

Confronting the Enemies of Unity – In Our Words
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James 3:1-12
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 3. We are continuing our series of messages on unity. Normally our practice is, as our sign and website say, to go verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book through the Bible. I believe that's to be the meat and potatoes of the church. That's the best way for the church to be fed, but with an occasional seasoning of a topical series. Our desire always, when we go to a topic, is to let Scripture speak to that topic. So we're going to a passage this morning to continue looking at the topic that we have felt burdened as elders to deal with for some time, and that is the unity of the Body of Christ. We just finished five weeks in John 17, where we looked at how the priority of unity was something that was on the heart of our Savior. In the shadow of the cross, as He stood before the cross with its awful weight hanging upon Him, anticipating the agonies of suffering physically, but more than that, spiritually, for our sins, His heartbeat was to pray for the unity of His people. *...that they may be one, even as We are One.*

So we're coming to a passage today which we're going to see will really help us to understand it, though we have inherited a great sense of real unity when we become a Christian. When we're born again, we're born into God's family, and there is an inherent unity. As we saw in John 17, *...that they may be one, even as We are One.* Jesus is praying for that, that when we become a Christian, when we are born again, we enter in a mystical yet true, real way, the communion of the Godhead. We become people who are in Christ. That's the favorite way of the New Testament to talk about a Christian. We are in Christ. Well, if we're in Christ, Christ is in God. We somehow come to partake of that sweet communion, perfect love, perfect joy that exists in the Godhead. So we become partakers of that unity. One of the questions is: If that's the reality of who we are, why do we see so little of that reflected in our experience? Why is there such a great distance between our inheritance and our experience? We're going to see it's because we have very real enemies that make their aim continually to rob us in our experience of what God has given us. The glory that He would have us make known by being one, is the very goal of our ultimate enemy Satan, to destroy.

We really have three enemies. The Bible makes clear you have three enemies, kind of an unholy axis of evil: The devil, the world, and the flesh. These are the three enemies that every Christian has, and that unholy axis of evil is determined to undo

all that God wants to do. Now God is sovereign and He's going to win. We sang about that in 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God'. Nothing can stop His Word from prevailing. That's our great hope and confidence.

But it is His Word that we come to, even today, so that it can prevail in us because you and I every day wake up and we're in a war zone. We'd rather not be, but we are, and until the day we die, we continue to fight. Like Paul said, we want to be able to say at the end of our lives, "I have fought the good fight." Well, we're going to talk about what that means today. The Epistle of James addresses the issue of Christian unity from the standpoint of the battle that we have to fight. What we're going to see in it, and really we're going to be looking at James 3:1 through James 4:12 for a number of weeks.

The middle part of James' book, his epistle, his letter, is aimed at the issue of relationships within the Body and particularly dealing with dissension in the Body of Christ. That's really the unifying thought behind the middle section of James' epistle. He's very practical. That's really something about James, he is intensely practical. How we can deal with it. We're going to look this morning, at the first 12 verses of Chapter 3, but the title of the message is really going to be 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity'. That's really a title for a series of messages. 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity'. We've been given unity in Christ, why don't we experience it? Because we have the enemies. Well, we need to be ready to fight, to confront the enemies of unity. To do what Paul said in Ephesians 4:3:

Ephesians 4:3 ~ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The word 'preserve', when we talked about that a while back, is 'guard'. It's a word that was used of a soldier guarding something. Guard the unity of the spirit. So we've got to guard it against enemies. We've got to guard it against those enemies, those three enemies: The flesh, the devil, and the world, on different fronts, like a military situation. You know when wars are fought, when battles are waged, the strategy of the generals is to come against their enemy in different ways so that they can overcome them. Satan comes against in different avenues, in different ways. This is really what James does. What he does is he basically says, "Look, the way that dissension is happening is that Satan is coming against you. First of all, in your words." This is an avenue we have to fight in and the tongue is the focus today that we're going to talk about. We're going to see that he says, "There is great power in the human word." There is surprising power in speech, power for good or for evil. Satan wants to hijack that power that's in our words to

bring destruction and division. That's our focus today, and we'll see in subsequent messages, that Verses 13-18 of Chapter 3 is about waging the war against the enemies of our unity in our attitudes. Then Chapter 4, Verses 1-12, we have to wage war against our enemies in our hearts, the desires of our hearts. For fighting in all these fronts, we're going to preserve that unity that God has intended us to have.

