

Verbal Faith: Faith's Wise Use of Words

James 3

Introduction

Chapter one teaches that when believers **endure** trials victoriously, their faith is demonstrated. Christians can face trials with joy and patience because they know God has a purpose for the difficulty.

In chapter two, James teaches that everyone struggles with the sin of hypocrisy and how it can be a test of our faith. James described the way a believer should treat others. His examples were Abraham, who sacrificed everything, and Rahab, who risked everything. God promises that those who live by true faith and trust Him are never disappointed and will never be ashamed (Psalm 34:22 and Isaiah 50:7).

In chapter three, James looks closely at the tiny, terrifying tongue. Our words will be examined as proof of faith.

Outline of James 3

- I. Two Kinds of Verbal Expression - James 3:1-13
- II. Two Kinds of Verbal Wisdom - James 3:14-18

I. Two Kinds of Verbal Expression - James 3

Not many of you should become teachers...Why does James warn against choosing to be a teacher? It is because teachers will be judged more strictly than other people. This makes sense, because teachers have an influence over many people. A carpenter uses a hammer, as a teacher uses his words (words are his tools). The teacher's life must agree with his words. In the same way that faith without works is dead, words without works are useless.

Paul agrees. *You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach*

that a man should not steal, do you steal (Romans 2:21)? Teachers must be willing to back up their words with their lives. A popular expression is 'practice what you preach.' If a teacher tells students to work hard and arrive on time, but he does not show up to class prepared or before the bell rings, how can the students believe the teacher's words are true. Of course, no one is perfect. Mistakes will happen, but they should happen once in a while, not all the time.

James first mentioned the tongue in chapter one (1:26). He spoke about the dangers of an unbridled tongue. Now, he says that if a person can **bridle** the tongue, he or she is *able also to bridle the whole body*. If anyone does not stumble in word, *he is a perfect man*. Maybe it is better to remain silent! *Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace* (Proverbs 17:28).

A horse is a large animal and yet it is controlled by a small bit in the horse's mouth. Ships are large vehicles that are able to be controlled by a small rudder. Likewise, the tongue is a small member of the body but has great power and influence. Do you control your tongue, or does it control you?

James shows that much harm can be caused by the tongue. Agreements are made and reputations are ruined by as little as one or two words. Words are **crucial** because of their power to bring harmony or harm.

James reminds his readers that just as one small match can light a forest fire and destroy many acres of centuries old trees, so can a single word destroy reputations, businesses, or fellowship. Fire does damage quickly. When Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern in

1871, the Chicago fire soon burned out of control. In the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, more people died from the fire which followed than died in the earthquake. In the same way, the tongue is an entire world of sinfulness in our mouths, capable of destroying families, marriages, churches, programs, dreams, and souls.

You cannot escape responsibility for the effects of your words. The psalmist prayed, *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord* (Psalm 19:14). Shouldn't this be our daily prayer, too? A truly awesome thought is that each and every person will be held accountable for every worthless word he has ever spoken (Matthew 12:36 and Luke 12:2-3).

So how then should we speak? Without fail, we have Jesus as our example. The gospels tell us that he had *gracious words* (Luke 4:22). We also know he was a prophet *mighty in deed and word* (Luke 24:19). He had the *words of eternal life* (John 6:68). Words stir up emotions. A movie without a soundtrack would be flat and unmoving. Song writers, lyricists, and poets know the power words have to stimulate desires. Satan uses words to entice people to evil (Matthew 4:6). Words carry messages. Do you use words for selfish, unholy, ungodly, or impure purposes? Do you listen to music with worthless words? Are you prepared to be judged by your words, both now and later?

