus denotes "the malicious triumphing at the least point of vantage gained by one party" over its opponents in their disputes. It was the natural fruit of their bitter zeal and party spirit. In 2:13, James used the verb of the triumph of mercy over strict justice in the coming judgment; here the picture relates to the triumph of arrogant pride over others in the interactions of daily life." (Ibid)

**Be arrogant** (2620) (*Katakauchaomai* from *kata* = against + *kauchaomai* = to boast) means to boast against. The basic idea is of exulting in being able to prevail over something or someone else, boasting in one's self to the injury of another person or thing. It means "to boast about something by downgrading something else." (Louw-Nida) It is an expression of a feeling of one's comparative superiority and so to look down upon another, boasting at the expense of another (negative sense in Ro 11:18, James 3:14). The force of *katakauchaomai* is to brag about oneself in comparison with others. The meaning is clearly illustrated by an inscription on

a grave in Asia Minor. The monument cites a gladiator as he gloats over a defeated foe. Katakouchaomai emphasizes one's superiority over others with whom one is being compared (Bauer).

**Mattoon** - When God's wisdom is at work, there is a sense of humility and submission. The person wants the Lord to be glorified. When the person is boastful, he wants to be glorified. His attitude is "It's my life and I want my way." If you do service for the glory of God, you won't get offended if you don't get recognized or patted on the back. (Mattoon's Treasures – Treasures from James)

**Ronald Blue** - A truly wise person does not seek glory or gain; he is gracious and giving.

**And so lie against the truth** - This is an interesting statement because most lies are "against the truth." James is not saying so much that you are to stop speaking lies, but that you are to stop living a lie, for your conduct which should be "**good**" is "evil" and this is in effect a "**lie**" about who you are professing to be. One writer has "claiming to be wise when in truth one is foolish" and another "your profession therefore is a lie." Saying that one has godly wisdom is not the same as having it -- objective standards of judgment must be applied. Truth is not just doctrinal knowledge, but also godly living.

**Guzik on lie against the truth** - Anyone who shows bitter envy and self-seeking should not deceive anyone – especially themselves – about how wise they are. They show a wisdom that is earthly, sensual, and demonic. Their wisdom is more characteristic of the world, the flesh, and the devil than of God. (Ibid)

As **MacArthur** says "if a person claims to belong to God and to have the wisdom of God, but his life is motivated and characterized by **selfish ambition and bitter jealousy**, he is simply lying **against the truth**. Whatever he might claim, he cannot be saved. He is a living **lie**."

**Do not...lie** (5574)(**pseudomai** from **pseudo** = to cheat, defraud, falsify) means to communicate what is false, with the evident purpose of misleading. The Greek term and the English equivalent 'to lie' involve more than simply telling what is not true, for this could occur without an intent to deceive or mislead. **Pseudomai** means means to tell a falsehood, attempt to deceive by lying, to speak falsely or deceitfully. **Pseúdomai** therefore involves not only the communication of a falsehood but also the intent to deceive.

**Truth** (225)(**aletheia**) has the literal sense of that which contains nothing hidden. **Aletheia** is that which is not concealed, but instead is is that which is seen or expressed as it really is. Several writers favor the meaning of **the truth** to be the Gospel which as Christians they professed to accept and promote.

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**Bitterness** - Bitterness can be like a winter storm blowing in from the north. At first the signs are subtle, but soon bitterness swirls into a blizzard of complaints, unforgiveness, depression, sustained grief, hopelessness, and rage against God. Most people have great difficulty admitting that they are bitter. They say words like "I'm not bitter, but I just can't forgive him!" or "I'm not angry, but it's just not fair." Bitterness is buried anger that has become frozen in resentment. Like a chain that ties us to the past, we carry unresolved anger in our hearts wherever we go. (June Hunt)

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**Jealousy** - The very nature of jealousy is to turn on those who harbor it; and it will ultimately destroy them. The Old Testament word for jealousy means "to burn or to inflame"—an apt description of what goes on inside the person who allows jealousy to smolder.

A legendary Burmese potter became jealous of the prosperity of a washerman. Determined to ruin him, the potter induced the king to issue an order requiring the man to wash one of his black elephants white. The washerman replied that according to the rules of his vocation he would need a vessel large enough to hold the elephant, where-upon the king commanded the jealous potter to provide one. Though carefully fashioned, it crumbled to pieces beneath the weight of the giant beast. He made many more vessels, but each was crushed in the same way. Eventually the potter was ruined by the very scheme he had devised to defame the man he envied.

In a similar way, Saul's jealousy eventually caused his own destruction.

In Proverbs 6:27 we read, "Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" The coals of jealousy quickly become a raging fire that will burn us severely. Unless we douse it with confession and repentance, it will eventually consume us. —Paul R VanGorder ([Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

As a moth gnaws a garment, so jealousy consumes a man.

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**James 3:14** - Inequality seems to cause jealousy. When we see someone with more wealth than we have or with qualities we lack, we become jealous.

While recording interviews for a radio program, I asked people on the street in New York City if they believed all men are created



equal. Most of them answered no. They cited our differing abilities, appearances, and environments. One man complained that he had to eat hotdogs for lunch while others ate in fancy restaurants. Only one person showed a deeper understanding of the question. She said, "Under God we are all equally human."

The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God, that they are all accountable for what they do with whatever He has given them, and that someday they will all die. So, "under God" there is equality—but only under God. Apart from Him and His plan to bring about eventual justice, we see much in life that is not fair.

Christians are in the best position to keep the right perspective. They have all come to God as sinners and have found forgiveness in the cross of Christ. Therefore, the rich person and the poor person stand together on the common ground of Calvary. The rich rejoice that they have discovered the emptiness of material wealth, and the poor rejoice that they have discovered eternal riches. And according to James, this is the wisdom that enables us to avoid the pitfall of jealousy. —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

No one can take from us the gifts that God gives us.

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## The Sign

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill. —Philippians 1:15

Today's Scripture: Philippians 1:9-18

A pastor friend told me about a sign he had seen in front of a neighborhood church. Instead of just advertising the congregation's own time of worship, the sign also listed the schedule for two other churches that met at different times in the same small town. Interestingly, my friend didn't think this was impractical or foolish. Instead, he imagined what it must do for a church to put such unselfishness at the heart of everything it did!

Whether it is a good idea to advertise the worship times of other churches is a matter of opinion. But one thing is certain—the Spirit of Christ is not found in a spirit of envy and self-serving competition. The generosity and goodwill that Paul expressed toward self-serving church leaders is a mark of the authentic Christian spirit (Phil. 1:14-18). This Christlike attitude lines up with the absence of spiritual competition James called for in his epistle (James 3:14-17).

Churches ought to be concerned about building their congregations. But beware of setting the bar too low by worrying about numbers. The wisdom and grace of Christ are not necessarily found in conventional wisdom. Good judgment often requires that we perform counter-intuitive acts of unselfishness that reflect Jesus' life in us. By: Mart DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

## Reflect & Pray

More like the Master I would live and grow,  
More of His love to others I would show;  
More self-denial, like His in Galilee,  
More like the Master I long to ever be. —Gabriel

Nothing is more pleasing to God than self-sacrifice that grows out of obedience.

**James 3:15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.**

Amplified This [superficial] wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual (animal), even devilish (demoniacal).

Phillips You may acquire a certain superficial wisdom, but it does not come from God - it comes from this world, from your own lower nature, even from the devil.

Wuest This wisdom is not the wisdom which comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual [having to do with the natural, physical existence as over against the spiritual world of the supernatural], demonic; f

NET James 3:15 Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, natural, demonic.

GNT James 3:15 ο κ σπιν α τη σοφ α νωθεν κατερχομ νη λλ π γειος, ψυχικ , δαιμονι δης.

NLT James 3:15 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly,



unspiritual, and demonic.

KJV James 3:15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

ESV James 3:15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

ASV James 3:15 This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

CSB James 3:15 Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

NIV James 3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

NKJ James 3:15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

NRS James 3:15 Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish.

YLT James 3:15 this wisdom is not descending from above, but earthly, physical, demon-like,

NAB James 3:15 Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

NJB James 3:15 this is not the wisdom that comes from above, but earthly, human and devilish.

GWN James 3:15 That kind of wisdom doesn't come from above. It belongs to this world. It is self-centered and demonic.

BBE James 3:15 This wisdom is not from heaven, but is of the earth and the flesh and the Evil One.

- **This wisdom is not that which comes down from above** Jas 3:17 1:5,17 Joh 3:17 1Co 3:3 Php 3:19
- **but is earthly:** 2Sa 13:3 15:31 16:23 Jer 4:22 Lu 16:8 Ro 1:22 1Co 1:19,20,27 1Co 2:6,7 3:19 2Co 1:12 Jude 1:19
- **natural:** or, natural, 1Co 2:14
- **demonic:** Ge 3:1-5 Joh 8:44 Ac 13:10 2Co 11:3,13-15 1Jn 3:8-10 Jude 1:19 Rev 9:11 12:9
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE, UNGODLY WISDOM

**This wisdom is not that which comes down from above-** This wisdom is the "counterfeit" wisdom. It is secular, not spiritual. **From above** was a rabbinical way of referring to Yahweh (cf **every good thing** in James 1:17<sup>+</sup>). It is not wisdom that God gives by His Spirit! It is not wisdom that **"falls"** from above, but which originates from the **fall**! James used the same phrase from above earlier declaring that "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is **from above** ([anathen](#)), coming down from the **Father of lights** (what a dramatic contrast with the "father of lies" the devil who also gives "gitts" including wisdom that is "demonic!"), with Whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." (James 1:17<sup>+</sup>) And in the present context one **"good thing"** and **"perfect gift"** is **wisdom from above**, from God our Father!

