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In the first chapter, James has told us that the mature Christian learns patience and perseverance in times of troubles, trials and tribulations. In the second chapter, we learned that the mature believer receives the Word of God and puts it into practice in his life. Now in chapter three, we see another characteristic in the mature believer - he learns to control his tongue.

Back in 1:19, we were warned to be *"swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger (wrath)"*. Then in 1:26 we were told the importance of bridling the tongue. Now this following section expands on the need to do this.

First, we are warned that teaching the Word of God is a solemn responsibility and not to be taken lightly. Throughout the NT, the writers of Scripture were being opposed by false teachers who were preaching a 'different gospel' than what the Bible teaches. But there will be accountability and judgment, and those who would lead others astray will incur a stricter judgment.

Any honest person must admit that *"we all stumble in many ways"* as it says in verse 2. Some of the common sins that we are often tempted to stumble into are the sins of the tongue. Words are very powerful and often leads to deeds.

Verses 3 and 4 are good illustrations of what is being conveyed here. In the example of the bit and the horse in verse 3, we see how a small bit can enable the rider to direct a horse, a magnificent animal who is much larger and stronger than the rider. Likewise in verse 4, a small rudder can enable the pilot to control and steer a huge ship.

Like these examples, the tongue is only a small member of the body, but it has tremendous power. It has the capacity to accomplish either great things or terrible things.

Also like the bit or the rudder, the tongue is met with opposing forces it must overcome. The bit must deal with the wild nature of the horse and its stubborn will to go its own way. The rudder of the ship must work against the currents, winds and waves that would push the ship off the desired course of the captain.

The mature tongue must fight against our old sinful nature. We are often confronted with sin from the inside or pressures from the outside to misuse the tongue.

The mature horse rider or ship's captain knows that they need a firm, strong hand or grip to control the object (horse or ship, in these illustrations). He must not neglect to give close attention to this, and if he does it is at his own peril.

The wise King Solomon wrote that *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue"* (Proverbs 18:21). His father, King David, wrote *"Set a guard, Lord, over my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips"* (Psalm 141:3).

The heart is the key to right speech. In the words of the Lord, *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Matthew 12:34). When Christ is the Lord of our hearts, He is the Lord of our tongues as well.

As does the bit and the rudder, the tongue has the power to direct. This means that our tongues affect the lives of others. 'Mere' words have led to many wars, many crimes, many outcomes that have changed lives for the better or for the worse.

With words, Peter preached a gospel sermon at Pentecost and three thousand souls came to salvation in Christ (Acts 2). The Lord Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman at a well and her life was magnificently changed forever (John 4).

The wisdom book of Proverbs has much to say about the tongue and speech, including *"a soft answer turns away wrath"*(15:1), *"he that restrains his lips is wise"* (10:9), and *"lying lips are an abomination to the Lord"* (12:22).

The tongue has power to direct others for good (or bad). The mature believer understands this and tames his tongue that it may be used for good.

James 3

The Untamable Tongue

3 My brethren, not many of you should presume to be teachers, knowing that we who are teachers will be judged more strictly. **2** For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he *is* a perfect (mature) man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

3 Now if we put bits into horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we can direct their entire body as well. **4** Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. **5** Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

Consider that a great forest can be set on fire by a little spark. **6** The tongue *is* also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. **7** All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man.

8 But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.

10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. **11** Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? **12** My brethren, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

Heavenly Versus Demonic Wisdom

13 Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by works done in the humility that comes from wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. **15** This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil.

16 For where envy and selfish ambition *exist*, there is disorder and every evil thing. **17** But the wisdom that is from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and without hypocrisy. **18** And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.