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Lesson 6 on James & Jude

I. Introduction to Chapter 3

A. James in my favorite book in the Bible.

1. One reason I really like James is that he always goes straight to the heart of the matter, and he does so with great clarity and bluntness.
2. It is very hard to misunderstand James, and nowhere is that more true than in his discussions of the tongue that occur throughout the book.
3. What he tells us is simple to understand, but we will work a lifetime at putting it into practice.

B. James has already mentioned his concerns about Christian speech.

1. In 1:19 he wrote: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."
2. In 1:26 he told us that the bridling of the tongue is a main ingredient of pure religion.
 - a) "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."
 - b) There is nothing subtle about a verse like that! If that verse doesn't reach out and grab you, then you cannot be grabbed.
3. In Chapter 3, he returns to this same issue and treats it at length.
4. Why does he do so here? Perhaps because he just finished talking about the importance of works, and (as Tasker reminds us) "words are also works." Indeed, much of the work of the world is accomplished through the medium of words.

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5. Also, this subject is extremely important to James. More than any other writer in the Bible, James clearly warns against the dangers of an unruly tongue.
6. Of all the Biblical authors, James most descriptively portrays the nature of man's tongue.

C. This section of the book tells us much about James' background.

1. The problem of uncontrolled speech is a frequent theme in the Old Testament (especially Proverbs) and Jewish wisdom literature.
 - a) (Proverbs 16:27–28) A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire. A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.
 - b) (Proverbs 18:7–8) A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul. The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.
2. But the illustrations that James uses were popular among the Greek and Hellenistic–Jewish moralists.
3. "The picture of James that emerges is of a reasonably well-educated Jew who knows his Old Testament thoroughly and who is well acquainted with the Hellenistic–Jewish culture, language, and literature."

II. Verse 1: Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

A. James approaches his subject by starting with a warning to teachers -- or rather to those who would become teachers.

1. James begins his discussion with a startling statement that reminds us of how Jesus often started speaking on a subject. James says

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something that is just the opposite of what we might expect him to say -- not many of you should become teachers!

- a) The King James version uses "masters" in place of "teachers," but the reference is still to those who teach, as in "schoolmaster."
2. Teachers played a prominent part in the life of the early church. Almost whenever they are mentioned, they are mentioned with honor.
- a) Paul singles them out as exercising one of the three most prominent ministries in the early church, along with apostles and prophets. (1 Corinthians 12:28; and see Acts 13:1, Romans 12:7, and Ephesians 4:11). Teaching, of course, is the only one of those three ministries that remains with us today.
 - b) 1 Timothy 3:2 tells us that elders must be teachers.
 - c) The teacher in the early church prior to the completion of the New Testament canon had the crucial task of faithfully, accurately, and completely transmitting the Christian doctrine.
 - d) False teachers remain a scourge today, but think how bad that problem would be if we did not have our Bibles. (But, of course, the situation is the same if we have Bibles but never use them!)
 - e) James is concerned about speech, and naturally his focus is drawn to the most important and prominent speakers in the early church. If they did not use their tongues correctly, then what hope would there be for anyone else to do so?
 - f) The main thought here is the greater responsibility of teachers and the extremely dangerous character of the instrument they use in their profession.
3. James is concerned about those who would become teachers for

the wrong reasons.

- a) Why? Because those who teach for the wrong reason are much more likely to teach the wrong things. They are much more likely to misuse their tongue if they are teaching from envy and selfish ambition (a theme that James will discuss later).
- b) The Jewish Rabbi was treated in a way that would be liable to ruin the character of any man.
 - (1) Among the Jews, the desire for the office of teacher and the title of "Rabbi" was prevalent.
 - (2) His very name means "My great one."
 - (3) It was held that a man's duty to his Rabbi exceeded his duty to his own parents. In fact, if both were captured by the enemy, the Rabbi must be ransomed first.
 - (4) Barclay: "No profession is more liable to beget spiritual and intellectual pride."
- c) We know that there was a problem in the early church with men who claimed to be teachers but lacked due authority or qualification. (Matthew 23:8; Acts 15:24; 1 Timothy 1:6-7; 3:2)
- d) Some early teachers tried to turn Christianity into just another sect of Judaism. (Acts 15:24)
- e) Some early teachers lived nothing of the truth they taught. (Romans 2:17-29)
- f) Some early teachers tried to teach before they themselves knew anything. (1 Timothy 1:6-7)
- g) Other early teachers pandered to the false desires of the crowd.

