

James 3 Notes

The Tongue (3:1-12)

- Its bridling (3:1-4).
 - This chapter treats two subjects directly related to each other: the bridling of the tongue and the analysis of true wisdom (cf. Proverbs 31:26). In a sense, 1:19-27 is a development of proper hearing; in the present section the proper attitude toward speech is developed. Control of the tongue is a part of working out our salvation as obedient children (Philippians 2:12, 15).
 - Teachers are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28; Acts 13:1 and Ephesians 4:11. The prohibition here against letting many become teachers is not due to an excess of teachers or to any discouraging of the proper ambition to teach. James is warning of the dangers inherent in the responsibility of teaching.
 - The teacher proclaims God's will and must proclaim it as God desires (1 Peter 4:11; Galatians 1:10-12). He will be judged on how well he performs this task. Therefore, we should avoid the taking up of the calling which brings the greatest responsibility and the greatest temptation of all to sin. The sins of the tongue seem to be the most prevalent of all sins and the most difficult to avoid.
 - The "perfect" man is one who has the kind of character which God is trying to develop in all of us as we grow into the image of Christ. The idea is that the man who has mastered the most difficult task can certainly do the less difficult. Hence the one not sinning in word must be all that God desires in a Christian.
 - Ships were a common sight on the seas of the Mediterranean world. They were so great in fact to carry many people (Acts 27:37), but even larger in relation to the small rudder. A ship uncontrolled in the face of wind and waves may be controlled by a very small instrument. The term "listeth" means "desire," "inclination," or "impulse." The one who holds the rudder can turn the ship about and thus control it.
- Its boasting (3:5-12).
 - The damage such a little member can do is so great that it boasts of its power and influence. James shows that unfortunately such a boast is not an idle one (cf. Matthew 5:29-30; 15:19; 1 John 2:16). One small match or spark may light a fire that could possibly burn millions of acres (cf. Psalm 83:14; Isaiah 9:18; 10:16-18; Zechariah 12:6).
 - The tongue may as completely destroy the whole body as the fire a forest. The tongue is a sort of "universe of evil" -- it voices every evil feeling and every kind of sinful thought; it sets in motion or gives

concreteness to every kind of sinful act. Nothing evil is beyond its power of accomplishment. James traces the inflaming nature of the tongue back to its source. It is "set on fire of hell;" this is his way of saying that it comes from the devil.

- That the tongue cannot be tamed by man is proof of its perverseness. It is more vicious than any of the wild creatures. The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Mark 5:4, of subduing demons.
- The only way in which we may subdue the tongue is through prayer (Psalm 34:13; 141:3; 1 Peter 3:10). This seems to be the force of the fact that no man can tame the tongue.
- James points to the inconsistency of the tongue in vss. 9-12. We bless the Lord and Father with our tongue and we curse men who are made in his likeness and are his children in another sense. Even nature is more consistent than this. To curse is to put someone under an imprecation, to invoke evil, or, even sometimes, damnation upon him (Psalm 62:4; Romans 12:14; 1 Corinthians 4:12). No curse of our own can be pronounced by a Christian upon a fellowman without reflecting the curse upon the God whose image man bears.
- Nature is not so incongruous that one may expect contradictory produce from the same sources. One would not expect to find a mixture of water in one place or fruit on one tree. Yet the fruit of the lips of James' readers was a mixture of blessings and cursings.

Two Kinds Of Wisdom (3:13-18)

- The wisdom from below (3:13-16).
 - Under the contrast of heavenly and earthly wisdom James sets forth the deadliness of the sins of the tongue of the unwise teacher and the beauty of righteousness as the fruit of the truly wise teacher.
 - The term "wise man" was frequently used of learned men such as philosophers and teachers (Romans 1:14, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:19, 26; 3:20). It was used by Jesus to describe the teachers whom He would send out (Matthew 23:34).
 - James told his readers to show conduct which manifests real goodness. If the teacher's deeds are the right kind, they will be characterized by meekness and such meekness will demonstrate that wisdom is present. The wise know how to receive instruction (Proverbs 12:15), and the wise teacher also knows both what kind of counsel to give and how to give it (Proverbs 11:14; 17:28; 29:9).
 - The man whose conduct reveals jealousy and selfish ambition shows that wisdom is missing. Jealousy and selfish ambition are opposite in character to the deeds of wisdom. The wise man will never produce such fruits. Actions always proceed from the heart. The pretense of

wisdom when the heart and life are not right is valueless. A man with great learning and knowledge and with potential skill in imparting his ideas might be exceedingly wicked in his heart.

- Such "wisdom" evaluates everything by worldly standards and makes personal gain life's highest goal. Instead, it is "earthly" in source as well as kind. It views life from the limited viewpoint of this world rather than from heaven's vantage point. Its mind is set on earthly things (Philippians 3:19).
- The wisdom from above (3:17-18).
 - The "wisdom that is from above" has seven characteristics, as does the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and the seven Christian graces (2 Peter 1:5-9). "Peaceable" is used for orderliness as opposed to confusion. "Gentle" is variously defined as "kindness" or "yielding or forbearing" (cf. Matthew 18:23-35). "Easy to be intreated" means "obedient" or "compliant." "Mercy" is generally used in the Bible as a description of a human attribute associated with deeds of love toward the poor and sick. Finally, a teacher should be consistent and without hypocrisy.
 - A righteous life of good deeds or fruits is what is reaped by the one who sows in the right way. "In peace" stresses that the sowing which produces this fruit is done under conditions of peace (not jealousy and ambition leading to disorder and vile practice). Under these conditions will the preaching of God's word grow and develop into a life of righteousness.
 - Righteousness is produced in the atmosphere of peace and is produced only by those who are peaceable (Ephesians 2:15). Such persons not only love peace and live in peace but also strive to create conditions of peace.