Most creatures can be tamed with patience and skill, from the Aardvark to the Zebra. But no one, has ever learned to tame the tongue. Some people just talk all the time. Their tongues are only still when they sleep. Are you like this? James calls the tongue *an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*. Poison kills! When you walk into a room, does your tongue bring death or life to a conversation? Take a moment now to confess to God any slander, gossip, lies, unimportant chatter, and foolish words in your life. Only God can heal a venomous tongue. He gives you a new heart

and song at conversion, and He can also give you a new tongue (Psalm 40:3).

James asks two **rhetorical** questions:

1. *Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter?* (3:9-11)
2. *Can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs?* (3:12)

A rhetorical question does not expect an answer because the answer is obvious. No, a spring cannot give fresh water and bitter water at the same time. No, a fig tree cannot grow olives and you will not find any figs on a grapevine. That's nonsense. In the same way, it is nonsense for us to praise God and curse men out of the same mouth. And, don't forget, the person you are cursing (speaking badly about or meanly to) has been made in God's image! So, here is a rhetorical question for you: Should a Christian praise God and curse His creation? No. He should not. It is a sin and hypocrisy.

To contrast the nonsense, James asks a new question. This time he asks about wisdom: *Who is wise and understanding among you* (3:13)? Jesus' words and actions were in agreement. They both pointed to God. Are your actions and words in agreement? Do you think before you speak? Or, do your words spill out of your mouth carelessly? If you were to take a jar of glitter and pour it out in front of a fan, it would be blown everywhere. You may wish to clean up the mess you have made, but it will be impossible for you to pick up every piece of glitter. In the same way, words spilled out of your mouth cannot be put back. Use wisdom and think before you speak, but not just any wisdom.

II. Two Kinds of Verbal Wisdom - 3:14-18

Just as James has called his followers to prove their faith with their works, he now calls them to demonstrate their wisdom by their words. He describes two kinds of wisdom. One is *earthly, sensual, and demonic*, while the other is *pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*.

Wisdom is a work of faith and it is given in answer to the prayer of faith. Wise words come from the Holy Spirit. How can you have wise words? First, ask yourself if you have prayed for wisdom as James instructed (1:5). Second, ask yourself if your words agree with God's Word, the Holy Bible? This might be hard for you to know if you do not read your Bible regularly. Do you? How can you know God if you don't KNOW Him from His word in the Bible?

Wisdom from above is peaceable. People want to work together when this wisdom is present. There is unity and harmony instead of strife, chaos, and confusion. It is full of mercy and good fruits which are described in detail in the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 8:14-31). Wisdom from above does not fear the truth or fail to speak the truth when necessary. Its words mean what they say. Jesus said, *Let your "Yes" be "Yes" and your "No" be "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one* (Matthew 5:37). This passage of James is similar to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:16-20. Some people have called James' book a study about the Sermon on the Mount.

Wisdom that does not come from above is full of bitterness, envy, and strife.

- Bitterness: I'm angry at you because you hurt me, and I will not forgive you.
- Envy: I want what you have, and I am angry that you have it instead of me.
- Strife: I am going to argue with you, because I want to argue about anything.

None of these come from God and are not His wisdom.

The world celebrates **discord**. Perhaps you are familiar with the cartoon Tom and Jerry. This cat and mouse duo are meant to keep you laughing from a young age. Each episode is about them attacking each other. There are no shortage of reality shows celebrating trickery, manipulation, and bribery. In fact, you can go to court on TV and show off one of your disagreements for the world to watch.

The TV show will pay for the sentence given by the judge. All the audience has to do is share your strife with the world for entertainment. And then there are 'games' to win as much as a million dollars. All you have to do is cheat, lie, steal, and deceive your opponent. Whoever does it best is,...not the loser,...the winner! If that is not a celebration of strife, what is? (This is another **rhetorical** question.)

The wisdom of this world is limited because it is from man's sinful mind. Science, literature, and education are wonderful achievements of humanity, yet they are flawed. Only the Bible is true in all it teaches. The world's wisdom will fail because its source is in selfishness and Satan. Heaven's wisdom, however, is bound to triumph because it comes from God and His goodness (3:15-17; Ephesians 3:8-12). †

Prayer

The psalmist prayed, *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord!* Make this your daily prayer this week.