**THOUGHT** - Given that wisdom is from the heart and mind of our Heavenly **Father**, and is **good** and is **perfect**, we would all do well to frequent plead with God modeling our prayer on James 1:5<sup>+</sup> "if any of you lacks **wisdom**, let him ask ([aiteo](#) in the [present tense](#) - continually, as our habitual practice!) of God, Who gives to all generously ([haplous](#)) and without reproach, and it will be given to him." I have prayed this prayer for all who are reading this note and for myself, in Jesus' Name. Amen. Grant us grace by Your Spirit to live it out for the glory of the Lamb. Amen.

He who has a constant longing for wisdom will persistently pray for it.  
D. Edmond Hiebert

**Another prayer** you might frequently pray is Col 1:9<sup>+</sup> to "ask that you may be filled with (CONTROLLED BY - pleroo same verb for being filled with the Spirit - Eph 5:18<sup>+</sup>) the knowledge ([epignosis](#)) of His will in **all spiritual wisdom** and understanding." And one who is filled with this spiritual wisdom is enabled to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col 1:10<sup>+</sup>). (Col 1:9-14 is a great prayer to pray for others - my accountability partner prays it for me daily and I reciprocate.)

**Another Prayer** - So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a **heart of wisdom**. (Ps 90:12)

Ultimately spiritual wisdom comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ and was modelled perfectly by our Lord about Whom Isaiah prophesied **"The Spirit of the LORD** will rest on Him (Mt 3:16), **The spirit of wisdom and**

**understanding**, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ." (Isaiah 11:2+) As John Calvin said "To search for wisdom apart from Christ means not simply foolhardiness but utter insanity." Zodiates adds an interesting comment that "Very rightly, then, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Messiah, is called by John in his gospel, "**the Word**," ho Lógos, (John 1:1+) which in its primary meaning is "Intelligence." But it also means "Expression," the expression of the eternal God in human form so that He may be made more understandable to man. **Wisdom**, we believe, is a synonym of **Logós** of the Word, and it refers to that perfection and eternity which is to be found only in God the Father, manifested to the world through His Son, the Lord Jesus, and existing in the world today only through His Holy Spirit. To Jesus Christ, wisdom was that practical understanding of the mind of God, that entire sympathy with His will and purpose, which enabled men to walk in His ways and do His will "on earth as it is in heaven."" (ED: cf Jn 5:19, 30, Jn 8:28, Jn 9:4, Jn 12:49, 14:10) (Ibid)

**Wisdom** (4678) see preceding note on [sophia](#)

**From above** (509)(**anóthen** from **ano** = above, upward, up + **suffix** "-then" = from) literally means from above with a secondary meaning of again. **Anóthen** can speak of place or time (from the beginning). This is the very word Jesus uses when he explains to Nicodemus "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born **again** (anóthen - from above) he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Jn 3:3, cf Jn 3:7). John the Baptist used anóthen to describe Jesus ""He who comes **from above** (anóthen) is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all." (Jn 3:31).

**But** - ([alla](#)) is a strong term of contrast.

**Is earthly, natural, demonic** - **Is** (estin) is [present tense](#) describing the continuing nature of the **wisdom** that is NOT *heavenly, supernatural and godly* (to use an antithetical description). It short, wisdom not from God is of the world, of the flesh and of the devil! **Mitton** aptly calls this "an ascending scale of wickedness!"

**MacArthur** has an excellent explanation of earthly wisdom as that which is "limited to the present, material world of time and space. By definition, it is restricted to things that man can theorize, discover, and accomplish by himself. It has no place for God or the things of God. It has no place for spiritual truth or illumination. It is a closed system, a circumscribed box, as it were, of man's own making and choosing under satanic prompting. As James has just noted, this wisdom is motivated by pride, selfish ambition, arrogance, self-centeredness, self-interest, and self-aggrandizement. It spawns a society whose watchwords are "**Do your own thing**," "**Have it your way**," and "**Look out for number one**." **It pervades philosophy, education, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, and every other dimension and aspect of contemporary human life.** (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James)

**William Baker** - We are people of two radically different realms, the heavenly and the earthly/demonic. This world is more influenced by the demonic, and this kind of "wisdom" can easily seep into everything we do, even ministry. Thus, we find the church being run, evangelism being done, counsel being offered by wisdom from the world. The church gets run by worldly management techniques, evangelism gets watered down by a half gospel that avoids the harsh reality of human depravity in order to avoid offending someone, and counseling gets corrupted by secular psychology. (James Commentary - Twenty-First Century).

**Stulac** - **Earthly** origin, in frequent New Testament usage, implies inferiority to heavenly origin.

**Moo** says that **earthly** suggests a "perspective that fails to consider God's realm and will" (Pillar NT Commentary-James)

**Hiebert** says "As "**earthly**" it springs out of and is limited to the frail and finite life of unregenerated humanity and associated with its turbulent affairs."

**Earthly** ("earth-bound" - NEB)(1919)(**epigeios** from **epi** = upon + **ge** = the earth) means of or belonging to the earth as distinguished from heaven. Terrestrial. Existing upon the earth. **Louw-Nida** - "pertaining to human, earthly activity (primarily in contrast with divine activity)." Belonging to human existence is the idea in James 3:15.

**Epigeios** - 6x - Jn. 3:12; 1 Co. 15:40; 2 Co. 5:1; Phil. 2:10; Phil. 3:19; Jas. 3:15 No uses in the Septuagint.

**Gilbrant** on **epigeios** - The seven New Testament instances of epigeios reflect a dualism between the "heavenly" and the "earthly." John (3:12) records Jesus' comments to Nicodemus that he would hardly believe "heavenly things" (ta epourania) since he did not believe the "earthly things" (ta epigeia) which Jesus had just told him. Such a contrast is not necessarily disparaging of earthly matters. The same can be said of its use in 1 Corinthians (e.g., 15:40; at the same time, the contrast is developed to highlight the superiority of the heavenly; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44,47,48). In other texts "earthly" carries a definitely inferior meaning and suggests "worldly" or "sinful" or "fleshly" passions (Philippians 3:19; James 3:15). The temporal contrast between heaven as eternal and earth as temporal (intimated in 1 Corinthians 15:40) is illustrated in 2 Corinthians 5:1 (our "earthly house" [our body]). The usage

in Philippians 2:10 reveals an expression used to encompass every aspect of creation, "in heaven, and . . . in earth (epigeiōn), and . . . under the earth," which will confess Jesus is Lord.

Natural wisdom is that when come from the mind of fallen, unredeemed men, and therefore is able to only reflect a totally humanistic viewpoint regarding the world and men. Paul writes that "God made foolish the wisdom of the world. (1 Cor 1:20)

**THOUGHT** - Let's get practical. What do you allow into your mind? What feeds your psyche? Are you reading secular books (self-help, etc, which have now infiltrated Christian bookstores!) that can only give you earthly, natural and demonic wisdom? Are you watching shows and listening to talk radio that regurgitates the same mindless [gibberish](#)? Beloved, as an alien and stranger (short timer) on earth, you need to change your intake from earthly to heavenly, from the temporal to the eternal. Is it any wonder that so many are filled worries, anxieties, fears, doubts, uncertainties, if their primary source of wisdom is the world! Let the words of Paul help you to rearrange and prioritize what type of wisdom you allow into your mind and heart -

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, **practice** ([present imperative](#)) these things (cf, GOOD BEHAVIOR in James 3:13) and the God of **peace** will be with you (NOTICE FRUIT OF PEACE IS SAME AS WITH HEAVENLY WISDOM! - James 3:18)." (Php 4:8-9<sup>+</sup>) "Therefore if (SINCE) you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking** ([present imperative](#)) the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your mind** ([present imperative](#)) on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, [*who is*] our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col 3:1-4<sup>+</sup>)

Natural is also translated sensual (KJV, NKJV, ASV) which aptly describes this earthly wisdom as that which seeks to accommodate our (animalistic) senses.

**Natural** (worldly-minded, lower nature, animal, sensual) ([5591](#)) ([psuchikos](#) from [psuche](#) = soul) is literally "**soulish**" and pertains to the **natural** man versus the **spiritual** nature of man. **Psuchikos** means soulish, with affinity to natural sinful propensities, the person in whom the [sarx](#), the flesh, is more the ruling principle even as **psuchikós** and **psuche** is for the animalistic instincts. **Psuchikos** pertains to life in the natural world as governed by sensual (fleshly) appetites and lived apart from the Spirit of God. It describes life apart from God, characteristic of earthly human life as opposed to what is spiritual.

**Wuest** translates [psuchikos](#) as "**unspiritual**" with this amplification - "having to do with the natural, physical existence as over against the spiritual world of the supernatural." That's a good description of worldly wisdom but take time to read Johnstone's explanation below to get a fuller sense of what James intends by using [psuchikos](#) to describe **earthly wisdom**.

**Robert Johnstone** gives us an excellent extended explanation of **natural** (sensual) **wisdom** (It is long but worth reading--I had to read it twice.) -

The **wisdom** which displays itself in bitterness (and alas, brethren, in the history of the church of Christ, how often has fancied wisdom displayed itself in bitterness! how much of real knowledge and mental power has been wasted in such bitterness!)—this wisdom is not from heaven; but as it displays itself on earth, so it is also of '**earthly**' origin. And, being 'earthly,' it is '**sensual**.' (NATURAL) The word so translated occurs in the New Testament several times, but is rendered '**sensual**' only here and in a verse in Jude, where '**mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts,**' (Jude 1:18<sup>+</sup>) are described as '**worldly-minded** ([psuchikos](#)), **devoid of the Spirit**' (Jude 1:19<sup>+</sup>).

Elsewhere the rendering is '**natural**,' as in the contrast between the '**natural body**' and the '**spiritual body**' in 1 Cor. 15:44 ("it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."), and in the statement in the second chapter of the same epistle, that '**a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God** (1 Cor 2:14<sup>+</sup>). According to its derivation, the original word strictly means '**belonging to the soul**.' The contrast with spirit and the spiritual, which is expressed in the passages that I have quoted from First Corinthians and from Jude, and implied in that now before us, is the key to the exact meaning. Sometimes in Scripture, as commonly among ourselves, man is spoken of as consisting of a body and a soul, in which case 'soul' is used in the widest sense. Sometimes, however, we have three constituent elements mentioned or alluded to—the body, soul, and spirit (**ED**: See [Dichotomy versus Trichotomy](#)). According to this division, the '**soul**' comprehends only those energies and capacities of mind and heart which have to do with the world known by **our bodily senses**,—man's mental and emotional nature in so far merely as he is the highest of the animals—an animal able to buy and sell, as the beaver can

build a hut and a dam; the 'spirit' is that highest power of a rational being by which it can apprehend the idea of God, and hold communion with Him,—by which through faith it can live under the influences of an unseen world.

