

# God's IQ Test (The Talking Dumb)

Taming the Tongue Part 3  
James 3:9-16 5-31-2015

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Summary: The source of our sinful speech is a saltwater pool underground (a defiled heart). A salt spring can't produce fresh water, which means our "praise" is not real praise if we have unrepentant cursing of one another. True wisdom is first and foremost ethical (the smartest way to live is in righteousness, and the dumbest way to live is in sin). God's IQ test is shown, not spoken. It is seen in humble living. But earthly wisdom is characterized by pride and hostility, resulting in chaos in relationships. The solution is cleansing of your "pool" through humble repentance.

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**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. **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. **3** When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. **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. **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. **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. **7** All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, **8** but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. **10** Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. **11** Can both fresh water and salt water flow

**from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. 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. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 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. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.**

## Introduction

I don't have very many pet peeves, but I can tell you one of them. Questions like this – If you were a planet which one would you be? Questions like that are for people who think in a very different way than the way I think. The only answer I can think of to that question is, I would never be any planet. And if I were a planet, it wouldn't matter to me which one I was (except maybe Pluto – that would be a bummer). But for those of you who like questions like that, maybe you can think of an answer. But whatever answer you gave, it wouldn't tell me much about you – except for one answer. What if you asked someone, “Which planet are you?” and they said, “I'm no planet – I'm the sun”? You would say, “Oh, ok – egomaniac.”

That would be an over-the-top answer, and yet, isn't it true that all of us tend to have a sun complex? Every one of us has a tendency to walk through life thinking, “It's all about me. Life revolves around me. I'm the sun.”

I walk into the house after work, and my wife's job is to come and attend to me: “Are you hungry? Here's some dinner. The kids sitting quietly over there – they won't bother you but they are available if you want to play with them for a few minutes. Is there a game you want to watch? Oh, you don't feel like talking right now? That's fine; I'll just be standing here in the kitchen in case you need some potato chips or something.”

Maybe that's a little exaggeration, but isn't it true that there is some of that in us? I'm the sun. I am the point. If I am on the road, all the other cars on the road should get out of the way. Why don't they just all just pull over – can't they see me coming?

“Why is this line moving slow? Don't these people know that I don't want to stand in line a long time?”

“Why is it my husband is insensitive to my needs? Why are my kids behaving in ways that make my life harder? Why do they disobey and do things that make my day unpleasant? That is not the purpose of the universe. The purpose of the universe is for me to be comfortable. “

If someone asks me, “Darrell, do you think you're the center of the solar system?” I would say, “Of course not,” but my emotions tell a different story. The kinds of things that upset me tell a different story. My reactions to things that happen to me have “I AM THE SUN” written all over them. It's natural for us to think that we are the center of the solar system, because from our point of view, we are the center. The only eyes I ever see out of are mine. And so I only experience life from wherever I am standing - and that makes me feel like the center. And if I am the center, and I am the main point, then everything ought to work out according to my perfect plan. There is no room in that plan for suffering, no room for loss, no room for pain or disappointment. None of those are in my plan. And the biggest problems in life are these people who keep interfering with my amazing plan. In fact, not only do they refuse to be a planet in my solar system, but they think they are the sun and they want me to be a planet in their solar system. And the chaos that results comes out in our speech.

## Review

Throughout this chapter James has been talking about sinful speech. And in today's passage he is going to show us the source of our sinful speech. Why do we say sinful things to one another? Because of bad wisdom. There is good wisdom and there is bad wisdom, and the bad wisdom results in bad speech. James is going to show us that the wisdom that results in bad speech is not really wisdom at all. It is stupidity. You have heard of the phrase "Dead men walking"? James says these people are dumb men talking.

