



## THE BOOK OF JAMES

### JAMES 3:1-12

#### SECTION THEME

In this section, James is going to address the tongue (our speech). James must have been concerned about church's actions here. Remember, we are still in the same letter in which James is encouraging Jewish believers in the midst of trial. There must have been people speaking badly—boasting about themselves, cursing others, picking fights. It is certainly something that we can improve on in the church today.

#### GO DEEPER

Learn more about the importance of what we say in the following Bible passages. Psalm 19:14; Philippians 2:14-16; Hebrews 10:24-25; Proverbs 10:31-32

According to these passages, how important is what we say?

What different "audiences" are described here? Who's listening to us?

Do you get any ideas here about how to control your tongue?

**1**Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. **2**For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. **3**Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. **4**Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. **5**So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

**6**And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of

our life, and is set on fire by hell. **7**For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. **8**But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. **9**With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; **10**from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

**11**Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?

**12**Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

## DIGGING IN

- **We see the word *body* at the end of verse 2. That word can actually mean several different things in the New Testament. What do you think it means here?**
- **And then how does mastery of one's speech keep the whole body in check?**
- The most basic meaning of *body* is our physical existence. If we read it this way, James is saying that those who control their speech are also able to control their physical actions.
- But *body* is used elsewhere in the New Testament for the church, "the body of Christ." If this verse is still talking about teachers, then it might mean that those who master their speech are able to control (keep in check, literally "bridle") the *church*.
- Look now at James 3:3-6. **How is the tongue like a bit in a horse's mouth?**
- **How is it like the rudder of a ship? How is it like a fire?**
- **Do you think these comparisons make more sense regarding individual behavior or regarding leadership of a church? Or perhaps both?**
- **Do you think it's really impossible to "tame the tongue," as it says in verse 8?**
- **How would a person do this? If you tried to tame your speaking habits, how would you go about it?**
- **How would you describe the situation in verses 9-12?**
- **Who is James talking about?**
- Verse 9 fits with the inferences James has been making all along. He's talking to people who hear the Word of God but don't obey it. They want to be religious, and they say nice things to beggars, but they don't actually help people in need. Some of these people are leading churches with a double-mindedness. James says it clearly: This ought not to be so.

## 5 MARKS FOCUS: SHARE YOUR STORY

Consider the areas in life where you may have been affected by a careless statement someone made. Maybe think of a time when you were careless with your words.

If there was reconciliation, how did that go? Share your story about what was affected and how healing took place in that relationship. If there hasn't been reconciliation yet, what steps do you need to take in order to set things right?

### USE THE 2 OF THE FOLLOWING APPLICATIONS IN YOUR WALK THIS WEEK:

**Memorization:** Learn James 3:9-10. This isn't your normal type of memory verse, but it might prove helpful in real-life situations.

**Stop-Phrase:** When you find yourself speaking badly about someone, stop—in mid-sentence if you need to. Find a phrase to run through your mind in those cases. Maybe it's James 3:9-10. Maybe it's just "This should not be." Or maybe it's a more positive statement like "Bless the Lord, O my soul" or the prayer from Psalm 19:14.

**Encouragement:** Think of three people you can encourage this week, and do so. Be as specific as possible. Can you bolster their confidence or their faith?

**Thanks:** Who has encouraged you in the past? Who has spoken words into your life that truly helped you? Can you find them and thank them for that?

**Media Fast:** Many of us learn unkind habits of communication from talk radio, cable news, or social media. If this is a problem for you, engage in a "fast," abstaining from those media sources for a period of time—perhaps the next seven days. Then re-evaluate.

## A PEEK AT THE GREEK

Don't get thrown by the word *perfect* in Verse 2. It can also be translated "mature" or "complete" (τέλειος/*teleos*). It's the same word used in James 1:4 for the person who develops patience through trials. So James is not saying that people who control their tongues are sinless. In fact, he has just said that we all stumble in many ways. It's just that the one who avoids stumbling *in speech* is may very well be a mature believer.