

## **Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 24, James 3:1-12.**

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 24, James 3:1-12.

We're ready now to move on to the next portion of James, which is James 3:1 through 4:12.

We begin as is our custom with the survey of 3:1 through 4:12, where we have arguments and exhortations regarding struggle with warring passions. You'll recognize, of course, that the sections that we are dealing with here, in turn, reflect the breakdown of the book from our book survey. Now, this passage, 3:1 through 4:12, I think is pretty clear, and this would be the consensus of scholarship as well, is pretty clearly a unit.

Although, how this unit is structured, how James has framed or formed this unit is a little bit difficult to discern on the surface. You have to read it quite carefully and quite sensitively. We know, though, one thing that in a case like this is well to begin by making more obvious observations and then go from there.

So, a more obvious observation is that we do seem to have four units here within this material. 3:1 through 12, of course, deal with unruly speech. 4:1 through, then 3:13, I should say, through 18 deals with earthly wisdom versus heavenly wisdom.

Then, in 4:1 through 10, we have the whole issue of unruly desires leading to a call to submit to God in repentance. And in 4:11 through 12, we have unruly speech. So, 3:1 through 12, unruly speech.

3:13 through 18, heavenly versus earthly wisdom. 4:1 through 10, unruly desires. And 4:11 through 12, he comes back to unruly speech again.

Although in 3:1 through 12, he dealt with unruly speech in terms of what he calls the unbridled tongue. Whereas in 4:11 through 12, he speaks of unruly speech in terms of evil speaking and the like. Now, that's the first observation that we can make.

That's more obvious. A second observation, though, as we just go a little deeper here, is that units 1, 3, and 4, that is to say 3:1 through 12, 4:1 through 10, and 4:11 through 12, address specific situations, specific practices. The tongue, wars and fightings within the community, these kinds of things.

Whereas 3:13 through 18 deals really with matters of essential character, which suggests that 3:13 through 18 may be more general. Has to do with general character, both good and bad, both evil and righteous. That comes to expression, particular expression, in specific situations or areas of life.

In terms of speech, 3:1 through 12, 4:11 through 12, and in terms of wars and fightings among members of the community in 4, 1 through 10. We also note that in, and this is the third observation, in 3:13 through 18, James introduces the issue of wisdom again and draws a contrast between true wisdom and false wisdom, between wisdom that is above and wisdom from below, which may then relate to contrasting descriptions in 3:1 through 12, 4:1 through 10, and 4:11 through 12, where he sets forth the wrong way, the evil way, and improper way over against the right way, suggesting again that earthly wisdom, which results according to 3:13 through 18, in every vile practice, including selfish ambition and jealousy, might be expressing itself in 3:1 through 12, in terms of unruly speech, unbridled tongue, in terms of unruly desires, wars, and fightings, and again in terms of unruly speech, evil speaking, 4:11 through 12. Whereas the heavenly wisdom that is set forth in 3:13 through 18, leading, according to that passage, to the good life, good works, especially meekness, and humility, may come to expression in 4:5 through 10, submission to God and repentance toward God, where he emphasizes especially the issue of humility.

If that is, in fact, the case, 3:13 through 18, earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom may be the cause for the kinds of specific behaviors that he either presents negatively as something that ought not to be done, in the case of unruly speech, unruly desires, and again, unruly speech, or in the case of heavenly wisdom being the cause of submission to God and repentance towards God in chapter 4, verses 5 through 10. So, in other words, it may be that at the center of this passage is the passage 3:13 through 18, with the presentation of earthly wisdom in contrast to heavenly wisdom. The two types of wisdom there, in 3:13 through 18, form the cause for, in the case of earthly wisdom, unruly speech, unruly desires, unruly speech, and the cause, in the case of heavenly wisdom, for this whole business of submission to God and repentance.

This would be then an effect of both a particularization of, as I say, a manifestation of, but also an effect of heavenly wisdom. That, at least, is a possibility. Now, if, in fact, that is the case, or insofar as it might be the case when it comes to structural relationships, we would have here a kind of interrogation, a problem-solution kind of structure.