(2 Timothy 4:3)

4. And yet James' concern is not just for the hearers, but is also for the teacher himself -- he will be judged with greater strictness.
 - a) A more literal translation is that a teacher will receive a greater judgment.
 - (1) This language reminds us of Jesus' statement in Mark 12:40 that the scribes "will receive the greater condemnation."
 - b) Teaching is a tremendous responsibility, and it is not a responsibility that should be taken up lightly or assigned lightly.
 - c) If every idle word will be weighed at judgment (Matthew 12:36), then how much more the utterances of one who presumes to teach the word of God to others?
 - d) The sad state of Christendom today can be laid at the feet of teachers who failed in their responsibility to accurately and faithfully convey and explain the word of God, and at the feet of those who put them in a position to teach.
 - e) Teachers have two tremendous responsibilities: They must always take every care that they are teaching the complete truth, and they must not lead lives that contradict that truth.
 - f) Many today try to proclaim the good news without ever mentioning the bad news.
 - (1) (Acts 20:26-27) Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.
 - g) Those who teach have a greater responsibility to live according to that teaching.

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- (1) Again, we are reminded of Jesus' statement in Matthew 23:2-3 to the Pharisees: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice."

5. Is there a lesson here for us today? Absolutely!

a) We should proceed with the utmost caution when we select someone to teach a Bible class.

- (1) The caution is certainly for the class who is forced to listen, but the caution is also for the teacher himself whom we have placed ill-prepared into a position of tremendous responsibility and tremendous danger.

(2) At some congregations, the most important classes (high school and junior high) are taught by those least knowledgeable and least capable!

(3) The first Bible class I ever taught was a 6th grade class that I taught while I was in college at Rice. I alternated each Sunday with a co-teacher who, on the days he taught, would always walk in and ask me two questions: (a) Where did I leave my teacher's guide?, and (2) What lesson are we on?

(4) James 3:1 was written for that type of person, and as I look back on that class -- knowing that a good number of those six graders have since left the church -- I pray that I did all I could to faithfully convey to them the word of God.

b) We need to choose teachers carefully.

(1) We need teachers with ability.

(2) We need teachers with desire.

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- (3) We need teachers with knowledge.
 - (4) We need teachers with time.
 - (5) We need teachers with maturity.
 - (6) We need teachers with love -- love of God, love of God's word, and love of God's people.
- c) But, you say, if we are that choosy then we sure won't have many teachers.
- (1) Right! Exactly! "Not many of you should become teachers!" That is exactly the point!

III. Verse 2: For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

A. One reason that James started off this chapter talking about teachers is that the main tool of a teacher's ministry is also the part of the body that is most difficult to control -- the tongue.

- 1. "It can sway men to violence, or it can move them to the noblest actions. It can instruct the ignorant, encourage the dejected, comfort the sorrowing, and soothe the dying. Or, it can crush the human spirit, destroy reputations, spread distrust and hate, and bring nations to the brink of war." (Curtis Vaughan)
- 2. "The tongue voices every evil feeling and every kind of sinful thought; it sets in motion and gives concreteness to every kind of sinful act."
- 3. Few gifts from God surpass the gift of words and speech, and yet few gifts are so misused.

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4. James notes that we all sin in many ways. What he has in mind here is not so much the number of our sins as the variety of our sins (although both number and variety are included).
 - a) "Life is strewn with orange peel." But what is an orange peel for me may be no problem for you.
5. But there is one way in which we all sin -- our speech. We all have that in common.
 - a) The hasty word, the untruthful statement, the sly suggestion, harmful gossip, innuendo, impurity. We all sin with our tongues.

