

KEY ISSUES (JAMES 3)

James 3 begins with a dire warning—we who teach should be especially careful for we will be held to a higher standard. Sure we all stumble in many ways, and when our speech has no fault, we have no imperfections. In fact, if we do keep our speech faultless, we can keep our whole body in check.

You see, a bit in the mouth of a horse can control the whole horse. Huge ships are steered by a small rudder, wherever the pilot directs. Similarly, the tongue is small, but it makes large boasts. A huge forest is burned by a small spark. The tongue is also a fire, and a world of evil. It corrupts the whole person, sets life paths on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell!

All kinds of wild animals have been domesticated and/or tamed, but no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of poison which kills. And to top it all off, we use our tongues to praise Father God.

AND, we use it to curse people. My beloved ones—THIS SHOULD NOT BE! Can fresh water and bitter water come from the same spring? Can fig trees bear olives? Grapevine bear figs? A salt spring can not produce fresh water.

- Q What is the worst thing you've heard a person teach? [For example, declaring the kings visited Jesus in Nazareth, without referring to Scripture to support the declaration.] Why are those who teach others judged on a more strict basis?
- Q Why does the tongue do more damage than "sticks and stones?"
- Q What is the spiritually pragmatic value of harnessing our tongues?
- Q What is the biggest forest fire you've seen caused by a tongue on fire?
- Q Why does the uncontrolled tongue corrupt the whole person? [Hint: the causality flow runs both ways. To wit, an uncontrolled tongue not only creates/facilitates evil in others, it "corrupts the whole person." James 3:6]
- Q Why is it difficult to "tame our tongues?" Why is it useful to believe we can not?
- Q Why and how do we fool ourselves thinking that words don't matter? [Bitter water and sweet water from the same spring?]

JAMES 3

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We 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.

³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or 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. ⁵Likewise 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. ⁶The 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.

⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹²My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

James 3:13-18. Now—about wisdom. Consider the wise and understanding people among you. Is it not



by their good life, by deeds done in humility which comes from wisdom? BUT, if you hang onto enviously selfish ambitions, don't brag about it, or deny the truth. Such so-called "wisdom" comes not from heaven but from the devil—it is earthly and unspiritual. Remember:

wherever you have envy and selfish ambition—you will have disorder and every evil deed imaginable.

Consider wisdom from heaven. It is pure. It loves peace. It is considerate. Submissive. Full of mercy. Impartial. Sincere. Most of all, wisdom from heaven has good fruit—sown in peace, the fruit from heavenly wisdom blossoms a full harvest of righteousness.

- Q Why are selfish ambitions not to be bragged about? [Hint: denying the truth creates self-lie.]
- Q Why does earthly wisdom cause disorder and all kinds of evil? What examples can you provide which illustrate this connection?
- Q Much has been done in the name of selfish ambition. Remember "selfish" is sometimes reified to "group." The world's wisdom asserts—"Whatever it takes." How do we overcome this propensity to disguise selfish ambition within group hegemony?
- Q Where are we to find heavenly wisdom? [verse 13] How do we recognize it? [Hint: *Heavenly* wisdom manifests as... [verses 17-18]

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| ✓ Humble deeds | ✓ Submissive |
| ✓ Pure | ✓ Merciful |
| ✓ Peace-loving | ✓ Impartial |
| ✓ Considerate | ✓ Sincere |

Which attribute of *heavenly* wisdom do you find most difficult to find among the "wise and understanding among you?" And, for you, which wisdom attribute is most difficult?

- Q What's the best sign that wisdom is coming from heaven instead of earth? [Hint: "a full harvest of righteousness;" verses 14-16. Or, consider—if I were to do what this "wisdom" suggests, would the Lord God be glorified?]

JAMES 3:13-18

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. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷But 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. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

