

A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

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Survey of James 3:1 - 4:12

CAREFUL SPEECH

Chapter 3

Another test of spiritual maturity in a believers life is the words that come out of their mouths. In this section James connects the mouth with the mind. Without a wise source from which to speak, the tongue is uncontrolled. Both **Controlled Talk** and **Cultivated Thought** are important in how a believer communicates with God and others.

1. James 3:1-12 **CONTROLLED TALK** (*the characteristics of the tongue*) James begins to discuss a believer's speech (this is being expanded from 1:26). The tongue is small but it is powerful, uncontrolled and poisonous if it is not brought under submission.
 - a. **The Power of the Tongue** (3:1-5)
 - 3:1 - It seems that James was addressing the fact in this verse that many of the Jewish Christians were ambitious to become teachers in church meetings. The Apostle Paul was often a visitor in various synagogues himself and was allowed to speak. But here James was saying too many of these believers were *overly anxious* to speak up and show off (John 3:10/9:40-41). There is no doubt that teaching has to be done. But James reminded them that there was a greater responsibility for those who teach. A person who professes to have a clear knowledge of their duty is obviously more bound in obeying their own teaching. They will be judged at a higher level because they aspire to teach.
 - 3:2 - James used the word "we" to include himself in this verse. He makes the statement that if a believer never stumbles in what he says he is perfect. He is mature because he is able to bring his whole body

under control. Spiritual maturity requires a tongue that is under complete control.

- 3:3-5 - James compares the tongue with three everyday examples to illustrate how small but influential it is. First, a grown horse can be turned by a *small bit* in his mouth. Second, a *small rudder* is able to guide an enormous ship. Third, it only takes a *small spark* to ignite an entire forest. *The tongue is small but can be powerful!*

b. **The Rebellious Nature of the Tongue** (3:6-8)

- 3:6 - The tongue can be satanic and infectious. Just like a spark can destroy a forest, the misuse of the tongue can cause pain and agony to many. A tongue that is uncontrolled will produce three results. First, it can *corrupt* the whole person. Second, it sets the whole course of the person's life on *fire*. Third, the tongue is set on fire by *hell* itself. James goes on to say that all nature can be tamed by man but no human can ever tame the tongue. It is unstable and full of deceit. ***Although the tongue can serve as an evil instrument, it can become an instrument of positive blessing (Colossians 4:6). The tongue is not doomed to be evil, because God's grace can mold it into a force for good and righteousness.***
- 3:7 - James says that animals, reptiles, birds, and fish can be trained by humans but no human has ever tamed the tongue.
- 3:8 - He says that the reason the tongue is untamable is because it is unstable. We can't miss the fact that he says *"it is ready to pour out its deadly poison."* King David said this about the people who were seeking to destroy him (Psalm 140:3).

c. **The Poison of the Tongue** (3:9-12)

- 3:9-10 - Just like the forked tongue of a snake, from the same mouth comes praise and cursing. Praising God and others and with the same mouth cursing God and others. James said this should not be among Christians!
- 3:11-12 - James asks two questions here and he is anticipating a negative response. "Can both freshwater and bitter water flow from the same spring?" The answer here is no. "Can a fig tree bear olives or

a grapevine bear figs." Again, James is anticipating a negative answer. The point he is making is that a believers tongue should be consistent. *The tongue must be cleansed from the pollution and poison.*

2. James 3:13-18 **CULTIVATED THOUGHT** (*the characteristics of wisdom*) James says in these verse that if you want to know how to talk you must know how to think. The tongue may be hidden most of the time but comes out of its cage when enticed to do so. James says it is not intelligence that keeps the lock on the cage, it is wisdom. He discusses the **three characteristics** of this wisdom in these verses.

a. **Wisdom is Humble** (3:13)

- 3:13 - James begins this discussion by asking a question that doesn't necessarily require an answer but is meant to make a point; "who is wise and has understanding among you?" "Wise" is describing a person who is skilled in the practical issues of life. "Understanding" refers to an individual who excels intellectually. James answers his own question "let him show it." He is saying that wisdom is not acquired by lectures but by applying the Truth to real life. It is shown in the humility of wisdom. *A truly wise man is always humble.*

b. **Wisdom is Gracious** (3:14-16)

- 3:14 - James says that true wisdom has no room for jealousy and personal gain. He is saying that there is nothing to be prideful about, because these kinds of attitudes deny the Truth.
- 3:15-16 - He says here that jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. This is not the wisdom that is from above (James 1:17). This kind of wisdom is earthly and from the devil. If left unchecked it can produce confusion and evil deeds of all kinds. *A truly wise person does not seek glory or gain, he will be gracious and giving.*

c. **Wisdom is Peaceable** (3:17-18)

- 3:17 - James expounds on what he said in 1:17. He says that the wisdom that is from above has seven characteristics. **(1)** Pure (holy) **(2)** Peace-loving **(3)** Gentle (*considerate*) **(4)** Compliant (submissive) **(5)** Full of Mercy and Good Fruits **(6)** Impartial (*does not doubt*/James 1:7) **(7)** Sincere (*without hypocrisy*)

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- 3:18 - James describes Peace as a seed that is sown that produces a harvest of righteousness. *A truly wise person is a person of peace.*

If Christians are to ever achieve righteousness, spiritual maturity, and practical holiness (which is the theme of the Book of James) a believer has to guard his speech, because controlled speech comes from a wise spirit. A controlled tongue is only possible by cultivated thoughts. Therefore a mouth filled with praise comes from a mind filled with purity. Christians should stand confidently (chapter 1), serve compassionately (chapter 2), and speak carefully (chapter 3). He should be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, and speak what God wants him to speak.

