

SUMMER 3

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[0 : 00] Well, I say that sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. But it isn't true.

Names and words and speech and our use of the tongue hurts. Often words are far more damaging than sticks and stones.

We can mend the wounds of sticks and stones, but often the wounds caused by our speech, by our use of tongue, by our words, pierce deeper and are much harder and take much longer to heal.

I still remember odd names that I've been called over the years, some of them in primary school. I still remember one of my teachers in secondary school, first year of secondary school, telling off one of my fellow students with a name that I thought then was an inappropriate way of addressing him.

Whether he was hurt or not, I don't know. But those words are about the only thing I remember of that teacher for that whole year. Words hurt. It's said that a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with use.

[1 : 18] We use our knives. We have to keep sharpening them. The more we use them, the blunter they get. But with our tongue, the more we use it, the keener it becomes, the sharper it becomes.

In the first half of this chapter, James addresses the issue of the tongue, of speech, of words. And these are challenging words, I'm sure, for all of us.

I think as we hear these read, and as we study them tonight, they will make us, ought to make us, reflect on our speech, and our words.

And let me say not least for me, not just because I say things I ought not, but because as verse one says, those of you who are teachers, will be judged with greater strictness.

Now in this section, James, in many ways, reflects some of the proverbs of the Old Testament, that deal with our speech. And you may know in the book of Proverbs, it's a bit of a hodgepodge of things, but there are various proverbs, that deal with the use of the tongue, what the wise person will be like, in keeping silence, but in knowing what to say, words in season, and so on.

[2 : 35] Let me just give you a little sample, of a couple of proverbs, to help you get a feel, that James is coming out, of that Old Testament tradition, an Old Testament wisdom tradition, and very much in his day, a Jewish tradition as well.

In Proverbs 10 verse 8, the wise of heart will heed commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin. Notice how one who is babbling full of words, is a fool there, in contrast to the wise person.

A bit later in the same chapter, the mouth of the righteous, is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked, conceals violence. The lips of the righteous, feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.

And then in chapter 11, with their mouths, the godless would destroy their neighbours, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered. Now that's just a few, there are many, many proverbs, that deal with speech, use of tongue, and our mouths, and our lips, and the damage that is done, by the abundance of words, that flow out of our mouths.

Well chapter 3 begins, by saying, saying that teachers, in particular, will be judged with greater strictness. James has here in mind, I think, Christian teachers, in the sense of, in a congregation, or Bible study, or Sunday school, not meaning teachers out in a state school, teaching Latin, or maths, or something like that.

[4 : 07] I think he has in mind here, those who are teaching Christian people, the faith, or the gospel. And they will be judged with greater strictness. He's probably throwing a bit of caution, to those to whom he writes.

It's hypothesised, that there may have been many of them, who were wanting to be teachers, to be the head of churches, and congregations. And he's throwing a caution to them.

One of my roles in the Melbourne Diocese, is as an examining chaplain, of people who are applying for ordination. And one of the things I, make sure that I talk with them, when they come to see me, or I interview them at different stages, and so on, is to caution them, about their eagerness, to be an ordained minister.

Because I think all too often, people in our day, as presumably in James' day, they were wanting too eagerly, to be teachers of congregations, and so on.

Not realising the severity, with which such teachers are judged, by God. The teacher is to expound, God's truth. And of course, maybe, it's still important in our day, of course, but maybe even more so in James' day, when there were very few copies, of the scriptures in the early days.

[5 : 20] So people would not have access, to their Bibles. Many would be illiterate. So they depended more then, perhaps than they do now, on the teacher-preacher, in their churches, and congregations.

James himself is a teacher, so he's not saying, don't be a teacher. He acknowledges, that we who teach, will be judged with greater strictness, in verse 1. So he himself is a teacher.

He's not saying it's a bad thing, but we must take the responsibilities, very seriously, because our words matter. Sometimes we hear it said, that words are cheap, or they don't matter, and something like that, but that's not true.

God revealed himself, in the word, his son, and in words, in scripture. And so those who minister, God's word, using words, to others, are in a very serious position, and need to take that very seriously.

To whom much is entrusted, much is expected, is perhaps another way of saying, what James is saying here, about this greater strictness, of judgment for teachers, of God's truth.

[6 : 31] And also, Jesus in Mark's gospel, chapter 12, said there's greater condemnation, to teachers, who desire gain for themselves, or are insincere.

So James fits in with Jesus' own words, about the severity of judgment, against teachers. Now the concern is not just, in one sense, with the words you say, that is making sure, that you're not heretical, but in the words you say, in general, to people.

In part because our words, reflect who we are. And so here, as in Jesus' words, that I referred to, there is to be an integrity, of word and life, if you like.