The '**spirit**' should be the governing principle, holding the whole nature under a firm and healthful sway. But, as you know, brethren, in man, as he now is by nature, the **spirit is darkened, perverted, and weakened**; it is **dethroned through sin**; and **only the enlightening and strengthening energy of God's Spirit can enable our spirits to take their rightful dignity and rule**. Where the spirit does not rule, the soul—that is, as we have seen, the mental and emotional nature in so far as it is **occupied with the world open to the senses**—tends to become ever more and more subject to the lowest element of our constitution, **the appetites of the body**. Hence the Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, distinguishes all men into two classes—those who are '**in the flesh**,' and those who are '**in the spirit**;' the standard on which the division is based being that which I have now indicated: 'Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you' (Ro 8:9+). You see, then, that when James here calls the wisdom that bore bitter wranglings as its fruit a **wisdom 'of the soul'**, with an implied and well understood contrast to that **wisdom of the spirit** which ought to regulate all the thoughts and feelings, words and actions, of Christians, he means that it belongs entirely to the lower elements of our nature, and that its characteristics are simply those of the wisdom belonging to the men of the world, whose aim is **personal honour and aggrandisement**. **The words which this wisdom utters may be of God's glory, but their real aim is man's glory. Its plans and procedure have all reference to self and to this world of the senses, though the subjects it discusses may belong to the invisible world, the world known to faith**. Rightly understood, then, brethren, you cannot but feel how searching and scathing this word of the apostle is; and it is interesting to notice, that the very same tempers which are here denounced as unspiritual, merely '**of the soul**,' are those which the Apostle Paul specifies as peculiarly grieving to that Divine Spirit through whose indwelling alone man's spirit has rule over his lower nature.

'**Grieve** not ([present imperative with a negative](#)) the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you' (Eph. 4:30–32+).

From the completeness with which the distinction between **soul** and **spirit** has been lost to our modern thought, it seems impossible to give the idea of the word before us exactly in any translation. '**Sensual**' and '**animal**' suggest too exclusively the action of the very lowest propensities of our nature, though, as we have seen, the tendency of the 'soul,' when ungoverned by the 'spirit,' is steadily towards subjection to these. Perhaps, on the whole, '**natural**,' in its well understood opposition to 'spiritual,' is the best word. ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#)) (Bold added)

**Demonic** (only NT use; not in Septuagint)([1141](#))(**daimoniodes** from **daimonion** = demon) is an adjective which describes that which pertains to or proceeds from demons. It is used only here in James 3:15 and describes this wisdom as "demon-like" or "devilish" (of the devil). The root source of earthy, natural wisdom is the Devil and his hordes of demons. Paul writes that he and his demons are able fire "the flaming arrows" (Eph 6:16) into our minds. In that Ephesians passage Paul is addressing believers who can at least take up the shield of faith to extinguish the demonic arrows. But unbelievers have no defense against his demonic input!

Of course the prototype for this hellish wisdom is Satan's confrontation of a sinless man and woman in the garden of Eden when he tempted Eve telling her if she did what God had forbidden, she would not die (an overt lie) and would actually be like God (another lie). Indeed she thought would gain **wisdom**, which she did, but it was **earthly, natural and demonic** and ultimately deadly!. Moses records...

For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (Ge 3:5,6+)

So from the very beginning earthly, natural wisdom had its source in Satan's tempting words and he has not ceased this evil activity ever since. Little wonder that the world thinks is wisdom is at times even overtly evil and completely unrighteous!

Ungodly wisdom has the same "hellish" source as an ungodly tongue "which is set on fire from hell."

**Hiebert** - Behind this "wisdom," marked by jealousy, crafty party factions, and egotistical boasting, James detects the work of the demons in seeking to corrupt the harmony and very life of the Body of Christ.

**Johnstone** on **demonic/devilish** - But something more awful still has to be said of this wicked **wisdom**. Like all wisdom among men on moral questions, which is only 'earthly,' only 'natural,' it is 'devilish'—devil-like. Our first parents yielded to the temptation to sin, because they considered that the tree was 'to be desired to make one wise;' (Ge 3:5,6+) and this was the **wisdom**—a **wisdom** kindred to that of Satan, whose lie seduced them—full of envy and falsehood, moving ever in the atmosphere of selfishness and malignity. Where zeal even regarding religion shows itself in unholy tempers like these, the fire of this zeal is fire from the bottomless pit. The 'spirit' of man is in action here as well as the 'soul;' but, alas, the grandeur of the capabilities of this constituent of our being only deepens the debasement; and the spirit 'made but a little lower than the angels' of light, links itself with the lost angels of darkness. ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#)) (Bold added)

Paul describes how demonic wisdom has infiltrated the church...

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. (2 Cor 11:13-15)

**Glenn Spencer** observes that "Satan has his theology. It is cloaked in *Church talk*, but it is dangerous and its origin is Hell. That's right! Many Churches have been infiltrated with the doctrines of Hell. Satan is smart and shrewd (Ge 3:1+). He knows how to peddle his wickedness. He propagates his evil in Bible language and many Christians swallow it hook, line and sinker. Even with the temptation of Christ the devil was slick and sly (cf Lk 4:1-13+). He was worldly wise in his approach. He even used Scripture. Actually he misused Scripture." (**ED**: And Jesus responded with wisdom from above which trumped Satan's earthly wisdom! It did then and it does now. Therefore it behooves all believers to be steeped in the Scriptures, that they might be enabled to take of the "**Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God**" - Eph 6:17+).

**James 3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**

Amplified For wherever there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil and vile practices.

Phillips For wherever you find jealousy and rivalry you also find disharmony and all other kinds of evil.

Wuest for where jealousy and contentiousness are, there, in that place, are restlessness and instability and every base deed.

NET James 3:16 For where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is disorder and every evil practice.

GNT James 3:16 που γ ρ ζλος κα ριθεα, κε καταστας α κα π ν φα λον πρ γμα.

NLT James 3:16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

KJV James 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

ESV James 3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

ASV James 3:16 For where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed.

CSB James 3:16 For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

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

NKJ James 3:16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

NRS James 3:16 For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

YLT James 3:16 for where zeal and rivalry are, there is insurrection and every evil matter;



NAB James 3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.

NJB James 3:16 Wherever there are jealousy and ambition, there are also disharmony and wickedness of every kind;

GWN James 3:16 Wherever there is jealousy and rivalry, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

BBE James 3:16 For where envy is, and the desire to get the better of others, there is no order, but every sort of evil-doing.

- **For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist** Jas 3:14 1Co 3:3 Ga 5:20
- **there is disorder**: Ge 11:9 Ac 19:29 1Co 14:33
- **every evil thing**: 1Jn 3:12
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FETID FRUIT OF WORLDLY WISDOM

**Fetid** means offensively malodorous. My wife and I returned from several weeks away from our home and immediately detected a fetid smell upon entering the house. It took us two days to discover the rotting potatoes hidden in a bin out of view! It has taken us many more days to rid the house of this fetid smell. The fetid fruit of worldly wisdom is similar, because you can "smell" something is not right in a church body, but it may take a while to discover. Even sadder it may take much longer to reverse the adverse effects of disorder and wickedness that are reaped when seeds of worldly (earthly, natural, demonic) wisdom are sown!

**For (gar)** (Term of explanation - always pause and ask what is the writer explaining?) - James justifies his strong condemnation of earthly wisdom in the preceding verse explaining the fruit of wisdom which is earthly, natural and demonic!

**Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist - Amplified** - "For wherever there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition)."

Notice how James repeats these two negative markers of ungodly, worldly wisdom - **Jealousy** (see preceding note on [zelos](#)) and **Selfish ambition** (see preceding note on [eritheia](#)). And as James taught in James 3:14, both of these sinful attitudes are hidden in and originate from the heart.

**Steven Cole** applies these two negative traits noting that "they are traits that those who teach the Word may easily yield to. If someone challenges our teaching or another preacher across town has a bigger congregation, we can become jealous. Godly wisdom, as we've seen, would listen to the one who raises an objection and consider whether he may have a valid point. If we hear that the preacher across town has a bigger church, as long as he's preaching the truth, we should think, "Praise God that His truth is going forth!" But worldly "wisdom" doesn't seek God's glory. It is rooted in selfishness and pride." ([James 3:13-18 Wisdom for Harmonious Relationships](#))

**There is disorder and every evil thing - Amplified** has "here will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil and vile practices "

The church at Corinth was experience "**disorder**" which prompted Paul to write

"God is not a God of **confusion** ([akatastasia](#) = same word James uses in 3:16) but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." (1 Cor 14:33).

Paul used this [akatastasia](#) again in his Second letter to the church at Corinth writing

"For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, **jealousy** ([zelos](#) used in James 3:14, 16), angry tempers, **disputes** ([eritheia](#)- used in James 3:14, 16), slanders, gossip, arrogance, **disturbances** ([akatastasia](#) )." (2 Cor 12:20, recall that in 1 Cor 3:3 Paul had characterized them as "still fleshly. For since there is **jealousy** ([zelos](#)) and **strife** [[eris](#)] among you.")

Clearly Paul was afraid that **wisdom** which was **earthly, natural and demonic** had crept into the Church at Corinth and potentially was wreaking havoc in the harmony of the body, resulting in **disorder and every evil thing**.

