

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, August 3, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES “Bridling the Beast in Your Body” *James 3:1-12, Various*

*“Through its every word, the tongue telegraphs the condition of the heart.”  
– Dr. Charles Swindoll*

In the third chapter of his letter, James goes for the jugular vein of the Christian life: the problem of the tongue! This problem is not localized or dated, but is one that has universally faced both the brilliant and the foolish throughout time. All around the world, people have written much on the subject of the tongue but have done very little to control it or curb its misuse. Ask God to rivet His truth into your life as you expose yourself to this powerful passage of Scripture. No other section of the Bible speaks with greater authority or impact regarding this subject than does James. Entering this study with the words of Jesus will provide us with a crucial perspective. Notice what Jesus said in Matthew 15:11 and 18-19;

*“<sup>11</sup> Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man... <sup>18</sup> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” – Matthew 15:11, 18-19*

We need to see that the heart and tongue are directly associated with each other. Through its every word, the tongue telegraphs the condition of the heart. Because the tongue is that which communicates the contents of the heart, when we use the word “tongue,” let’s think “heart.”

### **I. AS WE BEGIN: AN INTRODUCTION (James 3:1-2)**

It might appear, on the surface, that James was attacking the teaching ministry of the Church when he wrote in James 3:1-2, *“<sup>1</sup> My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup> 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.”*

**A INTERESTING COMMAND (v.1)** – Beginning with a direct imperative, James literally said, “Stop becoming many teachers.” He was telling those of the Church not to run quickly into the role of teaching.

**AN EXPLANATION (vv.1-2)** – James introduced a sobering reality... namely that those who teach will be held to a stricter judgment than their students. Perhaps several reasons may be cited:

**3 Reasons Teachers are Held to a Stricter Judgment than their Students:**

1. **The teacher is responsible to teach the truth and not his or her own opinion.**
2. **That which a teacher teaches affects many lives**
3. **The teacher is expected to live the truth he or she teaches**

**Explanation of Verse:** The word translated in verse 1 as “teachers” is the word “masters” In the gospels and refers to a person who functions in an official teaching or preaching capacity. The word “judgment” in verse 1 or “stricter judgment” usually expresses a negative verdict in the New Testament, and here refers to a future judgment: 1) for the unbelieving false teacher, at the second coming (Jude 14-15); and 2) for the believer, when he is rewarded before Christ (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). This is not meant to discourage “true” teachers, but to warn the prospective teacher of the role’s seriousness. Hebrews 13:17, *“<sup>17</sup> Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*

James goes on to day in James 3:2 , *“<sup>2</sup> 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.”* Verse 2 tells us that since no one is infallible, and since the tongue is the teacher’s tool, a teacher is to guard the manner of its exercise. Scripture contains much about all the evil which the tongue can cause.

Psalms 34:11-14 – *“<sup>11</sup> Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. <sup>12</sup> Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? <sup>13</sup> Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. <sup>14</sup> Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”*

Psalms 52:1-4 – *“<sup>1</sup> Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. <sup>2</sup> Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. <sup>3</sup> You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness. <sup>4</sup> You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue.”* Notice the contrast between the “goodness of God” which endures forever and the “evil of man”... us exhibited in the tongue that destroys. The psalmist uses word like “destruction,” “sharp razor,” “working deceitfully,” “evil,” “lying,” “devouring,” “deceitful.”

Proverbs 6:16-19 – *“<sup>16</sup> These six things the Lord hates, yes seven are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, <sup>19</sup> a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”* Notice that more than half of these are directly related to the tongue if not all of them on some level.

Proverbs 17:20 - *“He who has a deceitful heart finds not good, and he who has a perverse tongue falls into evil.”*

Proverbs 26:28 – *“A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”*

The tongue has immense power to speak sinfully, erroneously, and inappropriately... human speech is a graphic representation of human depravity. The word translated as “stumble” in verse 2 is a much stronger word in the Greek than simply the idea of getting “tripped up” or “tripping.” The word actually refers to sinning or offending God’s Person. The form of the Greek verb, “stumble,” emphasizes that everyone continually fails to do what is right. Remember Paul’s words in **Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”**

James also speaks of the “perfect man” in verse 2. The word “perfect” may refer to true perfection, in which case James is saying that, hypothetically speaking, if a human being were able to perfectly control his tongue, he or she would be a perfect man or person. But, of course, no one is actually immune from sinning with his tongue. More likely, “perfect man” is describing those who are “spiritually mature” as back in **James 1:4** where James says, **“Let patience have it’s perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”** ... again, not speaking of perfection or sinless perfection but rather full spiritual maturity. So James is most likely describing those who are “spiritually mature” and therefore able to control their tongues.

