

**Confronting the Enemies of Unity – In Our Words – 1B**  
**Pastor Ty Blackburn**  
**James 3:1-12**  
**June 24, 2012**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 3. We're continuing a message we began last week, a series of messages from the Epistle of James. This is a smaller subset of a larger series that we've been doing. Now we normally exposit. Our normal course of action is to just go through a book chapter by chapter, verse by verse. Since right after Easter, we've been doing a topical series on unity in the body of Christ. We felt like we needed to do that for a period of time, for the health and the life of the church. The Lord was leading us in that direction, so we are continuing to work on that.

James is helping us to address some of the causes of disunity and dissension. We've seen in John 13 and 17 that we have a glorious inheritance of unity, that we're supposed to be as Christians, caught up into the oneness of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, existing in a perfect harmony, oneness, and love for all eternity. They've invited us into that unity. When we come to be in Christ, we come to be partakers of that oneness. We're supposed to manifest that and reflect that in our relationships here on Earth, particularly in the Body of Christ. We understand very early on that though that is our calling, we live so far short of that so much of the time. Why is that? Well because we have a real enemy, and enemies, who are working to destroy that—the world, the flesh, and the devil. They fight against us on a number of fronts.

James, basically, is dealing with, in the heart of his epistle, three different battle fronts upon which we must guard the unity of the Spirit. We have to fight for it, and we have to fight against our enemy faithfully. There are three different battlefields. The first is the battlefield of the tongue, our speech, which we looked at last week, and will be looking at today. We'll see the second battlefield that he addresses in Verses 13-18, is the battlefield of our attitudes, our thinking. Then finally, our hearts, James 4:1-12, the battlefield of our hearts. So he starts at the fruit, as it were, speech is the fruit that comes out. If you follow the fruit, if you look at a tree you see the fruit, the apple. Well the reason the apples grow is because of the root system. So you trace it all the way down and you go from the fruit to the root. That's what James does. He starts off with the fruit, our speech, and he works down the trunk of the tree into the attitudes, and then he gets to the heart, which is the root of our sin.

So we're going to continue to look at this morning, as he does, at the power of the tongue. We began this message last week and we titled it 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity'. It's the larger title for all of these messages from James 3:1-4:12. The first two messages are 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity in Our Words', or with our tongue, on the battlefield of the tongue, the battlefield of our words, our speech. We started last week so this is Part 2, or Part 1B, I think is how we've listed it. So this is 1B this week.

Let's read **James 3:1-12:**

*1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.*

*See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.*

Let's pray together:

*Our Father, as we come before Your Word, we are reminded of our complete dependence upon You, the power of Your Holy Spirit to make Your Word comprehensible, apprehensible for us. We pray that You would do that this morning. We pray that You would take Your Word and speak it to our hearts and*

*bring about real and lasting change for the glory of Jesus Christ. We pray this is His Name, Amen.*

James, in these verses, uses a complete repertoire of word pictures. He piles up word picture upon word picture to really help us feel the force of his argument. He wants us not just to deal with this intellectually, he wants us to be emotionally, effectively engaged, our affections to be impacted by his words. So he uses these word pictures, one after another, and you hear the earnestness in his voice. Did you hear him several times at the end of the chapter say, “My brethren, it ought not be this way.” “My brethren, brothers...”? He’s imploring the people of God not to live like this. So in these images that cause us to feel the force of his argument, the essential theme is the awesome power of the tongue, the surprising power of the tongue. Our speech is much more significant than we tend to think.

We saw last week in Matthew 12:36, Jesus says, “I tell you, every idle word we will have to give an account for it.” Men will have to give an account for every idle word, every single word that we’ve ever spoken. God is that concerned about what we say. We saw that because we’re in the image of God. We’re created in God’s image, and God’s Word has great power and He’s made us in a way to reflect that, and there’s something about the human word that has power.