**Hiebert** - In James 1:8, James used the adjective ([akatastatos](#)) to describe the impact of double-mindedness upon the individual, and in James 3:8 it is descriptive of the uncontrolled tongue. Here the noun ([akatastasia](#)) points to the resultant public confusion, disorder, and chaotic turbulence in the assembly....In Luke 21:9 it is used to describe the tumults, uprisings, and revolutions that will



mark the period preceding the parousia. Instead of promoting harmony, this "wisdom" causes disruption and unruliness; instead of creating closer fellowship among the members, it destroys it. Such a "wisdom" cannot be from God. (Ibid)

**Disorder** (confusion, tumult)(181)([akatastasia](#) from [akatastatos](#) [adjective] in turn from **a** = negative + **kathistemi** = set in order) means literally without order or stability and thus has a basic meaning of instability = an unsettled state of affairs, an upheaval, a state of violent group disturbance, a tumult, or unrest, especially in a political or social setting (riots, revolutions). **Louw-Nida** - "to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands." Here it would refer to the **disorder** caused by those who with their false wisdom trouble the group of believers by demanding their own rights and exercising a party spirit. (Borrow [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : based on semantic domains](#))

**MacArthur** - James has already made clear that **disorder** does not characterize God's people but rather the "double-minded man, unstable [[akatastatos](#)]" (James 1:8) and the unredeemed tongue, which "is a restless [[akatastatos](#)] evil and full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). Because "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33), biblical wisdom, on the other hand, brings harmony, unity, peace, and love. All the conflicts, crimes, battles, and wars of the world are evidence of the devastation caused by human wisdom. (See [MacArthur Commentary](#))

**Evil** (5337)([phaulos](#)) means worthless, corrupt, good-for-nothing, depraved, mediocre, unimportant, of no account, vile, evil, wicked, foul, depraved. **Worthlessness** is the central notion and thus [phaulos](#) indicates the impossibility of any true gain ever coming forth.

**MacArthur on thing** (pragma) - The idea is that absolutely **nothing** of any ultimate good results from human wisdom. ([MacArthur Commentary](#))

**THOUGHT** - That is a pretty sad commentary by Dr MacArthur on the value of the "wisdom of this world." It amounts to **nothing** in the light of eternity! Beloved, this is mind blowing! It begs the question of each of us as followers of Christ -- am I conducting my life being primarily guided by **godly wisdom** which will yield "good fruits" (2 Cor 5:10+) or am I ordering my steps along a path laced with a liberal admixture of **ungodly wisdom** which will yield virtually no "good fruits"? This is a sobering thought which we all do well to pause and ponder. Life is short. Eternity is long! Good fruit will endure for eternity!!!

**Adoniram Judson** wrote that "A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity... If it has been a useless life, it can never be improved. Such will stand forever and ever. The same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever... Each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny (**Note:** Not in loss of salvation but of rewards - cp 1Co 3:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, Jn 15:5, 2Co 5:10+, cp 1Ti 4:7, 8+). No day will lose its share of influence in determining where shall be our seat in heaven. **How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness! It will then be too late to mend its appearance. It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked.** (See page 33-34 of [A memoir of the life and labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson](#))

**Thing** (affair, matter, case) (4229)([pragma](#)) is "that which is done or happens, deed, thing, event, occurrence, matter." (**BDAG**) **Pragma** may denote a deed or event that has occurred with no indication of its moral quality. In this context the moral character is clearly evil. In using [phaulos](#) the idea is not so much primarily that which is malignant, but rather that which is good for nothing and without possibility of ever yielding any good. However other writers like **A T Robertson** make the point that "In the realm of morals, what is merely indifferent soon gets to be **bad**."

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## Where Does It All Begin?

Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. — James 3:16

Today's Scripture: James 3:13-4:6

Two ships collided in the Black Sea in 1986, hurling hundreds of passengers into the icy waters and causing a tragic loss of life. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed that the accident was caused by human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence and both could have taken evasive action to avert the collision. But neither wanted to yield to the other. By the time they saw the error of their ways, it was too late.

According to James, even greater havoc and loss can be created in human relationships for similar reasons (3:14-16). We prefer to

blame the world's problems on religious or political differences. But James said the root problem is "bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts" (3:14), which stems from pride. That's what caused Lucifer to fall from heaven (Isaiah 14:12), and Adam and Eve to lose their innocence in Eden (Genesis 3:6).

So what is the solution? How can we keep selfish ambition and pride from turning into major disasters? We must draw on "the wisdom that is from above"—wisdom that is "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits" (James 3:17). That will mark the beginning of harmony—not havoc. By: Mart DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

There is a power of selfishness—  
The proud and willful I—  
And ere my Lord can reign in me,  
That proud old self must die.  
—Anon.

Some troubles come from wanting our own way;  
others come from being allowed to have it.

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**James 3:16** Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea, causing a tragic loss of life. The news of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident that hurled hundreds of passengers into the icy waters. The blame did not belong to defective radar or thick fog but to human stubbornness. Both captains were aware of the other ship's presence and could have taken evasive action to avert the collision. But according to news reports, neither wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield the right-of-way.

Even greater havoc and loss can be created in human relationships for much the same reason—"envy and self-seeking." We prefer to blame the world's problems on religious or political differences, but James says that the root problem is pride and self-centeredness. It caused the archangel Lucifer to fall from the heavens (Isa. 14). And our first parents, Adam and Eve, lost their innocence for the same reason.

The only way to keep jealousy and envy from turning into major disasters is to draw on the wisdom that comes from above, wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, and full of mercy and goodness. That will mark the beginning of harmony—not havoc. —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Some troubles come from wanting to have our own way; others come from being allowed to have it.

**James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.**

Amplified But the wisdom from above is first of all pure (undefiled); then it is peace-loving, courteous (considerate, gentle). [It is willing to] yield to reason, full of compassion and good fruits; it is wholehearted and straightforward, impartial and unfeigned (free from doubts, wavering, and insincerity).

Phillips The wisdom that comes from God is first utterly pure, then peace-loving, gentle, approachable, full of tolerant thoughts and kindly actions, with no breath of favoritism or hint of hypocrisy.

Wuest But the wisdom which is from above is essentially pure, then peaceable, sweetly reasonable, satisfied with less than its due, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free from insincerity.

NET James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and not hypocritical.

GNT James 3:17 ὁ νόθος σοφία πρὸς τὸν μὴ γινώσκον, περὶ εὐρηνικῶς, πεικρῶς, ἐπειθῶς, μεστὸς ἰσχύος καὶ καρπὸν ἔχων, δι' ἀκρίτου, ὑπὸ κρίτου.

NLT James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.

KJV James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

ESV James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

ASV James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy.

CSB James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy.

NIV James 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.

NKJ 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.

NRS James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

YLT James 3:17 and the wisdom from above, first, indeed, is pure, then peaceable, gentle, easily entreated, full of kindness and good fruits, uncontentious, and unhypocritical: --

NAB James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.

NJB James 3:17 whereas the wisdom that comes down from above is essentially something pure; it is also peaceable, kindly and considerate; it is full of mercy and shows itself by doing good; nor is there any trace of partiality or hypocrisy in it.

GWN James 3:17 However, the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure. Then it is peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good deeds, impartial, and sincere.

BBE James 3:17 But the wisdom which is from heaven is first holy, then gentle, readily giving way in argument, full of peace and mercy and good works, not doubting, not seeming other than it is.

- **the wisdom from above:** Jas 3:15 1:5,17 Ge 41:38,39 Ex 36:2 1Ki 3:9,12,28 1Ch 22:12 Job 28:12,23,28 Pr 2:6 Isa 11:2,3 Da 1:17 Lu 21:15 1Co 2:6,7 1Co 12:8
- **first pure,** Jas 4:8 Mal 3:3 Mt 5:8 Php 4:8 Tit 1:15 1Jn 3:3
- **then peaceable:** 1Ch 22:9 \*marg: Isa 2:4 9:6,7 11:2-9 32:15-17 Ro 12:18 Heb 12:14
- **gentle:** Isa 40:11 1Co 13:4-7 2Co 10:1 Ga 5:22,23 Eph 5:9 1Th 2:7 2Ti 2:24 Tit 3:2
- **full of mercy and good fruits:** Joh 1:14 Ac 9:36 11:24 Ro 15:14 2Co 9:10 Php 1:11 Col 1:10
- **unwavering:** Jas 2:4 Mal 2:9 1Ti 5:21
- **without hypocrisy:** Isa 32:6 Mt 23:28 Lu 12:1,2 Joh 1:47 Ro 12:9 1Pe 1:22 2:1 1Jn 3:18
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SEVEN MARKS OF CELESTIAL WISDOM

James 3:17–18 are a list of qualities of godly wisdom even as James 3:14–16 describe ungodly wisdom

**But the wisdom from above**- As noted earlier **from above** was a rabbinical way of referring to Yahweh. This wisdom is characterized as a "good thing given and (a) perfect gift (that) is **from above**, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." (James 1:17<sup>+</sup>). This "extraterrestrial" wisdom is **the gift of God** and is only given to believers (Eph 2:8)

Proverbs comments on the Source of **wisdom from above**

"For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Pr 2:6)

[Utley](#) - True wisdom is known by its deeds. Paul's definition of true and false wisdom is seen in 1 Cor. 1:18–3:23.

Heavenly wisdom is better than worldly wealth, and to be preferred before it.

Matthew Henry

James will now answer the question of how a believer knows he or she possesses wisdom from above.

**Is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy- First - first** in rank and time. Here it refers **first** in rank and which specifically to purity because without purity the wisdom is not from above! Some writers think **first pure** implies a progression of qualities of godly wisdom.

