

James 3:1-12

Controlling the Tongue

Topics: [Restless](#), [The whole course of his life](#), [A world of evil among the parts of the body](#), [Perfect](#), [Controlling the Tongue](#)

One sure sign of true or worthless faith is what comes out of a person's mouth. Jesus says, "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks," so "by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" ([Matthew 12:34, 37](#)). For Jesus, this is one of the chief fruits by which we can discern true believers from false ones ([Matthew 12:33-37](#)).

All of us will be judged by our words, but none of us more than teachers. Being a rabbi in Jewish culture meant power, privilege, and respect, but Jesus told His disciples not to be called "Rabbi," "Father," or "Teacher" ([Matthew 23:8-12](#)). James has similar counsel. In chapter 3 he comes to his second test of pure religion ([1:26](#)), of living faith ([2:26](#)), of maturity ([3:2](#))—the use of the tongue. Read [3:1-12](#).

1. Why should we hesitate before we presume to be teachers ([James 3:1](#))? (*Optional*: Consider [Matthew 12:33-37](#); [Romans 2:17-24](#).)

Perfect ([3:2](#)). This is the same Greek word as "mature" in [1:4](#) and "complete" in [2:22](#) (KJV has "perfect" in all three verses). The word means "that which has reached its maturity or fulfilled the end contemplated." God's goal for us is holiness and righteousness like His ([Matthew 5:48](#); [Ephes. 4:22-24](#)). We may not reach that goal in this life, but we should be growing toward it.

2. James uses some vivid imagery to explain why controlling our tongues is the key to maturity. How is a tongue like a horse's bit or a ship's rudder ([3:2-5](#))?

A world of evil among the parts of the body ([3:6](#)). Or, "the world of evil." The tongue represents and expresses the fallen world order in our bodies perhaps more than any other organ.

The whole course of his life ([3:6](#)). This is the probable meaning of "the course of nature" (KJV).

3. Put into your own words what James says about the tongue in [3:6](#).

Restless ([3:8](#)). Like a wild beast ready to break out of its cage at any time.

4. Animals can be tamed because God gave man dominion over them at Creation ([Genesis 1:26-28](#); [James 3:7](#)). Why can't man tame his own tongue ([Genesis 2:16-17](#); [Genesis 6:5](#); [James 3:8](#))?
5. Why is it especially horrible to curse or verbally abuse a human being ([James 3:9](#))?
6. How does James depict the idea of doubleness ([1:8](#)) with respect to the tongue ([3:10-12](#))?
7. Back in [3:2](#), James said that the person who can control his tongue is perfect, mature. From [3:1-12](#), why is this so?
8. James says it isn't possible for a human to attain perfection by completely taming his tongue ([3:8](#)). How, then, can we control our tongues and become mature ([Matthew 19:25-26](#), [James 1:5-8](#))?
9. Bearing your answer to question 8 in mind, what can a person do to become more godly in what he or she says? (*Optional*: See [John 15:5-8](#), [Romans 6:11-14](#), [James 4:6-10](#).)
10. What one insight from [3:1-12](#) would you like to take to heart?
11. How do you need to grow in this area?

12. With your answers to question 9 in mind, write some plans for acting on this insight.

13. List any questions you have about [3:1-12](#).