We see this in various ways. We have a couple of dogs now, and the dogs make it into my sermons a lot, don’t they? We had a Boxer that died last fall, and we got a new puppy this year. The new puppy has not yet learned to respond to my words correctly. Last night it was crate time, and I’m telling her, “Georgie, come,” and she went. I said, “Come,” and she kept going. Well thankfully, eventually we got her in the crate, but I was having to deal with this. “Hey, wait a minute, Genesis 1:26-27, I am to rule over you. You are to submit to me.” She wasn’t won by the argument yet, pray for her. Over time they tend to understand who is in charge and they get the message. Some people say that they find out who the Alpha male is in the family. “Oh, Dad is the Alpha male,” so the dog does what Dad says. Well, anyway, Lady, our dog that died last fall was a dog that was very aggressive about other dogs. She never bit anybody or attacked people, but if a dog came into her territory, it was a big deal. She used to run, like there would be dogs outside of the fence, she would run into the fence, just run headlong into the fence trying to get to the other dogs. One time she broke through the fence and was taking off after a dog, and I saw it happening. I yelled out, “Lady! Come!” This dog that had just broken through the fence, was flying like this, she stopped, turned around, and came back. I was like, “That is what I’m talking about!”

The Lord has made us to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. He's given us this power to, because we are in His image, somehow our tongue has power. Now it's not intrinsic, it's given, it's reflected. We said last week, it's not like the 'Word of Faith' people believe, we're not God. We're a dim reflection though, and what a glorious thing it is to be a reflector of the all-glorious and infinite God. It's something we should take seriously because our words matter. This is why, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me," is such a foolish, ridiculous sentiment. The words of people have power.

One of the issues that we must deal with in understanding that, letting the weight of that hit us is: Are we going to reflect God's glory when we speak or not? It's interesting when you look at the history, as you look at the Bible unfold, to watch the speaking that goes on there at the beginning. Look at the words of God. God speaks and it comes to pass. We saw it 10 times in Genesis 1, ***Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.*** And God said, "Let the waters teem with fish, and sea creatures," and it was so. God says and it happens. What you see in the first three days is God forming the universe. He's forming the light, and then He's forming the heavens on Day Two, and the water below. Then on Day Three He forms the dry land. Then on Days Four, Five, and Six, He fills what He formed. What He formed on Day Two, He fills on Day five. What He formed on Day One, He fills on Day Four. Two—five. Three—six. Make a note of that and just look at Genesis 1 and see that. God's Word forms and fills.

Then after He's formed and filled, He speaks to man and He blesses. God blessed them and said, "You're to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." So God's Word forms, it fills, and it blesses. God's Word brings out of chaos, order. God's Word brings out of disarray, beauty and elegance. You and I are called to reflect that. Now, God wasn't the only one speaking at the beginning though. When you follow the narrative of the creation what we find is that there was another speaker. I mean, man and woman are speaking there. Adam is naming the animals and then he is excited when Eve is created for him, and he speaks. But then in Chapter 3 we find out that there is another speaker, and that is the serpent, who was more crafty than any of the other animals which the Lord God had made. He comes and he speaks, and the first four words that he says to Eve are, "Indeed, has God said..." He calls into question the truth that God has made known, and then he lies. He arrogantly, in the most defiant, rebellious way says, "Indeed, has God said you shall not eat of any tree in the garden." Eve says, "No, there's one tree we can't eat of, for in the day we eat of it or touch it we'll die." "You surely shall not die," Satan says. He contradicts the Word of God. He lies, and through his lying, he murders, he kills man.

Everything that is wrong with the world happened through that lie. The reason people die, the reason people suffer, the reason the world is out of order is because of that lie that was believed.

Now the question is: Reflecting through our words, are we going to image God and the way He speaks, or are we going to image Satan and the way he speaks? God is the One Who creates and sustains life. Jesus upholds all things how? By the Word of His power. His Word fills, forms, sustains, and blesses. Satan's word lies, kills, and destroys. We need to see it that way when we are speaking. "What am I doing? Am I edifying? Am I building up? Am I blessing? Or am I lying, and killing, and destroying?"