Now this morning, we're going to look at the power of our words, confronting the enemies of unity in our words. We're probably going to be here the next couple of weeks, this morning and next week. We'll be looking at the 12 verses about the tongue. Before we do that, I just wanted to set the direction of this so you'll know we're really going to be in James 3, but I've got to address something that I didn't address last week, or didn't make clear last week, which relates tangentially to today. We talked last week about the power of the Word of God in creation. I mentioned that in Genesis 1:1-3 you have all three persons of the Godhead present. You guys remember this from last week? That you see the Father, Who is directing creation, you see the Spirit over the waters, and you see the Son of God there too. Something happened and I had a brain lapse and I didn't follow through my thought. It happens a lot to me, doesn't it? I want to follow through the thought this morning because I think it's such an important principle and I want you to see that. So you might want to slip a piece of paper in James because we're going to come back there pretty quickly, but I want to go to Genesis 1:1-3. Before we read, let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we bow before You, before Your Holy Word, Your mighty Word, and we pray that Your Spirit might illuminate the Living Word of God, the written Word that we might see the Eternal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. That we might see Him in all of His glory, that we might serve Him from the depths of our souls, with more surrender, with more love. We pray this in His Name, Amen.

Last week's message was about the fact that there's a oneness of God in His purpose. That the three persons of the Trinity act with one mind and one purpose, and that we are to have that in our Body. There are many exhortations that have the same mind, maintain the same purpose, Philippians 2. One mind is something that's encouraged throughout the New Testament epistles. That we are to be about the same thing, which we said, is to glorify God.

Now, I went off on this Genesis and I said the Lord works in one mind and in perfect harmony in all arenas, and that what you see is the Father is the One Who plans and directs within the economy, that is the sort of division of labor within the

Godhead, for lack of a better term. Basically, there are certain things that the Father does, there are certain things that the Son does, and there are certain things that the Spirit does when They, together, God does something. Essentially, we see this, this mystery of the Trinity revealed across the pages of Scripture that the Father plans and administers, the Son accomplishes the plan, and the Spirit applies the plan.

In Genesis 1:1-3, you see all three of them there. ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*** That's the Father Who is taking the sense of ownership for all of creation. Then, ***The earth was formless and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.*** There in the first two verses we already have two persons of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit there. Then Verse 3, ***Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.*** The second person of the Trinity is there as well because the second person of the Trinity is the Word of God. What you have in Genesis 1, ten times when God is creating the universe. Ten times in this passage you will read these words: ***Then God said...*** God speaks and it comes to pass. In fact, you have this formula: ***Then God said, "Let there be light." And it was so. Then God said,...*** And it was so. He merely speaks and it happens. So God's Word brings about creation. Ten times:

Verse 3: ***Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.***

Verse 6: ***Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let separate the waters from the waters.***

He creates the heavens.

Verse 9: ***Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so.***

You have the seas and the dry land there created on Day Three. On Day Three also:

Verse 11: ***Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them"; and it was so.***

Then Day Four:

Verse 14: *Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years;*

He creates the Sun, the Moon, and the stars.

Verse 20: *Then God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.”*

He fills the seas and the heavens on Day Five. What He created on Day Two He fills on Day Five. Then what He creates on Day Three, the dry land, He fills on Day Six.

Verse 24: *Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind”; and it was so.*

Verse 26: *Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

Everything happens by the creative Word of God. In Psalm 33:6, the Psalmist glories in this. He says:

Psalm 33:6 ~ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Now turn with me to John 1, so you see how this all ties together in the glory of the triune God and what he’s saying here. Here we have the New Testament interpretation of Genesis really. Genesis 1 is interpreted by John 1.

John 1:1 ~ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now we find out in this passage clearly Who the Word is. Who is it John is describing as the ‘logos’, the Word? Verses 14 to 18 tell us.

John 1:14-18 ~ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And we find out specifically, namely, Who it is that became flesh. The Word that is God became flesh:

John 1:17 ~ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

He says the Word, the Eternal God, Who was with the Father but was God Himself, the Word is Jesus Christ. Look at Verse 2 now.

John 1:2-3 ~ He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

What's He saying? All things came into being through Him, the Word. ***...and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*** How did anything come into being at the creation? How did there come to be light? Through the Word, you see? The spoken Word that is the Son. The Lord is speaking to us in a way we can understand. He's saying the Eternal Son of God is the One that actualized it, made it happen. To use it in a way we can understand, if God the Father said, "We're going to create this," the Son is the One Who actually did the talking and spoke it into being. You see it again also in Colossians 1.

Colossians 1:15 ~ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

He is the icon of the invisible God. He is the invisible God, made visible in the man Jesus Christ. And then He says: ***...the firstborn of all creation.*** Some people misunderstand that and think that Jesus is created, but He explains. There are two meanings of the word 'firstborn', the word 'progenitor' basically here in the Greek. It can mean 'the one who is firstborn', 'a firstborn son' as someone who didn't exist before, or it can mean 'the origin of everything that is born', the agent through which everything was created. The firstborn of creation is the second point here. There wasn't a time when Jesus was not, no, He's always existed. He Himself is the One Who is, and was, and is to come. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, just as the Father is, always existing. Look how He

interprets the word ‘firstborn’ in Verse 16. What it means that Jesus the firstborn of all creation.