B. If someone were able to control the tongue -- the most difficult part of our body to control -- then that person would be a perfect man.

1. And what did James know about this? He had grown up with just such a person!
2. (1 Peter 2:22) "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."

C. One cannot overstate the importance of words to a Christian.

1. James has already told us in 1:18 about the utmost importance of the "word of truth."
2. When John opened his gospel, he began by referring to Jesus as the "word" made flesh.
3. If you ever hear anybody denigrating or belittling the written or spoken word in favor, for example, of something felt or experienced, that person is not proclaiming the gospel. The gospel is the word of truth -- and it is conveyed with words!

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- a) Our Christian lives are a vital part of proclaiming the gospel, but absent words our Christian lives will lead no one to Christ. To do that requires words followed by obedience.
- 4. A Christian should view words as God views them. Our speech must be careful and controlled, but always seasoned with salt.
 - a) (Colossians 4:6) Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.
 - b) (1 Peter 3:10) Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.
- 5. And the tongue is much more than what we say out loud.
 - a) If not, then a mute person would, according to James, be a perfect man.
 - b) We also write with words and think with words.
 - c) It is hardly a victory if we are filled with evil thoughts and just manage not to voice them (although that's a good first step!).
 - d) (2 Corinthians 10:5) "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"

D. With this background, is it any wonder that sins of the tongue are condemned so thoroughly in Scripture?

- 1. The first recorded words spoken to God after the expulsion from the Garden were a lie. (Genesis 4:9)
- 2. When Paul wants to show that all have sinned and no one is righteous, what does he point to?

- a) (Romans 3:13–14) "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."
3. When Isaiah wants to explain his alienation in the presence of the Holy God, what does he point to?
- a) (Isaiah 6:5) "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."
4. And what message do we find in almost every letter of Paul?
- a) (Ephesians 4:31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
 - b) (Colossians 3:8) But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.
 - c) (2 Corinthians 12:20) For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.
 - d) (Romans 1:29–31) They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
5. And do we usually consider sins of the tongue to be a major sin or a minor sin? How do we rank gossip along side adultery or theft? Do we permit one to go unchallenged in the body while the others are met with a swift rebuke?

IV. Verses 3–5a: If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5a So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

A. Verse 2–5 are a call for self-control.

1. Both illustrations focus on control exercised by a person through a small object (the bit or the rudder) on a large body (the horse or the ship). One commentator said that these two represent the sum total of what man steered in those days.
2. The tongue bears influence far out of proportion to its size.
3. When that small part is not controlled, the rest of the body will likewise be uncontrolled and unrestrained.
4. One commentator notes "the talkativeness, the reckless statements, the frothy rhetoric, the abusive language, and the misleading assertions that are all characteristic of the uncontrolled tongue."
5. When it comes to self control, our self-examination, instead of stopping short at the sins of speech as is often the case, should begin with them.

B. The Bible, of course, has much to say on the subject of self-control.

1. (Proverbs 25:28) A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.
2. (1 Corinthians 9:27) But I discipline my body and keep it under

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control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

3. (1 Thessalonians 4:4) "that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor"
4. (Galatians 5:22–23) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
5. One of the songs we sometimes sing is entitled "Lord, Take Control," and it is part of the so-called "Lord, Take Control Medley."
 - a) Perhaps Psalm 141:3? (Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!)
 - b) But what is James saying in this chapter? Lord, take control? Or rather, Christian, take control?
 - c) And who is going to be the guard over our mouths if not us?

C. So, if sins of the tongue are so bad, then we just should not say anything, right?

1. Wrong! Just as we are commanded in the Bible how not to use our tongues, we are just as clearly commanded about how we are to use our tongues.
2. Although James has said we must be slow to speak, he has not told us to remain silent.
3. In fact, I would submit that a cowardly silence is the worst sort of cowardice.
4. What do we say when those around us take the Lord's name in vain and hurl the vilest forms of abuse against him? Are we silent?

