

Today, ~ We'll Continue Our Study Of James' ~ Third Mini-Essay.

A treatise on human speech, ~ in 3:1-12.

▶▶ More specifically, ~ the power of the tongue ~ and its control.

▶▶ The Bible has much to say ~ concerning the power of speech ~ for good or evil. **Proverbs.**

▶▶ This mini-essay by James ~ is the classic exposition ~ of the problem of controlling the human tongue.

Review outline.

▶▶ **Vv 1-2**, ~ James points out ~ the significance ~ of a controlled tongue.

▶▶ **3-5a**, ~ controlled tongue ~ is powerful influence for good, ~ out of proportion to its size.

▶▶ **vv 5b-6**, ~ shows the destructiveness ~ of an uncontrolled tongue.

▶▶ In **vv 7-8a**, ~ he shows the untamable nature ~ of the tongue.

▶▶ In **v 8b**, ~ James gives a brutally realistic description of the tongue in its natural state.

▷▷ And points ~ to the negative effects ~ an uncontrolled tongue can have on others.

▶▶ And then in **vv 9-12**, ~ the inconsistency ~ of the tongue. **1/16**

Today, ~ VV 7-8.

1st, ~ The Untamable Nature Of The Tongue, ~ Vv 7-8a.

In vv 7-8a, ~ James contrasts ~ the ability of humans ~ to subdue animals ~ ¶¶

▶▶ with the inability ~ of humans ~ to subdue the tongue.

▶▶⁷ For every kind ~ of beast and bird, ~ of reptile and sea creature, ~ can be tamed ~ and has been tamed by mankind, ~ ¶¶

▷▷^{8a} but no human being ~ can tame the tongue.

Vs 7, ~ The Ability To Tame Animals.

The series of kinds of creatures ~ is intended to cover ~ the breadth ~ of what we call the animal kingdom.

▶▶ The adj. ~ every ~ is a literary exaggeration.

▶▶ And does not mean ~ all creatures ~ without exception.

▶▶ As we'll see, ~ alluding to humankind's dominion over the animal world.

▶▶ So here, ~ James is no doubt emphasizing that dominion, ~ by the use of hyperbole.

▷▷ And his emphasis ~ marks a sad state of affairs.

↪↪ We can control the animal world, ~ but not our tongues. 2/16

Furthermore, ~ James is not talking about ~ making pets out of every animal.

▶▶ The word for "tame" ~ does not mean ~ "domesticate" ~ ~ 77

▷▷ so much as ~ "subdue" ~ or ~ "bring under control."

▶▶ Its only other use in the NT ~ is in [Mk 5:4](#), ~ which says of the Gerasene demoniac ~ 77

▷▷ that no one had the strength ~ to subdue him.

▶▶ Even though people have not been able ~ 77

▷▷ to make a pet ~ out of every wild beast or sea creature, ~ ~ they have been able ~ to capture, ~ 77

↳ ↳ cage, ~ leash, ~ or otherwise control ~ any creature they wish.

▶▶ The implication ~ is that ~ the wildest and biggest beast ~ is easier to control ~ 77

▷▷ than one's own little tongue.

James is alluding ~ 77

▶▶ to humankind's dominion over the animal world here.

▶▶ He is reflecting ~ on the created order given in [Gen. 1:26](#).

▷▷ And God said, ~ "Let us make humankind ~ in our image ~ and according to our likeness, ~ ~ and let them rule over ~ the fish of the sea, ~ and over the birds of heaven, ~ and over the cattle, ~ and over all the earth, ~ and over every moving thing that moves upon the earth." 3/16

▶▶It was then mandated in *Gen. 1:28*.

▷▷And God blessed them, ~ and God said to them, ~ "Be fruitful and multiply, ~~ and fill the earth and subdue it, ~~ and rule over ~ the fish of the sea ~ and the birds of heaven, ~ and over every animal that moves upon the earth."

▶▶God granted humankind a dominion, ~ i.e., ~ ¶¶

▷▷a subordinate sovereignty ~ or ~ viceregency, ~ over all the other creatures.

▶▶*Ps 8:6-8* ~ celebrates humanity's God-given domination over the animal creation.

▷▷You have given him dominion ~ over the works of your hands; ~~ you have put all things under his feet, ~ all sheep and oxen, ~ and also ~ the beasts of the field, ~ the birds of the heavens, ~ and the fish of the sea, ~ whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

▶▶God also then commanded humankind ~ to fulfill that dominion, ~ ¶¶

▷▷a mandate ~ that humanity is more or less successfully carrying out.