James is telling us in James 3 that too often we are speaking like Satan. Our words have incredible power to destroy. We saw last week, we were organizing our thoughts in Verses 1-12 around five major points. The main theme is the power of our speech. There are five points that we see in the power of the tongue. First of all, to condemn and to control, which we saw last week. That's really in Verses 1-5. The first part of Verse 5 ends that first section. You saw that the tongue has the power to condemn and the power to control. We'll be judged by our words and can be controlled as a ship is controlled by a rudder or a horse by a bit. If you control the tongue, you get the whole person. This morning we want to look at the next three points, and these are not going to be C's, they're going to be D's. Three D's.

### 1) The Tongue Has the Power to Destroy:

The first point this morning, which is the third point overall, is the tongue has the power to destroy. Look with me at the second part of Verse 5.

***James 3:5 ~ ...See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!***

Some translations say 'behold'. The word there is 'behold'. Look! Take note of this. Isn't it astonishing how large a forest can be destroyed by a small, tiny fire? Isn't that something?

You may have heard that there are so many wildfires raging all over the world. I did some research and there are always wildfires going somewhere, and certain times of the year a lot more than others. There's one in Utah that has destroyed 4,000 acres, and 9,000 people have been displaced from their homes. There is danger of the power grid south of Salt Lake City being destroyed. It started because some guys were out shooting guns and a spark ignited from target

practice. It's burning out of control. They said there have already been 400 wildfires in Utah this year, and literally 380 of them have been caused by humans. I'm always a little skeptical about their statistics because I think people tend to blame humans a lot more than they should a lot of times. I mean, we're responsible for global warming, we're going to destroy the world. We get that all the time, right? This is such an offense because God is the One that holds the world up. If we think we can destroy the world, we are arrogant. We will not destroy it until He's ready for it to be destroyed, and when He's ready He's going to destroy it. I've got news, He's going to burn it up, but in His time. But that was a side note, the point is: We can start a fire that burns out of control by accident.

You might have heard about the Canadian who was visiting Norway, camping on the small Island of Hillesoy, who lit a signal fire because he had broken his foot and couldn't get out. He needed help so he lit a signal fire and it burned up almost the entire island. Thankfully he was rescued. It did work. Just a little fire can just go way out of control. James says, "That is what your words are like." He uses this image to show us the intensity of the power to destroy. It is great power that our words have, like a fire that ravages out of control. That's the power of the tongue. It can ravage a person's soul, burning in their mind. The things that we say. Isn't it astonishing the damage that one harsh word can do? If you think about it in your relationships, how one sentence, even just one word in that sentence, can totally transform a special night out. This has happened to me before, and I say something wrong, sinful, and I've ruined the mood. I've hurt my wife. It's just stupid. It's sinful. Or something I've said to my children, the same thing. One word and its power to just eat up and burn up.

Scripture is filled with references to the word being like a weapon. Proverbs 12:18 says:

***Proverbs 12:18 ~ There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.***

Think about that. Rashly, something coming out quickly. It's like the thrust of a sword. Now think about that. You're working on an anger problem, and you're controlling your anger, and you're controlling you're anger, and you're controlling your anger, and then you get angry. You say, "Well, hey, I know I just said something that wasn't kind here, and I'm sorry. Please forgive me, but that was nine times in a row that I didn't say something I wanted to say." That's like saying, "You know, I only stabbed you once." That's enough to kill me.

***Psalm 64:2-4 ~ Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, From the tumult of those who do iniquity, 3 Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow, 4 To shoot from concealment at the blameless; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear.***

The sword and the arrow. The sword is something that happens in hand-to-hand combat that happens in interaction, but with an arrow, you can be shot from a long distance away. How much damage a word can do to somebody that's over there? Gossip, slander—how destructive they are! So the intensity of the power to destroy. The power to destroy is our first point, and you see the intensity in that word picture of a fire out of control. Then James continues, he says explicitly in Verse 6 ***...the tongue is a fire,...*** What he does next is not just cause to the intensity of the fire, but to show the extent of the power to destroy. He wants us to see first the intensity of the power to destroy, in the image of the fire, and then he wants us to see the extent to which it destroys. Look at the way he continues to explicate what it means, that the tongue destroys.