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5. There are times when a Christian must speak up quickly and loudly, and woe to us when such opportunities come and we let them pass by without remark!
6. The key is not to remain silent -- the key is knowing WHEN to remain silent and when not.

D. But is James really saying that the tongue controls our body the way a rudder controls a ship or a bit controls a horse?

1. Perhaps, in a way. He is telling us that the tongue is a key factor, and perhaps the key factor, in controlled living.
 - a) We ask ourselves how to control the powerful forces within us that cause us to sin, and James replies with an answer we likely did not consider -- control your tongue.
 - b) If we can master the hardest part to control, then won't we be able to control the others? Just as with a rudder, our tongue can keep our entire ship on course -- or it can send the ship straight for the rocks.
 - c) Control of the tongue is more than just evidence of spiritual maturity -- it is the means to spiritual maturity!
2. But we must guard against pressing any of these analogies too far.
 - a) "When a man calls his wife a jewel, he need not mean that she is hard and unyielding."

E. Verse 5 says that although the tongue is small, it boasts of great things.

1. Boasting is generally seen in the Bible as a sinful activity, but here the term may not be used with any negative connotations.

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- a) The tongue does have great importance -- it has reason to boast!
 - b) Phillips: "the human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of!"
2. But it is also possible that James has the arrogant boasting of man in mind here.
- a) (Psalm 12:3) "May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts."
- V. Verses 5b–6: How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.**
- A. The second half of verse 5 is a transition between the preceding verses (which focus on the disproportionate power of the tongue) and verse 6 (which highlights the tongue's destructive potential).**
- 1. The word translated "forest" could also refer to the brush that covered many Palestinian hills and that in the dry Mediterranean climate could easily burst into flame.
 - 2. Verse 6 has been called one of the most difficult passage in the entire epistles because of its unusual grammar and terminology, and yet even so it presents a very clear message.
- B. Unrestrained passions have often been compared to fire, but that analogy works particularly well with unrestrained speech.**
- 1. "Here is the most brilliant expose of the dire consequences of the tongue when it goes unchecked and is allowed to start a brushfire that spreads beyond human control to contain."

2. Just as with throwing a lit match out a car window, we can never tell where our words will land and what sort of conflagration they might ignite.
 - a) Once spoken, they are no longer under our control.
 - b) The control must be exercised before they are spoken.
3. Few disasters in the ancient world were feared more than fire as the ancients possessed precious few resources to battle them.
 - a) Even today, wildfires are burning out of control all over the state of California.
4. Think of the enormous, sometimes irreversible, harm that can be caused by unsubstantiated rumors. Such a rumor can be harder to stop than any forest fire.
5. Think of the permanent damage that can be caused by harsh, unloving speech -- much more damaging than any forest fire.
6. Adults know that the childhood phrase about "sticks and stones" reverses the truth of the matter. The wounds caused by sticks and stones heal whereas the wounds caused by words can last a lifetime.

C. The tongue is a world of unrighteousness.

1. (Matthew 15:11, 18-20) "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person. ... But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."
2. No other member of the body can wreak so much havoc on the

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godly life.

3. The tongue has been called an arrow because it can kill at a distance.
4. (Psalm 73:9) They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.
5. Looking back over our lives, there are likely many deeds we wish could be undone -- but aren't there very many more words we wish could be unsaid?

D. The tongue stains the whole body.

1. James has already told us that part of pure religion is to keep ourselves unstained by the world. The tongue accomplishes the opposite of pure religion.
 - a) Each sinful thing we say shows how we have been stained by this world.
 - b) The sins of the tongue spread spiritual pollution in ourselves and to others.
2. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body.
 - a) What does James mean by "the whole body"?
 - b) A fascinating feature of this passage is that it seems to be proceeding on two levels.
 - (1) One is obvious -- a person's speech can stain or poison his entire body.
 - (2) The other is less obvious but fits in well with the first verse of chapter 3 discussing teachers -- a teacher's speech can stain

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or poison the whole body of the church.