Trouble is, it's our words, that give us away first, sometimes. And that's the theme, that we saw two weeks ago, hopefully you saw that, last week as well, that in James, he's dealing with Christians, who seem to be double-minded, or double-souled, or double-hearted, depending on which word, we want to use.

That is, there's an element, in which they're wanting, to serve God, but an element, in which they're wanting, to serve the world. They're wanting God's wisdom, but some worldly wisdom. There's a lack, of integrity, in their lives.

[7 : 40] A sort of, a split faith, in a sense. And here, James comments, about judgment, especially on teachers, is that our words, and our lives, and our actions, everything has got to be integrated, and an integrity, before God.

So he goes on then, for all of us, make many mistakes. This is explaining, in a sense, his first verse. A variety of mistakes, and perhaps the word mistake, suggests something unintentional, a slip-up.

That is, you make a mistake, and then you realize, it's out before you've realized. That's behind that word there. Not so much, sort of deliberate, malicious, sins of intent, with malice or forethought, but rather, those slipped out words, and we realize, it's too late.

We can't take them back in. All of us, make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes, in speaking, is perfect. Now, he's going to elaborate on that, but what he's saying is, if you have got your speech, perfect, the rest of your life, will be perfect.

He'll show some illustrations, in the verses that follow, for that point. Anyone who makes no mistakes, in speaking, is perfect, able to keep the whole body, in check, with a bridle.

[9 : 00] And that then gives way, to, some illustrations, in the next verses, about the power of the tongue. And, and the first illustration, picks up the idea, of the bridle, at the end of verse 2.

If we put bits, into the mouths of horses, to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Now, I think I mentioned, a couple of weeks ago, was that in a sermon, I can't remember now, horse riding, recently.

But, this verse is a puzzle to me, because this horse, didn't obey anything, that I tried to do. But I think that, the ideal is, that a little thing, in the mouth of the horse, you pull on, bits of rope, they've got a name, but I can't remember.

And it, it'll force the horse, the whole horse, which is bigger than you, to do exactly, what you want to her, just because the little bit, that goes through their mouth, and is attached, to other bits of rope. I'm sure you understand, what I mean.

I'm not a horse lover, or a dog lover. James's point here, is that a little thing, controls a great big beast.

[10 : 15] And he's likening that, to a tongue. The little tongue, in our mouth, is the thing, that in a sense, controls us, or shows us, the direction, in which the whole body, is going.

And he goes on then, to, use the example, of a rudder, and a ship, in verse 4. Or look at ships, he says. Though they're so large, that it takes strong winds, to drive them, yet they're guided, by a very small rudder, wherever the will, of the pilot directs.

Same point. A little tiny rudder, can influence, and control the direction, of a great big ship. That's great, when you're, speaking through the Bible, because one of the great, troubles I have, preparing sermons, is finding, finding decent illustrations.

James is full of them, I don't have to find, any others. Here we've got, the bit in the horse's mouth, now we've got the rudder, in the ship. At the same point, small thing, controls a very large thing.

And then he says, in the beginning of verse 5, before he gives, a third illustration, so also the tongue, is a small member, that is, bit of your body, yet it boasts, of great exploits.

[11 : 24] Now, what it's, what it's saying, basically there, is that the tongue, is powerful. The tongue, is powerful, to do good or bad.

It's only a little thing. But in a sense, it shows the whole direction, of a person's life. And, here perhaps, the idea of boasting, of great exploits, is not necessarily, meaning a negative thing.

It's just that the tongue, expounds, what the person is on about. A part, greater than the size of it, compared to the body. Then another illustration, the end of verse 5, how great a forest, is set ablaze, by a small fire, a spark even.

Well, I guess we've seen, that sort of thing, just recently, in New South Wales. The schoolboy prank, just like in a little fire, \$70 million damage. No wonder, the Premier of New South Wales, was rightly incensed.

But a tiny spark, can set ablaze, hundreds and thousands, of acres, in a great big fire. The language there, is to emphasize, the greatness, and the smallness. That is, it's not necessarily saying, the tongue is like a spark, that'll set something afire, although it's got the sense, or connotation of, of bad, and destruction about it.

[12 : 37] But it's the smallness, of the tongue, compared to the bigness, of what it does, and compared to the control, of the body, that it shows, and directs. Same with that illustration, of the spark, and the fire.

And then he goes on, to say in verse 6, the tongue is a fire. It is placed, among our members, as a world, of iniquity. It stains the whole body, sets on fire, the cycle of nature, and is itself, set on fire, by hell.

Now this is a very difficult verse, and commentators, try hard, to understand exactly, what's being said here. The general thrust of it, I suppose, is clear enough though.

What, what James, is saying here, is that the tongue, because it is so difficult, to control, by us, our own tongues that is, that it becomes, the conduit, for evil, in us, and through us.