The problem, essentially, according to this passage, is earthly wisdom and that which flows from it. The solution to the problem is heavenly wisdom and that which flows from it. We would also have causation-substantiation with generalization-particularization and contrast.

By that we mean that he begins with a particular effect, unruly speech, and then moves to the general cause, earthly wisdom. In other words, unruly speech is the effect of earthly wisdom. But the earthly wisdom that he talks about, he describes in terms more broad, more general, than simply speech.

That's why you have not only movement from effect to cause but also from particular to general. Unruly speech, as described in 3:1-10, is a particular effect of the general cause of earthly wisdom, which then also leads to the particular effect of unruly desires and unruly speech in the material that follows 4:1-10. Now, the earthly wisdom in 3:14-16, of course, is contrasted to heavenly wisdom, which is a general cause for the particular effect of submission to God and repentance towards God in 4:5-10. Now, we begin then with the detailed analysis, which, again, you'll see reflects the breakdown that we identified in the segment survey. So, really our main units and subunits from the segment survey provide the framework for our detailed analysis, the outline of the passage.

So, we begin with the first main unit here, unruly speech on bridal tongue in 3:1-12. Let's look at it. Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. For we all make many mistakes, and if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.

If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So, the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue, a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it, we bless the Lord and Father, and with it, we curse men who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

My brethren, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives or grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh. Now, as we stand back and look at the whole of 3:1 through 12, we actually note that you have the major break here between 3:1a and 3:1b. He begins with the exhortation, and it's the only exhortation we have here in the whole of 3:1 through 12.

He begins with the exhortation, which is a negative exhortation. Let not many of you become teachers, which really involves both numbers; let not many of you become teachers, and implicitly, perhaps he has in mind the manner of the decision to become teachers rashly. These are logical observations or categories.

Let not many, number, and then manner rashly become teachers. Now, I would note here, and this really involves historical background, that the office of teachers and teachers in Judaism and Christianity was a big deal. The office of teachers and teachers in Judaism and early Christianity, especially Judaistic Christianity, of which James was well acquainted, was held in very high regard, very high regard at all, indeed.

This may have led many to seek the office and function, and thus, James warns, let not many of you become teachers. Now, in the history of interpretation, many commentators have declared that this exhortation involves motive. Say, essentially, they see James as saying that one should not assume this office or function simply because of the personal prestige and personal following that it affords.

This is not the proper motivation. Now, it is, however, the fact that there is nothing in verses 2 through 12 that suggests that the issue of motivation is in view. They get that rather from scriptural testimony and from historical background, but everything else being equal, evidence from context is most significant for interpretation.

And there is nothing in verses 2 through 12 that suggests that the issue of motivation is in view here. Rather, the issue is indicated by the substantiations in 3:1b through 12, and especially 3:1b through 2, as we'll see in just a moment. Yet, having said that, verses 13 through 18 may indicate that this may be involved in a secondary way.

Again, as we understand the structure, what he says in 3:1 through 12 stems from, as a result of, what he says about wisdom from above and wisdom from below in 3:13 through 18. Let's remind ourselves what we have here. Who is wise in understanding among you? By his good life, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter jealousy and not especially selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. For, as he goes on to say in verse 16, where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder in every vile practice. All that to say, the suggestion that selfish ambition is a motivation, wrong motivation, for entering into the teaching office may be suggested by a more remote context here, and therefore the notion that part of what's involved in this exhortation that not many should become teachers has some justification and may be there, but I think in a secondary, not a primary way.

Now, of course, talking about context, quite clearly there are two things that are involved in the work of teaching. Formally, it involves the use of the tongue. Teachers must use words.

They must speak. That is what teaching is, speaking. And materially, it involves wisdom.

Particularly in the ancient world, teaching was the bestowing the passing on of wisdom, not just in communicated by the way, verbally, but also embodied. So, it's no accident that you have here this exhortation regarding teachers in a passage that goes ahead to discuss the use of the tongue and goes ahead in 3:13 through 16 to discuss wisdom. Now, let's note how he substantiates this exhortation.

The reason I say that not many of you should become teachers is substantiated in 3:1b through 12. He begins the substantiation in 3:1b, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. Stricter judgment, then.

