

James 3  
The Tongue's Power, Purpose, and Produce

Thursday, January 18, 2024 • Read James 3

Questions from the Scripture text: How does v1 address the readers? What does it urge them not to do? Whom does he include among the teachers? What will he and they receive? Why—who stumbles (v2a)? In how many things? But in what thing, specifically, does every imperfect man stumble (v2b)? What would he be able to do, if he didn't stumble in word? What else can be controlled in this manner (v3)? And what else are controlled by what (v4)? What can the tongue do (v5a)? What else can do what great thing (v5b)? What else is a fire (v6)? What is it a world of? What does it defile? What does it inflame? By what is it inflamed? What have been tamed by man (v7)? Which man can tame the tongue (v8)? Why not? What great and glorious use was it made and redeemed for (v9a)? But what exactly contrary use do we make of it (v9b)? What makes cursing men so evil—in Whose likeness are men made? And what makes it so irrational (v10)? By what analogies does v11–12 further reinforce the irrationality of this? What must these few teachers be (v13)? What shows their wisdom and understanding—what sort of conduct, and works done in what sort of wisdom? What two things in the heart are contrary to good conduct and the lowliness of wisdom (v14)? What is a man doing, if he has these in his heart but is a teacher anyway? What does this indicate about his "wisdom"—from where does it NOT descend (v15)? What three things characterize it? What do envy and self-seeking produce (v16)? What kind of wisdom does v17 describe? What first characterizes it? What second? What third? What fourth? Of what two things is it full? What two things do not characterize it? Of what fruit, especially, does the wisdom that is from above sow the seeds (v18)? In what manner is the fruit of righteousness sown? What do those who plant it make?

**Since the Lord's commandments about the Lord's works are so important, who should teach them?** James 3 prepares us for the second serial reading in public worship on the Lord's Day. In these eighteen verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **teachers in Christ's church should be men who respect the power of the tongue, who are committed to praise and blessing together, and whose conduct exhibits the humility and gentleness that correspond to wisdom and righteousness from God.**

**Men who respect the power of the tongue,** v1–8. It may be appealing to be a teacher (particularly an elder, a pastor-teacher), but as James well knows, they will be greatly (mega) judged (v1). There is a real danger of someone with an envious, self-seeking heart (v14) ending up as a teacher in the church. It is clear that this is not saying the teaching ministry is for those who do not stumble at all, or even who only stumble a little, because such do not exist (v2a).

From v2b–5, the passage emphasizes just how powerful the tongue is. And from v6–8, the passage emphasizes just how evil the tongue is. A teacher must not be someone who underestimates the power of the tongue or its potential for wickedness. He does not pretend that he is past the risk of doing such damage. He takes the necessity for self-discipline and sanctification with utmost seriousness.

**Men who are committed to praise and blessing together,** v9–12. Some self-deceived teachers are not so bold as to curse God. They try to keep up appearances, and perhaps they even think that they are good because they bless God (v9a). Note that they even call Him Father! But watch out for a man (especially yourself) who lets himself speak of others in a reviling, despising way (v9b). Such a man genuinely disregards the likeness of God (end of v9).

v10–12 hold up to us a mirror in which we ought to see the dreadful inconsistency between reviling men and praising God. Indeed, one who mocks at others should not think that his praise is genuine or genuinely received. But we are made for the praise of God, so let us do so! And if we do so, let us also use our mouths in a way that respects God's image in them and seeks always to bless them.

**Men whose conduct exhibits the humility and gentleness that correspond to wisdom and righteousness from God,** v13–18. The language of "wise and understanding" in v13 brings us back to the subject at hand for this entire chapter: qualifications of teachers. What does "good conduct" "show"? "The meekness of wisdom" (v13). Lowliness, humility. Good conduct is the opposite of bitterness, envy, and especially self-seeking.

The way that this section of the passage carefully distinguishes between wisdom from above and earthly wisdom should alert us to the fact that they can be difficult to distinguish from one another. This is very important, if we are to know whether we should be a teacher, or whether we should have someone as our teacher. If a man comes to a wrong conclusion about himself, v14 says that he "boasts and lies against the truth"—very dangerous in light of v1!

If a man has heavenly wisdom, he will be meek (v13), pure (innocent, holy, v17), peaceable (v17), gentle (gracious, kind, v17), willing to yield (compliant, persuadable, teachable, v17), full of mercy (v17) and good fruits (v17). The last two items in v17 take the whole of ch2 under the word translated "without partiality" and the whole of chapter three under the word translated "without hypocrisy." This is a lowly man who treats the smallest and poorest as well as the greatest, and who is the same before God on the inside as he is to men on the outside.