- (3) Think back over James' illustrations. Doesn't the image of a bit steering a horse and a rudder steering a ship fit well with that of a teacher steering a congregation to one viewpoint or another? In fact, one might say it fits better than the image of a person's tongue steering his own physical body.
- (4) "There is a churchly setting for these verses and a reminder that church leaders in their role as teachers affect the entire congregation."

E. The tongue sets on fire the entire course of life.

1. The Greek phrase translated here as "the entire course of life" is literally "the cycle of nature," and it was originally used in the false Orphic religion to depict an unending cycle of reincarnations.
2. But, by the time James was writing the phrase, it had been popularized and was used to denote the course of human life. A modern idiom that captures the same meaning might be "the ups and downs of life."
3. The tongue is an ever present danger that follows us throughout our lives, from beginning to end and in all circumstances.
 - a) Calvin: "Other vices are corrected by age or by process of time. They drop off from our lives" -- but from earliest to latest days the baneful influence of the tongue remains.
4. The tongue can corrupt all of life, whether the life of an individual or the life of the church.

F. The tongue is set on fire by hell.

1. And where does this enormous destructive power come from?

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James, as usual, is straightforward. It comes from Hell.

- a) The sinful tongue is an instrument of Satan.
 - b) (Matthew 16:22–23) And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”
 - c) A central concern of this entire section of James is power -- and Satan has tremendous power when it comes to the tongue.
2. Satan is the ultimate source of corrosive false teachings that work to destroy the body, either the individual body or the church, which is the body of Christ.
- a) Satan has been twisting the word of God from the very beginning, and he has not slowed down at all.
 - b) Satan is the author of confusion, and the human tongue is his favorite tool.
 - c) In one sense, there is no such thing as an uncontrolled tongue. Any tongue not brought into subjection to God is controlled by Satan.
3. It is telling that James uses the word "Gehenna."
- a) There are 12 references to Gehenna in the New Testament, and with the exception of this one in James, all are found on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels.
 - b) Jesus warns against several sins that could cause one to be go there, including calling your brother a fool. (Matthew 5:22)

G. It is interesting that James does not give us a list of sins of the tongue as we find elsewhere in the Bible.

1. Paul, for example, often lists specific sins of the tongue that we must avoid.
2. In Proverbs, we find thoughtless chattering (10:8), lying (12:19), arrogant boasting (18:12), and gossiping (10:18).
3. If James were really the legalist that some falsely call him, then wouldn't we expect to find a lengthy list of do's and don'ts? Instead, he goes straight to the heart of the problem, knowing that the details will follow if we get that part right.

H. It is also interesting to recall the events of Acts 2 as we read these verses.

1. Evil speech is like a fire, but the first act in the new creation of God's kingdom was the renewal of the power of speech in Acts 2:11 -- and that event was accompanied by a controlled fire sent from Heaven.

VI. Verses 7–8: For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

A. Verse 7 begins with the word "For."

1. James is providing evidence in verses 7–8 for his statement that the tongue gets its destructive power from Hell.
 - a) How else could we explain its inability to be tamed, more so even than any wild animal?
 - b) James' allusion here to man's dominion over the animals comes

straight from Genesis 1, even to the point of picking up the same fourfold classification found in Genesis 1:26.

B. The word "restless" in verse 8 translates the same word that James used in 1:8 to describe the double-minded man, 'unstable' in all his ways."

1. James is setting the stage for the next few verses that will describe the double, contradictory use of the tongue.
2. The description of the tongue as restless or disorderly heightens the contrast with the order and reason that should characterize the speech of a Christian and the teaching in the church.
3. The image James uses here is of a barely and inadequately caged beast that breaks forth with irrational destructive power.

C. The reference to deadly poison reflects Old Testament teachings about the tongue.

1. (Psalm 140:3) They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps.

VII. Verses 9–12: With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

A. As a final climactic indictment of the tongue, James attributes to it that "doubleness" that he so deplors and that is a special theme of the entire book of James.