***James 3:6 ~ And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.***

What he's trying to get at is that the tongue destroys everything. That's the extent. The extent is that it destroys everything, just like that signal fire, it destroys everything in its path. When he says it's a ***...world of iniquity;...*** he's talking about the tongue, this little thing in our mouths, this little piece of flesh in our mouths, as it were, captures the entire world of iniquity and brings it out. That's what James is saying. The world!

Then he uses this next phrase: ***...the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body,...*** The idea is that it's one member. It's just set among our members. The idea of the word 'set' here mean that it steps forward. Think about all the parts of your body. You've got shoulders, legs, all the different bones in our bodies, the muscles in our bodies, our brain, our heart, all these organs—yet it's the tongue, he says, that steps to the front. It says, "Look, let me up front. I'm the one that needs to be out front." Look at the tongue.

I was reading one commentator who said he was on an airplane and reading the airline magazine, and it had a picture in there that said, "What is this picture?" He said, "This has got to be the moon. It's clearly the moon." He turns to the back of

the book and it said, “That is the human tongue.” A close up the tongue shows that it’s filled with craters, so that you can capture taste and whatever else. That’s nasty! I mean the tongue, it says, “I want to be out front.” It takes the first place and says, “Follow me everybody.” That’s basically what the tongue does. This one small member can defile the whole Body. The idea here is ‘spots, stain’. That’s the word ‘defile’ in Verse 6. This one member can stain the entire Body.

Let’s say you have a nice shirt and you love this shirt. This is your favorite shirt and it gets a stain that won’t come out. You don’t wear it again. You don’t say, “Well, this is my favorite shirt, just ignore this one spot right here.” One stain ruins the shirt. But he’s saying, beyond that, it doesn’t just stain one spot, it actually stains everything. That’s what the tongue does. Then he adds another, a third reference that says how it sets everything on fire. It ... *sets on fire the course of our life*,... The King James says, ...*the course of nature*... It’s interesting, two words there that are important. The word translated ‘course’ is a word from the Greek verb ‘trecco’. Here a noun from that Greek verb ‘trecco’, which we get our English word ‘trek’, which means ‘a running course’. You can mark out the Peach Tree Road Race. You’ve got to run this course. That’s the trek. It sets on fire the entire track. Life here is ‘of our nature’. The whole track of our life. The idea is, everything about it, everything to do with it, the tongue ravages it all. He’s saying, “Listen, if you get everything else right, and you get this wrong, you get everything wrong.”

“I stopped slamming doors,” you say. “I stopped breaking things.” I didn’t really used to do that, but if that was a problem for you, you break things. I probably have broken something in my life, for sure. Some people are more physically demonstrative like that. In anger they just break something. “Well, I’m not breaking anything anymore.” Well that’s good. “But I’m still speaking venom out of my mouth.” That’s bad, and that means everything is bad. God is saying, “What comes out of your mouth is what defiles men.” Jesus says this in Matthew 18:15.

***Matthew 18:15 ~ But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.***

So the extent of the destruction. It’s an intense destruction, the image of the fire, it affects everything. But when we talk about this first point, the power to destroy, don’t just notice these three sub-points. The intensity and the extent of the power, but also the source of the power. It becomes clear at the end of Verse 6 what the source of this destructive power is, and it is the power of hell. That is the source of the tongue’s destructive power.

I started by saying that we've got to decide who we're going to emulate, who we're going to image, God or Satan? James is very explicit here in saying that what we're doing when we speak venom, when we speak in anger, when we lie, when we slander, we are a mouthpiece of hell itself, set on fire by hell, Gehenna. The Valley of Hinnom, is just outside Jerusalem, where in Old Testament times, the apostate Israelites would go out there and burn their children in the fire to worship the false gods of Canaan, particularly the god Molech. King Ahaz does this in 2 Chronicles 28. He takes his children and burns them there in the Valley of Hinnom. So Gehenna was a picture of evil and a picture of burning. It's a picture of hell. So the source is Satan himself. He is the one who finds a mouthpiece when he finds us ready to do that.