In Contrast ~ To Effective Human Mastery Of Lower Creatures, ~ ¶¶

humans are incapable ~ of taming the tongue ~ in their own mouth.

▶▶*Vs 8a*, ~ but no human being ~ can tame the tongue.

But wait.

▶▶James seems to be contradicting himself. 4/16

▶▶ In 3:2b, ~ he says, ~ If anyone does not stumble in what he says, ~ he is mature.

▷▷ Implies the tongue ~ can be controlled.

▶▶ And what of the psalmist's exhortation, ~ quoted by Peter in his 1st epistle?

▷▷ Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit?

Well, ~ notice carefully what James says here.

▶▶ Is he saying, ~ No one at all? ⇔⇔ No.

▶▶ Saying ~ no human being can tame the tongue.

Furthermore, ~ by the way James structured this sentence, ~ ¶¶

▶▶ he appears to be implying ~ that there is one ~ who can control the tongue.

▶▶ But, ~ it is someone other than man.

▶▶ James' idea here is this.

▷▷ What humanity is capable of doing with animals ~ no one ~ from among humanity ~ ¶¶

↳↳ is capable of doing with the tongue. 5/16

IOW, ~ James is indicating ~ that we need to look ~ outside humanity ~ 77

▶▶ for help in taming the tongue.

▶▶ While no human being can subdue their speech, ~ God, ~ and only God, ~ can help us control it.

▶▶ A perfect illustration: ~ the Gerasene demoniac

▶▶ David seems to have understood this need ~ to look outside ourselves ~ for help in taming the tongue.

▷▷ Note ~ his prayer in [Ps. 141:3](#).

↳↳ Set a guard, ~ O Lord, ~ over my mouth; ~ keep watch ~ over the door of my lips!

▷▷ If God guards our mouth, ~ then no evil words will come from it.

No one ~ can subdue a person's tongue ~ except God.

▶▶ Of course, ~ this does not imply ~ that people's tongues ~ are always out of control.

▶▶ Just as wild animals ~ are not ~ constantly rampaging.

▶▶ But it does mean ~ that a person unaided ~ does not have ~ 77

▷▷ constant and permanent mastery ~ of their tongue.

▶▶ It requires the supernatural power of God ~ to subdue the tongue. 6/16

And there's excellent news.

▶▶ God will help us subdue our tongues.

▶▶ Paul affirms this in [Phil. 2:12-13](#).

▶▶ In [vs 12](#), ~ he exhorts believers ~ to continue to mature spiritually.

▷▷ Of course this would include, ~ gaining mastery ~ over our tongues.

▶▶ In [vs 13](#), ~ Paul delivers the excellent news.

▷▷ For it is *God who works in you*, ~ both to will and to work ~ for his good pleasure.

▶▶ God gives us ~ the desire and the ability ~ to carry out the exhortation ~ ¶¶

▷▷ to continue moving forward in spiritual growth.

▶▶ Now, ~ this is great encouragement, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ because we cannot carry out this exhortation in our own strength or under our own power.

▶▶ In fact, ~ in the broadest sense, ~ we cannot ~ live the Christian life ~ ¶¶

▷▷ or carry out God's will ~ in our own strength ~ or under our own power.

↪↪ Apart from Jesus, ~ we can do nothing. 7/16

▶▶ But, ~ due to our sinful nature, ~ our inclination ~ is not ~ to desire or follow what the Lord wants.

▶▶ We're inclined ~ to do our own thing, ~ to carry out the desires of our fallen nature, ~ 77

▷▷ to follow the world and the devil.

▶▶ But praise God, ~ he works in believers ~ giving us ~ the desire and the power ~ to do what pleases him.

▷▷ Which includes ~ gaining mastery ~ over our tongues.

▶▶ We cannot subdue our tongues on our own.

▷▷ So, ~ we need to pray to the Lord ~ as David did.

↳↳ Set a guard, ~ O Lord, ~ over my mouth; ~ keep watch ~ over the door of my lips!

▷▷ And rest assured, ~ our heavenly Father ~ will do it.

In Vs 8b, ~ James Gives Us ~ Two Images Of The Tongue ~ That Give ~ 77

a brutally realistic description ~ of the tongue ~ in its natural state.