But before telling us that, James spends the first 12 verses of this chapter giving us a lengthy explanation of how bad the problem is. The world of our talk is a world of trouble. We are mostly numb to it, because we talk all day every day, and whenever we talk we all stumble in many ways, and so we just get numbed to sins of the tongue. But if we just stop and think about it for a moment - James is right. Would anyone here be perfectly comfortable if we just played the audio of your worst words just in the past month? If we were going to do that would you just say, "Oh sure, go for it. That would be great for my reputation. Everyone will just be amazed at all the gracious words that just tumble out of my lips on a daily basis." If you are upset with someone else for their dishonesty or gossip or slander or unloving speech - if we played the audio from your mouth this past month, would you be comfortable with that? No one? Every single person in this room has blown it that bad just in the last month? A month is a very long time. The truth is, as hard as I work at having godly, gracious speech, so many times I am an offense even to my best and most patient friends. We have got a real problem.

## We All Stumble

Our speech is next to impossible to control, which is bad, because when it is out of control it is bent toward evil. It is lit on fire with the very fire of hell, and it destroys like a forest fire. Do you know what a firewall is? In a building, if there is a fire and it comes to a firewall - it can't progress any further. It stops right there. If you had a church with 100 firewalls, gossip would never make it anywhere. It would quickly run into one of those firewall people who say, "That's gossip. I'm not going to listen to that!" and it would die out.

But so often, what do we do instead?

"Ooh, that person did something wrong? Do tell. Did you have the same experience I had with that person? Oh, let me tell you what I saw..."

You see some failure and instead of being a firewall it's like, "Let me throw gasoline on this!" Our tongues are like fire, and they are like snakes. The tongue injures people like a rattlesnake with ADHD. And so much of the damage that it does can never be undone. In a brief, 30-second conversation you provide a link in the gossip chain about someone, and you think it's no big deal. But by the end of that chain, that rumor has morphed into some terrible falsehood about that person. And in some cases, that person has to go the rest of his life, every time someone gives him a little bit of a questioning look, thinking, "I wonder if they have heard that rumor. And I wonder if they believe it." We damage each other in such devastating ways with our speech. And with that same, disgusting, defiled tongue we turn around and offer praises to God.

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

## The High Standard

So James paints a very bleak picture of our speech. And that's a big problem, because the standard for our speech in Scripture is incredibly high. We could spend weeks on that topic, but let me just show

you one passage. Take a look at Ephesians 4. Verse 15 says we are to speak the truth in love. That's not always an easy combination, is it? Look down at verse 25.

**Ephesians 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor**

God requires complete honesty – no matter what the consequences.

**29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**

How is that for a standard to measure your speech? *Nothing* unwholesome – ever? Everything I say to people has to be edifying and inspiring to them?

**31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.**

**32 Be kind and compassionate**

No angry speech – only kind words. That is the standard. The standard for our speech is high, and the natural course our speech takes is so sinful. This is a matter that requires urgent attention. Left unchecked, my tongue will bring devastation and destruction and pain and heartbreak. And it will be double minded – blessing God one minute and cursing men who are made in the likeness of God the next minute.

That is where we left off last time – in verse 10 with James describing that double-mindedness and saying, **my brothers, this should not be!** But then, in the next two verses, James throws us a curveball. You expect him to illustrate the point he just made in verse 10 – this dual output *should not be*. But that is not what his illustrations say. His illustrations don't say that dual output from the same source *shouldn't* happen. They say that dual output from the same source *can't* happen.

## No Such Thing As a Dual Spring

**11 Can both fresh water and salt (lit. bitter) water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.**

The point of those illustrations isn't that it is *immoral*, but that it is *impossible*. There is zero chance an apple tree will ever produce any other kind of fruit. If there are apples on the branches, you know that tree is appleistic all the way down to the roots. A salt water spring cannot produce fresh water – it can't happen. If salt water comes out of a spring, that is a saltwater spring. It won't produce fresh water. Why? Because if what comes out of it is bitter, the source is bitter.

Now, in James' analogy, what is bitter saltwater? It is cursing men. So if you have unloving speech, guess what – those words are coming up from a saltwater source underground – not a freshwater source.