***Psalm 140:1 ~ Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men 2 Who devise evil things in their hearts; They continually stir up wars. 3 They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips.***

You see this source also in Verse 8 of James 3, when he says:

***James 3:8 ~ But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.***

The word picture there is of a snake. Look at the viper striking with the fangs to inject poison that brings death. That's what our tongue is. Will we image God or will we image Satan? When we are getting angry, we are a mouthpiece of Satan himself. This is why I think Jesus spoke to Peter, not in anger but in clarity. There is a place where we speak with clarity and we convict people of sin. We're supposed to convict and reprove one another, and that's alright. Remember when Jesus says to Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan"? That's because Peter became a mouthpiece for Satan himself. Why? Because Peter had his mind on the things of man and not on the things of God. What Peter was doing was rebuking Jesus. He should have thought that was not a good idea. Peter said, "I believe You're the Son of God, and You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," and Jesus said, "Well, I've got to tell you, I'm going to suffer and die," and Peter says, "Wait a minute. You're wrong about that." Jesus says, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Peter was the mouthpiece of Satan.

Let's think about the power of the tongue to destroy in our lives, and the power of the tongue to make us lie and murder. Jesus said in Matthew 5 that if you call someone a fool, you've murdered them in your heart. If you say to someone,

“You’re stupid,” you’ve murdered them in God’s eyes. If you’ve said, “You’re of no value,” it’s the same essential thing as killing someone before God. The passage we read earlier from Proverbs 26:18-28 speaks of a number of different ways that the tongue is used to destroy:

***Proverbs 26:18 ~ Like a madman who throws Firebrands, arrows and death, 19 So is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, “Was I not joking?”***

That’s sarcasm. “I was just kidding. I didn’t really mean that.” That is like throwing firebrands, arrows and death. It’s like a flaming arrow you’re shooting at somebody when you use sarcasm in that way. This next verse talks about gossip:

***Proverbs 26: 20 ~ For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.***

Whispering keeps the fire going. Whispering about somebody else. “Do you know what they did? Do you know what they said?” That’s a burning fire that you’re feeding when you gossip.

***Proverbs 26:21 ~ Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.***

There’s something about gossip that we find attractive. We ought to hate that. God forgive me for wanting to hear this. Isn’t it amazing how when we hear something negative about someone, it’s something that we enjoy in our flesh? Every time we feel that, we ought to be catching ourselves and repenting of it before God. “God, help me. What is wrong with me? Deliver me from this body of death. Make me like Jesus.”

Verses 23 – 26 talked about flattery:

***Proverbs 26:23 ~ Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart.***

It’s just a clay pot that’s made to look pretty on the outside. It’s like silver on top of a clay pot. That’s what flattery is. We tell somebody something so that they’ll give us something. And sometimes even hiding our malice and our hatred, how wicked and how awful that is, and how like Satan that is.

***Proverbs 26:28 ~ A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.***

A lying tongue crushes people. Think of how destructive a lying tongue is. I mean, just even little white lies. That's something the Lord convicted me of some years back, and I have to continue to watch my heart on this. We all tend to want to make ourselves look as good as possible. That's part of our sin nature, our pride, and one of the ways the Lord convicted me of it some years back was that I might say to someone, "Well, I tried to call you and couldn't get you." Now, you can't say that anymore, because they have a record of it. "You tried to call me? Well, I have no record of a missed call on my cell phone or my home phone." Well, in the old days, you could say that, and they wouldn't know the difference. Remember the busy signal? Remember what that was like? What I really meant was that I thought about calling. I didn't really dial the phone. I tried to think about it. I actually forgot about it, but I know I should have called. That's a lie. What's the motive of that? Just to make yourself look good? Why not just say, "I meant to call you but I forgot. I'm sorry." Speak truth. We exaggerate to make ourselves look better in some way. Some of us struggle with that more than others. What does that do? Every lie breaks down trust and creates distance. So often we have a sense of that, don't we? We have a radar for that, because we recognize sin in other people that we have in our own hearts, and so we have a radar. "I just don't feel good about what they're saying there," and it creates distance. It creates separation. Trust is weakened. It's undermined, and so the relationship is hurt.

