

## The Teacher, the Tongue, and the Truth

### James 3

#### Introduction

1. The Lord has blessed us with His wisdom through the inspired word that we might be able to know Him and please Him – **1 Corinthians 2:13**
  2. The Lord has also left gifts for our use to the edifying of the body in His truth – **Ephesians 4:8, 11-13** (teachers)
  3. However, the weight of teaching is understood by the weight of the message taught. The responsibility is great.
  4. James emphasizes the great responsibility of teaching and warns of the potential evil of the tongue in his third chapter.
- I. Fair Warning for Teachers **(vv. 1-5)**
    - A. The Greater Judgment of Teachers **(vv. 1-2)**
      - a. Warning of judgment – **2:12** – speech and conduct.
      - b. Warning for teachers because of use of words to teach:
        - i. **(v. 2)** – The great danger of stumbling in word. (“word” used by metonymy for speech) (“Tongue” used by metonymy throughout text for speech)
      - c. **“Stricter judgment”** for teachers?
        - i. “Stricter” – *meizōn* – “It is the comparative degree of *meγas*” (VINE)
        - ii. “AV (45) - greater 34, greatest 9, elder 1, more 1” (STRONG)
        - iii. “larger” (STRONG)
        - iv. All to be judged with same strictness by same standard – **Romans 2:6, 11, 16**
        - v. Greater how?
          1. **(v. 2a)** – many things to stumble in for all.
          2. **(v. 2b)** – added difficulty with sins of the tongue. (WHICH IS THE PRIMARY TOOL IN TEACHING.)
          3. **Matthew 12:36-37** – judgment of words, idle (careless) words will condemn you.
          4. THE CHOICE TO TEACH OPENS ONE UP TO A GREATER SPHERE OF JUDGMENT – WOULDN’T BE JUDGED FOR WHAT YOU TAUGHT IF YOU DIDN’T TEACH.
    - B. The Need for Control Over the Tongue **(vv. 2-5)**
      - a. Maturity is an essential quality of teachers **(v. 2)**.
        - i. Perfect – *teleios* – complete; mature – **1:4; 2:22** (verb form)
        - ii. **Hebrews 5:12-14** – those who are unable to teach are babes.
        - iii. **1 Timothy 1:7** – first requires a knowledge of what is taught.
        - iv. NOTE: Not discouraging ALL from EVER becoming teachers but STRESSING THE NEED TO GROW IN THE WORD FIRST LEST YOU LEAD OTHERS ASTRAY.
      - b. Control of speech is a sign of maturity **(v. 2)**.

- i. Ability to control whole body:
    1. **Luke 6:45-46** – speech manifests the content of our heart.
    2. **Proverbs 4:23** – the content of our heart leads to action in life.
    3. **Matthew 15:18-19** – speech defiles a man.
      - a. Manifests his heart content.
      - b. Things in heart lead to action.
  - ii. If you do not stumble in word – evil things (murders, adulteries, fornications, etc.) not proceeding – THEN YOUR HEART IS SHOWN TO NOT BE FILLED WITH SUCH, AND YOU WILL NOT BE GIVEN OVER TO SUCH.
    1. EX: **“adulteries, fornications”** – cf. **Matthew 19:3** (Pharisees dishonest question about divorce)
    2. EX: **“Thefts”** – cf. **Matthew 15:5-6** (Pharisees tradition concerning earmarking money as gift to God to avoid giving it to parents)
  - c. Figures given to illustrate this point – **(vv. 3-5)**
    - i. **(v. 3)** – bit controlling horse.
    - ii. **(v. 4)** – rudder controlling ship.
    - iii. **(v. 5a)** – tongue capable of great things in our lives. (like previous examples)
      1. **(v. 5b)** – like a small flame engulfs an entire forest.
      2. NOTE: WORDS THAT LEAVE THE MOUTH CANNOT RETURN. (IF ERRING, DAMAGE WILL OCCUR.)
- II. Potential Evil of the Tongue **(vv. 6-12)**
- A. The Tongue’s Potential for Evil **(vv. 6-8)**
    - a. **(v. 6a)** – fire – following **(v. 5b)**.
      - i. Where fire spreads rapidly, and yields great damage, so does speech.
    - b. **(v. 6a)** – great potential for evil – iniquity – unrighteousness.
      - i. World – *kosmos* (COSMOS) – potential for such spans like the universe.
      - ii. NOTE: NOT INHERENTLY SINFUL, BUT ALSO HAS POTENTIAL FOR GOOD. (WARNING OF BAD IN CONTEXT)
  - c. The reach of the tongue:
    - i. As seen before in **(vv. 2, 5)** – control of tongue is essentially control of heart content, and conduct coming from such.
      1. Therefore, lacking control of tongue manifests, and leads to opposite.
    - ii. Defiles whole body – **Matthew 15:18**
    - iii. Course of nature:
      1. Course – *trochos*, “a wheel,” is translated “wheel” in Jas. 3:6, rv, with metaphorical reference to the round of human activity (kjv, “course”) (VINE)

