

James 3:1-12

Commentary: Taming The Tongue (James 3:1-12)

Up to this point, James has exhorted the early Jewish believers of the importance of godly action; doers of the word, and not merely hearers (1:22). In chapter three James notes that our words and how we use them, are of equal importance to demonstrating godly behaviour.

James notes that the tongue is a powerful, often dangerous beast that needs to be tamed if the believer desires to grow in spiritual maturity. The tongue can create stress and relieve it. It can express love and renounce it. It can build or it can tear down. Such inconsistencies from the lips of believers James rejects and urges his readers to learn to manage their mouths.

Instructions:

Carefully read through James 3:1-12 and then attempt to answer the questions which follow.

James begins this chapter highlighting the power that words have when they come from those in the position of teacher within the church. Teachers had an exalted status in the early church, which led to many unfit, incompetent people pursuing the role.

1) Why does James advise against seeking to be teachers (v1)?

The tongue is a cause for much stumbling in the life of a believer.

2) What happens if we can learn to control our tongue (v2)?

James points out that the tongue has incredible power even though it is only a small muscle in the body.

3) How do the analogies of the horse's bit and a ship's rudder illustrate this idea (v3-5)?

4) What is James saying about the impact of our words?

James uses a third analogy describing the tongue as a bushfire (v5-6). This demonstrates the destructive capabilities that our speech can have on ourselves and on others. The phrase “world of iniquity” (v6) suggests the tongue can actually serve as a representative of the enemy; bringing forth all kinds of unrighteousness.

5) What potential for destruction is contained in our tongues (v5-8)?

All throughout James’ epistle he has taken issue with believers who claimed to be loving others but whose behaviour did not reflect that love.

6) Why does the tongue, that both blesses God and yet curses men demonstrate Christian inconsistency (v9)?

7) What illustrations does James use to demonstrate how absurd it is for a believer to act with such inconsistent speech (v11-12)?

8) What does James imply about the dual nature of these believers as it relates to their speech (v9-12)?

9) What are some of the positive things that our words can do?