There are other kinds of lies that we tell. We lie in big ways. Sometimes we don't even see it. The lie of just going around depressed and complaining, that is lying. If you're a Christian and you go around complaining all the time, you are a person that is caught in lies. What do I mean by that? When I'm negative around people, I'm saying, "Look, this is just too much. It's unfair. What's happened in my life is not right. This is just not right. This is not good." What am I saying? "God is not good. God is not in control. God is not blessing. Something's wrong. The Lord has let everything out of control in my life." What I ought to be saying even when there's injustice and sin going on is, "Praise God, the Lord's working in this situation. Praise God, I have an opportunity to address a need." Do you see the difference? There's joy in that, and this is why Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." When we're not giving thanks, and when we're not rejoicing, we are lying about God."

That's why in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah saw the Lord, the thing that he thought about first was, "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the Lord. I have been lying about you, Oh God. You are sovereign. You are King. Every purpose of Yours is being carried out at every moment. What have I said about You?" Bite your tongue. Lies kill, don't they? What a destructive thing it is for us to be negative like that. What's it teach those around us? What does it teach our children and younger believers? When we rejoice in the Lord always, we're telling the truth. We're speaking, forming, filling, and edifying. When we lie, we're destroying and tearing down their faith. What a serious thing that is. The power to destroy is something that ought to make us stand in awe of the power.

That's what Psalm 73:13 is talking about. The psalmist looks around him and he sees all this injustice in the world. And there's a lot to be negative about if you just look at the injustice in the world. I mean, every day there is injustice and wickedness. The psalmist looks around him in Psalm 73, and he sees the wicked are prospering. Everything's going well for them. And he says:

***Psalm 73:13 ~ Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure...***

That's a psalmist in his heart, but the psalmist in Psalm 73 did not speak that. That's the difference.

***Psalm 73:15 ~ If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.***

He's saying, "If I had said, 'Surely have I kept my heart pure in vain,' it's all vanity for me to serve the Lord. If I had spoken this, I would have sinned against the next generation." To speak that is to undermine the faith of the entire next generation of people. It's serious business to be negative like that. God, help us turn from that. After that he says:

***Psalm 73:17 ~ Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end.***

We're going to feel that. We look at life and we don't understand why it's happening. So then what do you do? Go to the Lord. Don't go talk to your friend about it. Talk to Jesus about it. There are times when you have to go talk to your friend, but not first thing. Go to God first. And the Lord helped him to see: "You're sovereign, Lord. You're going to bring about justice in Your time. I can praise you

even in the midst of this injustice I see around me.” Remember, it’s going to be like this until Jesus comes back. What it does is it makes us long for Him to come back, doesn’t it? That’s good. Lord, thank You for reminding me that this world is not my home. It’s like a switch that gets flipped from on or off, isn’t it? We’ve got to flip that switch back on. Wow, Lord, You are so good.

## 2) The Tongue Has the Power to Defy:

The tongue has great power to defy. I mean that in terms of rebel. Defy all efforts at all human control. That’s what he says in Verses 7 and 8 of Chapter 3. Look at the word picture:

***James 3:7 ~ For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.***

Think about the first part of Verse 7. I mean, you can go to a circus and see a man stick his head in the mouth of a lion. I don’t want to do that, but there are guys who do that, and they do that for years and years, and you never hear about anybody getting eaten by the lion. Or you can see someone teach an elephant to do all kinds of tricks. They pop the elephant with a little whip. You’re like, “What’s the elephant doing? Doesn’t he know? You don’t have to put up with that.” No, he does, because maybe Genesis 1:26-27 is being preached more than we realize. But seriously, the animals know that this is man. We go see whale shows, and the whale does what he’s supposed to do, and jumps up in the air, and takes a person and pulls them up in the air. Isn’t that astonishing? Such power under control. James says, “The tongue cannot be tamed.” Man can tame everything else, but he cannot tame the tongue. The picture is one of utter hopelessness and despair. In fact, it’s emphatic. The NAS misses this. In Verse 8, ‘No one can tame the tongue’ is really ‘No one among men can tame the tongue.’ No man can tame the tongue. The emphasis is on humanity. It’s really saying: ***...is tamed and has been tamed by the man. 8 But no man can tame the tongue;***