2. Nature – *genesis* – state of being. (BDAG) (Greek title given to name of first book of OT)
3. I.E. AFFECTS THE ENTIRETY OF YOUR LIFE/ACTIONS. (CF. **PROVERBS 4:23** – out of heart springs issues of life)
- iv. Set on fire by “hell” – *geenna* (Gehenna) – evil use will lead to burning in hell. (cf. **Matthew 5:29-30** – cut it off/out?)
- d. **(vv. 7-8)** – ability to tame animals contrasted with inability to tame tongue.
  - i. NOTE: **(v. 2)** – mature man has tamed tongue. Using hyperbole in **(vv. 7-8)**.
  - ii. SHOWING THE DIFFICULTY OF TAMING TONGUE – MORE SO THAN WILD ANIMALS.
  - iii. Why?
    1. Unruly evil – unstable (i.e., as noted, if the heart is) (cannot be trusted)
      - a. Same as **“unstable” (1:8) – (1:6)** – image of waves to illustrate instability.
    2. Full of deadly poison – full of something when controlled by it – ready to unleash like a serpent.
- B. The Duplicity of the Tongue **(vv. 9-12)**
  - a. Manifestations of its instability – “unruly evil”
  - b. **(vv. 9-10)** – blessing God and cursing man who is made in His image. (cf. **1 John 4:20** – love God and hate brother = liar)
    - i. **“out not to be so”** – IMPLYING WE CAN CONTROL THEM.
  - c. **(vv. 11-12)** – such duplicity does not happen in nature and should not in the child of God!
    - i. **Cf. Matthew 12:33-35** – make the tree good and its fruit, or bad – ONE OR THE OTHER, NOT BOTH.
- III. Essential True Wisdom **(vv. 13-18)**
  - A. Wisdom – The Key to Controlling the Tongue, and the Requisite of Teaching **(v. 13)**
    - a. Connection between teaching **(v. 1)** and wisdom **(v. 13)**.
      - i. Do you want to be a teacher? Let not many...
      - ii. Are you wise? Self-examination – **1:23** – look in the mirror.
    - b. Wisdom discussed thus far:
      - i. **1:5** – ask of God. **(v. 3)** – for benefit of faith – **cf. Romans 10:17** – word of God)
      - ii. **1:17-18** – that from God is good, especially the wisdom of His word that made us His children.
      - iii. **1:19** – swift to hear God’s word.
    - c. Wisdom exhibited in conduct:
      - i. **1:21** – receive implanted word able to save souls.

1. Meekness – *prautēs* – “It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting” (VINE)
  2. (v. 13) – “in the meekness of wisdom”
  - ii. 1:25 – doer of word blessed.
  - d. One does not prove he is wise by hastily opening his mouth to teach, but by adhering in action to true wisdom.
    - i. NOTE: “wise AND UNDERSTANDING” – Hebrews 5:14 – reason of use, gain understanding, able to teach.
- B. A Contrast of Wisdoms (vv. 14-18)
- a. Earthly wisdom:
    - i. (v. 14) – bitter envy and self-seeking – ulterior motives to teach.
      1. Bitter envy – *pikros* (v. 11) *zēlos* (zeal) – zeal with bitter results.
      2. Self-seeking – *eritheia* – selfish ambition.
      3. Cf. Galatians 4:16-17 – Paul contrasted w/ Judaizing teachers.
        - a. Paul sought to speak truth to save them.
        - b. Judaizing teachers wanted them all to themselves, and that to their detriment.
      4. “boast and lie” – about having wisdom.
      5. “against the truth” – i.e. to the detriment of the truth. Hindering truth claiming to teach. (cf. Romans 2:21, 24 – blasphemy by their actions)
    - ii. (v. 15) – such wisdom has opposite origins and purposes than God’s.
      1. Earthly – as opposed to heavenly (v. 17).
      2. Sensual – appealing to physical senses, as opposed to spiritual.
      3. Demonic – from Satan! – as all oppositions to Divine truth are.
    - iii. (v. 16) – fruits of such wisdom – and implied teaching coming from such source.
      1. Where they exist? – “in your hearts” (v. 14).
      2. Also, there in the heart:
        - a. Confusion – *akatastasia* – opposition to established authority, disorder, unruliness. (BDAG)
          - i. cf. 1:19-21 – opposite seen in v. 21 – opposing God’s wisdom vs. accepting it in meekness.
        - b. Every evil thing – all sin comes from “opposition to established authority” (Confusion – *akatastasia*).
      3. Wisdom comprised of bitter envy and self-seeking – found with confusion and every evil thing.