Colossians 1:16 ~ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

You see, everything that is created was created through the Word, through Jesus. So that’s where we see in Genesis 1, we have the Trinity laid out there before our eyes in Verses 1-3. Then we have it even more clearly, there are a number of different ways, but I mentioned before in a previous message, in Verse 26.

Genesis 1:26 ~ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

In this singular God there is a plurality. That’s the glory of the Trinity. So what we see is the creative power of the Word of God. The reason this ties into the message even better than I had planned, when I realized I’d made this slip up, a couple of people talked to me, including my wife, and said, “Hey, you weren’t clear on this,” or “I needed some help.” They were both kind. My wife is usually more direct with me than others, because that’s just her nature. I appreciate that. It’s a gift to me to have a woman who speaks the truth to me in love. She was like, “That wasn’t clear.” Someone else came up to me, they didn’t say it that way, they just said, “Hey, let’s talk about this one thing you were talking about,” and I realized I didn’t make it clear. But anyway, hopefully we’ve corrected that today.

The wonder of it is that actually the power of the Word of God is one of the great themes in the Bible. We’ve seen this when we were looking at 1 and 2 Kings, a book that’s talking about the destruction that comes upon Israel and Judah, the kingdoms that divided the monarchy, the two kingdoms that were God’s people after Solomon’s reign when it was divided into the southern and northern kingdoms. There were cycles of sin, cycles of God’s judgment upon His people, until both kingdoms end in captivity and exile. One of the things that you see throughout is the power of the Word of the Lord. The Word of the Lord determines history, it doesn’t predict history. God is not Nostradamus, when God speaks, it determines what happens, it doesn’t tell you ahead of time what’s going to happen, it makes it happen. Read carefully 1 and 2 Kings and watch it happen right before your eyes. Everything that happens, happens according to the Word of the Lord. So

the Word of the Lord is powerful. That's the picture of the Bible. Jesus Himself is the Eternal Word so that whenever we have the written Word, we are being given a glimpse of the Living Word. That is the revelation of the unseen God made visible.

It's interesting that James 3 now, that it was all an extra introduction. In James 3, what we have put before us is the extraordinary power of the human word for destruction. There is surprising power in the human word. I mean, we say things like, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Remember that when you were a kid? "Mom, the kids were making fun of me." "Well, hey, sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Well, it's good not to let bullies know that they're hurting you with their words too much, because it encourages them sometimes, but the reality is that words are not something of no consequence. Words are of great consequence. There is something powerful about the human word. In fact, I think it's just one of the reasons that the 'Word of Faith' movement has taken over the church, which basically says, "You declare your future. You declare your blessing. You speak it and it comes to pass. You speak wealth and prosperity and you're going to have it." Nonsense. We are not God. We don't determine anything by our words ultimately. We don't have that power. I mean, it treats God as if He's a waiter—You tell Him what you want and He does it. Real prayer is when we get in line with God and we bend our will to what He wants. When we do, our prayers do make a difference. "When you pray in My name it will be that way, according to my character." You see? It's us humbling ourselves, bowing before his sovereignty. But the reason that there is an appeal to it, and a deception to the 'Word of Faith' movement is that there is a profound sense in which we are created in the image of God, created in the image and likeness of God. There is something powerful about our words. It's not God, it's not the power to create, but because we are in His image, to either bless or curse. We need to see this, and James brings before our attention, in the most vivid way possible, the power of our words. The power of our speech, in a way that should humble us and cause us to fall on our faces and plea with God for grace and mercy. And help, that our words might become a blessing, an avenue of blessing, and not an avenue of cursing. We see in this passage, great power to destroy that the words have.

James 3:1-12 ~ Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are

driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

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

Confronting the enemies of unity in our words, on the battlefield of our speech. The world, and the flesh, and the devil are against us and one of the great ways that Satan comes against us is in the area of our speech because he understands that there is power in the human word. Made in the image of God, to either bless or to curse.

There is something really about that that it can become intoxicating in a sinful way because we love to be powerful. That's a desire of sin. Sin at its root is to take the place of God. That was Satan's root sin, he wanted to be like the Most High and he voiced that. "I will be like the Most High." Then what was the root of his sin? His temptation to Adam and Eve, to Eve when he tempted her. He said, "Look at that fruit. The Lord knows in the day that you eat of it you will be like God." The essence of the desire of our hearts is to be like God. That's that essence of sin and we have to repent of that and bow our faces before the Lordship of Jesus Christ to be saved. But when we do that, and we come under His Lordship, then we find that we still do have power under His direction to either bless or to curse. There is power in the words.