The tongue is untamable, humanly speaking. All your efforts in your own strength will be fruitless. You can say, “I’m going to work on my anger problem. I’m going to just bite my tongue,” but isn’t that so hard to do? “I want to say something. I can’t say this. I can’t say this. I can’t say this.” There it goes. The tongue is unrestrainable. It’s not just untamable, but it’s unrestrainable. No one can tame the tongue. It’s a restless evil and full of deadly poison. The idea of restless evil is that which is not able to be quieted, or that which is not able to be restrained. It means

unsettled, unstable, unruly, unsubdued. Think about the fact that you could have an animal that you have not tamed, but you can build a fence and keep that animal out. If I was living in Africa, I would want a fence with some electric wiring around it to keep the animals out. The picture here is that the tongue can't even be restrained like that. You can't tame it. You can't restrain it. It's going to come through the fence, blow down the fence, and wreak havoc. Full of deadly poison, it's going to bring death. Its power to destroy is matched by its power to defy.

### 3) The Tongue Has the Power to Deceive:

***James 3:9 ~ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.***

The power to deceive is that it deceives *us*. We're self-deceived when this is happening. He's saying, "Is it not amazing, is it not completely unnatural that you can in one breath bless God, and in the next breath curse God's reflection?" That's the image. Imagine someone comes into your house and they say, "I love you. I appreciate you so much. I love your family. I'm so thankful for you," and they're walking through your house, and every time they see a picture of yours, they take it out and they stab it with a knife and tear it apart. "I'm so grateful that you're such a great friend." Every time they see a picture, they're stabbing it and tearing it apart. That is ridiculous. That is what we're doing. We bless God and we curse the reflections of God that we see around us. And this is actually speaking not just of what we do to Christians. When we do this to Christians, we're attacking the image of Christ that's been restored, but he's talking about even when we revile human beings. This ought to be sobering. There are a lot of wicked and evil people in the world. There are people that are doing great destruction in the world. Sometimes our political enemies, we get angry about what they're doing. And there's a sense of righteous indignation that quickly changes over to evil itself. We ought to be praying for our political opponents, praying for their salvation and for their blessing, because they are created in the image of God. And if we hate them in our hearts, we are voicing and exhibiting the character of Satan himself.

Calvin writes in his commentary that the one who truly worships God, must not revile any man that God has made. You still speak the truth. You say, "Yes, according to Scripture, you are headed to Hell. Please repent and believe." That's speaking the truth, but it should be out of a heart of love, not a heart that delights in hating anyone made in the image of God. But he says this is deceptiveness. How

can it happen that you can do both at the same time? How can we do that? And here he puts the metaphors at the back of this section. Usually he starts off 'the tongues of fire'. That's the metaphor. And look what it does. Here he says, "How can it be the tongue deceives? Look at the power of the tongue to deceive. You can curse and bless out of one mouth. And then he says:

***James 3:11 ~ Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.***

Basically, we have two metaphors doubled. He says, "Think about a fountain. If it's got good water in it, when you go to that fountain, you're going to get good water. Do you go to a fig tree expecting to get olives? No, you go to a fig tree expecting to get figs. A fig tree can't produce olives. Neither can a vine produce figs. A vine produces grapes. A fig tree produces figs. An olive tree produces olives. A Christian ought to produce blessing. It is irrational and unnatural for us to curse one another. It is completely against nature. He wants us to be appalled at this. This is the image he's trying to create in us.