That's the major substantiation. Now, although the RSV translates this, we shall be judged with greater strictness, that's really not what he's talking about. That's not the way the Greek reads.

It's not a matter of stricter judgment, as though teachers because they are teachers, will be judged by a different and higher set of standards. Rather, the Greek reads, *meizon krima*, greater judgment, greater judgment. That is, those who are teachers face the possibility of greater judgment.

And that really involves two things. This greater judgment involves two things here. First, greater liability to judgment.

We'll be more vulnerable to judgment or to condemnation as such. They are in a position where they can more easily incur serious guilt because their profession demands the necessary use of the tongue, which he'll go ahead to state is a morally very dangerous instrument. But this greater judgment involves also extent of judgment, vulnerable to more severe condemnation, more severe punishment than others.

Now, this notion of more severe punishment, of greater condemnation, of more severe punishment, clearly he's talking about eschatological judgment, so on and so forth, may seem strange in the ears of many Christians, because many Christians have a very, one might say, simple understanding of eternal reward and judgment. Either heaven, which for everyone, if you get in, means extreme bliss, reward in extremis, or hell, and even if you are consigned to hell, just barely, extreme distress, distress in extremis. But the New Testament is actually quite clear that there are degrees of reward and punishment.

Just to take the Gospel of Matthew, statements that Jesus makes in Matthew as an example, you remember in Matthew chapter 5, verses 19 and following, whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. And again, in Matthew chapter 18, verse 5, actually verse 4, whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And again, in chapter 20, verse 26, whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, etc. But actually, even going back beyond that to verse 25, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant. Whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

So, you have a number of statements really in Matthew's gospel, but this is just an example, you have it really throughout the New Testament, of degrees of reward. That is to say, of people who are or will enter the kingdom, but there will be some who will be greater in the kingdom, and some who will be less in the kingdom. But you also have degrees of punishment.

In Matthew chapter 11, Jesus declared in 11:22; I tell you it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven; you shall be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you have been done in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

But I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. So that, even those who experience judgment condemnation at the end, for those people who experience condemnation at the end, there will be degrees of tolerableness. Degrees of tolerableness.

Some will experience more or greater judgment, more severe judgment than others. Now the point really here in this passage is that teachers will be more likely than others to be found guilty at the day of judgment. And teachers who are found guilty at the day of judgment are likely to receive harsher sentence than other sinners who are not teachers.

I would note, though, that the writer includes himself among teachers, for you know that we who teach, again the importance of inflection, first person plural, not you who teach or they who teach, but you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. This really serves to qualify this rather severe statement.

It indicates for one thing that his exhortation does not exclude the office or function of teaching. He does not say he does not wish to be understood as saying, let no one become a teacher or let no one seek to become a teacher. It also indicates that not all teachers will receive condemnation.

Presumably, James would not have entered into the teaching office if he knew that it guaranteed condemnation. It also indicates that James considers himself mature or perfect. As he goes ahead to say in verse two, for we all make many mistakes and if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man able to bridle the whole body also.

This suggests by way of implication that James considers himself mature or perfect. That is to say that he has fulfilled the criteria that he himself sets forth for entering into the teaching office, which is maturity. A perfect man who is able to bridle the whole body also.

That is such perfection and control are possible. Now, here I would note the significance and weight of this warning for most of, for all of, for me certainly, and for most of you who will be watching this video. I have to think that many of you, if not most of you, who watch this video are in full-time Christian service.

Perhaps most of you or many of you are pastors. I just want to remind you that this applies to you because it is manifestly the case that at the heart of pastoral work, according to the New Testament, is teaching. I am of the opinion, which is the opinion of most, although not all, that when Paul talks about the gift of ministry within the church in Ephesians chapter 4, and I remind you of that passage with you, I am sure you are quite well acquainted, 4:11 and following, and his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints that pastors and teachers belong together.

So that, and this is the way you, this is way, this is suggested actually by the punctuation of the RSV, which I think is appropriate. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Not pastors and teachers as separate offices, but really pastors and teachers going together, that at the heart of pastoral work is teaching.