“But wait a minute – what about my praises? I come to church and bless God. I sing His praises. I profess Jesus as Lord.”

If I have unrepentant sinful speech coming out of my mouth, then I am a salt spring and only a salt spring and my so-called praises are nothing but saltwater pretending to be fresh water.

This is why James focuses on the problem of both blessing and cursing supposedly coming out of the same mouth. If his concern were just the cursing, there would be no need to mention the blessing. He could just talk to us about the evils of cursing. But the focus is on the fact that the blessing and cursing were coming from the same spring. He wants us to see that that is not actually possible, which means the blessing isn't true blessing if there is unrepentant cursing.

“So, am I a saltwater spring or a freshwater spring?”

If you could dig a hole and go all the way down to the pool of water that is the source of this spring called “Darrell's mouth,” would that pool – that source of my words – be a pool of saltwater or freshwater? That is the question James wants us to be asking as we move into verse 13. Starting in verse 13, James is going to show us the two underground pools. Whenever there is a freshwater spring, if you dig down to the source you will find one pool, and if you dig to the source of a bitter spring you'll find the other pool. And the two pools are these: earthly wisdom and godly wisdom.

## The Definition of Dumb

First he describes the saltwater pool in verses 14-16. Then, starting in verse 17 he describes the freshwater pool. We will save that one for next time. For now, let's take a look at the saltwater pool that makes your tongue a saltwater spring. When sinful, hostile words come out of the spring of your mouth, the underground pool where all that's coming from is earthly wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

Remember how James started this whole discussion back in verse 1? With a bunch of people who wanted to be teachers. When someone wants to teach, that person is claiming to have some wisdom. And even apart from teaching – people who speak negatively about others a lot – people who are judgmental or critical, they do that because they are wise in their own eyes. They are the judge of who is doing well and who isn't. They think it's their job to give performance reviews on everyone all the time. If you are giving performance reviews on the people around you, obviously you must think of yourself as having enough knowledge and wisdom to be able to make assessments of others.

So in verse 13 James asks, "Who really is wise among you?" Who's smart and who's dumb? Get out your #2 pencils because James is about to administer an IQ test. And we are each going to find out if we are smart or dumb.

### Ethical Component

And you might be shocked to learn that the beginning point is ethical.

#### **17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then...**

The first and most important mark of true wisdom is moral purity. To be wise means to live in a smart way. To be a fool means to live in a dumb way. And the dumbest way to live is sin. And the smartest way to live is righteousness.

That's a key principle, because in our culture, morality is not even on the radar when it comes to IQ. Anybody here ever taken an IQ test? Do you remember the section on morality and ethics? No, because there isn't one. They are big on how many facts you know, and short-term memory, reasoning, and verbal recall. But there is nothing on there about what to do when someone is out there telling lies about you. Or how to handle a situation where someone needs to be confronted but is easily offended. Or how to overcome laziness or do battle against evil desires in your heart. And so there are a lot of people that this world considers geniuses who are absolutely moral morons.

When our culture comes up with a test to measure who is smart and who is dumb, why do you suppose they leave out morality? What's the point of being a genius if you can't even figure out how to get along with your next door neighbor? Or how to overcome a temper problem or increase your joy in life? Why does the standard IQ test ignore such an important area of smart living? Could it be that the test was written by people who don't do all that well in that area? We tend to place a high premium on the things that we think we are good at, and we put a low premium on things we're not so good at? We have all these academic types who come up with those tests. What if we got some farmers together and we asked them – "Come up with a test to figure out who the smart ones are"? That test would probably look a little different, wouldn't it? Instead of questions about who invented the combine, it would be questions like, "when should you get up in the morning? Early or late?"

"Well, it depends. I'm kind of a night person..." - Wrong answer!