▶▶ It is a restless evil, ~ full of deadly poison.

▷▷ This brutally realistic description ~ vividly illustrates the need ~ 77

↳↳ to keep our tongues under control ~ at all times. 8/16

Prov. 21:23 (NIV).

▶▶ Those who guard their mouths and their tongues ~ keep themselves ~ from calamity.

▶▶ People who control what they say ~ are more likely to avoid trouble ~ than those who speak freely.

▷▷ The calamity here ~ may refer to ~ social and legal difficulties ~ into which ~ 77

↳↳ careless talk might bring someone.

▷▷ Therefore ~ one should say only what is ~ true, ~ helpful, ~ pleasant, ~ and kind.

↳↳ And avoid what is ~ false, ~ destructive, ~ painful, ~ and damaging to others.

Recall in vv 3-6, ~ James talked about ~ how speech ~ affects the individual who is speaking.

▶▶ In v 8b, ~ as noted, ~ his brutally realistic description ~ points ~ 77

▷▷ to the negative effect ~ an uncontrolled tongue can have on others.

The tongue ~ in its natural state ~ is a restless evil.

▶▶ It cannot be trusted ~ to stay submissively in its proper place.

▶▶ It is ~ notoriously unreliable, ~ constantly prone to break out in vicious words.

▶▶ The adjective ~ **restless** ~ suggests the picture of some caged ~ 77

▷▷ but unsubdued ~ wild animal, ~ ever pacing uneasily ~ up and down its den. 9/16

The nature of this restless tongue is "evil."

▶▶ This statement ~ could not call for more caution.

▶▶ It must be kept under control at all times.

▶▶ The uncontrolled tongue ~ in its restless destructiveness ~ is evil.

▶▶ It tends toward ~ anger, ~ self-deception, ~ offense, ~ quarreling, ~ boasting, ~ 77

▷▷ arrogance, ~ and swearing.

↳↳ Such is the tendency of the tongue ~ to indulge in evil speaking.

Is the gift of speech in general evil? ⇔⇔ No.

▶▶ As noted, ~ the power of speech ~ is one of God's greatest gifts to people.

▷▷ And in vs 9, ~ James says that people ~ can truly speak blessing and praise.

▶▶ But this great gift, ~ left to itself, ~ can be ~ very quickly and easily corrupted.

▶▶ So believers must be on constant guard against ~ the corrupted use ~ of this mighty gift.

The 2nd image James uses ~ that gives a brutally realistic description ~ of the tongue in its natural state.

▶▶ In its natural state, ~ the tongue ~ is full of deadly poison. 10/16

▶▶ The impact of the uncontrolled tongue is ~ deadly.

▶▶ It will poison ~ anyone or anything it comes in contact with. (expanded below, p. 12)

▶▶ And this refers not only to sinful speech.

▶▶ It most likely covers speech ~ that may not be necessarily sinful.

▶▶ That would include speech such as ~ continuously negative speech.

Paul exhorts us in Eph. 4:29 (NIV), ~ ¶¶

▶▶ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ but only ~ what is helpful for building others up ~ according to their needs, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ that it may benefit ~ those who listen.

▶▶ Believers' words should be well chosen ~ so that ~ we may ~ ¶¶

▷▷ edify others ~ and ~ have a beneficial effect ~ on them ~ and the church as a whole.

▶▶ The conversation of the follower's of Christ ~ should be wholesome and beneficial ~ ¶¶

▷▷ so that ~ it edifies others, ~ that builds them up ~ rather than tears or brings them down.

▶▶ My . . . ~ we should be characterized ~ by words ~ that help others. 11/16

▷▷ When we speak to our fellow believers, ~ we should always strive to use words ~ 77

▷▷ that build their confidence, ~ 77

↪↪ that encourage them in their tasks, ~ that promote their spiritual growth, ~ 77

→→ and ~ that foster goodwill in our local fellowship.

▶▶ The right words ~ can make an enormous positive difference ~ in people's lives.

▷▷ Prov. 16:24, ~ Gracious words are like ~ a honeycomb, ~ sweetness to the soul ~ and health to the body.

▷▷ Kind and pleasant words are like honey, ~ sweet to the taste.

↪↪ I.e., ~ enjoyable and easy to accept.

▷▷ And ~ they are good for our health, ~ both spiritually &, ~ we see, ~ even physically.