## **2 Spiritual Truths Concerning the Tongue:**

- 1. As we closer and closer to Jesus and grow in our faith and spiritual maturity the issue of the tongue will become less and less of a problem.**
- 2. The issue of our tongue is a great barometer of our true spiritual health.**

**A CLARIFICATION** – We must proceed in this study with the understanding of two things:

## **2 Important Clarifications:**

- 1. James is not condemning teaching, but is warning against hurrying into that profession before fully weighing the responsibility** – I might add, that I truly believe that just because you want to teach or want to be a teacher is not a good indicator that you should be one. You need to be sure that God is in it, and that you have a certain sense of “calling” from Him in order that you might be assured of His leadership and guidance. I think that ultimately the Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide and we are just his vessel... if you’re not ready to be “His vessel,” your definitely ready to teach.
- 2. James is not promoting silence, but is promoting control** – James is not saying here that we should never speak because our tongues are evil and 99.9% of what come out of our mouth is corrupt in some way. It may be truth that we need to deal with that 99.9% of what comes out of our mouths is more corrupt than we ever dreamed, but God has also chosen the mouth of men through which His “good new” will get out.” So, no, James is not promoting silence but that our mouth, tongue, lip be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit.

## II. THE BODY OF THE MESSAGE: AN EXPOSITION (James 3:3-12)

In the development of his thinking, James drew upon three illustrations to show what the tongue is like (vv.3-5), presented three word pictures to portray what the tongue is (vv.6-8), and applied what he said of the tongue to both humanity and nature (vv.9-12).

### 3 Truths about the Tongue in Contrast:

1. **The tongue is small but powerful (vv.3-5)** – *“<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”* In these three verses are James’s three illustrations that teach us that reinforce this truth concerning the tongue... that it is but a small muscle, yet extremely powerful.

### 3 Illustrations from James 3:3-5:

- (1) **A horse’s bridle** – James spoke of an apparatus containing a metal bit which, when placed in the mouth of the horse, controls the horse’s every movement.



**Word Study on “meekness”** – There is an interesting word that often occurs in the New Testament that plays into this discussion of the “tongue” and the key to taming the tongue, and it may very much relate to what James says regarding the key to the tongue. That word is the New Testament word “meekness” or “meek.” We tend to think of this word in terms of “weakness” or “shyness” or “being docile, no fight, no kick left.” Jesus said in the Beatitude portion of His “Sermon on the Mount,” in **Matthew 5:5**, *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* And **Paul** said in **Colossians 3:12**, *“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.”* And **James**, himself calls us as believers with these words in **James 1:21**, *“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”* And look down one verse in our passage in **James 3:13**, *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduce that his works are done in meekness and wisdom.”* The Greek word, translated in the New Testament, as “meek” or “meekness” is the word “praus.” It is an interesting word that actually comes from the ancient world of farming and ranching... especially tending animals. The words “praus” (translated as “meekness”) has its roots in the word used for breaking a wild animal as in a horse or domesticating a wild beast. In order for that animal to become useful it must first be broking and then brought under the control of its master. This is interesting in the context of James’s writing and he may have had this in mind in his analogy of the tongue and how to bring it under control. The tongue can only be controlled with our lives are broken by the Holy Spirit of God and we come into full and surrendered relationship with God through Jesus Christ, making Him LORD, Master of our lives. The only way to control the tongue is for it to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit in meekness. Some of us... all of us must surrender our tongue to His control daily, hourly, moment by moment!

- (2) **A ship's rudder** – A rudder is smaller in proportion to a ship than a bit is to a horse; yet, in spite of its size, it determines the course of the ship as it crosses the powerful ocean current.
- (3) **A fire's spark** – The proportional difference in this illustration is even more extreme than in the first two. Though miniscule, perhaps even unnoticed by the eye, a spark can cause the destruction of an immense forest and consume hundreds of lives.