But actually, this kind of teaching is true of all forms of ministry, including counseling or the like. All ministry involves or depends upon the use of speech. Incidentally, let me mention here too that I think this involves not simply oral speech, but also verbal speech.

Increasingly, of course, teaching is being done electronically through typing words onto the computer that go out into, through the worldwide web and so on and so forth. So that speech should not be limited simply to oral communication. It really

has to do with verbal, it has to do really with a verbal communication, the broader sense of the term, both written and oral.

So, the application here may be broader than you think at first. Now he goes ahead and engages in a further substantiation of this. Verses 2 through 12 substantiate both verse 1b, the claim that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness, but also support the exhortation, let not many of you become teachers.

So, the further substantiation of verse 2, the reason for this greater judgment, and thus the further reason why many should not become teachers is found in 3:2. Now we have an element of generalization here in 3:2. He has been talking about teachers, but now he talks about all of us. Note the inclusive scope. For we all make many mistakes, and if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man able to bridle the whole body also.

So, beginning in verse 2, he is no longer talking only about teachers. Although teachers are still ultimately in view, and we must interpret 3:2 through 12 in light of 3:1. Nevertheless, what he says here in 3:2 through 12 is not restricted to teachers but needs to be understood in the context of James' general concern for teachers. On the one hand, it is not restricted to teachers, but on the other hand, it needs to be understood in the context of James' general concern for teachers.

Now actually, within verse 2, we have a particularization. He begins with a general claim, the claim of general susceptibility to mistakes. We all make many mistakes.

And then he moves on to the particular susceptibility to making mistakes with the tongue. Only the mature or the perfect person will make no mistakes with the tongue and will be able to bridle the whole body. Now, when he says we all make many mistakes, actually, this can be more literally translated: we all stumble.

The word is *ptaio*. We all stumble in many ways. Actually, that same Greek word was used in 2:10. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails or stumbles, *ptaio*, in one point, has become guilty of it all.

Now, to stumble then, which, as I say, is used in James 2:10 and other New Testament passages, means falling short of God's will and expectations. It's not really a matter of making mistakes. Falling short of God's will and expectations is really a sin, both a great and small infractions.

And then, of course, he says, for we all stumble. And then, of course, the RSV translation says we all make many mistakes. We all stumble, but the Greek word here is *ptaio*.



It's the adverbial accusative. We all stumble a lot. This really relates, though, especially to the spheres or the types of stumbling.

We all fall short over against God's perfect will in various areas of life. Now, note here, again, the inflection. James continues to use a first-person plural.

We all stumble a lot. This really leads to an attitude of humility and caution over against boasting. Here, he's anticipating what he will say in 3:13 through 18.

Who is wise among you, wise in our standing among you, by his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. And later he will say here, he will also later, of course, once again bring up the whole notion of boasting and the like as well.

Now, as a matter of fact, he will do this in 4:16. As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Maturity or perfection, verse 2b, and that really the word *teleos* is used there, one of the favorite words of Paul.

If anyone stumbles, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. Maturity or perfection involves a recognition of human moral frailty and casting oneself constantly upon the mercy and the help of the Lord. 4.6, but God gives more grace.

Therefore, it says that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And 4.10, humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Now, I actually think, though, that when he says we all stumble often in 3:2, this is somewhat hyperbolic in light of 3.1. What he seems to be saying because otherwise, one would never become a teacher at all, really what he is saying here, I think, in 3:2 is that we are all prone; we are prone to stumble in many ways.

But then he goes ahead and particularizes, he talks about one specific area. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man able to bridle the whole body also. Now, he moves to speak about one area of life, the area of life that is most significant for teachers, the tongue.

Also, falling short in the area of the tongue is more problematic than falling short in various other areas because both of what stands behind falling short in the tongue and what leads to it. Say this on the basis of what James is about to say. Now, the main points that he wishes to make here, especially in verses 6 through 12, are these.

The tongue he begins by making the point that the tongue is the most difficult dimension of life to control. We have this, especially in verses 6 through 12, the most

difficult dimension of life to control. If anyone can control the tongue, the rest is, relatively speaking, a piece of cake.

