

**Text: James 3:1-2**

**Title: “The Teacher’s Tongue”**

Let’s open our Bibles to James 3:1. As you’re turning I want to say something about an incident you may have seen in the news this past week. An atheist group put up banners all over downtown Fort Worth that read, “In No God We Trust.” There’s some sort of atheist conference going on downtown and they took advantage of their legal right to advertise. How should we feel about this? This past week we celebrated the Fourth of July and the Declaration of Independence says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” One of those unalienable rights is religious liberty. Notice that we are endowed by our Creator with these rights. Good governments recognize that. Yes, religious liberty is a two-edged sword. It gives believers like us the freedom to express our faith and worship without fear of reprisal by the authorities. But that same freedom is also extended to other groups who do not believe what we believe. We do not have to fear, however, that opposing worldviews can in any way threaten the Gospel. The Bible says that the Gospel has the power to save. What could potentially weaken the impact of the Gospel in our pluralistic society is for believers to not utilize our freedom to proclaim the Gospel. So our bigger concern should not be that atheists *advertise*; our concern should be that we as believers don’t *evangelize*. And I just wanted to address that today while it may be on our minds.

Now we’re continuing in our summer study of James and today we come to a subject that James is really passionate about ... the tongue. **Read James 3:1-2.**

We shouldn’t be surprised that the Bible would have so much to say about the tongue because it is the real you. Someone said that the tongue is a tattletale that tells on the heart and discloses the real person. So in every chapter of James there’s something about how and what we speak. **Read James 1:19, 26; 2:12, 4:11; 5:12.**

One of the ways this is addressed is to challenge people in the church who have a speaking ministry ... the teachers. James 3:1 says, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers...” None of us have a greater challenge with the tongue than those of us who are teachers. Now don’t tune out because you don’t happen to be a teacher because there’s something here for all of us. So let’s start with:

## **1. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHERS**

**James 3:1a - Not many of you should presume to be teachers ...**

The fact is that every one of us here today depends on the ministry of teachers for our spiritual growth. In the formation of the church Jesus gifted individuals for teaching to edify the church and to establish believers. We need to read and study the Bible on our own, but we also need to be taught the Bible in community with other believers. Jesus said...

**Matthew 28:19-20 - Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**

**Ephesians 4:11-12 – (Christ) gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.**

We need to hold to the Word of God because it says in...

**2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

The job description for elders is, according to...

**Titus 1:9 - He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.**

There’s a lot of spiritual junk floating around out there and teachers in the church help believers guard against false teaching.

**Titus 1:11 - They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Perhaps you’ve heard it said that when they train bank tellers how to spot counterfeit money one of the first things they do is to make them so familiar with the genuine currency that it is easier to recognize the counterfeit. And that’s what teachers are to help us to do ... to know what is true so well that we can easily recognize something that is false.

Now this command here in James 3:1 ... “Not many of you should presume to be teachers” ... may sound odd in a Baptist church where we seem to always be asking for volunteers to teach in the various ministries. There always seems to be shortage. I don’t guess any church ever has too many qualified, called, prepared teachers. The point is, don’t grab this ministry out of ambition. Don’t crowd in to become teachers. Don’t stand up and start speaking or presuming to teach if your life isn’t ready to back it up. Teachers don’t just impart knowledge; they shape character. And to do that requires that they model the character they teach. This would include any leader who would speak publicly to exhort the church.

Now this was a particular temptation in James’s day when teachers were held in really high esteem. Jewish teachers, known as rabbis, were highly respected. Remember in the Gospels how the Jewish teachers loved the prestige ... the places of honor and the respect they were given. They loved the public attention that came with the appearance of knowing more than most people knew. And some of this likely carried over into the church where believers came out of a Jewish background. It can be a pretty heady thing and the flesh can really mess things up.

It is a very important responsibility. So in light of this there is this command to not grab for this privilege and position of teaching. And the reason is...

## **2. THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF TEACHERS**

**James 3:1b - Because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.**

He’s not saying that teachers are held to a different standard than other believers. All believers live by the same standard of the Word of God controlled by the Spirit of Christ. However, teachers will be judged with greater severity. We all must live our lives in the light of the Bibles teaching on the Lord’s judgment. Jesus said in...