**Steven Cole** on **wisdom** that is **pure** - It may point to moral purity, but in the context here, it especially has the sense of being free from any jealousy or selfish ambition. In other words, it is focusing on our motives. If we seek wisdom so that we can lord it over others, or use it for our own ad-vantage or power, it is not **pure**, godly wisdom. Our motive for seeking wisdom or for using wisdom must always be to glorify God and to build up the person to whom we are speaking. ([James 3:13-18 Wisdom for Harmonious Relationships](#))

**THOUGHT** - **Steven Cole** applies this attribute of wisdom to church life - We especially need to keep this in mind when we get into a doctrinal dispute with anyone. It is easy to want to win the argument, but you can destroy the person you are arguing with. Or, you want to prove that you are right so that you look good, but you excuse your pride by telling yourself that you are contending for the faith. Before you jump into any doctrinal dispute, ask first, "How important is this issue in light of God's glory and this person's spiritual wellbeing?" Also, keep in mind how difficult it is for you to change your mind on an issue! It takes time, so be gracious in granting that to the other person. Keep in mind Paul's words about not quarreling, being kind, patient, and gentle. And, ask God to open the person's eyes and grant repentance. Your motives must be pure, or you are not acting with godly wisdom.

**Pure** (53)(**hagnos**) means freedom from defilements, contaminants or impurities (e.g., Jesus is **hagnos** - 1 Jn 3:3+). No alloys, not tainted by any impurity (in 1 Ti 5:22 **hagnos** is translated in NASB as "free from sin"). **Hagnos** implies sincere, moral and spiritual integrity. **Hagnos** describes **wisdom** that is morally undefiled and not corrupted by any form of evil in this fallen world. Unfortunately believers can sometimes corrupt the purity of God's wisdom by intermixing worldly wisdom, especially when we compromise and mix worldly principles with Biblical principles. **Hagnos** is in the list of virtues ("whatever is **pure**") on which Paul commands believers to continually **dwell** ([present imperative](#) - continually = [need the Holy Spirit to obey](#)). (Php 4:8+).

**Hiebert** on **pure** - In its very nature it is "pure," clean and undefiled, free from all vices, such as jealousy and party factions.

**William Baker** makes an interesting point stating that "Much of worldly wisdom is a blend of true wisdom with earthly wisdom, something the evil one uses to enhance the world's approach to things—something that gives earthly wisdom some measure of credibility." (Ibid)

**William Barclay** on **pure** wisdom - came to describe the moral purity which alone can approach the gods. On the Temple of Aesculapius at Epidaurus, there was the inscription at the entrance: 'He who would enter the divine temple must be pure [*hagnos*]; and purity is to have a mind which thinks holy thoughts.' The true wisdom is so cleansed of all ulterior motives and of self that it has become pure enough to see God. Worldly wisdom might well wish to escape God's sight; the true wisdom is able to bear his very scrutiny. ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Robert Johnstone** on **pure** - The Christianly wise man shrinks from moral defilement of every kind. Nothing less wide of range than this is involved in the word '**pure**' here. One great fundamental characteristic of the morality taught in the Bible is, that it occupies the whole nature. 'Blessed are the **pure** in heart, for they shall see God.' 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' The truly wise man is he who has conformity of spirit to the 'only wise God,' who believes what God teaches, loves what God loves, lives as Jesus lived—He who was the express image of the invisible God. 'Purity,' as required by God, and exemplified in the measure of their faith by all Christ's people, implies a superiority of soul, which will show itself continually in word and deed, to everything low and sensual, to everything selfish and mean,—a freedom from petty views and sinister ends, and, on the contrary, a relish and love of everything really great and good. By such moral convictions, and feelings, and conduct, a man is proved to be wise with that heavenly wisdom which consists in a true, vital, energetic apprehension of his relations to God, of the chief end of man, of duty and happiness." ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#))

**Wisdom** is **peaceable** but that does not mean peace at any price. In other words if you compromise the purity of wisdom in order to maintain the peace, this is not godly wisdom. Conversely you may hold fast to purity but do so in a contentious manner and neither is this godly wisdom because it is not **peaceable**. The point is that wisdom that is peaceable does not cause friction and disharmony like **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** will almost invariably do, resulting in **disorder and every evil thing**.

**Steven Cole** on **peaceable** - Seeking peace in relationships is not a minor theme in the Bible! Just after his counsel to wives and husbands (1 Pet. 3:1-7), the apostle Peter cites from Psalm 34, "He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it" (1 Pet. 3:11). Those words apply to all relationships. We are to go after peace as we would pursue an animal in the hunt.

Paul echoes this theme often. In Ephesians 4:3, he says that we are to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Seek peace and pursue it with diligence! If you are always stirring up controversy over petty issues, you are not acting with godly wisdom. While we should never compromise doctrinal purity on essential truth, neither should we fight over minor matters where godly, Bible-believing people differ. Years ago, I received in the mail a number of papers from a man who had graduated from the same seminary that I graduated from. I assume he got my name from an alumni directory, since I did not know him personally. I threw the papers away in disgust, although I should have saved them for sermon illustrations! But the guy was going on at length about how someone at the seminary took some Hebrew word from Chronicles in a way that this guy insisted was not correct! He thought that he was wise and that he was defending the truth, but he was not displaying godly wisdom because he was not peaceable. ([Ibid](#))

**Hiebert** on **peaceable** - "Then peace-loving" names the first of the external qualities flowing from the inner purity of this wisdom. This heavenly wisdom is "ready for peace," desiring and fostering peace by restraining discord and pacifying the turbulent elements around it. It promotes "right relationships between man and man, and between man and God." But it does not pursue peace at the expense of purity. It will not compromise with sin to maintain peace. But even when fighting against sin, it hungers for peace, yearning to heal all divisions by its wise counsel. ([Ibid](#))

**Peaceable** ([1516](#))(**eirenikos** from **eirene** = peace) characterized or promoting a state of wholeness and well-being, that is, loving and promoting peace. The opposite of unrest. **Louw-Nida** - "pertaining to freedom from anxiety and inner turmoil —'peaceful, free from worry.'" **BDAG** - "pertaining to being conducive to a harmonious relationship." The only other use of **eirenikos** is Heb 12:11+ "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the **peaceful** fruit of righteousness." (So here the peaceful state is the result of divine discipline!)

**Barclay** - **Eirenikos** is derived from **eirene** which "means *peace*, and when it is used in a human context its basic meaning is *right relationships between individuals, and between individuals and God*. **The true wisdom produces right relationships**. There is a kind of clever and arrogant wisdom which separates people from one another, and which makes them look with superior contempt on others. There is a kind of cruel wisdom which takes a delight in hurting others with clever but cutting words. There is a kind of depraved wisdom which seduces men and women away from their loyalty to God. But the true wisdom at all times brings people closer to one another and to God. ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Eirenikos** in the **Septuagint** - Gen. 34:21; Gen. 37:4; Gen. 42:11; Gen. 42:19; Gen. 42:31; Gen. 42:33; Gen. 42:34; Num. 21:21; Deut. 2:26; Deut. 20:11; Deut. 23:6; 1 Sam. 10:8; 1 Sam. 11:15; 1 Sam. 13:9; 2 Sam. 6:17; 2 Sam. 6:18; 2 Sam. 20:19; 2 Sam. 24:25; 1 Ki. 2:35; 1 Ki. 3:15; 1 Ki. 8:63; 1 Ki. 8:64; 2 Ki. 16:13; 1 Chr. 12:38; Est. 5:1; Ps. 35:20; Ps. 37:37; Ps. 120:6; Prov. 7:14; Jer. 9:8; Jer. 38:22; Obad. 1:7; Mic. 7:3; Zech. 6:13; Zech. 8:16

Notice how the list of traits like **gentle**, **reasonable**, etc, serve to practically undergird and ensure that this wisdom is **peaceable**.

**Gentle** ([1933](#))(**epieikes** from **epí** = upon - intensifies meaning + **eikós** = fair, equitable) is a Greek word that is difficult to translate. **Louw-Nida** says it means "pertaining to being gracious and forbearing." The idea would be to be sensitive to other's needs and patient with them. This word includes the ideas of **gentle** (free from harshness, sternness, or violence), **forbearing** (holding oneself back from especially with an effort; controlling oneself when provoked), yielding, **equity** (freedom from bias or favoritism), **lenient** (mild and tolerant disposition, exerting a soothing or easing influence), unassertive, fair, fitting, appropriate, suitable, proper. Used 5x in NT - Phil. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 3:2; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18.

**New Linguistic and Exegetical Key** on **epieikes** - The word signifies a humble patience, a steadfastness able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and maltreatment without hatred and malice, trusting in God in spite of all of it

**Douglas Moo** says that **epieikes** "indicates a willingness to yield to others and a corresponding unwillingness 'to exact strict claims'." It is a quality that Jesus possessed (2 Cor. 10:1), and it is a requirement for elders in the local church (1 Ti 3:3).

**Barclay** - The person who is **epieikēs** is someone who knows when it is actually wrong to apply the strict letter of the law. Such a person knows how to forgive when strict justice dictates that there is a perfect right to condemn. Such a person knows how to make allowances, when not to stand upon individual rights, and how to soften justice with mercy, and always remembers that there are greater things in the world than rules and regulations. It is impossible to find an English word to translate this quality. The poet Matthew Arnold called it 'sweet reasonableness', and it is the ability to extend to others the kindly consideration we would wish to receive ourselves. ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Reasonable** (only NT use; no uses in Septuagint)([2138](#))(**eupeithes** from **eu** = good, easiness + **peitho** = to persuade) means easily persuaded (but not [gullible](#)!), willing to yield, compliant, congenial, open to reason. The person who displays godly wisdom that is **reasonable** is willing to defer to others and is open to adopt someone else's position, belief or course of action when given sufficient reason and when so doing would not violate basic Biblical doctrines or moral principles. In other words such a wise person



recognizes the good sense of another's argument without being detracted by some personal bias. James 1:19+ would be a good description of the **eupeithes** person who is "quick to hear." Godly wisdom that is **reasonable** does not push its own rights or opinions without listening to and respecting the rights and opinions of others. It is easy to see how this trait undergirds **peaceable**. In short, the one with wisdom that is **reasonable** knows when to yield rights or opinions, including when he is proven wrong (THAT'S WHEN WE REALLY NEED TO RELY ON THE HOLY SPIRIT'S SUPERNATURAL ENABLEMENT!).

