Let Them Show It By Their Good Life

James 3:1-18

Key Verse 13

#### 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

1. **Look at v.1-2.**

#### Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

#### 

**Why does James encourage fellow believers to not become teachers?**

* Two reasons are given:
  + 1. Receive a stricter judgment – “We who teach will be judged more strictly.”
    - Being a teaching leader (like James) is a great responsibility that will bring about a stricter judgement. Therefore, careful attention to one’s life and doctrine is an absolute requirement.
      * James wrote in Chapter 2, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom…” A “teacher” in the church must open their mouth to speak the truth and not be a hypocrite while doing it.
      * They also must not compromise the truth by sugar coating it, telling people what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear.
      * Jesus had his sharpest criticism for the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees because they were “blind guides” who loved money, selfish honor and to be praised by men. A “teacher” like James is responsible to live out the truth while faithfully discharging the duties of their ministry.
      * James didn’t want others to undergo the Lord’s strict judgement unless they were prepared to live at God’s high standards for teachers.
  + 2. Stumbling – “We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. ”
    - James admits that everyone stumbles in many ways. However he makes this statement to show why many shouldn’t become teachers.
    - Teachers are expected to have a tight rein on their tongue. Teachers must accept the standard of perfection regardless of its high level and by faith in Jesus seek perfection in what they say. Not everyone will want this when they consider it.

**Does verse 1 apply to the role of teaching the Bible 1:1?**

* Absolutely not. James is referencing leaders who serve the ministry of the Word of God, those who are called to serve the body of Christ as teachers by upholding, defending and proclaiming God’s truth.
* James is in no way dissuading Christians (even new Christians) from teaching the word of God in an evangalistic context. Doing so would be a total contradiction of the previous passages where he exhorts us to “Love your neighbor as yourself,” and “be doers of the word.” Ministering the truth of God’s word to lost souls is the golden example of faith in action and loving your neighbor.
* For, in Matthew 10, Jesus himself sent out his disciples (though they were spiritually young) and gave them “authority” to do what He was doing. The disciples were acting as Jesus’ messengers (relays) who shared what they had learned from Jesus’ teaching: “Freely you have received; freely give.” Likewise, when even new believers teach the Bible, they’re simply relaying what they received. They’re not acting as a “teacher” like James outlines here.

**What result occurs when anyone is “never at fault in what they say”?**

* Those who are “perfect” in controlling their tongue, gain control over their entire body.
* We might think addressing sexual desires, unstable emotions, or even laziness are more urgent issues for a Christian but James helps us prioritize the tongue above everything.
* The wisdom it takes to gain control over the tongue is easily applied to control of the entire body. He develops this idea more in the next verses.

1. **Look at v.3-6.**

**What two examples of control does James mention?**

* James references a:
  + Rider who guides an entire horse by controlling a bridle
    - A bridle can fit into a rider's hand and weighs about 2 lbs.
    - Amazingly, the small bridle steers a horse of 1,400 lbs at high speeds.
  + Sea pilot who guides a large ship by controlling a ruder
    - When viewing a ship, our eyes are drawn to the tall sails, thick wooden hull or wide top-deck. The small rudder, sitting halfway in the water, hardly receives any attention. Yet, it’s the unsuspecting rudder that reigns over the ship.

**Why does James say, “The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.”?**

* James wants us to see and understand the disproportionate power the tongue has compared to its small size. It’s a small part of the body but it’s able to do what no other part of the body can do, make great boasts.
* Boasting is the manifestation of pride. It’s a proclamation authored by arrogance.
* Wisdom runs in contrast to pride and boasting
  + Proverbs 8:12,13 — “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. 13 The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

**How many times did James mention “fire” while describing the tongue?**

* Fire is described 4 times
  + Consider what a great forest is set on **fire** by a small spark.
  + The tongue also is a **fire**, a world of evil among the parts of the body.
  + It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on **fire**,
  + and is itself set on **fire** by hell.