Now, this is, so we have, as I say, the difficulty of controlling the tongue, and which really links to the difficulty and importance is linked to the tongue's evil and the like. The second point that he wishes to make here is that the tongue is determinative for the whole of life. In large part, the tongue expresses and determines the whole moral life of the person.

The tongue expresses and determines the whole moral life of the person, the whole behavior of the person. The control of the tongue will allow us to control our whole being. Now, this he substantiates in verses 3 and 4. If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies.

Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder, wherever the will of the pilot directs. So, the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a fire is set ablaze by, how great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire.

The experience from horses and ships shows us that by means of controlling the tongue, we can control our entire moral lives, every dimension of our behavior. So he talks here about the difficulty of controlling the tongue, but also in these verses about the importance of controlling the tongue. Now, this necessary control of the tongue demands perfection and demonstrates perfection.

That's the third point that he makes. This necessary control of the tongue demands perfection and demonstrates perfection. Only the perfect, that is to say, whose life revolves, coheres around complete confidence in the complete goodness of God, with what we talked about in earlier segments.

We talked about the meaning of perfection in James there, where he first introduces it in 1:4, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Only a person who is perfect in that sense, in the sense that James describes it in 1:4, whose life is pure and undefiled, without alloy, complete confidence in the complete goodness of God, a life lived out in complete confidence, which is of course faith, in the complete goodness of God. The control of the tongue demands that kind of perfection and demonstrates that kind of perfection.

Only the perfect person is able to control the tongue. In this case, of course, perfection is essential, being whole, involves having all that is necessary to do what is required in this situation, in the situation of controlling the tongue. Here, the perfect person has a developed spiritual character, which allows that person to exercise control over every area of his or her life.

Again, 1:4, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. This person is not led by any impure impulse or desire but is able to bring all impulses and desires under control in order to be entirely obedient to the will of God. So, really, two dimensions of perfection as a comprehensive coherence are brought together in this passage, being free of admixture but also having all that is necessary in a situation.

Comprehensive adequacy. Now, you have two implicit exhortations actually in what he says in verse 2, in the indicative. Sometimes, you have implicit exhortations in indicatives.

The first is to let only the perfect, those who are able to control the tongue, become teachers and let them do so only after they are sure they can control the tongue. That they do control the tongue and that they are sure that they can control the tongue. And the second exhortation is to seek perfection, this kind of perfection or this kind of maturity.

Now, he goes ahead in verses 3 through 12 with more particular substantiation. We talked about the substantiation of verse 2. Now, he actually particularizes, he substantiates in verses 3 through 12, verse 2, but in the process he also expands upon or particularizes the claims that he makes in verses 3 through, in verse 2. He begins here in verses 3 through 5 with the great significance of the tongue. Notice that he uses images of horses, ships, and fires.

Very vivid use of language here. Now, what he says about the horse establishes the main point. So, he says with regard to the horse, verse 3, if we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies.

Here, he establishes the main point, the fundamental point: to control the tongue is to control the whole body. Of course, this relates to the bridal theme. Now, when he goes to the ship, he expands that point.

So, we read about the ships in verse 4. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. Here, he emphasizes the smallness and apparent insignificance of the tongue. If you just look at a great ship, it doesn't appear really that the rudder is what is directing the ship.

Matter of fact, you can't even see the rudder of a ship. It's under the surface of the water. And it's a very small thing in relation to the greatness of the ship.

So, the tongue is small and appears to be insignificant in relation to the whole bodily life of the person. Here, the emphasis is on the contrast between appearance and reality. Other things may appear to be more determinative in behavior, as is the case with great ships, which are driven by strong winds.

Other things may appear to be more determinative in behavior, but in reality, nothing is. Just a side note with regard to historical background, at that time especially, rudders of ships were tongue-shaped. And so, there's a natural connection between rudder and tongue here.

Then, he moves to fire. He emphasizes here the deceptively destructive power or significance of the tongue, as well as the contrast between the smallness of the tongue and the great effects of the tongue. Now, in a sense, what in the course of this way says about fire in verse five, so the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things, how great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire.