In classic Greek **eupeithes** was used of submission to military discipline and for observance of legal and moral standards in ordinary life; i.e., one who willingly submits to a fatherly will.

**Barclay** notes that **eupeithes** has "two meanings. (a) *Eupeithēs* can mean *always ready to obey*. The first of the eighteenth-century churchman William Law's rules for life was: 'To fix it deep in my mind that I have but one business upon my hands, to seek for eternal happiness by doing the will of God.' If we take the word in this sense, it means that the truly wise are always ready to obey whenever God's voice comes to them. (b) *Eupeithēs* can mean *easy to persuade*, not in the sense of being pliable and weak, but in the sense of not being stubborn and of being willing to listen to reason and to appeal. Coming as it does after *epieikēs*, it probably bears this second meaning here. The true wisdom is not rigid but is willing to listen and skilled in knowing when wisely to yield. ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Full** (3324)(**mestos**) signifies full up, full to the utmost, "stuffed". It refers to a quantity beyond what could or should be expected. **Mestos** - Matt. 23:28; Jn. 19:29; Jn. 21:11; Rom. 1:29; Rom. 15:14; Jas. 3:8; Jas. 3:17; 2 Pet. 2:14.

**Hiebert** - The adjective "**full**" underlines that this heavenly wisdom is characterized by an abundant measure of mercy. Such a life also will be full of "good fruit" (karpōn agathōn). (Ibid)

**Full of** applies to both **mercy and good fruits** which are therefore taken together as one attribute of godly wisdom. The idea is that our mercy is not all talk but includes action demonstrating the reality of our claim to be merciful, and in this way is similar to the dynamic in James 2:14-26 where James says genuine faith is authenticated by good works, practical good deeds. So if we see someone in need and "do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" (James 2:15-16+) God's wisdom motivates us to build up rather than tear down. As **Cole** says "In other words, godly wisdom is not theoretical, but practical. It rolls up its sleeves and takes action." Does this describe your Christian life?

**Hiebert** says **full of mercy and good fruits** is "the only double characteristic in the list, stands in direct contrast to 'every vile deed' in James 3:16." (Ibid)

Heavenly wisdom is **full of mercy** like our Heavenly Father - **Be** ([present imperative](#) = only possible by relying on [the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Lk 6:36+)

Recall that James had earlier alluded to the virtue of mercy in writing that "judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no **mercy**; **mercy** triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13+)

**Mercy** (1656) (**eleos**) is the outward manifestation of pity and assumes **need** on the part of those who are recipients of the mercy and sufficient **resources** to meet the need on the part of those who show it. In short not just feelings but actions! The idea of **mercy** is to show kindness or concern for someone in serious need or to give help to the wretched, to relieve the miserable. Here the essential thought is that mercy gives attention to those in misery. Leniency and compassion toward offenders by a person.

**Steven Cole** aptly observes that "God is merciful to us in spite of the fact that our problems usually stem from our own sin and rebellion. But while we were yet sinners, He sent Christ to die for our sins (Ro 5:8+). We are to extend the mercy that we have received to other undeserving sinners." ([James 3:13-18 Wisdom for Harmonious Relationships](#))

**Barclay** on **eleos** - The Greeks defined it as *pity for the one who is suffering unjustly*; but Christianity means far more than that by *eleos*. (a) In Christian thought, *eleos* means mercy for those who are in trouble, even if the trouble is their own fault. Christian pity is the reflection of God's pity, and that went out to men and women not only when they were suffering unjustly but also when they were suffering through their own fault. We are so apt to say, of someone in trouble, 'It is his own fault' or 'She brought it on herself', and therefore to feel no responsibility ourselves. **Christian mercy** is mercy for all who are in trouble, even if they have brought that trouble on themselves. (b) In Christian thought, *eleos* means mercy which produces **good fruits**, that is, which results in practical help. **Christian pity is not merely an emotion; it is action. We can never say that we have truly pitied anyone until we have given our help.** ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Robert Johnstone** on **full of good fruits** - Heavenly wisdom is 'full of good fruits:' it abounds with them; and hence, whenever it is present, you cannot fail to find them; or, if you do fail, the wisdom must be miserably stunted and blighted by the influence of worldliness. On the healthy tree every branch is laden with the fruits of mercy. By them will the reckoning be at the judgment. 'Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you,



he shall in no wise lose his reward.' (Mt 10:42) And let not any poor, and ignorant, and uninfluential Christian think that from the narrowness of his sphere he cannot be **'full of mercy and good fruits.'** The Lord's mode of reckoning is not like man's. In casting into the temple treasury the two mites that came out of deep poverty and deep love, the widow was far more 'full of good fruits' than the rich men who cast in many times the sum with no self-sacrifice and little true love. (Mk 12:42-44) Ever and anon, on a Highland hillside, one passes a little rocky cup filled with cool crystal water from a deep unfailing spring. The little cup barely affords a draught to the traveller, and yet, because it fails not, what a multitude of weary wayfarers does it refresh and invigorate, generation after generation; and how green and beautiful the little rill that trickles from it keeps a long stretch of the mountain-side! So, however little the cup of cold water be that you are able to give in Christ's name, it will refresh many hearts in a lifetime if it be kept ever full, ever ready. ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#))

**Good** (18)([agathos](#)) means intrinsically good, inherently good in quality but with the idea of good which is also profitable, useful, benefiting others, benevolent (marked by or disposed to doing good).

**Fruits** (plural = speaks of the variety of fruit produced)([2590](#))([karpos](#)) is used in its literal sense to refer to fruit, produce or offspring, which describes that which is produced by the inherent energy of a living organism. Figuratively, **karpos** is used of the consequence of physical, mental, or spiritual action. Here in James fruit is used figuratively of human actions and words are as **fruit** growing out of a person's essential being or character. The classic example is the supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23+). "The many acts of practical mercy mature in a rich harvest of variegated fruit." (Hiebert)

**Unwavering** (impartial - NIV)([87](#))([adiakritos](#) from **a** = without + [diakrino](#) = to separate, distinguish, judge) means making no partial distinctions, impartial. Not tending to cause divisions or factions within a group. **Friberg** - "(1) as being without uncertainty unwavering, unshakable (2) without making distinctions impartial, free from prejudice (God's wisdom does not treat one person a certain way and someone else another away)."

**Barclay** says **adiakritos** "means that it is not wavering and swaying; it knows its own mind, chooses its course and abides by it. There are those who think that it is clever never to make one's mind up about anything. They speak about having an open mind and about suspending judgment. But Christian wisdom is based on Christian certainties which come to us from God through Jesus Christ." ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Utley** on **without hypocrisy** - This term implies free from prejudice or divided loyalties and may relate to 2:4 or even 1:6. This was a theatrical term used of one who never played a part for personal gain. It speaks of a transparent genuineness (cf. Rom. 12:9; 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:22).

**Barclay** says that "The true wisdom is *anupokritos*, **without hypocrisy**. That is to say, it is not a pose and does not deal in deception. It is honest; it never pretends to be what it is not; and it never acts a part to gain its own ends." ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Webster** defines a hypocrite as "One who feigns to be what he is not; one who has the form of godliness without the power, or who assumes an appearance of piety and virtue, when he is destitute of true religion."

**Adam Clarke** on **without hypocrisy** - "Without pretending to be what it is not; acting always in its own character; never working under a mask. Seeking nothing but God's glory, and using no other means to attain it than those of his own prescribing."

**Without hypocrisy** (It is sincere; free of pretense)([505](#))([anuopkritos](#) from **a** = without + **hupokrinomai** = to pretend from **hupó** = under, indicating secrecy + **krino** = to judge) is literally without play acting, without playing the part or without hypocrisy. **Anupokritos** describes that which is unhypocritical, genuine (faith, love and wisdom in Scripture) and without show or pretense (pretense = a claim made or implied and especially one not supported by fact). Used 6x in NT - Rom. 12:9; 2 Co. 6:6; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:5; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 1:22. In short godly wisdom is sincere, so that what you see is what you get! The person with godly wisdom is not "playing the part." **Moo** adds that this person is "stable, trustworthy, transparent—the kind of person consistently displaying the virtues of wisdom and on whom one can rely for advice and counsel." Does this describe you (and me) dear reader?

As **Steven Cole** says "If we all would seek to live by these seven qualities of godly wisdom, personal conflicts would be greatly minimized and harmonious relationships would blossom and grow. But, unfortunately, we all battle the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#). These forces combine to draw us astray into **worldly "wisdom,"** which causes disharmony in our relationships." ([Ibid](#))

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**James 3:17 Level Ground** - Racial prejudice can take root early in human hearts. Children are colorblind until they hear adults making unfounded statements or see them shunning people of a different race. Prejudices soon become well-established weeds with deep taproots. Eradicating them isn't easy.

Laws can help to minimize discrimination in housing and the workplace. But no legislation eliminates prejudice in the heart. Its only sure killer is a long and hard look at what Jesus accomplished when He died on the cross. It's there that we can receive a wisdom "full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (Jas. 3:17).

It is said that after the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee, a devout Christian, visited a church in Washington, D.C. During the Communion service, he was seen kneeling beside a black man. Later, when someone asked how he could do that, Lee replied, "My friend, all ground is level at the foot of the cross."

What makes that ground so level? The awfulness of our sins, the terrible price Jesus paid to forgive them, and the love He has for all people. Prejudice cannot survive in soil from that ground.

We can all kneel together at the foot of the cross. --Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Forgive me, Lord, for prejudice,  
Remove its subtle lie;  
Remind me that for everyone  
You sent Your Son to die!  
--Dennis De Haan

To keep from looking down on others, look up to the cross.

---

## **Only A Rivet**

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, . . . without partiality and without hypocrisy. —James 3:17

Today's Scripture: James 3:13-18

Scientists have determined that faulty rivets may have caused the rapid sinking of the "unsinkable" HMS Titanic. According to researchers who recently examined parts recovered from the wreck, impure rivets made of wrought iron rather than steel caused the ship's hull to open like a zipper. The Titanic proves the foolishness of spending resources on fancy equipment and public promotion while neglecting the "ordinary" parts.