SURRENDERING WITH REMORSE

CHAPTER 4

This chapter begins in contrast to the closing words of the last chapter. James confronts the hideous behavior of hate, envy and pride with advice about how to handle “fights and quarrels” these Christians were possibly experiencing. He said that they needed to turn their hatred into humility and their judgment into justice.

1. James 4:1-6 **Turning Hatred into Humility** *James must have been disturbed by the apparent conflict that was taking place with these Jewish Christians. The tone he used in this section of the letter is obvious by his neglect to call them “my brothers.” He will discuss the cause of conflict, outline some consequences of conflict, and suggest a cure for conflict.*

- a. **The Cause of Conflict** (4:1-2)

- 4:1 - James begins this section with another question seeking to make a point. “What causes fights and quarrels among you.” “Fights” mean being in a state of war or conflict. “Quarrels” mean individual disputes or battles. Again, James answered his own question. He said that they come from their own desires that battle within them. Conflict is born out of an inner sensual lust or pleasure. *This “playboy” philosophy is still waging battles in people’s hearts today.*
- 4:2 - War is the produce of a person’s wants. Lust brings about murder. Covetousness results in frustration because of never being

able to obtain a desire. James says all these lead to “quarrels” and “fights.” The last part of this verse says “you don’t have because you don’t ask God for it.” Does that mean that we ask God for the “lusts” of our heart? No! *James was simply making the “source” of conflict crystal clear for his readers; “inner sensual lusts and pleasures.”*

b. **The Consequence of Conflict** (4:3-4)

- 4:3 - James says that the only way to have our legitimate needs met is by asking God for it. But He says that one reason a believer doesn’t receive what he asks for is because he asks with the wrong motives. The word “ask” has the meaning of “ask for yourself.” The words that follow clarifies this. “That you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” “Spend” could be translated “squander.” “Pleasures” again mean “hedonistic.” *God will never provide for “hedonistic squandering.”*
- 4:4 - James began this verse with strong language “you adulterous people.” Here is another question to make a point; “Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?” He goes on to say “Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” *The consequence of conflict is worse than if you ended up empty-handed. James seems to be saying that a rebellious Christian who has an illegitimate relationship with the world is being hostile toward God.*

c. **The Cure for Conflict** (4:5-6)

- 4:5 - Scholars have wrestled with this verse for centuries. The problem is that James is not quoting any particular passage of Scripture here but could possibly be making a general statement of the Truth of Scripture. It could be that James was saying that God has placed the Holy Spirit within every believer and that Spirit is very concerned about any rival for a Christian’s heart. God refuses to share our commitment with any other so-called god. He wants our total loyalty and devotion. We need to remember that God makes great demands of His people.
- 4:6 - There is no question about the clear truth of this verse. “God opposes the proud.” The word “oppose” is a military term meaning to “battle against.” James says “to the humble He gives grace.” The call

here is to shun pride and surrender humbly to God's authority. The cure for conflict is a humble spirit which is rewarded by God's unmerited favor. He will show in the verses that follow how humility is related to peaceful justice.

2. James 4:7-12 **Turning Judgment into Justice** *These Christians James was writing to seemed also to have a tendency to judge and condemn. But God requires Justice not judgment. James says that righteous relationships are important to spiritual growth. In these verses James offers advice about Justice, the advantage of Justice and the author of Justice.*

a. **Advice for Justice** (4:7-9)

- 4:7 - In verses 7-9 lay 10 commands that if followed will contribute to harmony and holiness. "Submit to God and resist the devil." "Submit" is a military term meaning "to be subordinated" or to "render obedience." "Resist" means to "take a stand against." *Take a stand against the devil, "and he will flee."*
- 4:8 - Now James says "draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Drawing near to God demands His cleansing "wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." "wash and purify" are verbs that refer to ceremonial cleansing which is a figure of speech that would have meant much to these Jewish Christians.
- 4:9 - In this verse James is calling for open repentance. He was suggesting for them to "grieve." That is to have a deep sense of shame for their disobedience to God. Mourning and weeping are outward evidence of this wretchedness. James said if their laughter turned to mourning they would recognize the sinfulness of their ways. Laughter and joy are not sinful but there are times when we meet God it is not a time to celebrate. There is a right time to rejoice and a right time to mourn. James was calling these double-minded readers to recognize their moral unworthiness.

b. **Advantage of Justice** (4:10-11)

- 4:10 - James gives a command and a promise here. To become humble before God demands for people to voluntary turn to Him (Matthew 23:12). James is picturing a person who is falling prostrate

before God and seeking mercy. Then he promised if they saw themselves from God's perspective they would be "lifted up." This means that God would give them moral and spiritual power to live their life. It could even provide hopeful encouragement for their future in heaven (1 Peter 5:6).

- 4:11 - The warnings in the next two verses grow out of the previous verses 7-10. He says that pride and the lack of humility cause "slandering" language. This is a complete contradiction to how the family of God should live. James says that if a person slanders another he is setting himself up as a judge. He tells them it isn't their place to sit in judgment of the law of God but to obey it. He says that when they slander they are showing their opposition to the law of love and are saying that they are exempt for obeying it.

c. **Author of Justice** (4:12)

- 4:12 - James firmly states that God is the only lawgiver and judge. He can save and destroy. He is saying that a slanderous Christian is one who is playing God. God is the Author of the law, the Judge over the law but He is also the Savior from the law's condemnation. He finishes with another question to make a point "so what right do you have to criticize anyone?" Simply driving home the point that we are not God!