Now, I think that in a sense, what he says about fire, the tongue is compared to fire, actually substantiates what he said about the significance of the tongue in guiding the whole moral life of the person. What he suggests here, really in verse five, is that the reason why, or at least one reason why, the tongue is such a small thing and yet being determinative, being so powerful in its influence over the whole moral life of the person is its destructive capacity. It's precisely its destructive, its potential destructive capacity, that gives it its power over the whole moral life of the person.

So, he says in verse five then that the tongue is a little member but boasts of great things. Here, the destruction is described in terms of really the character of the person himself. I say this because of verse six, the tongue is an unrighteous world among our members staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature and set on fire by hell.

Now, we note that this statement immediately precedes the first mention of the tongue's destructive character. What we have here, then, is self-centeredness, self-sufficiency, and delight in the power of destruction. The tongue boasts great things.

And what it boasts really is, and this links by the way to the notion of boasting, but if you have been, in verse 14, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. So that this notion of the boasting of the tongue suggests that the power of the tongue, the destructive power of the tongue, stems from self-centeredness, self-sufficiency, and even delight in the power of destruction. This is the source and ultimate character of the power of the tongue.

Now, in terms of the analysis of the characteristics of the tongue, which we have here in three, and this, by the way, we continue on with three, six, and following. So, you have the great significance of the tongue, and this leads him then to discuss the great difficulty in controlling the tongue in three, six, and 12. He has been talking about the great importance of the tongue, and now he talks about the great difficulty in controlling the tongue.

Incidentally, just one word with regard to going back to just something I should have mentioned. In verse three, if we put bits into the mouths of horses, that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies also. This notion of grit or of bridling horses actually picks up with the language of 1:26.

If anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue but to seize his heart, here James is indicating very explicitly that he is particularizing this very general, brief statement with regard to the tongue in 1:6. So, again, this supports the notion that what we have in chapters two through five involves particularization of these statements in chapter one. But he begins by saying in verse six that further, and this, of course, involves further characteristics, that the tongue is the unrighteous member, an unrighteous world, I should say, an unrighteous world among our members, an unrighteous world among our members staining the whole body, staining the whole body. Now, this language is very significant.

He talks about the tongue as an unrighteous world. Now, he has used world in 1:27. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

And he's going to mention the world again in 4:4. Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members. The tongue, in other words, is the sum total of the evil anti-God impulses found in humankind.

That's the meaning of the world. The evil anti-God impulses found in humankind. The world in James is a structure of the present age devoid of divine control and the finding and placing of security in the structures of the present age devoid of divine control.

James is saying that the tongue represents that evil anti-God impulse in our existence, the unrighteous world among our members. In all our personal experience, the tongue is the one place where that evil anti-God power comes to clearest expression. Now, because of that, he says, by the way, I think this involves causation. Because of that, the result is it stains the whole body.

Now, he's using body, of course, in a Jewish sense, not simply the physical flesh and blood body, but the whole person in that person's bodily existence. The tongue leads to the moral depravity of the person. The kinds of evil impulses that lie just behind speech and which find opportunity in speech so that the act of speech becomes the occasion for these vile influences within us spread like a cancer and engulf the whole person also.

This implies that it leads to the destruction and the breakdown of personality. It consumes our whole personalities. Now, he goes ahead then to say that it is, therefore, also, and this also involves, of course, causation, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature.

This involves both causation and generalization. Because it stains a whole body, it also has a destructive effect beyond the body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, the cycle of nature, generalization. Now, clearly, what he has in mind here, especially on the basis of what he's going to say, especially, say, in verses 9 through 12, and again, when he picks up on this at the beginning of chapter 4, 4:1 and 2, and at the end in chapter 4 verses 11 through 12, when he talks about the cycle of nature here, setting on fire the cycle of nature, he is suggesting that the tongue destroys not only our own personality, our own moral life, and indeed leads to the breakdown of our own personality, but destroys other persons and whole communities, including whole churches and the whole of society.

He returns, James does, to the fire image, setting on fire the cycle of nature. He returns to the fire image to emphasize the utter destruction and ruination. The woes of the world are largely laid at the tongue here.