The correct answer is "early." An IQ test developed by farmers would look a lot different than the IQ test developed by a bunch of academic eggheads. And which one would be better at predicting whether someone will live in a smart way or dumb way? I think I would want my kids to score high on that farmer one, to be honest.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare the results of earthly wisdom in vv.14-16 with the results of an unbridled tongue in vv.2-13.

But then again, farmers might have some blind spots too. What if a group of artists and musicians developed an IQ test? I can't even begin to predict what that one would look like. I just know I would fail it.

Different people have different conceptions of what it means to be smart or dumb. What about God? What does he say? What would His IQ test look like? We have it – it's called the book of Proverbs – and the other wisdom books.<sup>2</sup> What about James? James is going to talk to us here about wisdom. But he is not going to give us a full orbed, comprehensive definition of all aspects of wisdom. He wants to zero in on a particular section on God's IQ test that too many people in the church forget. These people who wanted to be teachers, but who were selfish and proud and argumentative, James is saying, "You can't be a teacher – you're failing an entire section on God's IQ test – the humility section." They think they are smart enough to be teachers, or they feel like they are smart enough to pass judgment on other people – they have such a high view of their knowledge and wisdom and insight, and James lets them know, "If you don't have humility, you're a blockhead."

## Smart and Dumb Are Ways of Life

**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.**

### Show Me

Here again we see that James was born in Missouri - the "Show me" State. In chapter 2 James said, "You have faith? Show me - Let me see it in your life." Now he says, "You want to be a teacher? You have a lot of wisdom? Ok professor - show me."

"I'll tell you all the stuff I know."

"No – don't tell me. Show me."

### Wise and Foolish Builders

Like so much of the book of James, this comes right out of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount with the point that everyone who hears His words fits into two categories – wise or foolish. And that's interesting, because both the wise man and the foolish man have the same knowledge. Jesus describes both of them as having heard His teaching. Both the wise man and the fool have the same knowledge – the only difference is that the wise man put that knowledge into practice, and the fool did not.

**Matthew 7:24 Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man... 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man...**

So James' IQ test is not fill in the blank, it's not multiple-choice, it's not essay – it's not written at all. It is a way of living. It is a lifestyle that shows a pattern of good deeds characterized by humility. If you are not humble, you're a dumbbell. You belong in the remedial class. You are not ready to be a teacher – you're still working on learning the ABCs of salvation. Remember what he said in chapter 1?

**James 1:21 ...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your soul.**

A posture of humbly, meekly, submissively receiving truth – that is what you learned in spiritual kindergarten. You have got to graduate from kindergarten before you can be a teacher.

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<sup>2</sup> The "wisdom" books of the Bible are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

So the IQ test, for James, is in your behavior. It's not just and how much you know, it's not just a matter of how gifted or skilled you are at teaching – the test of wisdom is your behavior. So let's take a look at some of the behaviors that will make us fail kindergarten.

## “Wisdom” Behaving Badly

### Selfish Ambition

In verse 14, it says people with earthly wisdom are people who **harbor ... selfish ambition**. That is why they want the title - because earthly wisdom is marked by self-glorification. It is driven by pride. And for some people that comes out in a desire for respect and prestige – they want people to look up to them.

For other people, they don't care so much about the title – they just want the power. They want to get into church leadership so they can get a say in what happens. They want to get their way.

For other people, they want to be part of the inner circle, so they are privy to all the information about what's going on. People have all kinds of reasons for wanting to get into leadership that have nothing to do with serving peoples' spiritual needs or washing people's feet. They are driven by self-exaltation. They are planets with a sun complex - it's all about them.

And again, we can take this beyond just those people who want to get into leadership. That applies to any of us who are so exalted in our own eyes that we think it is our role to put other people down, or grumble against them, or gossip about them, or look down on them for one reason or another. We exalt ourselves over other people because of **selfish ambition**.