Earthly wisdom may *sound* like heavenly wisdom—have many things in common with it. BUT it comes from a person who is self-seeking and ungentle, given to speaking against others. His wisdom comes from himself (sensual, v15) and even from demons (v15). It is deeply sobering to consider that a man could be a teacher in the church, think himself wise, be thought of as wise, and his counsel be demonic.

How will we know that a man's teaching is a casting of the seed that will bear the fruit of righteousness (v18a)? Because he is a peacemaking man, who speaks in peace (v18b). Men are drawn, sometimes, to teachers who are brash and ungentle, who make habit of denouncing and despising others. Men even think it honoring to God and helpful to others to speak in this way. So, let us be instructed by this chapter and let it guide us about what we believe or teach as wisdom.

How are you showing a respect for the power of the tongue? How has your use of the tongue demonstrated that it was made for the praising of God? What is your speech to others like? What is your speech about others like? How does your life demonstrate humility, gentleness, and peace?

*Sample prayer: Lord, forgive us! For, we all stumble in many ways. We neither control our tongues, nor our whole bodies. Forgive us, for we have been hypocrites who bless You in one moment and then revile Your image-bearers the next. Forgive us, for we have been envious and self-seeking, while thinking ourselves wise and understanding. Forgive us, for we have not been impartial, and we have been hypocrites. We thank you that Christ has been without partiality and without hypocrisy. Indeed, He did not stumble in a single thing. So, grant that we might be forgiven, and sanctified, for His sake, through whom also we ask it, AMEN!*

Suggested songs: ARP15 "Within Your Tent Who Will Reside?" or TPH461 "Blessed Are the Sons of God"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via [hopewellarp.org](http://hopewellarp.org))

James chapter 3. These are God's words. My Brethren, let not many of you become teachers knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 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. Indeed, we put bits and horses' mouths that they may obey us and return their whole body.

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. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest? A little fire kindles 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 whole the course of nature. And it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird of reptile and creature of the sea is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. With it, we bless our God and Father and with it, we curse men who have been made in this multitude of God. Out of the same mouth, proceed blessing and cursing. My brother, these things ought not to be so. There's a spring send forth, fresh water and bitter.

From the same opening. Can a fig dream? My Brethren bear. Olives are a grapevine bear figs. Thus no spring yields, both salt, water and fresh. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct. That his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

This wisdom does not descend from above, but as earthly sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion. And every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure. Then peaceable. Gentle. Willing to yield. Full of mercy and good fruits. Without partiality. And without hypocrisy. Now, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace.

By. Who make peace?

So the chapter as a whole, is teaching us about who should be teachers. He starts with let not many of you become teachers and then He goes on to describe. The sort of man, especially that shouldn't and then Uh, the man that should As he contrasts him. So in verses one through eight, A teacher should be someone who

respects.

The power of the tongue. And who is familiar with God's grace? For sanctifying the use of the tongue. So that if he is familiar with God's grace, for sanctifying the use of it on, no man can tame the tongue. He says that, But of course, God can by his grace.

And the same sanctification that Grace produces in taming the tongue will work for anything. If it can work on the tongue he says Then it will work on the whole body and so first men who respect the power of the tongue in verses one through eight. In the second place, men who are committed.

To both praise of God and blessing of men. Men who know what their mouth is for. So they know the power of the tongue and they also know the purpose of the tongue. Tongue was created first and foremost for the praise of God. But if it's not also combined with the blessing of men, Then we're not actually praising God.

The tongue. A spring coming out of the heart. And if the heart treasures God, Then it will praise him and bless our neighbor. But if uh, if we're praising him, but not blessing our neighbor. If we praise him and hurts our neighbor, Then it is not truly a spring.

We are self-deceived. When thinking that we are praising God. And then the last place in verses 13 through 18. Men whose conduct exhibit. What you see in verses 17 and 18. In verse 17, in particular, So first A man must know the power of the tongue second. He must know the purpose of the tongue.

And third, he must seek. The produce. Of Peace. I'll seek the produce of peace. First, then the power of the tongue. He says, don't try to be a teacher. We all stumble in many things and teachers will receive A stricter judgment, which means he stumbles in the tongue and in other things.

Why? Because if he's controlling his tongue, All right, then he's able to control the whole body. It says, the rest of verse two. And so the tongue is Very powerful. And difficult to control, but in itself. Can control other things. And so each of us, since we are called to hate all of our sin and put it to death, One of the primary focuses that every Christian will have for the rest of his life.