It is the, somebody said, the ambassador, of hell, in our bodies, our tongues, this little tongue, and yet, it is such a fiery, inferno, of badness, and a conduit, for badness, in us.

[13 : 58] And in a sense, what James is saying, in these illustrations, is exactly, what Jesus himself, has said. Matthew 15, is a good, parallel for this, in a couple of places, in fact.

Firstly, in Matthew 15, 11, don't worry about looking it up, if you don't want to, I'll read it to you. But in Matthew 15, 11, Jesus says, it is what, it is not what goes, into the mouth, that defiles a person, but it is what comes, out of the mouth, that defiles.

That is our speech, and our words. They are what defile us. And Jesus is saying there, that our words, are very important. Our tongue, is a very influential, part of our body.

And Matthew 15, goes on to say, a bit later on in that section, but what comes out of the mouth, proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.

For out of the heart, come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and slander. These are what defile a person. That is, it is our speech, that reveals who we are.

[15 : 08] Our speech, reveals our heart. Yes, it does flow in a sense, from the heart. It doesn't, in a sense, originate with our words, but our words are where our heart is exposed.

Firstly, that's the vulnerable part of our body, and that's why it's so difficult to control. Someone said that, no other part of the body wreaks such havoc, on godly lives, than the tongue.

James gives three expressions, at the end of verse six, to show the bad effects of the tongue. It stains or corrupts the whole body. That is, the words that come out, they, in the end, defile the whole person.

It's what comes out of the mouth that defiles. Then it sets on fire the cycle of nature. That's a hard expression, which probably means something like, the whole course of a person's life.

That is, it influences their whole life, their words, and their speech. There's no part of life that is unaffected by the words that people speak. And then, finally, in verse six, it is itself set on fire by hell.

[16 : 16] That is, it's in a sense, as I said before, an ambassador of evil within us. Fairly strong language. I think James is not pulling any punches here. We might want to sort of balance it a bit, and say, well, we say nice things and good things as well.

I don't think he's denying that. In fact, what he attacks in this chapter and this letter is not people who are consistently evil. He actually is attacking people who are inconsistently good and evil.

And that's what he's saying about the tongue for Christians. We are meant to be consistently good, but our tongue is inconsistent. It's full of evil and full of good. Interspersed.

We'll see that sort of exchange in a few verses time. The sorts of sins, I guess, that James is thinking about are not just words of heresy, of course. He's thinking about all Christians, not just teachers, too, by the way.

He's thinking about our thoughtless chattering, our rumors, which often are cloaked with so-called good intent. Can I, you know, find out something for our prayer concerns and so on, which is just an excuse for a rumor and gossip and chatter, often backbiting behind people, destroying their reputations, or maybe not quite doing that, but just casting aspersions on people.

[17 : 31] That's the sort of speech that James is referring to here, as well as things like lying, telling untruth, or concealing the truth with evasive words as well.

You don't often really hear politicians lie, but their answers to questions are so evasive that they're misleading sometimes.

Well, that's the sort of thing that we also do, not just politicians, and they're the sorts of things that James has in mind. Then there is our arrogant boastfulness, our selfishness in our speech.

It's no coincidence, I think, that the foolish person in the book of Proverbs is one who is full of words, that is always wanting to say their own opinion, their own thoughts, I, I, I, very selfish sorts of things, rather than being quick to listen, as James himself will make that comment as well.

But it's also this, words that are harsh or uncaring, unloving, abrupt or rude, the sorts of things that Christians ought not to say, but so quickly and readily we say, especially when our defences are down.

[18 : 41] They're the sorts of things, and it's easier to mend wounds of sticks and stones than to mend the wounds that those sort of words cause. Well, James continues with a theme of the difficulty of controlling the tongue in the next couple of verses.

He draws a striking contrast. Verse 7, he says, for every species of beast, bird, reptile, and sea creature, the basic four categories of every living animal, he says, can be tamed, and has been tamed, by the human species.

I don't think he's meaning there that people have got sort of pet tigers in their backyard that are not going to gobble up their children. And, you know, pet Staffordshire bull terriers, for example, that could at all be domesticated.

That's not what he's got in mind. Such animals should be put down. But, although I can't imagine any Christian having an animal like that, so. It's all right.

I know there are four people here who do. What he's talking about is that we have dominion over the animals of this life. He's reflecting on the command given to humanity way back in Genesis 1.

[19 : 59] Take dominion over every living creature. And humanity does that. And he's saying we can control all these different species, he says.

But in verse 8, no one can tame the tongue. An extraordinary contrast. The great power of humanity to exercise control over every species of living animal, but we can't even control our own tongues.

It's a striking contrast. He goes on then in verse 8 to say that the tongue is a restless evil full of deadly poison.