▷▷ Also speaking of the right words making an enormous difference in people's lives, ~ 77

↪↪ in Job 4:4, ~ Eliphaz said to Job, ~ Your words ~ have upheld him who was stumbling, ~ and you have made firm the feeble knees."

→→ Job supported and strengthened others emotionally and spiritually ~ by his words of counsel.

▶▶ We should never underestimate the power of inspiring words ~ 77

▷▷ to encourage our brothers and sisters ~ in their spiritual growth ~ and in the battles of life. 12/16

▶▶ We should also never underestimate ~ the harm ~ an uncontrolled tongue can wreak.

▷▷ Again, ~ the impact of the uncontrolled tongue is ~ deadly.

↪↪ It will poison anyone and anything it comes in contact with

Interestingly, ~ Asaph was well aware ~ of how negative speech could affect others.

▶▶ And he refused to engage in it.

▶▶ Ps. 73

▶▶ In the moment of his crisis of faith, ~ Asaph was very careful ~ 77

▷▷ in how he handled his doubts and questions.

▷▷ He didn't want to affect others adversely.

▷▷ It seems that he felt ~ that he would do more harm than good ~ if he voiced them to others.

▶▶ He resolved ~ not to introduce unnecessary doubts into the minds of other believers ~ 77

▷▷ by talking too much about the issue.

▶▶ Prov. 12:18.

▷▷ The words of the reckless ~ pierce like swords, ~ but the tongue of the wise ~ brings healing. 13/16

▷▷ Like a madman swinging a sword ~ in a crowd of innocent people, ~ 77

↳↳ so the person who does not measure and control his words ~ wounds many innocent people.

▷▷ But the words of the wise bring healing.

↳↳ Because they are ~ faithful and true, ~ gentle and kind, ~ and uplifting and encouraging.

▶▶ Back to Asaph.

▷▷ He refused ~ to talk about his doubts and questions ~ in a way ~ 77

↳↳ that could ~ hurt others ~ and cause them to stumble.

▷▷ Side note.

↳↳ Asaph's problem solved

PERHAPS A GOOD QUESTION TO ASK OURSELVES ~ BEFORE WE SPEAK ~ IS THIS.

▶▶ Will what I'm about to say ~ hurt ~ or ~ help?

▶▶ Prov. 18:13, ~ If one gives an answer before he hears, ~ it is his folly and shame.

BACK TO JAMES.

AGAIN, ~ THE TONGUE IS ~ FULL OF DEADLY POISON, ~ HE SAYS. 14/16

▶▶ May be alluding to the poison of the serpent's tongue in Eden.

▶▶ Satan's evil words ~ led Adam and Eve astray ~ and poisoned their thinking with lies.

▶▶ And we all know how that turned out.

▷▷ All of mankind and all of creation ~ was then poisoned.

▷▷ Rom. 8:20-21, ~~ For the creation was subjected to futility, ~ not willingly, ~~ but because of him who subjected it, ~ in hope ~ that the creation itself ~ will be set free from its bondage to corruption ~ and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

THE POISONOUS EFFECT OF THE TONGUE, ~ MAKES IT FORMIDABLE AND MENACING.

▶▶ No wonder the Lord Jesus could equate the worst insults ~ with murder.

▷▷ And anyone who says, ~ 'You fool!' ~ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

FROM THE TWO IMAGES OF THE TONGUE IN ITS NATURAL STATE, ~ 77

RESTLESS EVIL AND DEADLY POISON, ~ the application is the same. ⇔⇔ Discipline.

▶▶ More specifically, ~ self-discipline ~ is to be practiced ~ actively and diligently, ~ 77

▷▷ in recognition of the constant danger.

▶▶ It takes discipline ~ to be ~ quick to listen, ~ slow to speak, ~ 77

▷▷ and slow to become angry. 15/16

And ~ when at times we fail, ~ don't despair.

▶▶Let's repent immediately.

▶▶Furthermore, ~ be assured that, ~ while sinful talking is serious, ~ 77

▷▷repentance ~ brings God's forgiveness ~ and ~ removes our sins as far from us ~ 77

↪↪as the east ~ is from the west.

▶▶Repentance also brings ~ joy to the forgiven.

▷▷Ps. 32:1, ~ How joyful is the one ~ whose transgression is forgiven, ~ whose sin is covered!

▶▶Praise God. 16/16