**The Point:** Although seemingly inconsequential because of its size, the tongue's potential to influence and destroy is far reaching, depending on how it is used. I will go so far as to say that as a pastor who had been in the ministry now for 30 years and has been in 6 different churches, I have seen and learned that the "tongue" is the most destructive and perhaps the greatest threat to the health and vitality of a church that there is... and the "enemy," Satan knows this! Don't you doubt it! Almost on a daily basis I see this... even here!

2. **The tongue is necessary but dangerous (vv.6-8)** – *"<sup>6</sup>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 course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup>For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. <sup>8</sup>But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."* James likened the tongue to three things. These things, to which James likened the tongue, are interesting, because each serves its purpose and can be used for either good or evil, just as the tongue. Let's look at these 3 things that are necessary but dangerous to which James likens the tongue:

### **3 Things that are Necessary but Dangerous that James Likens the Tongue To:**

- 1. The tongue is a fire** - He used the term fire to represent the sum total of iniquity, saying that it finds its expressions in the tongue. It is virtually impossible to seethe with anger or bitterness, burn with lust or selfishness, or desire power without expressing it somehow with the tongue. James added that the tongue is "set on fire by hell." The word "hell" used here does not refer to Hades, but to Gehenna, which in James's day was the name for a garbage dump into which the city's filth was thrown. The tongue is an untamed beast  
**What good can come from a fire? What bad can come from a fire? How do you think this relates to the tongue? *A fire can warm, cheer, bless, encourage or it can destroy, burn, blister, melt just as the tongue.* What is the key, do you think? *Control***
- 2. The tongue is an untamed beast** – We marvel at man's success in calming the wild nature of various animals usually known for their ability to hunt and kill, yet we overlook man's failure to tame the muscle in his mouth. In fact, James stressed man's inability to tame the tongue. **What good can come from a tamed beast? What bad can come from an untamed beast? What did James call the tongue? How do you think this relates to the tongue? *An untamed beast can***

*tear you up and destroy, just as the tongue.* What, do you think, is the key?  
**Control**

3. **The tongue is a deadly poison** – Behind man’s teeth lies a lethal weapon; its poison, when dumped, spreads death-like thoughts and comments. **What good can come from a poison?** *Some medicines are actually poison (Chemo. kills Cancer, Cummadin [blood thinner] can prevent Strokes and Blood Clots that can kill). Poison also can inhibit spread of dangerous pests and growth that are dangerous to humans (Rats, fleas, fire ants, weeds, etc.)* **What bad can come from poison?** *It can kill.* How does this relate to the tongue? What, do you think, is the key? **Control... how it’s used!**

**The Point:** In and of themselves, these things can either be destructive or beneficial and the key is control... in this case the key is the control of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Our tongues must be brought under the subjection of the Holy Spirit, otherwise it is sure to be a deadly fire, an untamed wild devouring beast, poisonous!

3. **The tongue is helpful but inconsistent (vv.9-12)** – *“<sup>9</sup> With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”* Readers of all time have been able to understand the implication of James’s illustrations pertaining to the use of the tongue. The first is drawn from an observation of human behavior, the second from an observation of nature’s order. Let’s focus on the principles we can learn from each.

### **2 Principles to Learn From:**

1. **From humanity... opposites ought not come from the same source ( vv.9-10) -** Speaking of the tongue’s activity James wrote in verses 9-10, *“<sup>9</sup> With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.”* Such behavior, in James’s thinking is unwarranted, unjustifiable, needless.
2. **From nature... opposites cannot come from the same source (vv11-12)** – Then James adds in verses 11-12, *“<sup>11</sup> Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”*

### **III. AND IN SUMMARY: SEVERAL APPLICATIONS**

In order to drive home James’s message, we can make three brief statements:

#### **3 Important Statements About the Tongues:**

1. **The tongue defiles** –
2. **The tongue defies** –
3. **The tongue displays** –

What is your tongue saying these days about the content of your own heart? This is one instance where the tongue does not lie. That which is harbored within will ultimately be represented by what we say! Wow!