In this text we see a series of striking metaphors, really a procession of vivid, visual images that James parades before us. Word picture follows word picture, piling one on another, so that we see the scenes before us, so that we feel the impact of these images, so that we understand something of the incredible power that is there. A picture is worth a thousand words and the Lord speaks to us in

pictures. Isn't wonderful how, in the Scripture, you find such vivid imagery. There are no pictures in the Bible actually, right? Unless you have a children's Bible or something, there are no pictures there.

I remember hearing when I was in seminary, one of my professors said, when you read the Bible, look for the pictures, see the word pictures. How glorious it is to read the pictures. If you read a novel that is well-written and you see how the novelist paints the picture for you? It's more wonderful to see the pictures in your mind than it is to see pictures on TV. I remember the man I was talking about was talking about his granddaughter. He was talking to his little girl, she was like 5 years old, and she had seen a movie, and she had the book of the same movie read to her. He asked his granddaughter, "Which did you like better the movie or the book?" She said, "I like the book better because the pictures were clearer." Isn't that amazing? But it's true. God has made the spoken word to be powerful. That is why we gather together and have preaching and teaching of the spoken word. Somehow the Lord has ordained in His great wisdom that this is the way He's to communicate truth. The foolishness of preaching. So there is power in the word.

In the text we're going to organize our thoughts around five points. We're going to look at the first two this morning. The tongue has power. First of all, the power to condemn. The tongue possesses the power to condemn. You see James' use of literary tools. First of all, in the fact that he personifies the tongue. It's as if the tongue has a mind of its own in the passage. In reality, that's a great description. Isn't that how your life is? Don't you find yourself saying something and the word gets out and you would like to catch it. You know even now, this is not the word. How often has that happened in 25, almost 26 years of marriage? There are times that I've said something and I wished I could bring it back. Other times, especially when we become angry, things just come popping out, or in fear. So he personifies it and he's using another literary tool of metonymy. He's speaking metonymically. Metonymy is when you use one word for something else. He's not really talking about the tongue. He's not really saying, "Hey, you need to have your tongue examined." Of course not, we know he's talking about our speech, but it's powerful to use the one for the other, that's metonymy.

So we're going to look at confronting the enemies of unity on the battlefield of our words, the battlefield which is our tongue here depicted in James 3.

1) The Tongue has the Power to Condemn:

The reason we need to give attention to it is because of the great power the tongue possesses. The tongue has the power to condemn. We see this in Verse 1.

James 3:1 ~ Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

Now we see in this, first of all, the seriousness of teaching. The incredibly high stakes involved in teaching the Word of God. ***Let not many of you become teachers...*** because you're going to ***...incur a stricter judgment.*** This is a sobering warning. This is why you see this seriousness about which teaching and preaching are viewed throughout the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, this sense of urgency. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul gives the exhortation to the young man Timothy who is leading the church.

2 Timothy 2:15 ~ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

It's not something light. You've got to make sure you handle the Word of God in a way that you're saying what God says. How often do we hear people say things that they say God says and they turn to the Bible, but they're not saying what God is saying there? They interpret the Bible out of context. They're not carefully handling the Word of Truth.

James is telling us here in James 3:1 that that is a serious offense that ought to make us tremble. I think this seriousness of handling the Word of God is what we see in Isaiah 66:2.

Isaiah 66:2 ~ ...“But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

The Lord says, “If you want to dwell with Me, or you want to be in My presence, the one I'm going to dwell with is the one who is humble and trembles at My Word.” It's a serious thing.

In Galatians 1:8-9, the apostle Paul gives us some sense of the heart of God for false teaching. The Galatian Church has been troubled by those who are preaching a different gospel, and the apostle Paul says in Galatians 1:8, something that is striking, and then he repeats it in Verse 9. He uses the most graphic, striking

language. He says this in Galatians 1:8. Paul and his associates had gone to Galatia and had preached the Gospel in that region, and he writes a letter saying:

Galatians 1:8 ~ If we, or an angel from heaven, should come and preach to you a gospel other than that which you have received, let him be accursed!

He says, “If I come back and preach to you a gospel which is different than what I’ve already preached to you, if I come and preach to you that there’s a way to be saved other than what I’ve already told you, which is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, if I tell you any other way, let me be accursed. Let me go to hell.” And then he says, “Let me say it again.” That’s serious business. Why? Because eternal life and death hang in the balance – the Gospel. James is saying, “Listen. Be careful. There are people in the church that have the gifts of teaching, and we’re all to learn how to counsel one another, and to speak the truth to one another, but remember, it’s serious business. Handle the Word carefully. We’re all called to teach. You’re called to teach your children. You’re called to teach the lost, to bring them to Christ. We all have this, but remember that it’s serious.”