Two more characterizations and two more statements of very strong language about the tongue. A restless evil. A restless evil. The word is the same word that was used back in chapter 1 verse 8 to be unstable.

Remember in this letter, he's dealing with Christians who are double-minded. That was the expression used in chapter 1 verse 8. They're double-minded and unstable. That is, they're not consistent in the practice of their faith and their devotion to the Lord.

[21 : 07] There is a prevaricating, a fluctuating between God's wisdom and worldly wisdom between goodness and badness and good words and bad words. That's what James is attacking. The inconsistency or the instability of Christian people.

The double-mindedness. And so he's saying here that the tongue is, in effect, double-minded. It's unstable. It's restless. He's not saying that every word we ever speak is a bad word, but that we're inconsistent.

We fluctuate from good to bad. And so on. And so it's, and then it's full of deadly poison, which is an expression from the Psalms about the tongue as well.

Now he continues now to develop this theme of the tongue being an instrument of being double-minded, of being inconsistent. And he says in verse 9, with the tongue, we bless the Lord and Father and with it, we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

Again, a reference back to Genesis 1, the original creation of humanity made in the likeness of God. And here is an example of inconsistency. On the one hand, we're eager to use our tongues and mouths to sing the praises of God or pray prayers of thanks and blessing and so on, and to affirm our own faith in God and bless God and make it clear that we're grateful to God for what he does.

[22 : 36] But on the other hand, we're very quick to use our same tongues to curse people made in God's likeness. To curse is very strong language. It's not just to treat badly. It's probably more to say an oath against them, maybe even to bring down God's judgment upon somebody.

So it's very strong language, negative language about how we treat another person. In effect, it could more or less be saying a curse is like a solemn prayer to cast somebody into hell, somebody made in God's image.

So on the one hand, we're quick to use our tongues to praise God. On the other hand, we're quick to curse somebody in God's likeness. That's inconsistency. And that's what our tongue is like, a restless evil full of poison, as he said in the previous verse.

Then in verse 10, from the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not be so. See, what comes out of our mouth is a barometer of our spirituality, reflects the heart, as we saw from Jesus' words, as well as James earlier in this chapter.

And what it's showing is that in our heart, it's split. We're double-hearted or double-minded or double-souled are the expressions that I've used in the first week as well as today. That is, our tongue's a giveaway for where our heart is at.

[23 : 59] It's the bit of us that is the most vulnerable as well as the most damaging. And so it reflects what's in our heart. Christians, you see, ought to be pure in speech, but we're not.

And our lack of purity in our speech reflects our lack of purity in our hearts. Now that point's hammered home with some illustrations in verses 11 and 12.

Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish or bitter water? That's an absurd idea. It doesn't.

A spring doesn't pour forth from the same opening a good water and bad water. It's either good or bad or somewhere in between. It's consistent water. It's an absurd idea.

James uses a rhetorical question with a very clear expected answer. No way. It doesn't do that. And then in verse 12, at the beginning of verse 12, can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives?

[25 : 06] Well, I'm not much of a gardener, but I think the answer to that must be no. That's an absurd idea. You don't plant a fig tree and go and expect to pick olives. Now maybe with some sort of clever grafting in, you can get all sorts of weird things these days, but basically, it's an absurd idea.

You don't get olives from a fig tree. And also, you don't get figs from a grapevine. That is, these are things that show a consistency. Same should be for our tongues.

We ought to be consistent in good words, praiseworthy words, if we're Christian people. The trouble is, we don't. And then finally, as a final illustration in verse 12, no more consult water, yield fresh water.

A person who is double-hearted or double-souled or double-minded will expose that in their speech. James doesn't give a means of correction here.

Notice how he doesn't say to us, come on, strive to control your tongue. You can't do it, you see. James knows that. He knows that inevitably in this life, Christians will be inconsistent.

[26 : 15] There will be times when our tongue lets us down and when it exposes our doubled heart. But James is saying we must be striving nonetheless to control our tongues.

We can't do it perfectly in this life, but we must strive to do it. He doesn't give us an answer or solution. And just because it's an ideal that is perfect and outside our realms of ability does not mean that we should just give up.

That often, I think, is how Christians end up in life. We start off full of ideal to change, to see God's spirit and work within us, changing us in character to be more and more like Jesus.

And then after a while, sometimes we just sort of peter out and think, well, I'm too old to change. I'm like this. God will forgive me. I'm okay. James and the Bible generally doesn't have anything to do with that idea.

Yes, it's beyond us to control our tongue perfectly, but we are to strive and strive and strive to do so so that we become more and more consistent in our faith, more and more single-minded, single-hearted and single-souled loving God with all our heart and all our mind and all our soul.