Now, this is a view of the tongue that is not uniquely related to James. We mentioned before, when we looked at the end of chapter 1, talked about the tongue there, that Jesus himself talks about the significance of the tongue and the power of the tongue, and therefore, carefulness with regard to speech and speech of the tongue. And this kind of thing, but you also have it, for example, in Jesus' Ben Sirach, in the book Ecclesiasticus, where we read, many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not so many as have fallen by the tongue.

Well, is he who is defended from it and has not passed through the venom thereof, nor has been bound in her bands. Now, he goes ahead to say that not only is the tongue and the unrighteous world among our members, but the tongue is actually a kind of microcosm of the world in terms of the evil anti-God impulse, but also that it is demonic. Here, he indicates that there is a transcendent evil power at work in the tongue, set on fire by hell, really, literally, by Gehenna, set on fire by Gehenna, which, of course, involves hell as a place of torment and is linked to, really, to the demonic.

Hell has been prepared for the devil and his angels. This is a way that I'm talking about its demonic character. Now, of course, James is speaking very vividly, using very vivid language here, and what he's really saying is that it is set on fire by a flame from hell, set on fire by a flame from hell.

This points to its source. The source is transcendent, is satanic, and also points to its end, Gehenna, as a place of torment, the place of imprisonment. To experience it is to experience hell itself.

Then, in verses 7 through 8a, he insists that the tongue is humanly uncontrollable, for every kind of beast and bird, reptile, and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind. But by way of contrast, no human being can tame the tongue, noticing exclusive scope. No human being can tame the tongue, a restless evil full of deadly poison.

Now here, of course, you have the contrast between the tongue and animals, which indicates the tongue's uncontrollable character. Notice he says all kinds of animals, inclusive of scope, are being trained and have been trained. This, by the way, says that what he says can be trained uses a present tense.

This is the case not simply before the fall. They are being trained and they have been trained. And here, of course, really you have the notion of irony.

Large creatures outside of ourselves we can tame, but a small organ inside ourselves is far beyond our reach. Large creatures outside of ourselves we can tame and we do tame, but a small organ inside of ourselves is beyond our reach of taming. And that is true for everyone.

No human being, exclusive scope, can claim the tongue. Now, when he says no human being can claim the tongue, he implies that only God can do this. So here also we have an implicit exhortation, an appeal to God in full recognition that only He can help somehow to bring this ravenous beast under control.

Here, incidentally, is one of the passages in the Bible where what we experience in modern life actually reinforces and expands the truth of what the ancient biblical writer is saying. Because the ancient biblical writer was talking when he thought about the taming of the human power to bring creation under control, he thought in terms of the taming of the animals. But note how human technology in the modern age actually makes James' point all the more for him.

As I say, we are able actually to split the atom. We have brought all sorts of aspects of creation under control, under our control, in ways that James could never have even imagined. So how ironic it is that we have such control over the taming and over the processes of nature, but are not able to control a two-inch pad within our own mouths.

This really points to the folly of liberalism and of modernity. Human control of external forces has tended to lead liberal thinkers in the West to think that humans can control themselves. Because we can control the world, we can control ourselves.

But James says this is not so. He says it is a restless evil. A restless evil.

The word here is akatasxeton. This is a favorite word of James. It's a word that he uses in contrast to one and in contrast to perfect.

It is the opposite of unity, of consistency, of wholeness. It is really chaos. A chaotic evil.

A restless evil. He'll use a noun in 3:16. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Ultimately, the demonic character of the tongue is not that it never speaks good, but that it speaks both good and evil at the same time. It represents disorder and chaos, the opposite of God, who is perfect, stable, and consistent.

For James, the chief characteristic of evil is instability and inconsistency. This leads to the reign of disorder, the opposite of God and of God's kingdom. Now, he also says that the tongue is poisonous.

A way of saying that it's deadly. In verse 8c, it is full of deadly poison. Very toxic.

Again, James brings in the theological category of death and all the richness that is implied within it. Note the significance of placement here. Its deadly power is linked to its inconsistency, its restlessness.

And then, that it is inconsistent and contradictory. Here, he picks up on this notion of restlessness and develops it in verses 9 through 12. With it, we bless the Lord and Father, and with it, we curse men who are made in the image of God.