**What does this fiery nature of the tongue tell us about it?**

* The tongue is a force of destruction that brings harm, pain and loss; both personally and anyone in proximity.
* Among the parts of the body being used for sinful activities, the tongue creates a “world of evil” that far exceeds the evils of other parts of the body. Therefore, the tongue gets credited as the greatest source of sinning.
* It’s probably a revelation that the super majority of our sinning has been done by our words. When we consider it, the tongue indeed has been the greatest source of sinning in our lives.

**Looking at v.7-12 What does James mean when he says, “no human being can tame the tongue”?**

* The tongue is totally out of control and is so perplexing to mankind that even though he’s applied immense effort to tame various animals, no one can tame the tongue and get it under control.
* It’s ironic that a man has more ability to tame and control a wild animal (a separate being of another species) than he has ability to control his own tongue.

**What problem does the contradiction of saltwater and fresh water coming from the same source reveal?**

* A salt spring that produces fresh water is an impossible contradiction. If the source is a salt spring, the water will be salty. If the source is a fresh water spring, the result will be fresh water.
* The source is the key deciding factor and it’s impossible to get any other outcome.

**What clue does this give us about the way to control the tongue and stem its destructiveness?**

* The issue is our heart because it’s the source and produces the overflow of our tongue.
  + Matthew 12:34-35 — “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? **For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.** 35 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

**Considering all the verses describing the tongue, what is the fitting response?**

* The fitting response is alarm, concern and a sense of urgency.
* If we saw a fire in our house, burning down our home, endangering our family, threatening our neighbors, we would immediately focus on putting the fire out.
* There is a fire, a spiritual fire that’s far worse than a physical inferno. The tongue is destroying relationships, consuming blessing and opportunities, burning and scarring innocent people.
* However, few see it like James but the time has come for believers to hear what James is saying and have the urgency that’s fitting to this threat and emergency.
* Dealing with the tongue, keeping it from destroying our lives and those around is, has to be a top priority. We must stop this fire!
* The only way to stop the fire, is to change the source, by repenting of worldliness, selfishness, and lack of mercy.

**Look at verses 13-16.**

**Why did James ask, “Who is wise and understanding among you?”**

* There are many people who would say they have wisdom and understanding. If you were to ask a church of 1000 people, maybe >80% would say they have wisdom and understanding.
* The question is, how many people actually have wisdom and understanding? How can we know? It’s actually easy to prove who has wisdom and understanding.

**How did his question set up his challenge in v.13?**

“Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom”

* Those with God’s wisdom, can “show it” by:
  + (1) by their good life
  + (2) by **deeds** done in the **humility** that comes from **widom**

**How did the “wise and understanding” people get God’s “wisdom” and “understanding”?**

* No one is born “wise” or inherits “understanding.” It comes from heaven, generously provided from the Father to each person who eagerly seeks it.
* **Proverbs 2:1-8**  
   My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you,  
   making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;  
   yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,  
   if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,  
   then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.  
   For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
* **Proverbs 4:7**
  + “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding.”

**How is the “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” wisdom made apparent?**

* By bad deeds, the opposite of “good deeds”
  + Dark wisdom is manifested through a person’s life, their actions, speech and behavior.
  + A bad tree produces bad fruit because the wisdom it contains is earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom

**Describe the main differences between the two types of wisdom.**

* There are three differences…
  + Where they come:
    - The first kind of wisdom comes down from heaven, it’s given generously by the Father
    - The source of the second wisdom is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic”
  + What type of environment they make:
    - The first kind of wisdom produces “peace” and order
    - The second kind of wisdom produces chaos and “disorder”
  + How they are expressed
    - The first kind of wisdom is expressed in “humility” or “meekness”
    - The second kind of wisdom is expressed in “boasting” and “ambition”

What are the qualities of the wisdom that comes down from heaven?

**How can this help us understand how to tame the tongue?**

* When we look at ourselves we often wonder what is the problem with me? How can I change?
  + The problem is the **wisdom** running in our **heart**, which controls our **tongue**, which controls the **course of our life**
  + The way to change is by aggressively dumping the wisdom from demons and earnestly seek the wisdom from heaven, asking the Father to abundantly bless us
  + Those who have this wisdom of God will bear the good fruit and characteristics found in v.18