

The General Epistle of James

Chapter 3 — Careful Speech



Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.
My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

— **James 3:10**

James Chapter 3 Orientation

Central burden: Mature faith is heard as well as seen. James warns teachers and every believer that the tongue can direct a life, kindle destruction, bless God, wound people made in God's likeness, or sow the peaceable fruit of wisdom from above.

Life Application Chapter Summary

Chapter	Movement	Christian Life
Chapter 3	Careful Speech	What a Christian says

Chapter summary transcribed from the supplied Life Application Bible page for James 3.

Chapter 3 Emphases

Theme	Importance
Accountable speech	Teachers and hearers alike answer to God for words that guide other lives.
Small, great power	A bit, a helm, and a spark reveal how a small member directs or destroys.
Undivided worship	The same mouth should not bless the Father and curse people made in His likeness.
Wisdom's fruit	True wisdom is recognized by purity, mercy, peace, good fruit, and peacemaking.

Interpretive Guardrails

- James does not forbid all teaching; he warns against seeking the role carelessly because teachers bear greater accountability.
- No human being can perfectly tame the tongue, yet this is not permission to surrender. Believers depend on God's grace while practicing restraint, repentance, and repair.

Additional Note: As you read, keep in mind, James is offering counsel to a scattered, pressured community. Chapter 3 continues that concern: words and teaching can hold a vulnerable body together, or set its fellowship ablaze.

Companion Bible Structure — James 3

The Companion Bible pairs the tongue with repeated comparisons, then moves from behavior to the two sources of wisdom. The plain-language labels below make the correspondence easier to see in class.

How to read the letters: Matching letters mark corresponding movements. The final D is a book-level continuation of the earlier teaching about wisdom, not a second label for the preceding H section.

Marker	Verses	Movement	Description
E-H	3:1-2	Teachers and accountability	The tongue reveals universal stumbling and the maturity required to guide the whole person.
J-c¹	3:3-4	Comparisons	A bit directs a horse and a small helm turns a great ship.
J-d¹	3:5-6	The tongue	A small member boasts greatly and can kindle a destructive fire.
J-c²	3:7	Comparison	Creatures of land, air, and sea have been tamed by humanity.
J-d²	3:8-10	The tongue	The untamed tongue blesses God and curses people made in His likeness.
J-c³	3:11-12	Comparisons	A fountain and fruit trees expose the contradiction of mixed speech.
E-H	3:13-14	Behavior reveals wisdom	Wisdom appears through meek conduct; bitter rivalry contradicts the truth.
D	3:15-18	Two sources of wisdom	Wisdom from below produces disorder; wisdom from above produces peaceable righteousness.

Structure adapted from the supplied Companion Bible pages for James 3, with plain-language movement labels added for classroom clarity.

Chapter 3 Study Map



#	Passage	Study Focus
1	3:1–2	Teachers face greater accountability; mature speech governs the whole person.
2	3:3–5	Bits, helms, and the tongue show how small things exert great direction.
3	3:5–8	The tongue can spread destruction like fire and resists human mastery.
4	3:9–12	Blessing and cursing from one mouth violate the order of God’s creation.
5	3:13–16	False wisdom is exposed by envy, rivalry, confusion, and evil work.
6	3:17–18	Wisdom from above is pure, merciful, fruitful, impartial, and peaceable.

Teachers, Stumbling, and Maturity

1 My brethren,

- † be not many masters,
- † knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2 For in many things we offend all.

- † If any man offend not in word,
- † the same is a perfect man,
- † and able also to bridle the whole body.

Small Instruments, Great Direction

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths,

- † that they may obey us;
- † and we turn about their whole body.

4 Behold also the ships,

- † which though they be so great,
- † and are driven of fierce winds,
- † yet are they turned about with a very small helm,
- † whithersoever the governor listeth.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member,

- † and boasteth great things.
- † Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

A Fire No Human Strength Can Master

6 And the tongue is a fire,

- † a world of iniquity;
- † so is the tongue among our members,
- † that it defileth the whole body,
- † and setteth on fire the course of nature;
- † and it is set on fire of hell.