- a. If you have such wisdom – **(vv. 1-2)** – LET NOT MANY BECOME TEACHERS.
  - b. BECAUSE YOUR TEACHING WILL BE WRONG.
  - c. **Cf. Matthew 12:34** – abundance of heart mouth speaks. (After they claimed Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebub – blasphemy of HS)
- b. Wisdom from above:
- i. Pure, peaceable, gentle:
    1. Pure – **1:26-27** – as it comes from God.
    2. Peaceable, gentle – **4:1-3** – in treatment of others.
  - ii. Willing to yield – **1:21; 3:13** – obedience.
    1. *euprethos* (εὐπρεθής, 2138), “ready to obey” (*eu*, “well,” *prethomai*, “to obey, to be persuaded” (VINE)
  - iii. Full of mercy and good fruits – **2:13-17** – on those in distress.
  - iv. Without partiality – **2:1-4** – in treatment of others – **“DO NOT HOLD THE FAITH... WITH PARTIALITY”** – in teaching.
  - v. Without hypocrisy – **2:8-9** – truly submitting to the Law in totality.
    1. **3:9-12** – not duplicitous.
- c. **(v. 18)** – ultimate goal of wisdom, and teaching:
- i. **“fruit of righteousness”** – **1:20** – wanting to produce the righteousness of God (in the gospel – righteousness of faith – plan of God for man to be righteous before Him).
    1. **1:20** – not produced by anger toward God’s word.
    2. **1:21** – rather, by humbly submitting to His word.
  - ii. Produced in peace – not bitter zeal and self-seeking **(v. 14)**.
  - iii. By those who make peace – conscious effort toward the good of man, especially seeking their right standing with God.
    1. What teaching is about – making peace between God and man, and between men themselves.
    2. Not stirring up strife.
- d. It is the wisdom from above that is needed for teachers **(v. 1)**.
- i. LEST THE POTENTIAL EVIL OF THE TONGUE IS REALIZED **(v. 16)**.
  - ii. SO WHAT IS GOOD IS GIVEN, NOT EVIL **(1:17-18)**.
- IV. Applications
- A. The desire to teach should be with great caution, and an extensive self-examination. **(vv. 1-2, 13-14)**
  - B. False teaching should be despised regardless of the teacher, for its damage is endless as the descriptions of the tongue show. **(vv. 5-12)**
  - C. Spiritual maturity should be pursued through saturating the heart with heavenly wisdom. Our speech will either manifest our maturity or betray us. Do not deceive yourself **(1:26)**. **(v. 1-2, 17-18)**
  - D. Our thoughts and actions must not be selfish, but humbly submissive to God and directed toward the good of others. **(vv. 17-18)**

## Conclusion

## The Teacher, the Tongue, and the Truth – Outline by Jeremiah Cox

1. The Lord has blessed us with His word, and teachers to help us to understand it.
  - a. However, the teaching of God's word is a great responsibility, and should not be approached lightly.
  - b. Great damage can come from attempting to teach without the proper understanding.
2. Also, the Lord has blessed us with the power of speech.
  - a. Speech can be used for great good.
  - b. However, it must be understood that speech has great potential for evil.
3. Lastly, God has graciously revealed His wisdom whereby we may grow into a mature child of His. However, we must know the difference between His wisdom, and what the world possesses.