What’s interesting is that James uses that as a springboard to really go off into not just the teaching ministry, but the speaking, because what he does is he then turns to the tongue in a more general way. It’s really as if this thought about teaching and the seriousness of it is a springboard or a point of departure to discuss the causes of dissension in the body, and he basically says the unbridled tongue causes disruption, dissension, and division in the body, and that’s serious business to God. The tongue has the power to condemn. The way we use the tongue is one of the ways that God is going to measure whether or not we are condemned.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 12 are a sobering reminder for us that all of our words are the basis of God’s judgment, the basis by which we will be judged.

Matthew 12:36 ~ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

That is astonishing, especially when you realize that the word ‘careless’ translated in the King James is ‘idle’. I really like that translation better. The word is the alpha privative, the ‘a’ on the beginning of a word that negates something, which in this case is on the word ‘work’ in Greek. So it means ‘no work’. He’s talking about every word which is not working, that’s idle. What he’s talking about are

insignificant words, words that we say that we don't really have an agenda with. He's talking about careless words. Careless is a good translation of the overall idea. Sometimes I'm not really thinking about what I'm saying and I say it. Jesus says, "That word will be judged. Every single word." We say, "Why? I didn't mean that." You look at that, and you think, "I don't think that way about my words." How often do we say something, and then say, "I didn't mean that," and then we think that makes it okay? "You know, I was having a bad day, and this was really bothering me." We have a lot of bad apologies.

We're working on that in the Bible study we have on Sunday morning about resolving everyday conflicts, and one of the things you learn is how to make a good confession. And a good confession is not, "Hey, I'm sorry that I said that, but..." Or, "I'm sorry if I offended you with what I said. If you are so sensitive that you would be offended, then I'm sorry that you are so sensitive." It's a good apology, isn't it? The Lord says we should see our words as much more grave and serious, where when we speak, we are doing something that He takes very seriously. Even our idle words, the words that we don't think matter at all, are being weighed. Why are these things so important? Because of the power of our words. Listen to these words from Proverbs 18:

Proverbs 18:21 ~ Death and life are in the power of the tongue,...

Proverbs 15:4 ~ A soothing tongue is a tree of life, But perversion in it crushes the spirit.

When we speak a word that's intended to console, that's a soothing tongue. But perversion in it crushes the spirit. How far that is from sticks and stones. In words are death or life. In the words are a tree of life or crushing of the spirit. God says that it's not the way you and I see it. We say so many words. Think about how many words we say. I remember reading years back that guys say 12,000 words a day and women say 24,000 on average. I think I'm usually above the 12,000 quota. But that's 12,000 or 24,000 to give account for, and it's not trouble for God to remember all of them. He is infinite. He is omniscient. He has it all written down. But the reason is because He's made us in His image, and there is a power in the word that we don't see. There's a power to bless or to curse. Our words either continue, establish, and support life, or demean and destroy life.

This is why Ephesians 4:29 says: ***Let no unwholesome speech proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification.*** Something that is unwholesome is something which pollutes, something which brings down. That

which edifies is that which builds up. Use your words to build up. God has made every person in His image, and every human being is precious to Him. He loves all people. He loves the elect in an extraordinary way, but the Scriptures tell us clearly that He loves all people, and that He invites all people to be saved. So every human being is of value, and we must not condemn anyone. God will condemn every unbeliever, but that's for Him to do. We can speak the truth and say, "You're under the wrath of God." That's not condemning. Speaking the truth to someone is edifying them. If you love them, you're concerned about their soul. It's not the way the world sees tolerance. The world has a crazy view of tolerance. The Biblical view of tolerance is you tolerate a person though you disagree with their ideas, and you maintain the disagreement. You articulate it.

In fact, Christianity is the only place you can find tolerance. See how much tolerance you get in a Muslim nation, or how much tolerance you got in a Hindu nation before they got turned around by England or somebody. There was no tolerance. Christian nations tolerate. We say, "You're lost and you're going to hell," but we will allow you, because you're in the image of God, to disagree, and we're going to continue, as we have opportunity, in the right moments, to season our words with salt to encourage you to believe, but we maintain your right to exist and to bring honor to God in the ways that you can – creating, making things, whatever you're doing. So it's not tolerance to say you can't have a disagreeing opinion. That's the way the world thinks of it now. If you say they're wrong, you're being intolerant. That's ridiculous. You can't live that way.

