

**Theme: Christian Speech**

James 3:1–12

<sup>1</sup> My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. <sup>8</sup> But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

**Consider**

**3:1.** What warning does James give to those who desire to teach truth to other Christians? Why does he give this warning?

**3:2.** When James says we all “stumble,” what is he talking about? How do we stumble?

Look back through your study in James so far and note the times when James has mentioned the tongue (speech).

According to this verse, what can we do if we can control our speech?

**3:3–4.** List the two examples James provides that demonstrates the impact such a small thing can have:

- A \_\_\_\_\_ in the horse’s mouth.
- A \_\_\_\_\_ of a ship.

In what specific ways is the tongue like these examples?

Do you recall a time in your own life where you experienced the power of the tongue personally (either positively or negatively)?

**3:5–6.** James refers to the tongue here as a “fire.” How is the tongue like a fire?<sup>14</sup>

In what way does the tongue “defile the whole body”?

According to 3:6, what is the source of the tongue’s fiery, destructive abilities?

List some sins associated with speech: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3:7–8.** James says that we can tame (subdue or control) every kind of animal, but we cannot tame the tongue. Instead, the tongue is “unruly”<sup>15</sup> (or “restless”) and full of \_\_\_\_\_. How should you respond to his warning?

**3:9.** How does James describe people in 3:9? What is significant about this, especially related to how we speak to them (see Genesis 1:26–27)?

**3:10.** How should we think about the human tendency to speak differently around different people?

**3:11–12.** James asks three questions to demonstrate the absurdity of hypocritical speech. List them below:

- Can a spring \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- Can a fig tree \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- Can a grapevine \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Is there ever an excuse for believers to be deceitful in our speech? Can you think of similarities between being “double-minded” (1:8) and double-tongued (See Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6; Matthew 5:33–37)?

<sup>14</sup> James is also using a play on words. Because of its appearance, fire was sometimes described as a “tongue” (Acts 2:3). Even today, we might describe how a fire “licked” the walls of a burning building.

<sup>15</sup> This is the same word used in 1:8 to describe the double-minded man who is “unstable” in all his ways.

Look back at how the chapter began (3:1–2). Why do you think God addresses speech so soon after warning those who want to teach?

### Ask Yourself

Do I use my speech as a powerful force for good or for evil?

What settings or circumstances am I most often tempted to use my speech in an ungodly way?

What are some specific ways I can use my words for good? Who can I encourage with my speech?

Is there someone I need to ask forgiveness from for my anger, gossip, or other sinful speech?

Am I predictable in my speech? Are my commitments to Christ demonstrated by how I talk outside of church?

### Cross References

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.

Isaiah 64:6

But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

Romans 3:10

As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one."

Genesis 1:26–27

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup> So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Proverbs 25:11

A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold In settings of silver.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Colossians 4:6

*Let* your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Matthew 5:33–37

<sup>33</sup> "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; <sup>35</sup> nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Luke 6:43–45

<sup>43</sup> "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>44</sup> For every tree is known by its own fruit. For *men* do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup> A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.