

A Wise Heart Tames a Wild Tongue

James 3:1-18



What We Say Matters

- James early in the epistle introduces the necessity of bridling the tongue (Jas 1:26; cf. 3:2, 3).
- Anyone who considers himself to be a religious person but who does not control his speech deceives himself (1:26; cf. vv. 19, 27; Gal 6:3).
- What we say and teach, if unchecked, makes our religion vain (Jas 1:26; 3:1; cf. Acts 14:15; 1 Cor 15:17; Isa 29:13; Matt 15:7-11).

A Dangerous Member

- James transitions from the generic demonstration of faithfulness (works) to the specific (words), prohibiting many of his readers from becoming teachers (Jas 3:1).
- Our words are powerful like rudders (direction), fires (destruction), and fountains/plants (display; vv. 2–12).
- We must hold back words that are boastful, hurtful (e.g., slander, insult), or indecent (e.g., profanity, euphemisms; vv. 5a, 8b–9; cf. 4:11; Eph 4:29).

Applying Heavenly Wisdom

- James verbally connects his discussion of bridling the tongue with that of living wisely (Jas 3:13-18).

Connections

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good conduct his works in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

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bitter (3:11), full (v. 8), fruits (v. 12), without hypocrisy (vv. 9-12; cf. 1:26-27), make (3:12)

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gentleness (1:21), heart (v. 26), truth (v. 18), from above (v. 17), good (v. 17), righteousness (v. 20)

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show (2:18), works (vv. 14, 18; cf. 1:25), do ... be arrogant (2:13), peace/able (v. 16), make (v. 12)

Applying Heavenly Wisdom

- James verbally connects his discussion of bridling the tongue with that of living wisely (Jas 3:13–18).
- Whatever wisdom that we adopt—whether from above or from below—determines how we speak and act (vv. 13–18; cf. Matt 12:33–37; Phil 4:8–9).
- If we struggle with our conduct, including our speech, we must ask for help, fix our hearts, and change our habits (Jas 1:5; 5:16 ... 1:8, 25 ... 1:21–22; 3:13, 18).

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