From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so. And then, he substantiates that it ought not to be so by an appeal to God's revelation in nature.

Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives or grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh. Now, note the quantitative selectivity in this description. That is to say, the relative amount of relative space the writer gives to these various characteristics of the tongue.

He gives over here; he gives four verses to talk about this inconsistency and contradictoriness of the tongue. Now, when he says, with it, we bless the Lord and Father, and with it, we curse men made in the image of God, almost certainly, when he talks about blessing here, he's talking about liturgical blessing. And when he talks



about the curse, he's probably talking about a curse that is related to anger, angry, destructive speech.

Two others, 1:19 through 20, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Angry, destructive speech to others, angry, destructive speech about others, 4:11 through 10 through 12. Do not speak evil against one another, brethren.

He who speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law. This, I think, is really an argument against any cursing, but probably implies also evil speaking or any destructive speech, especially on the basis of chapter 4, verses 11 and 12. This has to do really then with the object of speech.

In a worship setting, liturgical blessing. Again, he goes back to this notion of the setting of worship to indicate a real problem of inconsistency between what we say or what we do in worship and how we treat other people, as he has in this scenario in chapter 2, verses 2 through 4. One cannot pretend to bless the person, God, and curse the representative, the representation of that person, a human being. Here, of course, he's going back to the Genesis account and the notion of human beings being created in the likeness of God.

Other human beings are God to us in this sense, even as, according to Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats, other humans are Christ to us. Insofar as you have done it or have not done it unto the least of one of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it or have not done it unto me. We encounter Christ in our dealings with others, especially the poor among us.

We encounter God in other persons. When we curse other human beings, we curse God. What we do to other human beings, we're doing to God because they are the likeness of God.

There is talking about this being presented here in the context of liturgical blessing, really the worship setting. He is one of the great expository preachers, and if you can get a hold of any of his books or listen to any of his recordings, it would be well worth it. One of the great expository preachers of a generation ago was Paul Rees, R-E-E-S.

He was for many years vice president at large for World Vision International. He worked closely with Billy Graham and also with Charles Colson, especially in Colson's later years in prison ministry. He was pastor of the largest church in Minneapolis for many years, a fine expository preacher.

But he mentioned a sermon by another preacher entitled, The First Ten Minutes After the Benediction, which had to do with how people talk immediately after the

blessing of the worship of God in holy service. The kind of gossip, the kind of demeaning of other persons in conversation that takes place among worshipers ten minutes after the benediction. Now, he moves here, talking about the contradiction from the object of speech in verse nine to the source of speech, a contradiction in terms of the source of speech in verses ten through twelve.

From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so, etc. Now, the point here is that both blessing and cursing come from the same source.

And the point is that this is contrary to nature. He says this stands in contrast to what we find in nature. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives or grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

This is contrary to nature and, therefore, is perverse and grotesque. Note the grotesqueness, by the way, of these images. Consistency is woven into the very fabric of the universe, at least as we read nature in light of God's special revelation in Scripture.

And, by the way, this implies, really, that God's will, God's character is expressed in nature and especially in the consistency of nature. So that there is a consistency, and of course this is exactly what you expect, between the revelation of God in Scripture coming to culmination in Jesus Christ and the revelation of God in nature. Between special revelation, use theological categories between special revelation and natural revelation.

I do have to pause here, though, to say that with regard to this implicit appeal to natural revelation here, in my judgment, according to the Scriptures, we read God's revelation in nature rightly only if we interpret nature in light of God's Word. And, of course, that is what James is doing here. Now, 3:12b actually transitions to 3:13 when he says, when he talks about this, 3:12b here.

One speech reveals one's essential character, he's suggesting. One speech reveals one's essential character. When he says, no more can salt water yield fresh, what is yielded in nature reveals the character of that which yields it.

And as I say, this transitions then to verse 13, where he will move now from the tongue to the essential character of the person that lies behind the tongue. And this I think is a decent place to pause here so that when we come back, we can move into 3:13 through 3:18.

This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 24,

James 3:1-12.