[27 : 36] Well, the last paragraph of this chapter deals with the theme of wisdom. And as I said two weeks ago, James is a sort of letter that does jump around a bit. It reflects something like the book of Proverbs where you get one theme and then you seem to get another thing completely unrelated.

And we saw that in chapter one, a little bit in chapter two. And here, in a sense, it occurs again, although some people try to find close links between the two sections.

But I think, by and large, we'll just take it as a new section dealing with the issue of true wisdom. And in this paragraph, we find a contrast between two types of wisdom.

True wisdom that is marked by humility and peace that's commended. It's in contrast to the world's wisdom, which in our day and age we could categorize as things like greed is good, I'm okay, look after number one, fulfill yourself, and those sorts of ideas.

And in particular, perhaps, what motivates this section is the lack of peace and unity and harmony in the church or churches to whom James writes.

[28 : 43] We ought not be surprised by that, virtually every letter in the New Testament. It's written to Christians or churches where there is some threat of or reality of disunity and disharmony in the church.

Sometimes people say, if only the church today can get back to the church in the first century. I think that's very naive, to be honest. We wouldn't like to be the Corinthian church, although we're probably not all that much different anyway.

Well, verse 13, who is wise and understanding among you? Probably the thrust of that question is that there were people there claiming to be wise.

Maybe this is not all that different from the church in Corinth, where there are people we see, especially in chapters 12 to 14, but in earlier chapters as well, are almost boasting about their spiritual prowess and wisdom.

Well, Paul undermines that in the opening chapters of Corinthians, and he undermines their boasting of their spiritual gifts, including wisdom, in chapters 12 to 14 as well. James, in his own way now, is dealing with that.

[29 : 47] Who's wise and understanding among you? That is, a number of you are claiming to be wise and understanding. They're the people that he's addressing here. He's picking up on perhaps their boasts.

And remember, this theme of wisdom is not new in James either. Back in chapter 1, verse 5, if any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

So the issue of wisdom was sounded as an opening note, so to speak, there in chapter 1. Now a little bit more about wisdom here in this paragraph at the end of chapter 3.

Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness, born of wisdom. And again, he's dealing with people who are double-minded, double-souled, double-hearted.

That is, people who are claiming to be wise and have lots of understanding. That is, perhaps, that they're mature Christians. And he's saying, okay, if you make such a claim, then show it in your life.

[30 : 51] Now that's in effect what you would have seen last week in chapter 2. If you've got faith, show it by your works. That's in effect what James is saying again here on the issue of wisdom. You see, the person who's double-minded, double-hearted is the one who will claim one thing but their lives don't reflect it.

There's a disintegratedness about them. So that there's a statement or claim about being full of faith or being wise or understanding or mature or whatever.

Well, James says, show it in your life. And how do you show wisdom in your life? We might think, oh, it'll be full of cleverness. Ingenuity, somebody who's done lots and lots of reading and learning. That's not the sign of wisdom.

That's not godly wisdom. Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. An extraordinary way to show wisdom.

It's not the way our world thinks wisdom should be shown. In fact, it despises gentleness by and large. Meekness or lowliness is what that is. Or humility. Our world doesn't think humility is a sign of wisdom by and large.

[32 : 04] More arrogance and boastfulness and self-ambition, they're the sorts of things that show wisdom. Someone climbing to the top and being an expert, knowing everything. But that's not what godly wisdom is.

You see, the wisdom that James commends here is exactly the wisdom of the Old Testament. Skill in living under God. It begins with the fear of the Lord in the book of Proverbs, in Ecclesiastes and in Job, the three main books of the wisdom literature in the Old Testament.

What James doesn't say begins with the fear of the Lord, but what he says here is consonant with what's said in the Old Testament about wisdom, about godly wisdom. It's about being demonstrated, it's being practical, demonstrated in Christian living.

It's not an intellectual capacity, being wise. It's about practical living that is godly, reflecting the character of God, deriving from the fear of the Lord.

And that's what James is in effect, reflecting here as well. Now in his day and age, the Greeks despised humility, as people do today. They thought it was a sign of weakness, not strength.

[33 : 17] Humility or gentleness, as it's described in our translation at the end of verse 13, is actually not weakness. I think a good definition of humility is not putting yourself down, but putting others up above you.

That is, sometimes people think humility is lack of self-esteem and a poor view of yourself, putting yourself down all the time. That's not humility. Humility is a right understanding of yourself that acknowledges your dependence on God and fully lifts up and exalts and praises other people for their goodness and greatness and nobility and so on as well.

Not trying to put yourself over others, but also on the other hand not deliberately putting yourself down either. It's a realistic way of viewing yourself. He goes on then to say in verse 14, and this is by way of contrast with what godly wisdom is.

So here, if you like, is worldly wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.