Think about if there are two mechanics working on an airplane, and one mechanic says, "I think that bolt is broken," and the other guy says, "Hey, why are you being so intolerant? I think it's okay." Somebody's right and somebody's wrong, and I want the guy that's right to articulate his position when I'm getting on that plane. Don't you? Or course. One doctor has a diagnosis of this, and another doctor has a diagnosis of that. "Well, I'm sorry. He said that and I don't want to offend him." No, you tell me what you think. My life's at stake. We must maintain the truth.

But what we see here is that as we speak the truth, the way we say it, and what we say must reflect the glory of God, the love of God, and the compassion of God. When we speak the truth to unbelievers, even just the speaking of the truth in love and humility and kindness, we'll find sometimes it's received with great anger, even disproportionate anger. They're mad just because we say that God says this is not the way to heaven. Jesus is the only way to heaven. But let us not add to the offense of the cross any other offense. That's what James is saying. It's serious

business to add other offenses. The Lord is serious about that. He cares about people and He cares particularly about His elect and His church.

Being in God's image, in the power of our words, we have power to bless or power to curse. It's interesting that in the Bible, our enemies are irate against us, the devil being one of them. There are many names for Satan, but the two main names for Satan are "Satan" and the word "devil". The Old Testament word for our English word 'Satan' is a transliteration of the Hebrew word 'Satan', which means 'adversary' or 'accuser'. It's one who stands against and who speaks against. Do you see that? What is the essence of Satan? It's to speak against. It's to tear down with words. He blasphemes God and he is the accuser of the brethren.

So when you and I as Christians are involved in gossip or harsh treatment of another believer, what are we doing? We are manifesting the character of our enemy, the adversary. The word 'devil' in English comes from the New Testament Greek word 'diábolos' which is made up of two words which mean to throw or hurl against or through. So the word devil itself means the one who throws, or hurls against or through. He's throwing things? What's he throwing? He's throwing words. He's the one who hurls temptations, words, and thoughts. That's what he's doing. He's speaking lies. That's what Jesus said about him. He's a liar and the father of lies. He's lied from the beginning. God is speaking truth, and Satan is speaking untruth. When you and I are walking in the Spirit, we're speaking truth, we're speaking blessing, and we're speaking life. But the reality is that the sin nature that we have, the world system that's filled our minds with lies and is speaking to us every day, with Satan himself tempting us, we have the opportunity to speak untruth, lies, and death. That's corruption. It has the power to condemn us.

2) The Tongue Has the Power to Control:

James 3:2 ~ For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

The principle he lays down right here is that if you can control your tongue, the rest of your life basically comes along with it. That's what he's trying to articulate. If you can learn to control your tongue by God's grace, through the power of His word applied to your heart, growing in Christlikeness, you have got everything else with it. That's his principle. In fact, he articulates the principle again in the first part of Verse 5:

James 3:5 ~ So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

It's one small part of your body, one small part of yourself, and yet it boasts of great things. It goes way beyond what appearances would say. That's the bracket. That's like the bread of the sandwich. If you control your tongue, if you're able to bridle your tongue, you control your whole body. So focus on the tongue. It has tremendous and surprising implication. And then in the center of the two pieces of bread are the two word pictures, the meat of the sandwich there in James 3:3.

James 3:3 ~ Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

That's the first word picture. He lays word picture on top of word picture in this passage, all the way through Verse 12. There are like seven or eight metaphors, depending on how you count them. He wants us to see this. Think about a horse. Think about how strong and mighty a horse is. I've ridden a horse a few times, and I've experienced the strength of a horse. We ride horses up in the mountains. There's this one place that we've gone a number of times, and I get Old Joe, I think is his name. Being a person that's over 200 pounds, you get the larger horses. I think the horses are really glad about that too. But anyway, Joe is this giant horse. I mean he looks like a mammoth, and so I've been riding Joe. I've ridden him four or five times through the years. I forget the other horse's name. But Joe is powerful. All the horses are. And when you're on a horse, you feel a sense of awe. "Wow... If you wanted to take off, there's really not much I could do." I don't know what I'm doing, but they kind of know the way they're supposed to go, though Joe usually wants to stop and eat. He's stopping to eat, and he's thinking, "You can't stop me from stopping to eat." Well, over the times of riding him, I've determined that I'm going to teach Joe not to eat right now. He has that bit in his mouth, and if you pull on the reins, that bit inside of his mouth hurts bad enough that this massive animal that could trample me and destroy me if he wanted to, I've got control of Joe by the bit. It doesn't really make sense looking at it. It shouldn't make sense, because I'm small compared to him, but the bit controls it.