Memory Verse

James 3:17 *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

Vocabulary

endure - to continue patiently; tolerate; suffer

bridle - putting a head piece on a horse to gain control over its movements

crucial - very important; significant

rhetorical - a statement or question to make a point without expecting an answer

discord - lack of agreement or harmony;

QUESTIONS FOR JAMES LESSON 4

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. a. To what does James compare the tongue?

b. What do you think a person's words reveal about the kind of person they are?

c. What do you want your words to reveal about you?

- _____
2. a. What are the two wisdoms?

b. Which kind of wisdom do you want to have? Why?

DAY TWO: Read James 4:1-6.

3. a. Where do "wars" (quarrels) and fighting come from? Give verse. _____

b. ? (Thought Question) What do you think the word "desires," in verse 1, means? Use the following verses to help with your answer: James 1:14, Ephesians 2:3, 2 Timothy 3:4, Jude 18.

4. a. Give two reasons why people do not receive what they want from God?

b. What does James call these people?

c. ? (Thought Question) Why do you think James calls them this?

5. a. If you are a "friend" of the world, then what are you to God? Circle the correct answer.

His child

His enemy

His partner

His teammate

His servant

- b. From verse 5, what does the Scripture say about the Spirit? What do you think this means?

- c. What does God give, and to whom does He give it?

DAY THREE: Read James 4:7-10.

6. a. From verses 7-8, what two things does James tell us to do “to God.”

- b. What does verse 8 say God will do in return?

7. a. What does James tell us to do about the devil?

- b. What will the devil do in return?

- c. What do you think it means to “resist” (you may use the dictionary)?

8. Circle T (true) or F (false) next to each of the following statements. If you mark the statement false, correct it according to the Scripture.

T or F James commands sinners to cleanse their hands.

T or F James says the double-minded should judge one another.

T or F James says sinners should lament, mourn, and weep.

T or F Everyone should laugh at the devil.

T or F Humble yourself before God and He will give you anything you want.

DAY FOUR: Read James 4:11-12.

10. a. In these verses, what does James tell you not to do?

b. What do the following passages teach you about your treatment of others?

James 4:11

Psalm 101:5

Matthew 7:1-2

Ephesians 4:31-32

11. What is an alternative to slandering or passing judgement on another person?
See Matthew 18:15-18 and Galatians 6:1-2.

12. a. Who is the only rightful Lawgiver and Judge? Why? See also Romans 14:4, 10, 12.

DAY FIVE: Read James 4:13-17.

13. What does James say about each of the following?
“tomorrow”

“your life”

what you “ought to say”

“boasting”

14. a. If you know the right thing to do and you don’t do it, what are you doing?

b. How do the following Scriptures explain this further?
Luke 12:47-48

2 Peter 2:21

John 9:41

VOCABULARY FOR JAMES LESSON 4

***"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think...
and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."***

— Wilfred Funk

DAY ONE: Write the definition of each vocabulary word.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

DAY TWO: Write three sentences using three different vocabulary words from this lesson.

1.

2.

3.

DAY THREE: Circle the word's synonym(s). (Synonym is a word/phrase that means the same thing.)

1. . **endure** continue suffer surrender

2. . **crucial** optional important necessary

3. . **discord** agreement disharmony peace

DAY FOUR: Match the word to its meaning.

<u>Word</u>	<u>Definition</u>
endure	putting a head piece on a horse to gain control over its movements
discord	to continue patiently, tolerate, suffer
retorical	very important; significant
bridle	lack of agreement or harmony; conflict
crucial	a statement or question to make a point without expecting an answer

DAY FIVE: Review previous vocabulary word(s). Try to work from memory.

Find the hidden words left, right, forward, backward, and diagonally. Each letter is used only once.