Is untaming his tongue? Every single one of you, every single one of us. One of the things that we should be doing in our walk with the Lord, Is being careful about our speech. Being careful only to speak in a way that honors God. Only in a way that respects others.

And especially in a way. That seeks to produce fruitfulness. Uh, to increase one another. It's not just Tranquility in the home and Lack of verbal Warfare among men. Uh, but to use our mouths, each of us in a way that will help one another Uh, walk rightly with God, think well of him.

And so Praise of God will not only be on our lips when we're talking to God. Well, praise of God will be on our lips when we're talking. With one another. But a teacher should be someone who is mature. Uh, in these things. Someone who knows the power of the time, respects the power of the tongue.

And is not like, A fool. Uh, who Around a wild Untamed Beast. Is making a great show of. Uh, of how unafraid he is of it. He's not respecting. Um, it's power. Men have tamed. Every sort of Beast verse 7 says, but no man can tame the tongue. It is And unruly evil full.

Of deadly poison. Uh, when the tongue. Speaks it. Um, it speaks out of overflow of what is in our hearts. And it is often, and especially by our tongues. That we discover. How much remaining sin? How much. Fleshliness. Actually remains in. In fact. Verse 6, verse 6 says it is set on fire.

By hell. So everyone. Um, should respect the power of the tongue. And should focus on mortifying sins of the tongue. And especially someone who, Um, Who is a teacher? And especially someone who is your teacher. Your Minister your father, you don't get to choose. Well, you guys don't get to choose either of those.

But if you ever end up in a place, where, The minister is the sort of guy. Cracks foul jokes and uses foul words. Especially someone who lashes out at others. Uh, with his mouth. Don't listen to him and certainly don't. Uh, listen to Um, Don't listen to. Teachers over media that are like, There's, One individual in particular that I can think of That many people who end up at our church and sometimes even who are in our church.

Uh, listen to And uh, he definitely does not pass. The James 3 test. So, it doesn't matter how clever the podcast is. Um, If the man does not. Respect the power of the tongue. And if he does not identify the purpose of the tongue, And if he has, Seeking.

A produce of Peace from the tongue. And don't listen to him, he shouldn't be a teacher, he's going to be more strictly judged. And you shouldn't take him to be your teacher. So a man who respects the power of the tongue in the first place. A man who, Knows the purpose of his time in the second place, when, when I was Giving kind of the headings, the outline.

Uh, give you almost this whole thing. With it. We bless our God and Father, he says, in verse 9 starts this little section In verses 9 through 12. And when he says with it, we bless our God and father, he's recognizing the purpose of your tongue. This is what your tongue was made.

For the praise of God. The praise of God that comes not only from a creature. But from a sinner that has been redeemed through Union with Christ, And now is adopted in Jesus and because we are Sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his son into our hearts.

And what does the spirit cry out? Both in that place in Galatians 4 that? I was just quoting and in Galatians 8, one of the great things. The first great thing that the spirit gives our tongue to do From our heart is to call God. Our Abba, Our Father And immediately this orients us to our whole life in Union with Jesus.

And as children of God, That we are to be blameless. And pure in the midst of a corrupt and perverse generation Well, what is one of the first marks of that blamelessness and pureness Purity? That we do all things without Complaining or arguing. But we walk in love as children of God.

Uh, to come. Uh, to Ephesians 5 at the beginning. There. And so, Uh, prayers as adopted Saints in Christ. Who are indwelt by his Spirit, this is The reason tongues exist. Than the reason your tongue exists. Now, if your tongue Exists for that reason. You can imagine. Um, You know, one of these great epic Tales.

And there's this super powerful sword to borrow from verses one through eight, and it exists for one great reason and it's kept on the wall. And uh, You're permitted to take it down. If you're going to use it for a reason that is consistent with its great reason. And how Dreadful it would be if someone even in even in this fiction.

Would take that sword down and use it for something else. Always use your tongue. This powerful tongue that was created for this great and glorious. Purpose of praising God as his redeemed and adopted child only in ways that are consistent with its great purpose.

And that means never. Attacking or despising someone who is made in His Image. Now, the people you have to practice honor one another And so seek to speak. Respectfully, too. And about one another. And seek to use. The way we talk in conversation in the home. In a way that edifies and builds, one another up.

With it, we bless our God and father and with it, we curse men who have been made in this multitude of God. Made In His Image made in his likeness. And you're gonna attack them. And speak words that tempt them into curse and bring them into curse. Of course, not.