**Matthew 12:36 - I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.**

**2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**

**Romans 14:12 - So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.**

We all must live our lives in the light of the Bible's teaching on the Lord's judgment. Now, the judgment we go through as believers is different from that faced by non-believers. When non-believers stand before the Lord their judgment is more like a sentencing as the consequence of their rejecting Christ. As believers the judgment of the Lord becomes the basis for our rewards. There are consequences to our actions in this life. And this is even more crucial for teachers and other leaders.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I've shown this to you before, but in talking to ministry students I like to use the image of a triangle. The higher up the triangle you go in terms of leadership and responsibility the less latitude we have. There are greater restrictions on our lives. And we will be judged more strictly.

Why the stricter judgment?

- First, the role of teaching is so important in the church for discipling believers. If teachers handle the word flippantly and lightly then the Lord is dishonored and people don't take God or His Word seriously.
- Second, teachers have a greater potential of leading others astray. Teachers lead with their life and their lips.
- Third, teaching can become self-serving – false teachers are greedy and can take advantage of their position.
- Fourth, the flesh can easily get the upper hand. Teaching can be a heady thing. Pride sets in. Sometimes we can fall in love with the sound of our own voice. We can become pleasers of men who speak flippantly and lightly as though they were just entertaining people for their applause.

So our teachers need to be among the more mature among us. That's why James speaks about...

### **3. THE MATURITY OF TEACHERS**

Again, teachers are held to a greater accountability so they need to be spiritually mature. But spiritual maturity and growth should be a goal for all of us.

James 3:2 says that *we all* stumble in many ways. The "we" includes James himself. We all trip and slip from time to time. Sin can easily creep up on us. There's no end to the ways we can mess up, but our words can lead to sin more easily than any other part of our life.

**James 3:2b - If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.**

And James keeps that image going in v.3 where the tongue is like a bit you put in a horse's mouth that guides the horse. In v.4 the tongue is like the rudder that steers a big ship. In v.5 it's like spark that can ignite a huge forest fire. In v.8 it's compared to a wild animal that can't be tamed. In vv.10-12 it's compared to a fountain that pours out sweet water or polluted water or a tree that can bears good fruit or bad fruit.

That's one of the reasons teachers have to be so careful. This is why we need Jesus. We all stumble in many ways. We are all sinners in need of the forgiveness that was bought for us when Christ died for our sins. So we should repent of our sins and come to Christ for cleansing.

But our goal is maturity. James says that if anyone doesn't sin in what he says ... or writes or tweets or posts ... he or she is a "perfect" person. The word "perfect" doesn't mean sinless perfection; it means to be mature or complete. James was saying that those who control their speech are well on the way to spiritual maturity. Our words are the main way we relate to the Lord and others. It stands to reason that first and foremost our spiritual maturity will show up in what we say. The self-control that it takes to zip your lips is the self-control that allows you to keep your whole body bridled.

One of the greatest disciplines we must develop in our maturity as a follower of Jesus is to think before we speak.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Now those of you in the younger generations missed a real blessing if you never learned to drive a car with what is called a "standard transmission." Cars had "four on the floor" or "three on the tree" meaning you had to press another peddle called the clutch, put it in gear and release the clutch at the same time you're pressing the accelerator. It took coordination. With automatic transmission you just put it in drive and step on the gas. That's the way we can be with our tongue. We can step on the gas of our words without thinking.

**Proverbs 10:19 - When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.**

So let me just shoot some questions at us for self-examination today.

Do you use your words as weapons? If so, is it because you have a bitter, hateful spirit? We need Christ. Let His forgiveness wash over you so you can forgive others.

Do you talk too much? If so, does it reveal a need to dominate the conversation so others will be focused on you? Let your aim be to put the focus on the Lord and His interest in others.

Are you harshly critical of others? If so, is it because you don't feel you're measuring up so you pass the shame off on others? Rest in what Christ did for you. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Are you inclined to speak inappropriately or to tell off-color jokes? Is it because you want to appear cool or important? Long for the purity of Christ in all your words and your ways.

Do you find yourself lying or exaggerating? Is it because you feel you need to boost your image in the eyes of others? Remember you are already accepted in Christ.

Yes, as James 3:2 says, "We all stumble in many ways." And because of that we need Jesus. The Bible says we can confess our sins and He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us. Then pray Psalm 19:14 throughout the day:

**Psalm 19:14 - May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.**