

James 3:1-12

James the half brother of Jesus writes this letter to the Jewish believers who have been scattered after Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7 and during Herod's persecution in Acts 12. In this letter he is basically providing these early believers with a practical manual of the Christian life.

James devotes a major portion of his letter to the tongue. He actually mentions the tongue in every chapter of his letter.

--James 1:26

--James 2:12

--Here in Chapter three

--James 4:11

--James 5:12

James wants us to guard our tongue, so he identifies at least 3 different powers that the tongue of the human body possesses.

I. The Power to Direct v1-4

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

James begins by giving a warning to those who teach the word of God

1. Those who teach the word give direction to those who sit under them
2. They shape the minds and hearts of their hearers in either positive or negative ways
3. Therefore they should be extremely cautious as to what they are saying before them
4. Teachers are in special danger of misusing their tongues and thus having a stricter judgment by God
5. 2 Tim 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*
6. Obviously it is important to watch and guard our tongues when we are directly directing others through teaching the Scripture.

But, we should also guard our tongues when we are indirectly directing others in normal conversation.

2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man,

1. This word perfect can mean, "Without any flaw or error." It can also mean complete and mature.
2. James 1:4
3. A purified and mature heart is the source of righteous speech.
4. What one says or does not say gives evidence of a purified and mature heart

2b If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

1. James 1:26
2. James says that a Christian who can bridle his tongue is able to bridle his whole body as well.
3. God has tried to help us with this monumental task!
 - a. He put the tongue behind a cage of teeth and walled it in with the mouth.
 - b. But the tongue is still in a wet place, therefore it can easily slip.
 - c. If one can control his tongue which so easily slips, then controlling everything else will follow.
4. Ps 39:1 *I said, "I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me."*

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

As long as a horse is expected to perform, they require the control of the bit.

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.

Compared to the overall size of a ship, the rudder is very small, yet it can easily steer the whole ship.

1. Like the bridle and bit and the rudder, the tongue has power to control the rest of us.
2. The bridle and bit must overcome the wild nature of the horse
3. And the rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off course.
4. The human tongue can work against the flesh....or against the spirit depending on how it is used.

II. Power to Destroy v5-8

5-6 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! 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.

The tongue is compared to a fire

1. Fire has the amazing and unique ability to reproduce itself in an almost unlimited way as long as it has fuel to burn.
2. On October, 8 1871 a lantern in a barn was kicked over by a cow igniting the great Chicago fire.
3. Before it could be contained, 17,500 buildings were destroyed, 300 people died, and 125,000 others were left homeless.
4. In 1903, a pan of rice boiled over onto a fire, spreading coals across the room and starting a blaze that eventually consumed a square mile of a Korean city, burning some 3000 buildings to the ground.
5. We all remember the Gatlinburg fires from 2 years ago that left 14 dead, 175 injured and \$500 million worth of damage
6. The tongue is just like a fire, feeding on more and more words and spreading and destroying.

Fire has the amazing and unique ability to reproduce itself in an almost unlimited way as long as it has fuel to burn.

1. As it spreads, fire destroys, and the words we say do the same exact thing.
2. For every word in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* 125 people were killed in WWII.
3. Prov 26:20 *Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.*

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

The human tongue is uncontrollable and untamable. Human's can tame animals, but no human in his own power can tame the tongue.

1. It is a restless evil
 - a. Ps 52:4 *You love all devouring words, You deceitful tongue.*
 - b. It loves to devour so much, we must constantly hold it back.
 - c. It is a restless evil
2. It is full of deadly poison
 - a. That is strong terminology isn't it?
 - b. Psalms 140:3 *They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips.*

III. The Power to Delight v9-12

- A. The tongue has the power to do wonderful things
 1. It can bless God
 2. It can, like a fountain bring forth sweet words
 - a. Prov 10:11 *The mouth of the righteous is a well of life,*
 - b. Ps 35:28 *And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness and of Your praise all the day long.*
 3. The tongue can be a delight
 4. If our tongue is to be a delight, it must be carefully guarded
 - a. On one occasion it can bless God, and on another it can curse men made in his image if it is not guarded
 - b. On one occasion it can bring forth pure water, and on the next bitter if it is not guarded
 - c. On one occasion it can bring forth proper fruit, and on another improper if it is not guarded
- B. There should be no place in a Christian's life for a forked tongue. So guard it!

Conclusion:

1. The church gossip was convicted and went forward at church to confess her sin
2. The pastor asks, What do you plan to do?
3. She replies, I want to lay my tongue on the altar
4. There is not an altar big enough

—The tongue has the power to direct directly and indirectly.

—It has the power to destroy reputations, hearts, relationships, witnesses, and churches

—It has the power to delight.

What kind of a tongue do you have this morning?

1. One that directs towards God or away from Him?
2. One that destroys or one that delights?
3. Don't underestimate the power your mouth can play in seeing or stopping a move of God.
4. And don't miss the fact that what comes out of the fountain of your mouth is revealing it's true source.
5. And that source is revealing who you really belong to.

Some of you this morning need to...

1. Open your mouth and speak!!!
2. Come repent
3. Pray for an extra measure of bridling and guarding
4. Get saved