Here's the fruit of false wisdom. The person who claims to be wise, but in fact under God is not. They don't practice it. They're the double-minded person.

[34 : 40] And what they're characterized by is very much in contrast to humility, envy and selfish ambition. In fact, bitter envy literally is what is described here in our translation.

That is, sometimes the word that's used for envy is jealousy is a good thing. God is jealous. At times, that's good. That is, when he wants our exclusive devotion, jealousy is a good thing.

Husband for a wife, wife for a husband, they ought to be jealous for the attention and the exclusive relationship from their partner. God's like that. But this is not talking about a positive characteristic.

It is bitter envy. That is, it is wanting something that is not one's own, for one's own benefit and gain and enjoyment or prestige or whatever.

It is selfish and it is also dishonest in a way. It is then characterized too by selfish ambition. Ambition itself is not necessarily bad.

[35 : 39] Ambition can be a positive thing but selfish ambition is what is criticized here. Ambition that is selfish, in particular, the word has connotations of being like a party spirit and therefore divisive in its effects.

Godly wisdom, by being humble or gentle and leading a good life will be unifying and harmonizing in relationships with people. But the opposite of godly wisdom, worldly wisdom, will be divisive in the end at fracturing and factionalizing amongst people.

And this god, this ungodly or worldly wisdom is those who practice those things, selfish ambition and bitter envy are told, do not be boastful and false to the truth.

Now in Jeremiah, the prophet, chapter 9, he says these words, do not let the wise boast in their wisdom.

Do not let the mighty boast in their might. Do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth. But let those who boast, boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord.

[37 : 01] Now I think what James is saying at the end of verse 14 about do not be boastful and false to the truth is not dissimilar to what Jeremiah was saying there. Don't boast in your wealth or your might or anything else about you but boast in knowing God.

So those who are full of worldly wisdom rather than godly wisdom are full of boastfulness. There's a very selfish, self-centeredness about those who are worldly wise.

And they are false to the truth. The end of verse 14. That is, I think what James is saying here is that they're claiming to be wise but actually they're being very false to the truth because they're actually fools.

Keep thinking of the expression in Romans 1, claiming to be wise. They became fools by their ignorance of God. He goes on then in verse 15 to speak about this false wisdom where it's from.

Such wisdom does not come down from above, from God that is, but is earthly, unspiritual and devilish. Again, that's very strong language about those who might be worldly wise or claim to be wise without practicing a good life.

[38 : 21] It is earthly, it doesn't come from heaven, from above, from God. It is unspiritual. That is, true wisdom is, we could say, a spiritual gift. It comes from God.

Indeed, in many respects, James' use of wisdom in this letter parallels Paul's use of the Holy Spirit in his letters. So wisdom and the Holy Spirit are sort of parallel ideas in a way, as some would reflect.

I made that comment when we looked at chapter 1, verse 5 as well. And in fact, it's devilish. It doesn't just not come from God, it actually comes from the devil in the end.

Very black and white language, I admit. But James is not pulling any punches here. It's very clear. Verse 16 goes on to justify why this wisdom that people are claiming to be wise but in fact are just worldly wise and not godly is devilish.

He says in verse 16, for where there is envy and selfish ambition, the expressions used in verse 14, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

[39 : 32] Now here, the disorder is again that same word used restless in verse 8, unstable back in chapter 1, verse 8.

It's disorder. It's inconsistent. And James, of course, is saying that godly wisdom will make a Christian consistent. He's attacking inconsistency.

Worldly wisdom is inconsistent. It may have good things about it and there may be goodness in some people. Should not be misled by that. But the inconsistency of people who claim to be wise Christians but are not is what James is attacking in this letter.

They're actually unstable and restless. The disorder is in contrast to peace. It's divisive. It's factionalizing. It's full of party spirit. Those words have got those connotations about it.

No wonder we'll see next week that there are conflicts and disputes in this congregation at the beginning of chapter 4. And of course, I guess it's worth reflecting on the fact that when the council of Jerusalem met in Acts chapter 15, James had quite a role as a peacemaker and here he is commending godly wisdom which does not divide and factionalize but actually harmonizes and brings peace.

[40 : 50] Well, verse 16 says that wisdom does not come or verse 15 and 16 that it doesn't come from above and that it's devilish because it divides and it brings about wickedness and now we see the positive contrast in verse 17.

The wisdom from above is first pure. Now there is a contrast to being unstable or divided or double-minded or double-souled.

One who is pure in the sense of being consistently pure, not someone who's got bits of purity mixed with impurity. That wouldn't be pure. So the godly wisdom brings about consistency or purity and that's what this letter is striving to see Christians exercise and demonstrate.

And notice I should also say about this heavenly wisdom. James is not describing what it is but what it does. And in a sense that's what matters most.