If the tongue is a spring, Then make sure that what comes out of it with respect to God and what comes out of it with respect to demand match one another Because if they don't match, Then uh, that exposes our praise of God as false. And God have mercy if we bring him.

False hypocritical. Praise. So, a teacher should be someone who Respects the power of the tongue knows the purpose. Of the tongue and then, Seeks the produce of peace or produces peace. With his tongue. The first thing that shows wisdom Is humility. Verse 13, who is wise and understanding among you let him show by good conduct that his works are done.

In the meekness the loneliness, the humility. The gentleness. Of wisdom. And so, you'll have Works that are kind and gentle not just words. That are sugary and soft and sweet. But there is gentleness and kindness. That proceeds from his hand just as There are is humility and gentleness that proceeds from his mouth.

Verse 14 is something that each of us have to Evaluate for ourselves. Whether we are speaking in a way. That. Tries to advance ourselves better Envy. Or secretly hopes that we will have some gain or admiration or

And self-seeking if that's we have that desire in our heart.

If? A daughter or a wife. As six of you are, You may be thinking, well, I don't even need to listen to this chapter. Because there's no danger of me being a teacher. Well, first of all, Hebrews 13, you're instructed to follow the outcome of your teacher's. And so you are seeking to have these things reproduced in you.

But second of all. Now, you are hoping or you already are in one case. Uh, to be a mom. And you want to speak. With gentleness. You want kindness from the hand and kindness from the lip. So that when they hear you say, what is wise, They will know that it is wisdom from above.

Okay, so there's Uh, teaching. That may sound very similar. To the wisdom that is from above. Verse 17. The wisdom that is from above is first and so on. But wisdom, that is Seeking one's own purposes. And does not descend from above. But as Earthly and sensual, Uh, fleshly and demonic.

For where Envy and self-seeking exist. Confusion and every evil thing are there. So, half the time. They're telling you to what to do or what not to do. Just to get what they want. And the other half the time. Uh, they're not saying to do or not, to do to do the same things.

They speak in confusions. This is true, even of Of our podcaster and whom to listen to online. For instance, or whose books to read. You welcome them into your mind as teachers, that way. And those who, Are envious and self-seeking. They make a big deal of themselves. Maybe even tried to build a whole city around themselves.

And, They create confusion and every evil thing.

Well, that's what to avoid. But what should be in that place wisdom, that is from above is Pure. It is not okay with Any sort, of course, language or harsh language Dishonoring disrespectful. Why? Because those things are against God just as much as any of the other things that he talks about are against God.

So, it's first pure vertical. And then Peaceable. Horizontal with others. Peaceable gentle Willing to yield is a word that Describes something that is shapeable or teachable. This comes from a mouth, that is still growing white. Well, first of all, he knows that God has infinite Wisdom and he does not.

And so the wisdom from above Teaches him to be teachable. Without partiality. He doesn't treat one person different than another person. Is not a respecter of those who seem to be something. And you remember, The whole first half of chapter two, in which we Consider that and without hypocrisy.

And that goes back to verses 9 through 13. And speaking to God, one way and to men another way which shows That the, the Speech that is made to God or about God. This supposed praise. Is not actually coming from the heart, but is hypocritical. And so the wisdom that is from above is first pure and then Peaceable gentle teachable full of mercy and good fruits.

Without partiality without hypocrisy. Now, the fruit back to this. Full of good fruits. Uh, the fruit of righteousness. Is sown in Peace by those who make peace. And praise God. We have just recently heard Blaster. The peacemakers for they shall be the sons of God. And they are seeking to see people brought into, Peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Repentance unto life. The Saving Graces that. Um, by which God unites us to Christ and Brings our fellowship with Christ, the Life of Christ out in our lives. And, Uh, The one who should be a teacher speaks in a way. That is peace, seeking and Peaceable. And peaceful. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace.

By those who make peace. Is very, very different than whom the world would make teachers. The world tends to make teachers? Those who are most impressive of presentation. Not those who are Most humble, and gentle. And peaceful. And yeah, these are the ones. Uh, him the Lord. Has made his teachers.

Uh, the teachers that serve him. In the church. Man, let's pray. Our gracious. God, we pray that you by your spirit. You would write the truth of this passage on our hearts. That you'd make us to be those who know the power of the tongue. And who are therefore mortifying sins of the And those who know the purpose of the tongue.

And those who produce peace. In our Manner, and as our goal, And our use of the tongue. Grant that we ask in Jesus name. Amen.