### Bitter Envy

The other thing he mentions in verse 14 is **bitter envy**. That word translated **envy** means to have especially strong feelings. And in this case, strong **bitter** feelings. It is the same word used back in verse 11 to describe the bitter water that comes out of the salt spring. It is hostility towards people.

Prideful people tend to have a lot of anger. They have one crisis after another in their relationships, because when a person has the goal of self-exaltation, most people won't cooperate with that goal. People routinely do things and say things that don't exalt you at all. In fact, they do the opposite. They put you down, they marginalize you, they put the spotlight on your weaknesses, they ignore your strengths, they think little of you. If your goal is self-exaltation, and people start doing that, there is going to be conflict. Especially when you run into other people whose goal is self-exaltation. You're mad at them for messing up your exaltation, and they are mad at you for messing up their exaltation, and you get all kinds of fireworks. And it is next to impossible to reconcile those relationships, because no one will admit the problem. If you asked them, “Why is this relationship broken?” they will describe a whole bunch of symptoms, but none of those are the real issue. The real issue is I want to be exalted and this person won't cooperate. I want to be the sun, but they won't be a good planet and just revolve around me.

And in the case of those people who have selfish ambition for a position or a title in the church, that also results in bitter hostility and animosity. For them it's directed at whoever has the position that they want.

“I should be the one up there – not him!”

#### *Disguised as Zeal*

Thomas Manton, in his commentary on this section makes a helpful observation. He says, “Envy and strife often go under the mask of zeal.” Very often these people will cause all their turmoil under the guise, “I'm fighting for the truth!”

“I'm taking a stand against sin!”

But that is a diversion. They are just upset because they didn't get what they wanted, but they don't want to admit that, so they make it about some noble cause. This happens here constantly – someone wants a certain position or title, they don't get it, and they get angry and suddenly they are all up in arms about some complaint they have that never was an issue before.

## The Origin of Bad Wisdom

Why do they behave that way? Here's why:

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

### Earthly

First, it's earthly. It is not from God.<sup>3</sup> This world's wisdom would be fine if the earth were all there were. If this world were the final, ultimate reality, and there is nothing beyond this world, then earthly wisdom would be just fine. But we have to deal with spiritual realities. I need to deal with factors that are going to impact my situation 10 million years from now. Earthly wisdom is not going to help with that. I need wisdom that can show me how to do battle with spiritual beings – Satan and his demons. Earthly wisdom is bankrupt in that department. And most of all, I need wisdom that can show me how to interact with God. I need wisdom that can show me God's will. Earthly wisdom has never even heard of God's will. So when it comes to wisdom, if it's earthly, it is worthless.

### Unspiritual

Secondly, he says it is **unspiritual**. That means it is driven by your fleshly appetites and desires. It doesn't come from the Holy Spirit, which means it is completely devoid of any spiritual power.

### Demonic

And then thirdly, this wisdom is **demonic**. Earlier James said it is ignited by the very fire of hell. And now he says it is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic – why don't you just tell us what you really think, James?

## The Results of Bad Wisdom

James hates this kind of wisdom, because look at the results:

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

The word translated **disorder**<sup>4</sup> refers to chaos - disturbances, unrest, and tumult in personal relationships. It is the opposite of peaceful relationships. And that's no surprise, because of course there will be chaos when a planet thinks it's the sun. I'm Mars, and I wake up every day expecting Jupiter to revolve around me. I see it coming closer, “That's right, very good, keep coming – now turn...,” but then off it goes. And I don't understand.

“Where is it going? Here comes Earth ... oops, now where is it going?”

I am picturing myself as the center, and all the movements of the planets are so confusing and so aggravating and maddening.

“What is wrong with them? Don't they know how to orbit? I think they need a little help.”

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<sup>3</sup> True wisdom is not a part of the creation. **Proverbs 3:19 By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place.** Wisdom existed before anything was created, which means any wisdom that is part of this world is a counterfeit.