R C U K M L B K T Y B F Z T C
H O V S G F J L T Y G L I J G
X B X L V D K I A W B I O U S
Z H U U J N L G H S R J J D Y
T I K M L A L R G X P E I A Z
U K I E I V Q Q H T Q H R I J
G C Y T D J O C Z C Z D E S G
F Y R T F O H T A R W F O M D
P A W N R W Y P G D Y L N F Y
P B A D E F L A D X A O R Z A
F Y A N L A T T A S O X K N R
J I N R Y K D W J N Y G D R L
N F Z H P D N W F L I P B A N
I V S M V T E Y C X X E G L T
P H M G J M P H A R I S E E S

DEFINITIONS FOR WORDS IN THE PUZZLE...

showing favor to someone or something instead of another

decree, destine; God's pre-determined, unalterable ways

a religious group of Jews who practiced Judaism and strict observance of the Mosaic law

a behavior or action that is contrary to God and His truth

violent anger; punishment for sin or a crime

living according to Jewish custom

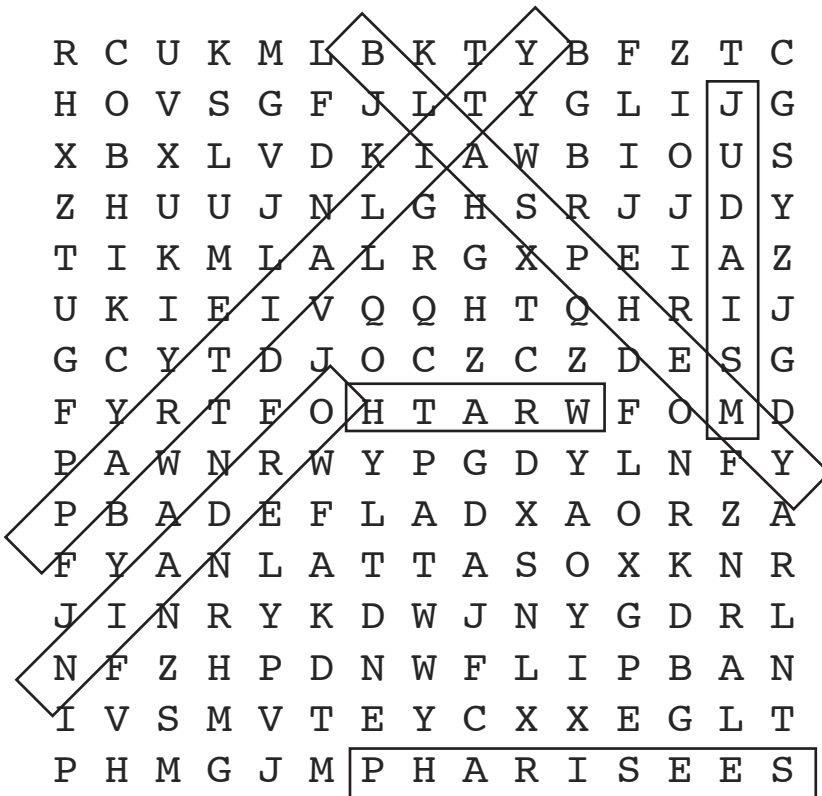
VOCABULARY WORDS TO CHOOSE FROM...

faith
character
generation
ordain
blasphemy

partiality
wisdom
persecution
Judaism

wrath
epistle
proverbs
Pharisees

ANSWER KEY



DEFINITIONS FOR WORDS IN THE PUZZLE...

PARTIALITY showing favor to someone or something instead of another

ORDAIN decree, destine; God's pre-determined, unalterable ways

BLASPHEMY a behavior or action that is contrary to God and His truth

WRATH violent anger; punishment for sin or a crime

JUDAISM living according to Jewish custom

PHARISEES a religious group of Jews who practiced Judaism and strict observance of the Mosaic law