It's not what is this wisdom, how do you define it, but rather this is a description of its fruit. It brings purity. If you want to know whether you're wise in godly terms, then does this list of verse 17 characterize you?

[42 : 09] Does verse 13 characterize you? Living a good life that your works are done with gentleness, born of wisdom. That is, if you are wise in God's eyes, there will be gentleness, there will be good works, there will be purity, the beginning of verse 17.

And then nextly, there will be peaceable, you will be peaceable, peace-loving, even heading towards peacemaking, not just somebody who admires and likes peace, but somebody who actually works for and helps create peace.

No doubt, I think, in that idea there are echoes of the Sermon on the Mount. I think throughout this whole letter, the echoes of the Sermon on the Mount are resound, blessed are the peacemakers, and so on.

This person also will be gentle, picking up what was said back in verse 13 as well. Somebody who's non-combative, somebody who's like Jesus, who is described in the same way, somebody who is willing to yield.

Now, we shouldn't think here that this is a person without convictions who will say yes to anything. Yes, I agree with that. Oh, yes, I agree with that. I'm willing to yield to this. unwilling to the truth and wisdom of God, not to wrestle against it, full of selfish ambition and bitter envy.

[43 : 35] They're also to be full of mercy. James goes on to say in verse 13. Of course, that's a characteristic again picked up in the Sermon on the Mount, beginning of Matthew chapter 5.

But to be full of mercy is to be forgiving, it is to be compassionate, it is to be about helping practically people who are down and out and in need.

That's picked up by the expression full of mercy and good fruits. That is somebody who is like a giver of arms, somebody whose merciful heart will be exposed in merciful actions for people's benefit.

Then without partiality or without a trace of partiality even towards the end of verse 17. Picking up an idea back in chapter 2 verse 14 as well, but the sense of being without partiality, the word has also got the connotation of being undivided.

Again, this idea of consistency of singleness of purposes there. That is somebody who's not divided in their conflict so that they might favour one and then favour another. That's showing partiality, but somebody who is straight in their dealings with people, single-minded and focused in how they deal and upright, not double-crossing people.

[44 : 52] And then finally in this list there is no trace either of hypocrisy. That of course typifies a person who's double-souled or double-minded. On one hand they say, yes, I serve God, I love God, I want his wisdom, but on the other hand they're after the world's wisdom.

They claim to be one thing full of faith, but their works don't show it out. That's hypocrisy, something the church is all too often accused of and all too often rightly accused of. Well, the culmination of this argument and chapter comes in verse 18.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. That is, a wise person in God's eyes makes peace.

That's the thing that brings it all together in practical terms. See, wisdom is practical, not intellectual. And the wise person will be gentle, willing to yield, therefore cultivating healthy relationships, not undermining one by showing partiality to another and so on.

It is cultivating peace between people. It's very practical and very relational as well. Genuine wisdom brings peace, harmony, unity to the people of God into Christian community.

[46 : 15] And there is a harvest of righteousness sown in peace. That is, if you like, a reward, I think, for peacemakers. As Jesus himself said, blessed are they, peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

God, God, for to be God. You don't need me to tell you that Christian churches are all too often torn apart by dissension, by pride, selfish ambition, envy, and so on.

It happens in lay people, it happens among clergy. claiming to be wise, our behavior falls short of true wisdom, far short often.

And God wants unity in church life. He wants unity from practical and wise living, from Christians. Certainly teachers, Christian teachers, preachers, leaders, ministers, have a key role in that.

And notice here that James has not said anything about expertise, cleverness, gifts, or anything like that for teachers. Only godliness of character.

[47 : 19] It's the only thing he's talked about for teachers. But of course, James is not just addressing teachers like me. He's addressing us all. When you go to the doctor, he might ask you to poke out your tongue and say, ah, and he'll have a look.

Always wonder what he's going to find and see. Have I cleaned my teeth properly? If Jesus said the same, what will he find? Poke out your tongue and speak.

For out of our heart or out of our speech comes an exposure of what's in our heart, our double souledness, our double mindedness, our double heartedness. So let us then strive to bridle our tongues under God.

Let us be doers, not only hearers of his word. let us ensure that our faith is accompanied by good works and let us strive for that harvest of righteousness for those who make peace.

Let me finish with some words from the psalm, psalm 34, some words that are useful, I think, to bring this to a close. It's 34 verse 12 onwards.

[48 : 33] Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.

At the beginning, the question or the comment was, is James implying that the tongue can be controlled? I'm not sure that he is, apart from God, because he says in verse 2, anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect.

perfect. Now, of course, we know no one's perfect, and I think James knows that. I think he's saying if you can control your tongue, you're perfect, because everything else of you will have been under control. That's the hardest thing to do.