That's why James says that's the tongue. If you get control of the tongue, you get the whole person. And then he says, "Let me show you another. That's not enough images." James says:

James 3:4 ~ Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

The wording is vivid here. The ships are so great. The word is a comparative word of the superlative sort. Look how big the ships are, and they're driven. The word for driven is a powerful word. It's not that they're guided along. They're driven. This big ship is being driven by strong winds. The word really means harsh, severe winds. Look at this big ship driven by severe winds, and it's controlled by a little rudder, by a pilot sitting there with a stick or with a wheel that turns the rudder, and the ship goes where he says. Isn't that amazing? He's saying that's what the tongue is like. If you control your speech, you control your life. The whole course of one's life is controlled if you control the tongue.

How does that fit in? I mentioned Matthew 12 earlier, and I want to go back to that passage and show you the context. What he's saying, basically, is that if you control the tongue, if you learn to walk in sanctification and control your speech, you are applying God's grace to your life in such a profound way that you're going to see all kinds of purity growing. The fruit of the Spirit is going to be growing in your life if you can focus on your mouth and your speech. But he's also saying in a bigger way that the tongue controls your eternal destiny, that if you're not getting pure speech over time, if your words never get better, then it's probably an indication of the fact that you're not really saved. By your tongue, evidence is given of your eternal destiny, so that no matter what your life looks like, it's the tongue, it's the bit, it's the rudder that's going to determine whether you end up in vastly different places: heaven or hell. You see this in Matthew 12:

Matthew 12:36 ~ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

Look at the context of who he's speaking to. He's speaking to the Pharisees.

Matthew 12:33 ~ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit."

The quality of someone's soul, what's going on in their heart, is made known by the fruit. If you're not a tree expert and you look at a tree, you don't know if it's an apple tree or a peach tree unless there are apples or peaches on it, and then you know that's an apple tree. That's what he's saying. You don't know what the nature of the tree is until you see the fruit. He says to the Pharisees, ***"You brood of***

vipers...” You profess faith. You say that you’re godly, but you’re really a brood of snakes. You’re of your father the devil. ***You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good?*** “What comes out of your mouth is evil because you are evil,” is what Jesus is saying.

Matthew 12:34 ~ You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks, so that your words are an indication of what’s in your heart. And if your words are never getting purified, it means that the Spirit is not in your life. Sanctification takes effort. You have to continue in the word. You have to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. You have to walk in the Spirit so that you won’t carry out the desires of the flesh. It doesn’t mean that you’re not saved because you still struggle in these areas. You’re going to continue to struggle in these areas, but if you don’t make progress over time, though it’s up and down, there should be a general progression toward righteousness in our lives. One measure of that is the way we speak. Is it harshness? Is it condemning? Are there angry words that come out continually? Then examine yourselves. If it is, go back to Christ and get in His word. And if you are born again, getting back in His word, you will start growing.

Turn over a page or two to Matthew 15:15-20, where we see this connection between what comes out of the mouth and what’s in the heart.

Matthew 15:16 ~ Jesus said, “Are you still lacking in understanding also? 17 Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?”

They were thinking like the Jews thought, that what you eat defiles you, or what you eat makes you unfit for God.

Matthew 15:18 ~ But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man. What comes out of the heart is what defiles us. What comes out of the heart is what’s in it. If I gave you a tube of toothpaste, and I said, “I want you to predict what’s going to come out of

the tube when you squeeze it,” what would you say? You’d say, “Toothpaste.” Why? Because when you squeeze it, what comes out is what’s in it. When your circumstances squeeze you, what comes out? That’s what this text is calling us to examine. What comes out of our hearts when we are squeezed, when trials and difficulties come? What comes out of the believer at times are these wicked things, but how do you respond? Do you repent? Do you go to God? Over time, are you growing?

James is saying it’s so important for us to understand the urgency of the tongue, because the tongue not only has the power to condemn, but it has the power to control the whole course of our life. It’s sobering to think about the careless words that we say each week. I know that I lose my temper. My wife was sharing with me last week her concern about how I sometimes comment on other drivers, and I think that in my heart that I justify the fact that well I’m just teaching my family. *What’s this person doing? Why are they doing that? What are they thinking?* She talked to me about that, and I started praying about it, and then this text was the next text I was working on. I thought, “Wow... every idle word?” So when I say something like, “What are you thinking?” and that person can’t hear me, but that’s what’s coming out of my heart, that’s a word of condemnation to that person. My family is hearing that. If they’re not in the car, then I’m hearing it, and I’m making that a part of my thought process. That is wicked. There’s a way to comment on a situation that may be helpful. “You shouldn’t do that when you’re driving, son.” I can talk to my son or daughter that way, but that’s not the way that I do it. That is not of God. That is me giving my members to the flesh and allowing Satan to accomplish his purposes: to steal, to kill, and to destroy. We must repent of those things. I must repent of that and ask God to help me bless.