7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds,

- † and of serpents, and of things in the sea,
- † is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

8 But the tongue can no man tame;

- † it is an unruly evil,
- † full of deadly poison.

Blessing, Cursing, and Creation's Witness

- 9** Therewith bless we God, even the Father;
† and therewith curse we men,
† which are made after the similitude of God.
- 10** Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.
† My brethren,
† these things ought not so to be.
- 11** Doth a fountain send forth at the same place
† sweet water and bitter?
- 12** Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries?
† either a vine, figs?
† so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Wisdom from Below

- 13** Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?
† let him shew out of a good conversation
† his works with meekness of wisdom.
- 14** But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts,
† glory not,
† and lie not against the truth.
- 15** This wisdom descendeth not from above,
† but is earthly, sensual, devilish.
- 16** For where envying and strife is,
† there is confusion and every evil work.

Wisdom from Above

- 17** But the wisdom that is from above is first pure,
† then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated,
† full of mercy and good fruits,
† without partiality,
† and without hypocrisy.
- 18** And the fruit of righteousness
† is sown in peace
† of them that make peace.

Biblical Observations

Observation 1

Teachers, Accountability, and the Mature Man

James 3

1 My brethren,

- † be not many masters,
- † knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2 For in many things we offend all.

- † If any man offend not in word,
- † the same is a perfect man,
- † and able also to bridle the whole body.

- *be not many masters...* James warns against multiplying teachers carelessly. Because teaching directs souls, the teacher's words carry greater responsibility before God.
- *in many things we offend all...* The warning begins with humility: every believer stumbles in many ways. Authority in teaching never removes the teacher's need for mercy, correction, and restraint.
- *able also to bridle the whole body...* The person who does not stumble in speech is mature—able to govern the whole life rather than being ruled by impulse.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Masters — teachers; the warning concerns assuming authority to instruct others.
- Greater condemnation — stricter judgment because teaching influences the spiritual lives of hearers.
- Offend — stumble; perfect — mature or complete; bridle — restrain and direct.

Personal Application — Do I desire influence more than accountability? What would mature restraint sound like in my teaching, counsel, or ordinary conversation?

Biblical Observations

Observation 2

The Bit, the Helm, and the Power of Small Things

James 3

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths,

- † that they may obey us;
- † and we turn about their whole body.

4 Behold also the ships,

- † which though they be so great,
- † and are driven of fierce winds,
- † yet are they turned about with a very small helm,
- † whithersoever the governor listeth.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member,

- † and boasteth great things.
- † Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

- *bits in the horses' mouths...* A small bit placed in a horse's mouth can direct the strength and movement of the whole animal. Speech likewise reveals and redirects the will.
- *a very small helm...* A ship is large and the winds are fierce, yet a small helm answers the hand of the governor. The issue is not the tongue's size but who directs it.
- *the tongue is a little member...* The tongue boasts great things because a few words can influence a family, a church, or an entire course of life—for healing or for harm.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Bits — the bridle piece placed in the mouth; obedience follows skilled direction.
- Helm — rudder; governor — helmsman; listeth — wills or determines.
- Little member — physically small yet morally powerful; boasteth — claims or accomplishes great effects.

Personal Application — Who is directing my words—pride, fear, anger, love, or the wisdom of God? What small change in speech could redirect a larger pattern?

Biblical Observations

Observation 2 — Continued

14 Kinds of Tongues

James 3

5 Even so the tongue is a little member,

† and boasteth great things.

† Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

1	Viper's tongues (Job 20:16)
2	Flattering tongue (Ps. 5:9)
3	Proud tongue (Ps. 12:3)
4	Lying tongue (Ps. 109:2; Pr. 6:17)
5	Deceitful tongue (Ps. 120:2)
6	False tongue (Ps. 120:3)
7	Froward tongue (Pr. 10:31)
8	Wholesome tongue (Pr. 10:31)
9	Healthy tongue (Pr. 12:18)
10	Naughty tongue (Pr. 17:4)
11	Perverse tongue (Pr. 17:20)
12	Soft tongue (Pr. 25:15)
13	Stammering tongue (Isa. 28:11; 33:19)
14	Backbiting tongue (Pr. 25:23)

Discuss: Which kind of tongue most warns, challenges, or encourages you today? What response would honor God?

Dake note — transcribed verbatim from the supplied James reference photograph.

Biblical Observations

Observation 3

A Fire No Human Strength Can Master

James 3

6 And the tongue is a fire,

- † a world of iniquity;
- † so is the tongue among our members,
- † that it defileth the whole body,
- † and setteth on fire the course of nature;
- † and it is set on fire of hell.

7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds,

- † and of serpents, and of things in the sea,
- † is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

8 But the tongue can no man tame;

- † it is an unruly evil,
- † full of deadly poison.

- *the tongue is a fire...* Words move from direction to destruction. A spark seems small until it finds fuel; one sentence can spread through a community.
- *the tongue can no man tame...* Human skill tames creatures, but no person masters speech completely. This reveals our need for God's grace, not permission for careless words.
- *full of deadly poison...* Poison works quietly before injury appears. Gossip, misrepresentation, contempt, and accusation can scar long after a speaker moves on.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- World of iniquity — a sphere of wrongdoing capable of staining the whole life.
- Course of nature — the circle of life; hell — Gehenna, the image of destructive fire.
- Untameable — beyond unaided control; unruly evil — restless; deadly poison — speech that wounds.

Personal Application — What conversation has become fuel for a destructive fire? Where do I need to stop, confess, correct the record, or seek reconciliation?

Biblical Observations

Observation 3 — Continued

James 3

8 But the tongue can no man tame;

- † it is an unruly evil,
- † full of deadly poison.

12 Things About the Tongue



1	A little member (v 5)
2	Boasts great things (v 5)
3	Is a fire (v 6)
4	A world of iniquity (v 6)
5	It defiles the whole body (v 6)
6	Sets a fire the course of nature (v 6)
7	It is untameable (v 7-8)
8	An unruly evil (v 8)
9	Full of deadly poison (v 8)
10	Used to bless God and curse men (v 9)
11	Capable of good conversation (v 13)
12	Capable of bitter strife (v 14)

Reflect: Which description most clearly names the power of your words? Which one calls for prayer and change?

Biblical Observations

Observation 4

Blessing, Cursing, and Creation's Consistency

James 3

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father;

† and therewith curse we men,

† which are made after the similitude of God.

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.

† My brethren,

† these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place

† sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries?

† either a vine, figs?

† so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

- *bless we God... and... curse we men...* The contradiction is theological as well as relational: the people we curse bear the likeness of the God we bless.
- *these things ought not so to be...* James does not accept divided worship. Praise in the gathering cannot excuse contempt, cruelty, or degradation outside it.
- *sweet water and bitter...* A fountain and a fruit tree produce according to their source and nature. Mixed speech signals a heart that needs cleansing and an allegiance that needs wholeness.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Similitude — likeness; the reference recalls humanity made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26).
- Fountain — a spring or source; bitter — brackish or undrinkable water.
- Fig tree and olive — creation's consistent fruit exposes the moral inconsistency of blessing and cursing.

Personal Application — Is there a person made in God's likeness whom I diminish with labels, ridicule, or contempt? What blessing, apology, or correction is needed?

Biblical Observations

Observation 4 — Continued

James 3

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place

† sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries?

† either a vine, figs?