<sup>4</sup> This word (*akatastasia*) is related to the word translated **restless** in 3:8 and **unstable** in 1:8 (*akatastatos*).



And so I devote all my energy to getting them to revolve around me. But that is just an exercise in total frustration, and it causes chaos.

And not just chaos – not just disturbances and unrest in relationships, but, James adds, every kind of **evil practice**. There is just no end to the list of sins that come as a result of earthly, self exalting wisdom.

## **Presenting Wisdom in a Package of Foolishness**

So that is James' description of earthly wisdom. You know what that reminds me of? You read that description, and it bears uncanny resemblance to what Proverbs describes as ... foolishness! Pride? Proverbs 10:8 says the chattering fool won't accept commands. And Proverbs 26:5 says the fool is wise in his own eyes. And Proverbs 28:26 says the fool trusts himself.

Sinful speech? Proverbs 10:14 says **the mouth of a fool invites ruin**.

**Proverbs 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once**

**Proverbs 15:2 ... The mouth of the fool gushes folly.**

Animosity and slander?

**Proverbs 10:18 ... whoever spreads slander is a fool.**

Fighting and strife?

**Proverbs 20:3 It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.**

Disorder and lack of peace?

**Proverbs 29:9 ...the fool rages and scoffs, and there is no peace.**

Evil conduct?

**Proverbs 10:23 A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct**

Earthly "wisdom" is actually the opposite of true wisdom. It is foolishness. Just like we saw in chapter 2 that dead faith is actually no faith, so earthly wisdom is no wisdom.

So can you see why James doesn't want them to be teachers? It is hard to teach people wisdom wrapped in a package of foolishness. Have you ever tried to do that? I have. Most of us who are parents have done that. It's Sunday night, 10 o'clock, you're about to go to bed, and one of your offspring comes up and says, "I just realized – my science project is due tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock. Can you help me think of an idea?" Or, "All I need is some poster board, markers, and ... 12 baby chickens." And what do we do? We fly off the handle.

"You haven't even started? What's the matter with you? I know for a fact that project was assigned six years ago! I can't believe you put it off until now. When I was your age, I never did that. I was such a good student, they didn't even have to assign science projects to me – I just did them on my own out of sheer self-discipline. I can't believe you put it off to the last second – how could you be so stupid!"

And of course your teenager is sitting there thinking to himself, "Ah, this is so helpful. Wait, let me write some of this down. I just wish my dad would come up to my room more often and drop these kinds of pearls of wisdom on me. I'm finding myself so motivated and encouraged and instructed."

Do you think that's what he is thinking? No. Why not – because he's hardhearted and impossible to teach? Or could it be that it is just hard for anybody to receive wisdom packaged in a box of folly?

## **The Solution to Bad Wisdom**

Well, how did you score on the IQ test? What should you do if you're sitting here at the end of this sermon thinking, "Wow, I'm a moral moron"? James handed back my IQ test and it just says the word "fool" written at the top with great big red letters. What should I do? Here's a tip – don't boast about it.

## Don't Boast

**14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.**

If what comes out of your mouth on a regular basis came from hell – that's nothing to brag about. Don't boast about it, and don't lie about it either. We are so good at lying to ourselves. We have learned this creepy skill of self-deceit. We have lived with ourselves long enough to know the kinds of lies that won't work. So we tell the ones that will work. We're good at it.

## Admit the Truth

How many of you are really mad at someone because they lied to you – lied to your face, multiple times? Maybe you can cut that person a little slack when you realize that there's someone else who has lied to you a lot more than that person. There's someone else who has deceived you in a lot worse ways – much more damaging ways, and much more often than that person. And that person is you. We lie to ourselves every time we talk ourselves into caving in to a temptation. We lie to ourselves every time we procrastinate. We have major problems in our character that could have been fixed 20 years ago if we just would have been honest with ourselves. No one has caused more harm and more heartache and more pain in your life through deceiving you than you have in lying to yourself.