It’s amazing how freeing it is to relax when you’re driving, when you realize, “I don’t have to fix everybody or comment on everybody.” It’s actually been a good week that way, I think. A better week. Just drive and praise God. Pray for the person. “Lord, that person is really doing something that’s not very safe right now. Help him.” That is a blessing. Moments where we speak in anger, moments where we speak and articulate things that are not true, or when we say something like, “Oh, I knew it was going to happen that way, because it always rains when you plan a picnic,” that’s wicked. Capture those words and repent of that. And even there, confess it before the people that I’ve said it to. That is wrong. God is good. He’s sovereign. He’s the one that chose for it to rain today for His purposes and His glory, and we will praise Him in it. And when we do that, we’re speaking life. Everyone’s learning that God reigns. This world is not out of control. “Look how

dad's responding to the traffic." God is on the throne. That's life being given. There's so much power to bless or power to curse. May God help us.

The good news is when you see that curse coming out of your mouth, what are you to do? First of all, "There it is, Lord." Run to Christ. We have a Savior. We have a great Savior who never uttered anything but what God wanted Him to utter, whose words from the beginning of the universe brought life. So when I find myself speaking words that are not life, turn from that and run to the Savior who paid for that wicked word, who pays for every idle word for those who are in Christ. Praise God that when we stand at the judgment, if the Lord does go through the catalog of every single word for believers – which may happen – if He does, every time He brings one up, Jesus is going to say, "I paid for that." I think He may do that just so we can glory in the amazing salvation of Christ. We have all eternity anyway. It's not going to take that long to go through it from God's standpoint. He may do that, but it will only be to redound to the glory of a Savior who saves us from every stain. Everything under His blood, He died for it.

So you go to Him and you say, "Lord, thank You for dying for that sin. Thank You that You not only died for that, but You've given me Your righteousness. You have a perfect righteousness. You never reviled other people when they reviled You. You didn't revile, but You entrusted Yourself to Him who judges righteously. Lord, You live in me through the Holy Spirit, and You can empower me to bless, and I surrender to You." Over time, if we keep looking at Jesus, we become more like Him, and we who were born in sin, conceived in iniquity, redeemed by the power of God, we find that our words really do begin to impart life when we let Him speak His words through us. What a miracle. Isn't it a miracle that God changes a person, his eternal destiny, somebody you meet tomorrow that is on the road to hell, that is in the grip of Satan? What a mighty enemy Satan is, but one little word shall fail him. God chooses to take a human being, made in His image, redeemed by His blood, you speak, air passes across your vocal cords, and out of your mouth, and you say, "Look at Jesus," and that person is delivered, translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son in an instant through the spoken word. What amazing power God has entrusted to us. Who is adequate for these things? But praise the Lord He is in us and He is doing that.

Let's go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we come with hearts that are overwhelmed first of all with our own awful inadequacy, our sinfulness, our string of failures, Lord, and the understanding that we don't even really begin to understand how badly we've

failed. You're so gracious to only show us enough of the ugliness to grant us repentance. And how grateful we are for a Savior whose blood is mighty, totally sufficient, adequate. Though our sins are as scarlet, You make them white as snow. You're a Savior who not only delivers us from the guilt of sin, but the power of sin. We pray that You would help us, Lord, to walk in victory.

We pray for those that are here who have not repented and believed in Christ, who do not truly know you, who examine their lives, and as they look at the fruit of their lives, are concerned. Lord, You know the heart. We don't know our own hearts, but You know it all. We ask that You, by Your Spirit, would open their hearts and let them see in reality their condition before You, and Father, that You would also open their eyes to see the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Grant repentance. Grant faith. Give them earnestness of heart to turn from sin and to turn to Christ by faith. Save, Lord. We're thankful, Lord, that You have shown in Your word that You are ready to save, that You delight, Lord, in bringing people into Your Kingdom, and that You rejoice more over one new convert than over 99 who are already Yours. You celebrate. There is joy in the presence of the angels every time a sinner is converted. Father, You delight to save, and we praise You that You not only are at work to bring us into the Kingdom, but You are at work to make us more like Your Son every day.

We pray that You would have Your way in our hearts, that Your Holy Spirit would work powerfully, that we would stop resisting, and by seeking You in Your Word, would submit, and that You would transform us into His image, so that our words would be pleasing to You. May our words would be an indication and fruit of righteousness, so that people might marvel, not at us, but at the glory of a God who can transform sinners and make them holy. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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