

• *Signs of true spirituality – first compassionate deeds of love*

• *Second control of the tongue...*

• *'Talking' has incredible power – creation – the fall – in prayer – witness – fellowship – leadership...*

1. For those who wish to be Christian teachers

• *The teaching ministry is not endless theorizing! It is getting out into the world to reach the poor and build them up in faith and works of love*

2. We all tend to use our tongues badly

In James 1:26–27 James mentioned three signs of true spirituality: compassionate deeds of love, control of the tongue and a refusal to be stained by the world. He then went on (in 2:1–26) to expand his comment about the need for compassion. Now in 3:1–18 he will proceed to expand his concern about control of the tongue. He begins with a word of warning to those who, like himself, wish to be teachers in the church^{□1}. That leads him to speak of the great tendency we all have to use our tongues badly^{□2}, yet he holds out the possibility of 'perfection' if we can bring the tongue under control^{□3}. Verses 3–8 give a series of illustrations and arguments all of which underline the immense power of the tongue, for good and for evil. Then verses 9–12 urge us to see our inconsistency as grotesque and perverse, and the task of controlling the tongue as vital. Verses 13–18 bring the section to a close by describing two kinds of wisdom.

'Talking' has incredible power. Talking has always existed. 'In the beginning was the Word ...' ^{□1}. The Father and the Son have been talking together since all eternity. Talking is what distinguishes humankind from the animals. Talking was used to create the universe. God said 'Let there be light ...' Talking was involved in the fall of the human race. The serpent talked to the woman; the woman replied. Talking is involved in salvation. Faith must be expressed in talk to God and confession of faith before others. Talking is the essence of fellowship. Talking is one of the secrets of leadership. You never find a good leader who is not able to communicate. 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue'^{□2}. We need to consider how we talk!

1. **First, there is a word for those who wish to be Christian teachers.** It seems that many of James' people were eager to become teachers in the church. The kind of person I have described as a 'respectable backslider' likes to be an expert in censuring others – especially the poor. So James starts at this point. *'Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because as you know we who teach will be judged more strictly'*^{□1}. It is a curious fact that lazy Christians like to be teachers! They are not willing to get to the outside world to reach the poor, but they are willing to sit at home talking like an expert! James gives them a warning. Few people are really called to be teachers and they have to work hard! The teaching ministry is not endless theorizing! It is getting out into the world to reach the poor and build them up in faith and works of love. The more we claim to know the more strictly we shall be judged. Knowledge enables the possibility of greater reward; it also involves the possibility of greater condemnation.

2. **We all tend to use our tongues badly.** James includes himself and speaks humbly of himself. Even a Christian teacher finds this matter difficult. *'For in many ways we all make mistakes'*^{□1}. He as a Christian teacher might stumble, as much as

□1 3:1

□2 3:2a

□3 3:2b

□1 John 1:1

□2 Proverbs
18:21

□1 3:1

□1 3:2a

anyone else. This is an area of life where there are no super-saints. It is one of the great proofs of the universal sinfulness of the human race. Apart from our Lord Jesus Christ there is no one who is flawless at this point.

3. A kind of 'perfection' if we can control our tongue

• All-round-maturity

• Having a good conscience about all the areas of our life

• There is still more we have to learn but we are walking in the light

If we control the tongue, we shall keep the whole of our lives under control

3. He holds out the possibility of a kind of 'perfection' if we can bring the tongue under control. He says: *'If anyone makes no mistakes in talking, that person is perfect and is able to keep the whole body under control'*¹. Of course he is not referring to sinless perfection. No one is ever sinless this side of heaven. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves². But there is a kind of all-round maturity that we may reach, and in this connection the Bible uses the word 'perfection'. Sometimes the word 'perfect' means 'mature'. James says you will come to 'maturity' if you can use the tongue skillfully.

We are 'mature' when we hold no grudge¹, when God can teach us², when we take trials without grumbling³ and (as James 3:2 tells us) when we can talk freely without stumbling, with graciousness, attractiveness, helpfulness. Are we expected to reach this kind of maturity? Yes! The Bible talks about our getting there (Colossians 1:28 and the verses already cited). But you never become totally sinless. You can never do without the blood of Jesus. There are always sins you have not seen yet. The blood of Christ cleanses you as long as you walk in the light. 'Maturity' or 'perfection' is not total sinlessness; it is having a good conscience about all the areas of our life. There is still more we have to learn but we are walking in the light. 1 Corinthians 4:3, 4 and 1 John 1:7 are key verses here.

To the extent that we control our tongue we can control the rest of our personality. If anyone makes no mistakes in talking, that person is 'mature' and is able to keep the whole body under control. We shall never get there with total sinlessness this side of heavenly glory, but we can press towards the mark. Even a small measure of control over the tongue will bring powerful blessings. And as we grow in this matter we shall find our progress in the kingdom of God goes forward with leaps and bounds. We shall keep the whole of our lives under control, if we control the tongue.

¹ 3:2b

² 1 John 1:8

¹ Matthew 5:48

² 1 Corinthians 2:6; Philippians 3:12, 15; 2 Timothy 3:17

³ James 1:3-5



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