Does anybody feel a little black and blue at this point? This is brutal stuff, isn't it? No wonder James started out with that statement – **we all stumble in many ways**. So what are we supposed to do with this? If you have saltwater coming out, then the underground pool (your heart) is a salt spring. So what does that mean for those of us who stumble in many ways in our speech? Is every single one of us a salt spring, including James? Is every one of us who ever gossips or uses harsh speech characterized by earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom? When our tongues prove to be double minded – blessing God then cursing men who are in His likeness – is this just proof that every last one of us is lost? What can be done with a double minded tongue that has soiled and defiled and contaminated my heart? Is there any remedy for that? If you are corrupted and polluted by the sins of a minded heart tongue, what should you do? Turn the page in your Bible to James 4:8.

## Purify Your Heart Through Repentance

**James 4:8 ... purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

Those are words of hope! That is some of the greatest news in the whole book, because it tells us that a defiled, double-minded heart can actually be purified! This is incredibly good news! How is it done? Humble repentance.

**James 4:9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

We will talk about that passage a lot more when we get to it, and we'll talk about all the various aspects of true repentance, but for now, it's just great to know that there is a remedy, not only for my sinful, spiteful, hell-fire, snake venom tongue, but there's a solution for the bitter, salt reservoir down below that is making it a saltwater spring. There is a solution to my saltwater heart. Humble repentance. If you humble yourself before God and repent of your sins, God will consider your heart clean.

**1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Why was Abraham considered righteous even though the saltwater of lies about his wife had come out of his mouth? Because he had faith - the kind of faith that drove him to action. And the most

immediate action faith will cause in your life is repentance over sin. People who genuinely believe and trust God have a lifestyle of repenting when they see sin in their lives. Whenever they stumble, they repent. Instead of making excuses, instead of trying to justify themselves, instead of denying reality – they repent and let go of that sin and turn back to God. And those people are considered righteous in God’s sight. Those people are considered freshwater springs, and when they bless God, God is honored and pleased. Do they still stumble and curse men? Yes, but when they do, they repent.

## **Brokenness**

Why does James wait so long to give us the solution? Why did he force us to endure the pummeling we got going through chapter 3? It is because when it comes to our sin, our only hope is brokenness and humble repentance. And that will not happen until my pride is crushed to powder by conviction.

This has been verified in my experience. I have tried all kinds of things to get a handle on my tongue – reading books, memorizing verses, accountability, trying harder, reminders... But looking back, the one thing that really made a big difference in getting control of this unstable, restless, poisonous, incendiary, unpredictable, double-minded, out-of-control mouth of mine – the most effective thing I’ve found in my life for getting control of my selfish, proud, boastful words, as well as my unkind, harsh, judgmental words, is brokenness over sin. When I have really blown it big, and have committed sins I never thought I was even capable of; when I have become enslaved to a sin and fallen time after time after time no matter how hard I try to escape it; or when my sin does massive damage in my life or in the lives of others – when those kinds of things happen and bring me to a point of being crushed and broken and shattered before God; that is when my proud, condescending, judgmental words are finally silenced. In times like that, someone comes to me with some gossip and my thought is, “Well, at least that person isn’t as bad as me.” Someone hurts me and I think, “What that person is doing isn’t much different from what I’ve done.” Nothing will soften your speech like the humility that comes from brokenness and contrition over your own sin.

The reason James goes on and on about the evils of our speech is not to make us feel condemned. It is to break our pride so we can truly repent and be cleansed in God’s sight.

**James 4:6 ...“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

**Benediction – Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.**

## **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

1. Are there any areas where you can see that the world has affected your concept of intelligence and smart living?
2. In which kinds of circumstances do you find you are most tempted to be critical, judgmental, etc.? Consider the implications regarding your wisdom.
3. Do you know someone in the church who has heavenly wisdom (humble, pure, etc.)? Name that person and describe what you’ve seen in them.