In a sense, churches are like ships, and many of their people are like rivets. Although rivets seem insignificant, they are essential for holding the ship together and keeping it afloat.

Feelings of insignificance are rampant these days, even among Christians, and some do hurtful things to make themselves feel important. James says, "Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (3:16). People corrupted by worldly desires for beauty, wealth, and power can bring down great churches, but people who are pure and undefiled (1:27) hold churches together.

As members of God's church, we need to be "rivets" without defect. When we are pure (James 3:17), strong (Eph. 6:10), and steadfast (1 Cor. 15:58), we will be used by the Lord to keep His ship afloat in times of crisis. By: Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

The task Thy wisdom hath assigned,  
O let me cheerfully fulfill;  
In all my works Thy presence find,  
And prove Thy good and perfect will.  
—Wesley

It is a great thing to be faithful in little things.

---

## **No Trouble**

Read: James 3:13-4:6

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable. —James 3:17

A Christian high school had taken its chorale to England to minister to the churches there. One day after the young people had sung, a member of one of the churches struck up a conversation with the principal of the school, who was on the trip as a chaperone.

The Englishman was a new believer and was excited about his faith. He asked, "Are these the best singers in your school? Is this your whole choir?"

The principal explained that this was a select group of young people, chosen not just for their singing but also for their Christian testimony and their walk with the Lord.

"We wouldn't want any troublemakers to be in the chorale," the principal explained.

The new believer was surprised. "Troublemakers? Why would a Christian be a troublemaker?"

Why, indeed! That man may not yet have had much biblical training, but he knew one truth for sure: The term Christian troublemaker is an oxymoron. Those two words shouldn't go together.

We who belong to Jesus Christ and claim to be His followers should be known as peacemakers (Mt. 5:9), never troublemakers. By Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O Prince of Peace, keep us, we pray,  
From strife and enmity;  
Help us to speak with loving words  
That quell hostility.  
—JDB

Never invite trouble—it always accepts!

---

## Wisdom From Above

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable. —James 3:17

Today's Scripture: 1 Samuel 24:1-10

If Kiera Wilmot had performed her experiment during her high school science class, it might have earned her an A. But instead she was charged with causing an explosion. Although she had planned to have her teacher approve the experiment, her classmates persuaded her to perform it outside the classroom. When she mixed chemicals inside a plastic bottle, it exploded and she unintentionally unsettled some fellow students.

The Old Testament tells the story of another case of peer pressure. David and his men were hiding from Saul in a cave when Saul entered (1 Sam. 24). David's companions suggested that God had delivered Saul to them, and they urged David to kill him (vv.4,10). If David killed Saul, they thought they could stop hiding and David could become king. But David refused to harm Saul because he was "the Lord's anointed" (v.6).

People in our lives may sometimes suggest we do what seems most gratifying or practical in the moment. But there is a difference between worldly and spiritual wisdom (1 Cor. 2:6-7). Wisdom from above "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy" (James 3:17). When others are urging us to take a certain course of action, we can invite God to influence our response. By: Jennifer Benson Schuldt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray (AND SING)

### **Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!**

Hold o'er my being absolute sway!  
Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see  
Christ only, always, living in me.  
—Pollard

One is truly wise who gains his wisdom from above.

---

## Which Wisdom?

Read: James 3:13-18

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield. —James 3:17

Is it wise to be bitterly envious of other people's possessions, talents, or good looks? Is it wise to be selfishly ambitious—and then brag about what your ambition brings you?

A passage in the Bible actually seems to call such attitudes wise. James used the word wisdom to describe “bitter envy and self-seeking” (3:14-15). That’s surprising, because we normally equate wisdom with something good. But James used the word in a specific context. The source of this wisdom, he pointed out, is evil. It doesn’t come “from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.” It is the wisdom that leads to immoral decisions about how life should be lived.

This kind of “wisdom” is all around us. Bitter envy and selfish ambition threaten many of our institutions and destroy relationships. Society pays the price for this twisted thinking at all levels, for it always leads to “confusion and every evil thing” (v.16).

The prophet Isaiah said, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes” (Isa. 5:21). As believers in Christ, we must pursue a higher wisdom—the wisdom that comes from God. It is pure, peaceable, and gentle. It is merciful and without hypocrisy (Jas. 3:17). Ask God for that kind of wisdom. Is there any doubt which wisdom is better? By Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The wisdom from above flies in the face  
Of what the world holds in death's embrace;  
Willing to yield, yet resolutely pure  
And peaceable, God's wisdom will endure.  
—Gustafson

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. —Proverbs 16:25

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### Where Can Wisdom Be Found?

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. —James 1:5

Today's Scripture: James 3:13-17

Wisdom is the beauty of holiness. James says wisdom is reasonable; flexible; forgiving; peaceful; caring; given to friendly visits, small acts of courtesy, and kind words. It is humble, transparent, simple, gentle, and gracious to the core (James 3:17).

Where can wisdom be found? It comes from heaven (1:5). “Wisdom,” wrote Charles Spurgeon, “is a beauty of life that can only be produced by God’s workmanship in us.”

It’s good to ask from time to time: “Am I growing in wisdom?” After all, life is relentlessly dynamic. We’re either growing sweeter and wiser as the days go by, or we’re growing into foolish or even sour-faced curmudgeons. Into what are we growing?

It’s never too late to begin growing in wisdom. God loves us with an ardent, intense affection that can deliver us from our foolishness if we yield ourselves to Him. His love can make the most difficult nature into a miracle of astonishing beauty. It may hurt a little and it may take a while, but God relentlessly seeks our transformation. When we ask, His wisdom will begin to rise in us and pour itself out to others.

We have this promise: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to [you]” (1:5). By: David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, please put an end to our foolishness and  
turn our hearts toward the wisdom that comes  
only from You. We ask You now to take our  
lives and transform them into Your likeness.

True wisdom begins and ends with God.

---

**James 3:17** - The wisdom that is from above is... without hypocrisy.

**SPEAK AND DO** - In ancient Greek dramas, a person behind a curtain spoke the lines while the performer on stage acted out the role. We might refer to the speaker behind the scenes as the one who didn't "practice what he preached."

This person behind the curtain reminds me of a problem we as Christians experience today. Many of us are skilled at sounding religious, but we don't put our words into action. This is hypocrisy.

When there is a discrepancy between what we say and what we do, we create confusion in the minds of our "audience." That's why many nonbelievers do not take the gospel message seriously.

A Christian who makes the greatest impact on a watching world, and who furthers the cause of Christ, is one whose actions harmonize with his speech. When James spoke of the "wisdom that is from above," he described it as "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (3:17).

Our role as Christians is vastly different from the ancient Greek actors. They had speakers who didn't do and doers who didn't speak. We are to be people who speak and do the truth! - R W De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

You're writing a "gospel," a chapter each day,  
By the deeds that you do, by the words that you say;  
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true -  
Say, what is the "gospel" according to you?  
-Gilbert

When actions and words agree, the message is loud and clear.

---

### **Speak And Do**

The wisdom that is from above is . . . without hypocrisy. —James 3:17

Today's Scripture: James 3:13-18

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Men read what you write, whether faithless or true—  
Say, what is the "gospel" according to you?  
—Gilbert

When words and actions agree, the message is loud and clear.

---

### **The Pure And Gentle Way**

Read: James 3:13-18

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits. —James 3:17

The parents were heartbroken when their young adopted daughter died in an unusual accident. She suffocated when the drawstring of the hood on her jacket became caught in a playground slide. They learned later that she was not the first child to die this way. Design flaws in both the clothing and the slide made this an accident waiting to happen.

Some people might have seen in this tragedy an opportunity for a lucrative lawsuit against two big corporations. But the parents refused to sue. In a television interview, the mother said they would have seen any remuneration as “blood money.” She and her husband knew that the leaders of the companies involved never intended their products to harm anyone. So the parents appealed to the clothing and slide manufacturers to correct the problems that led to the death of their daughter. Both firms took immediate action. The mother is now leading a crusade to promote child safety.

While I acknowledge that it is not always wrong to sue, I was moved by the choice of those parents to follow the pure, peaceable, and gentle way (Jas. 3:17). What an impact we would make in our society if all of us who profess to believe on Jesus would follow their example! By Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Thinking It Over

What is wrong with wanting revenge? (Rom. 12:19).

How do I react to vengeful people? To gracious people?

How, then, can I best honor God and help others?

Nothing is so strong as gentleness

**James 3:18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

Amplified And the harvest of righteousness (of conformity to God's will in thought and deed) is [the fruit of the seed] sown in peace by those who work for and make peace [in themselves and in others, that peace which means concord, agreement, and harmony between individuals, with undisturbedness, in a peaceful mind free from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts].

Phillips And the wise are peace-makers who go on quietly sowing for a harvest of righteousness - in other people and in themselves.

Wuest And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace

NET And the fruit that consists of righteousness is planted in peace among those who make peace.

GNT καρπὸς τοῦ δικαιοσύνης ἐρπύλλεται τὸ σπέρμα τῆς εἰρήνης.

NLT And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

KJV And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

ESV And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

ASV And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace.

CSB And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace.

NIV Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

NKJ James 3:18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

NRS James 3:18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

YLT James 3:18 and the fruit of the righteousness in peace is sown to those making peace.

NAB James 3:18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.

NJB James 3:18 The peace sown by peacemakers brings a harvest of justice.

GWN James 3:18 A harvest that has God's approval comes from the peace planted by peacemakers.

BBE James 3:18 And the fruit of righteousness is planted in peace for those who make peace.

- **fruit is righteousness** Jas 1:20 Pr 11:18,28,30 Isa 32:16,17 Ho 10:12 Mt 5:9 Joh 4:36 Php 1:11 Heb 12:11
- **make peace:** Mt 5:9
- [James 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**SOWING PEACE AND REAPING**



## A HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The **NIV** has an excellent, straight-forward rendering stating that "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."