So he's saying we should be striving for it, but it is a perfect thing, and we won't meet that standard until heaven, I think. Every goal has got to be measurable and achievable.

the trouble is in the Christian life, what we strive for is not achievable, apart from God and apart from arriving in heaven. We've still got to strive for it, though. Any other questions or comments?

[49 : 46] The question, in case you couldn't hear, was why does James not speak about the benefits of teaching the gospel and spreading the faith and so on? Why is he, in a sense, a negative approach to it?

I think he's addressing the current situation. And the current situation is there are people who, it seems, are claiming to be mature Christians, but their lives don't reflect it.

There's a split there. They're double sold, is the expression I've been using. Because they're claiming to have faith, there are no works to back it up. They're claiming to be wise, but there's no lives that back it up.

And their speech is what exposes that doubleness. They praise God, but then they curse others. So that's what he's attacking, that's the issue he's addressing. And I don't, so he's not, he's not saying the tongue will only speak evil, but it's the inconsistency and the difficulty of controlling the tongue that he's dealing with, I think.

And I think, maybe too, he uses very strong language. And I think, I don't think he overstates the case, but I think in using the strong language he forces his point.

[50 : 53] because if you try and say everything, or you keep everything in a very fine balance, it loses the sharpness of what's being said. So I think he deliberately leaves out the good things about using speech.

They're there implicitly, but it's to keep the focus on the real issue, I think, in this case. Thank you. Well, I think so.

I think, you know, James is acknowledging, you know, it's the heart and the mind that really is the controlling thing within us, but the tongue's where we fall down most. It's the point of vulnerability, vulnerability, and that's why it's got to be addressed, and also because it does such damage.

So that's why he's addressing that, I think. But yes, a means of correction is certainly to try and deal with our hearts so that our hearts don't sort of lead to inconsistent speech.

But on the same hand, we've got to also bridle our tongues, because even trying to perfect our hearts is beyond us in this life. More has been given, so more is expected for teachers, but also because of their role in setting an example and leading other people.

[52 : 27] So they have the opportunity, if you like, to influence more other Christians and other people than those who are not teachers.

so they're in an influence. It's because of the, you know, too much is given, so much is expected, and because of their position of influence, then they will be judged more strictly.

Mentioned in Genesis 1, so I presume they're a result of the fall. joy and then dawn.

Jesus is such a good example because he's the prince of peace, the one who came in peace, the one to bring peace with God and between people, and yet he overthrew things, he got angry with things, he rebuked people, he said words of woe and condemnation to people are very, very severe, so he wouldn't tolerate peace that covered over unrighteousness and wickedness, so that's a good example to follow.

Yes, there he's got the context of answering people and testifying, I think, to faith, whereas James got a broader view about just our words generally in conversation, not just necessarily as Christian witness, but, oh, yes, I would say, probably it would be an impossibility to make sure that every word we had was seasoned and full of grace, etc., but the New Testament is full of those impossibilities.

[54 : 08] To be a person who perfectly exhibits the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22 at every point in our life, a person who loves God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength all the time, they're impossibilities, but, one, they show us how far down we fall short of the standard, but two, is we can't give up striving for that standard at any point of our life.

Only in heaven will we make it, of course, but we know that we're actually righteous through grace and not through our achievements as well. One last question or comment and then we might pray.

Okay. Well, let's pray. I want to just give us a couple of minutes silent prayer because I think after a passage like this, it is worth reflecting on our own use of speech.

And it may be worth thinking back, are there times in recent past where we've said things we ought not to have said but have not repented of it or apologised for it. God may have placed something on our mind from this tonight.

Then I'll pray a prayer and then if anyone else wants to pray after that, you may like to do so. So let's have a bit of silence as we reflect on this first. Acknowledge that we have said things that we ought not to have said.

[55 : 36] That we've hurt people or misled them. We've been quicker to speak than to listen. We've said harsh, destructive or critical words rather than words motivated by love.

We acknowledge that there are times when we've said words that have not displayed our Christian commitment to you or our love of you. There are times when we've spoken words that have perhaps damaged people behind their backs or even to their faces.

we confess that there are times when in our tiredness, frustration or anger we have let slip words that have been wrongly said but unable to be withdrawn.

we confess that our words have not always brought glory and honour to Jesus Christ or built up and edified your people or commended the gospel to those who are not Christians.

Our God, we repent of those sins of speech. give us strength by your spirit to bridle our tongues, purify our hearts by pouring your spirit into them so that our words may be full of grace and full of love.

[57 : 18] and we long for that day when the only words which we will speak will be pure words full of wisdom, full of praise, full of grace and love as we with all your people in a common tongue will gather round your heavenly throne and sing your praises there forever.

Amen. Amen.