† so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

4 Comparisons



1	A fountain cannot produce sweet and bitter water at the same time
2	A fig tree cannot produce olives
3	A vine cannot produce figs
4	The ocean cannot produce sweet water

Reflect: Which comparison most clearly reveals the inconsistency James confronts? What kind of speech should flow from a heart devoted to God?

Biblical Observations

Observation 5

False Wisdom Exposed by Its Fruit

James 3

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?

- † let him shew out of a good conversation
- † his works with meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts,

- † glory not,
- † and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above,

- † but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife is,

- † there is confusion and every evil work.

- *Who is a wise man...* Wisdom is not proven by a title, forceful speech, or superior knowledge. It is shown by good behavior and works carried out with meekness.
- *bitter envying and strife...* Envy and rivalry may wear religious language, but they distort the truth. Self-promotion cannot produce the community God desires.
- *earthly, sensual, devilish...* Wisdom from below is confined to earthly ambition, ruled by natural appetite, and open to demonic disorder. Its harvest is confusion and every evil work.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Conversation — conduct or manner of life; meekness — gentleness governed by strength and truth.
- Envying — jealous zeal; strife — selfish rivalry or factional ambition.
- Earthly, sensual, devilish — wisdom bounded by this world, natural appetite, and demonic influence; confusion — disorder or instability.

Personal Application — Where might envy, rivalry, or the need to be seen as right be shaping my words? What fruit reveals the true source of that wisdom?

Biblical Observations

Observation 5 — Continued

James 3

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts,

† glory not,

† and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above,

† but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife is,

† there is confusion and every evil work.

8 Characteristics of False Wisdom



1	Bitter envying (v 14, 16). Gr. zelos (point 9, 17 Works of the Flesh, p. 362)
2	Strife in the heart (v 14, 16)
3	Glory in profession (v 14)
4	Earthly, having this life only in view (v 15)
5	Sensual, living only to satisfy the animal appetites (v 15)
6	Devilish, inspired by demons (v 15)
7	Confusion (v 16)
8	Every evil work (v 16)

Reflect: Which characteristic most exposes wisdom from below in your present circumstances? What fruit is it producing?

Biblical Observations

Observation 6

Wisdom from Above and the Harvest of Peace

James 3

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure,

- † then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated,
- † full of mercy and good fruits,
- † without partiality,
- † and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness

- † is sown in peace
- † of them that make peace.

- *wisdom that is from above...* Heavenly wisdom is first pure, so its peace is never compromise with evil. Purity orders every quality that follows.
- *full of mercy and good fruits...* Mercy and good fruits move wisdom beyond ideas into conduct. Its gentleness is reasonable, approachable, impartial, and sincere.
- *fruit of righteousness is sown in peace...* Peacemakers sow in peace and wait for a righteous harvest. Their words do more than avoid conflict; they cultivate conditions in which what is right can grow.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Pure — morally clean; peaceable — disposed toward peace; gentle — considerate and forbearing.
- Easy to be intreated — willing to listen and yield where obedience permits; without partiality — not divided or discriminatory; without hypocrisy — sincere.
- Fruit of righteousness — the righteous harvest cultivated by those who make peace.

Personal Application — Which quality of wisdom from above most needs to govern my next conversation? What act of peacemaking can I sow today?

Biblical Observations

Observation 6 — Continued

James 3

- 17** But the wisdom that is from above is first pure,
- † then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated,
 - † full of mercy and good fruits,
 - † without partiality,
 - † and without hypocrisy.

- 18** And the fruit of righteousness
- † is sown in peace
 - † of them that make peace.

8 Characteristics of Divine Wisdom



1	Pure—chaste, holy and clean (v 17)
2	Peaceable (v 17; Heb. 12:14)
3	Gentle—meek, modest, and kind (v 17)
4	Easily entreated—not stubborn or obstinate, but yielding to others (v 17)
5	Full of mercy—always forgiving, performing acts of kindness (v 17)
6	Full of good fruits (Gal. 5:22-23)
7	Without partiality—having no respect of persons (v 17; Jas. 2:1-10)
8	Without hypocrisy—open, honest, genuine, and true (v 17)

Reflect: Which characteristic of wisdom from above stands out to you? How can it become visible in your speech and conduct this week?