**Robert Johnstone** - As the false, exhibiting itself in 'envying and strife,' (James 3:16) thus brings in 'confusion and every form of evil,' and in this way proves itself to be from beneath; so the true wisdom, showing itself in 'peace' and peacemaking, thus brings in 'righteousness,' and proves itself to be from above. ([Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James](#))

**John MacArthur** - There is an inexorable causal relationship between godly wisdom, genuine **righteousness**, and **peace**. Godly wisdom produces a continuing cycle of righteousness, which is planted and harvested in a peaceful, harmonious relationship between God and His faithful people and between those people themselves. As Isaiah declared, "The work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever" (Isa. 32:17). As James continually emphasizes, the person who professes to be a Christian must prove it by his works, his daily living. If he is a true believer, he will possess his Lord's own wisdom, and that wisdom will manifest itself in righteous, selfless, and peaceful living. He has the revelation of God's wisdom in Scripture and the teacher and interpreter of God's wisdom in the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul therefore prayed for the church at Ephesus, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17). He later admonished them, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise" (Eph 5:15). "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food," the apostle elsewhere assures us, "will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10), the righteousness "which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11). (See [James Commentary - Page 180](#))

**And the seed whose fruit is righteousness** - There is no Greek word for **seed** in Greek. **NET** = "the **fruit** that consists of **righteousness**" The NET Note adds that this refers to "the **fruit of righteousness**," meaning righteous living as a fruit, as the thing produced." In other words, heavenly wisdom's fruit is **righteousness**.

**Utley** - Notice it is not the **fruit** of wisdom; wisdom without **righteousness** is not **wisdom**. God's **righteousness** results in His children living right. The whole life—the head (doctrine), the heart (volition), and the hand (lifestyle)—is affected and redirected.

**Barclay** reminds us that [eirene](#) "means right relationships between individuals," so "what James is saying is this: 'We are all trying to reap the harvest which a good life brings. But the seeds which bring the rich harvest can never flourish in any atmosphere other than one of right relationships between individuals. And the only people who can sow these seeds and reap the reward are those whose life work it has been to produce such right relationships.' That is to say, nothing good can ever grow in an atmosphere where people are at variance with one another. A group where there is bitterness and strife (**selfish ambition**) is a barren soil in which the seeds of **righteousness** can never grow and out of which no reward can ever come. Those who disturb personal relationships and are responsible for strife and bitterness have cut themselves off from the reward which God gives to those who live a godly life." ([James 3 Commentary](#))

**Fruit** ([2590](#)) see note above on [karpos](#)

**Righteousness** ([1343](#)) ([dikaosune](#) from [dikaos](#) = being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified being or in accordance with what God requires) is the quality of being upright. In its simplest sense [dikaosune](#) conveys the idea of conformity to a standard or norm and in Biblical terms the "standard" is God and His perfect, holy character. [Dikaosune](#) characterizes a life or lifestyle in conformity to justice, law and/or morality as ordained by God. **Dikaosune** is rightness of character before God and rightness of actions before men. Righteousness of God could be succinctly stated as all that God is, all that He commands, all that He demands, all that He approves, all that He provides through Christ.

**Johnstone** - When James says that 'the fruit righteousness is sown,' the expression is one implying a lively anticipation of results; as if a man planting acorns were to tell you that he was sowing an oak forest, or a farmer should this spring be said to sow next winter's bread. The field in which the seed is sown is the human mind and heart, immeasurably the noblest and richest soil to be found on earth. The grandest created thing certainly must be a soul that can grasp the idea of a Creator, and can love that Creator as a Father.

**Is sown in peace by those who make peace** - If you sow peace, you will reap peace, which is what wisdom from above sows. On the other hand, if you sow worldly wisdom (with its "seeds" of selfishness and strife) you will reap disorder and every evil thing (conflict, disharmony, etc). (cf Gal 6:7-10+).

The **Amplified Version** functions almost like a "mini-commentary" - "[The fruit of the seed] sown in peace by those who work for and make peace [in themselves and in others, that peace which means concord, agreement, and harmony between individuals, with undisturbedness, in a peaceful mind free from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts]."

**Cole** makes an excellent point that "also implicit in the verse is the fact that a harvest is **not accidental** or serendipitous. No farmer

sits around doing nothing all year, then goes out into the field and says, "Whoa, look at that bountiful harvest!" If there is a harvest, it's in part because he has worked hard to cultivate that harvest. If you see a church or a home where there is peace, it is because the members have worked to cultivate peace. They have listened to one another, respected one another, judged their own selfishness and pride, and sought to live in accordance with godly wisdom, not worldly "wisdom."

**G Campbell Morgan** - The marginal reading of the Revised Version suggests the substitution of the word "by" for "for," and that would seem to be the real thought of the writer. He had been contrasting the wisdom from beneath with that from above. The first produces jealousy, faction, confusion. The second is first pure and then peaceable. Now carefully observe that he says much more than that peace is the fruit of righteousness. That is true, and it had already been said in the declaration that heavenly wisdom is first pure, then peaceable. But here the thought is that of the propagative power of life according to heavenly wisdom. Righteousness bears fruit after its kind, and that is peace. When this is sown, still in peace, it produces righteousness again, wherein is the further fruitage; and so ever on. Those who make peace had been declared by the Lord to be blessed, the sons of God. Here the blessedness is shown in its effect. The peacemakers are those who live by the heavenly wisdom, which is first pure and then peaceable, that is, by righteousness. These are the men who make peace. To compromise with wrong, to seek for quietness by the sacrifice of righteousness, is not to secure peace, but to make it impossible. On the other hand, to stand for righteousness, even though there must be conflict and suffering, is to sow the fruit wherefrom peace will come. The ways of - God are all severe, but they are the only ways of goodness. To do right at the cost of ease, is to make peace. To seek ease at the cost of righteousness, is to make peace for ever impossible. (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

**Is sown** ([present tense](#) = the customary practice)(4687)([speiro](#) from **spao** = draw out, pull) literally means to scatter (seed) and the opposite of reaping or gathering. The emphasis is on giving, not gathering! **Speiro** is used figuratively to describe the sowing of the "seed" of the Word of God, the Gospel (= "the word of the kingdom" - Mt13:19, cp Mk 4:14 15, 16, 18), "the ideas and precepts that have been implanted like seed in their hearts, ie, received in their hearts (Mk 4:18)." (Thayer). Jesus used **speiro** repeatedly in His parables (Mt 13:3, 18, 24, 31) We are all sowing some kind of seed. What kind are you sowing?

Jesus gives a blessing to peacemakers declaring "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Mt 5:9)

**Make** ([present tense](#))(4160)([poieo](#)) means "to do" which focuses more on the end/achievement of the action. To give rise to or cause to happen. Louw-Nida - "to produce something new, with the implication of using materials already in existence."

**Peace** (1515)([eirene](#) from verb **eiro** = to join or bind together that which has been separated) literally pictures the binding or joining together again of that which had been separated or divided and thus setting at one again, a meaning conveyed by the common expression of one "having it all together". It follows that peace is the opposite of division or dissension. Peace as a state of concord and harmony is the opposite of war. Peace was used as a greeting or farewell corresponding to the Hebrew word shalom - "peace to you". **Eirene** can convey the sense of an inner rest, well being and harmony. The ultimate peace is the state of reconciliation with God, effected by placing one's faith in the gospel. In eschatology, peace is prophesied to be an essential characteristic of the Messianic kingdom (Acts 10:36).

**William Baker** - James has thus provided for us a prescription for harmony in the body of Christ. That harmony is threatened by worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom, in turn, lurks within all our minds, and our pride in trying to accomplish God's work in our own ability leads to the doing of God's work in man's way. Since everyone has an opinion on how something should be done, friction results. The prescription James offers is to seek the wisdom from above. This, I believe, comes through Scripture (**ED: AND I WOULD ADD PRAYER, ESPECIALLY CORPORATE PRAYER ON CORPORATE MATTERS**). If we look earnestly and in faith, we can find God's way for doing ministry in Scripture, often the last place we go. (Ibid)

**ILLUSTRATION/APPLICATION** - Settling arguments peacefully in English pubs has often been a difficult task. So, in 1955, the Guinness brewing company decided that an official record was needed to pacify its customers. The [Guinness Book of World Records](#) was created. It has been a best seller ever since. By 1987, it had sold more than any other copyrighted book in publishing history! (From "Fedco Reporter," April, 1987.) We have a far better best seller to help us to live harmoniously: the wisdom of God's Word. But because of selfishness, pride, and jealousy, many Christians have used the Bible to attack others and to justify themselves. James wants us to apply godly wisdom to our personal lives and relationships. Is there peace in your home? Are you at peace with those in this church? If not, check out what kind of seed you're sowing. If you're sowing worldly "wisdom," you'll reap disorder and every evil thing. If you sow God's wisdom, you'll reap peace. (Steven Cole)

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## A Work Of Peace

The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. —James 3:18

Today's Scripture: James 3:13-18

The small church in Umbarger, Texas, was an unlikely place for an international work of art. But toward the end of World War II, seven Italian prisoners of war, who were being held at a large camp nearby, were chosen to help decorate the church's plain brick walls.

The prisoners were reluctant to aid their captors, but they agreed on the condition that their efforts be considered a contribution toward Christian brotherhood and understanding. But as they worked on their paintings and a woodcarving of the Last Supper, one of the POWs later recalled, "A spontaneous stream of good feelings began almost at once to flow among us." No one spoke of the war or the past because "we were here for a work of peace and love."

Our lives are filled with unlikely settings for introducing God's peace. We can feel imprisoned by hard feelings, strained relationships, and confining circumstances. But peace has the power to break out anywhere. James reminded us that "the wisdom that is from above is . . . peaceable, gentle, willing to yield . . . . The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17-18).

Wherever we are today, let's ask the Lord to use us as His peacemakers. By: David C. McCasland

Reflect & Pray

O Prince of Peace, keep us, we pray,  
From strife and enmity;  
Help us to speak with loving words  
That calm hostility.  
—Branon

The best peacemakers are those who know the peace of God.