My problem even as we talk about these things and as I studied this week, is that when you think about the destructive power of the tongue, why is it that I can think about what other people have said to me that hurt me, and yet I don't first think about what I've said to others that hurt them? God, help me. The problems are not out there. The problems are in here, and you and I, our indignation about evil needs to be ten times greater about what's going on in here than it is about what's going on out there. It doesn't mean that we don't speak about what's going on out there, but what is wicked is what's going on in here. That's what it means to get the log out of your own eye before you get the speck out of someone else's. God, help me. And when we're seeing our sin rightly, it makes us gentle with others. We lose this censorious spirit that wants to put other people down. The irony is we can be worshiping God at one moment, praising the Lord, thinking things are well with us, and then slander, gossip, and speak in anger.

What comes out of your mouth? When you look at your life, what comes out of your mouth? What's the general course? Is it a fountain of pure water? I mean, it's not perfect. We have this inconsistency in our sin nature, but what's the pattern of your life? What's the direction of your life? James says to look at this and examine it and see if you're in the household of faith. Brothers, these things ought not to be. It has the power to destroy. It has the power to defy. It has the power to deceive. Our only hope is the Gospel. If we see our tongue rightly, we ought to flee to

Christ daily, moment by moment. Look at how quickly the words flow out. Our words are like a sword or an arrow. Come to see how desperate is our need of grace. When we feel that word welling up in our throats, we need to run to Christ. At that moment, you and I need a Savior.

He doesn't just save from the penalty of sin. He does, praise His Name, but He also saves us from the wrath of God once and for all when we are justified, when we believe on Christ, repenting of our sins, placing our faith in the finished work of Calvary. He died in our place. He paid our debt in full at the cross. He paid for every wicked word which we've ever spoken. He paid for every wicked deed which we've ever done. Jesus paid for the sins of all who would ever believe, at Calvary. Every single one. Not only did He save us from the penalty of sin, but He saves us from the power of sin. He saves us from the power of the tongue, which as this passage makes clear, is much too great for us to handle. That's the purpose of this passage is to make us fall on our knees and say, "Lord, help me, a sinner. There is no way that I can deal with this. Look how awful it is that I speak this way to my family, to those whom I love, to my family of God, the people of God who have been bought with a price. How can I use my mouth this way? God, help me."

When we come to Christ, we find He's not only paid for our sins, but He is our righteousness. This is the glory of the Gospel. He comes to take up residence inside of you, and the One who formed and filled, lives inside of you. The One who blesses, lives inside of you, and He can bless. He can form, and fill, and edify through you. Think of the kindness of Jesus Christ. Think of His gentleness. *Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy laden.* We might have those moments where someone comes to talk to us and we feel like, "I don't have time right now. Please get this over with." We don't say it, but we're thinking it. Listen to Jesus. *Let the little children come to Me. Do not hinder them.* So when you feel that, turn to Christ. Lord, I'm feeling like what I have to do is more important than listening to this person right now. God, help me. Let me be like Jesus. Come to me. Lord, help me. He never turned away one who wanted to be saved, who spoke the words. The man said, "If you're willing, Lord, You can save me." Jesus said, "I'm willing. Be cleansed." The One who in the face of death, brought life. "Lazarus, come forth!" The One who speaks can speak through you and me. We need to start preventing those words from coming out, looking to Christ, and trusting in His grace to save us. He's already paid for the sin of what I was wanting to say, or what I just started to say. Turn that around, Lord, Forgive me. Now bless. Give life. Edify. Encourage. Convict, but don't condemn, Lord. You never condemn. The Spirit convicts. He doesn't condemn, and we must not condemn one another either.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

*Our Father, we're thankful for Your Word which shows us our problem, our sin, our ongoing battle with evil that is in our very flesh, and shows us our need of a Savior. We pray for those that are here who have not truly embraced Christ, that You would grant them the grace to repent and believe today, to run to Jesus, to stop seeing what's wrong out there, and to start seeing what's wrong in their own hearts, so that they might see what a glorious Savior is Jesus Christ. Father, help those of us who know Christ to stop letting division come through our words, to stop imaging the enemy of our souls, and to start imaging our Lord and Savior. Help us to reflect His glory in all that we say, that our words will be life and peace. We pray this in Jesus Name, Amen.*

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