How the Study Notes Were Prepared



The study notes are not copied wholesale from one source. The chart below identifies what came directly from the supplied sources and what was written as classroom synthesis.

Material	How It Was Used
Companion Bible	King James Version text, the James 3 structure, word meanings, translation details, and cross-references. On observation pages, each base term comes from the Companion Bible and the wording after the dash gives a concise plain-language explanation for classroom use.
Dake Bible	The five numbered James 3 lists are transcribed from the supplied photographs: Fourteen Kinds of Tongues; Twelve Things About the Tongue; Four Comparisons; and the characteristics of false and divine wisdom.
Life Application Bible	The chapter summary—Careful Speech: What a Christian Says—is transcribed from the supplied page. Its practical emphasis also informs application questions concerning teaching, speech, fire, consistency, and wisdom’s fruit.
Biblical Observations	The explanatory paragraphs are original study synthesis based on James 3, the supplied notes, the video’s contextual emphasis, and the cited Scripture cross-references. They are not verbatim commentary from one source.

Source Pages

- The Companion Bible, James pages 1848–1854.
- Dake Annotated Reference Bible, James notes and the supplied topical-list photographs.
- Life Application Bible, supplied James 3 pages and chapter-summary table.

Chapter 3 Review



Summary

James chapter 3 teaches careful speech—what a Christian says. Teachers bear serious accountability because words guide the lives of others. Like a bit or a helm, the tongue is small yet powerful; like a spark, it can ignite destruction far beyond the speaker’s intention.

James exposes the contradiction of blessing God while cursing people made in His likeness. He then tests wisdom by its fruit. Envy and rivalry produce disorder, but wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, approachable, merciful, fruitful, impartial, and sincere. Peacemakers sow in peace and await a righteous harvest.

Key Movements in the Text

- 3:1–2 — Teachers face greater accountability; mature speech governs the whole life.
- 3:3–5 — Bits, helms, and the tongue reveal the influence of small things.
- 3:5–8 — The tongue spreads destruction like fire and exceeds unaided human mastery.
- 3:9–12 — Blessing and cursing from one mouth contradict God’s likeness and creation’s order.
- 3:13–16 — Wisdom from below is exposed by envy, rivalry, confusion, and evil fruit.
- 3:17–18 — Wisdom from above produces mercy, sincerity, peace, and righteousness.

Chapter 3 Review



Questions for Reflection

- Where do I speak with influence but forget the accountability attached to my words?
- What repeated phrase, tone, joke, or complaint is directing my life in the wrong direction?
- Where have my words kindled a fire that now requires confession, correction, or repair?
- Do I bless God while diminishing a person made in His likeness?
- What fruit shows whether my wisdom comes from ambition or from above?
- Which quality in James 3:17 most needs to govern my next difficult conversation?
- What act of peacemaking can I sow without compromising truth?

One Memory Verse

James 3:17

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure,
then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated,
full of mercy and good fruits,
without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Closing Prayer



Father, You are pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, and faithful in every word. We confess that our speech has not always reflected Your wisdom. Forgive us for careless teaching, proud claims, harsh judgments, gossip, exaggeration, and words that have wounded people made in Your likeness.

Set a guard over our mouths and govern the source from which our words flow. Where we have kindled a fire, give us courage to confess, correct what is false, and seek reconciliation. Teach us to listen before speaking, to tell the truth in love, and to use our influence with humility.

Deliver us from bitter envy, rivalry, and the need to win. Fill us with wisdom from above—pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to listen, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. Make our fellowship a place where truth and peace are sown together.

May the words of our mouths bless You, strengthen our brothers, protect the vulnerable, and bear a harvest of righteousness. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.