1. The inconsistent, unstable, wavering, double-minded man of 1:7–8

has an attitude of partiality (2:4) and fails to produce justifying works (2:14–16). He also fails to control his tongue.

2. Like Bunyan's "Talkative," who was "a saint abroad and a devil at home," the double-minded man shows by the contradictory nature of his speech that his faith lacks focus and stability.
 - a) Peter, who said he would never deny Christ, was soon thereafter denying him with curses. (Matthew 26:35, 69–75)
 - b) John, who said "Little children, love one another" was once ready to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village. (Luke 9:51–56)
 - c) Barclay: "Many a man speaks with perfect courtesy to strangers and even preaches love and gentleness, and yet snaps with impatient irritability at his own family. It has not been unknown for a man to speak with piety on Sunday and to curse a squad of workmen on Monday. It has not been unknown for a man to utter the most pious sentiments one day and to repeat the most questionable stories the next. It has not been unknown for a woman to speak with sweet graciousness at a religious meeting and then to go outside to murder someone's reputation with a malicious tongue."

B. James paints a sharp contrast between blessing and cursing.

1. The highest, purest, and most noble form of speech is the activity of blessing, in which we praise and honor God.
 - a) Jews of that day responded "Blessed be he!" whenever the name of God was mentioned.
 - b) Three times a day the devout Jew repeated a series of prayers that begin "Blessed be thou, O God."

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- c) And yet some of those very mouths were the same ones that would then turn and curse their fellow men.
 - d) (Psalm 62:4) They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse.
2. The lowest and filthiest form of speech is cursing.
- a) Cursing is the opposite of blessing.
 - (1) (Deut 30:19) I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.
 - b) Cursing involves a desire that the recipient of the curse be cut off from God and experience eternal punishment. It is a desire that God damn someone to Hell, and in fact a very popular form of the curse uses that very expression.
 - c) Can you think of any expression more heinous than that from the mouth of someone entrusted with the Great Commission?
 - d) Can you think of a more timely message in a time when many in the religious world measure the strength of their zeal for God by the intensity of their hatred against those who disagree with them?
3. (Luke 6:28) "Bless those who curse you."
- a) How then could a curse ever be found on the lips of a Christian?

C. Verse 9 is an incredibly rich verse.

- 1. We rightly cringe and complain when God's name is abused and dishonored, but what is our reaction when that same things

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happens to those who are made in the likeness of God?

2. James' reaction was shock, and he expresses that shock in verse 10 in the strongest possible Greek and with a word that is used nowhere else in the Bible but that is roughly paraphrased as "no way right"!
3. James knows nothing of the false doctrine that is called "total depravity." Though impaired, the image of God in his creation is not totally destroyed. Men, even after the fall, are made in the likeness of God.
4. When we get to the book of Jude later in this study, we will see where even the great archangel Michael would not presume to hurl a rebuke at Satan, but rather said "The Lord rebuke you."
 - a) (Jude 9) But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

D. James, like Jesus, is telling us here that a person's speech is a barometer of his spirituality; it reveals what is in his heart.

1. (Matthew 12:34–37) "You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."
2. Those who are pure in heart are also pure in speech. In fact, one's purity of heart is perhaps most clearly evident in their words.
3. Bitter words reveal a bitter heart. Critical words reveal a critical

spirit. Unloving words reveal an unloving heart in which the love of Jesus is a stranger.

E. James uses three illustrations in these verses. Each is cast in the form of a rhetorical question expecting the answer "no."

1. The importance of a fresh spring in dry Palestine cannot be overstated. The very existence of many a village depended on just such a source.
 - a) Some streams produced a mixture of fresh and salt water, and were unusable.
 - b) Of a river flowing into the Dead Sea, it was written: "The salt water and the fresh intermingle some way above the mouth of the river, and fish that are carried down are thrown up dead on the beach."
 - c) The tragedy of the tongue is that it can have this same kind of inconsistency -- blessings at one moment and cursings the next. Just as with the spring, such a person is unusable in service to God. Any good thing they might do is then immediately undone.
 - d) (Matthew 7:16) You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?