

James 3 - Wisdom from above

James now presents us with a conflict between 2 ways of thinking. One is of the flesh and the other is of God. Whilst **ch.3** is full of warnings, **v17-18** contains the antidote. As Paul says in **Gal 5:16**: "Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh".

Jesus Christ is the greatest example of this - the key to this chapter!

v1-12 CONTROL OF THE TONGUE

This subject is discussed briefly in **1:26** in the context of being doers of the word. **James 3:1-12** is an explanation of **1:26**.

v1 Masters: Gk. *teachers*. Ecclesial teachers must live what they believe. Some seek pre-eminence through teaching, for wrong motives: **Mt 23:5-8; 3 John 1:9**. Qualifications of teachers are given in **1 Tim 3:1-13; 2 Tim 2:24-25**. It is a Scriptural principle "to whom much is given, of him shall much be required": **Lk 12:48**.

We: James exhorts himself also. **Greater condemnation:** Leaders in the ecclesia have a serious responsibility, as they may cause some to err or lose their faith: **Mt 18:6; 1 Tim 4:12-16**. Hypocrisy in leaders can lead to disillusionment: **Mt 23:28; Lk 12:1**. James says in **3:17** that wisdom from above is *without hypocrisy*. Influential leaders often cause trouble in ecclesias with smooth words: **Rom 16:17,18; Tit 1:9-2:1; 2 Pet 2:1-2,18; Jude 1:4-16**. A major problem in the 1st century: **1 Tim 1:6-7; 2 Tim 4:3**.

v2 NIV "We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check." We are all sinners: **Rom 3:23; 1 Jn 1:8-10**. This is emphasised by man's inability to control the tongue. Controlling the tongue is a mark of maturity. **Jesus Christ is the ultimate example:** "As a lamb before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth": **Isa 50:4; 53:7; Mt 26:63; Jn 7:46; 1 Pet 2:21-23**.

v2 Bridle: same Gk. word as "bits" in **v3**. Same phrase as in **1:26**.

v3-4 NIV "When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go". These 2 illustrations are given to explain **v2**. These are relevant personally and in ecclesias. A large ecclesia can be guided for good by the sound guidance of a few: **1 Tim 4:12-16**.

v5 Tongue: "Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks": **Lk 6:45**. The serpent's use of the tongue brought about sin: **Gen 3:1-5**. Boasting great things is a major characteristic of the apostasy: **Dan 7:8,11,20,25; 2 Pet 2:18; Rev 13:5**. Large things always start out small! Be alert to the dangers from an early stage!

Colour code: Blue (God & Jesus); Red (sin/devil/judgment of wicked); Green (Kingdom); Orange (important words & phrases); Purple (return of Jews to the land); Yellow (practical exhortation). Prepared for Study Week 2012 - Listen to Live. For a PDF file, go to www.studyweek.net or email acdangerfield@webshield.net.au. Much assistance for this study has been obtained from notes by John Martin, NZ youth conference notes and talks by Carl Parry, John Martin and David Bailey.

CHAPTER 3.

¹ We are not rashly or arrogantly to reprove others: ⁵ but rather to bridle the tongue, a little member, but a powerful instrument of much good and great harm. ¹³ The truly wise described.

MY brethren, ^a be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater ⁸ condemnation.

² For ⁹ in many things we offend all. ^h If any man offend not in word, ^k the same is a ^l perfect man, and able also ^m to bridle the whole body.

³ Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

v5 God hates boasting: **Psa 10:3; 12:2-4**. **Pride is the cause of boasting:** **Prov 8:13; 15:25; 16:5,19; 21:4; Jer 9:23-24**. We speak what is in our minds.

Even though **Jesus** was perfect, he was **the most humble of men**, who never boasted in his own greatness: **Ezek 21:25-27; Mt 11:29; 1 Cor 1:26-30; Phil 2:5-8**. **v6** ESV "How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!" **Fire:** This concept is from **Prov 16:27**. Look at the context in **Prov 16:18-32** for the powerful exhortation. **Key verse:** **Prov 18:21**. **Hell:** Gk. *Gehennah*, where Israel's wicked kings sacrificed: **Jer 7:31; 19:5-6**. Constant burning rubbish dump outside Jerusalem. Used figuratively for judgment: **Mt 5:22; Mk 9:43-48; Lk 12:5**.

v7-8 Beasts tamed: Man can tame the animal but not himself. He becomes more uncontrollable than the fiercest beasts. **Poison:** Serpent's venom: **Gen 3:1-5; Psa 58:4; 140:3; Rom 3:13-14; 2 Cor 11:3-4**. **v9 Unruly evil:** Tongue is also described as a sword and arrows, used by Christ's enemies: **Psa 64:3-4; Prov 12:18**.

v9 Father: One of only 3 refs where God is called "the father" in **James**. James is **appealing to God's character** as motivation for us to become like God - as a father who shows **forgiveness**. This is the lesson of Elijah's life and why James ends his epistle on that note. **Similitude:** Man was made in the **image and likeness** of God: **Gen 1:26; 1 Cor 11:7**. This must have a restraining influence on our speech, especially to our bro/sis's who are in Christ, striving to be Godly: **2 Cor 3:18**. **v10** For us to show the family likeness we cannot be in conflict with God Himself: **Prov 10:31-32; Mt 5:22-24,44; 1 Pet 3:9**.

v11-12 James now gives 3 illustrations from the natural world to show how sin is inconsistent with creation. **Fountain:** God: **Jer 2:13; 17:13**. Christ: **Jn 4:10**. Believers: **Jn 4:14; 7:38**. **Fig tree/vine:** Jesus uses similar illustrations in **Mt 7:16-20; 12:32-37**. **v13-16 EARTHLY WISDOM** **v13 NIV** "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." **Wise:** One who guards his mouth: **Prov 13:1-3**. One who continues in God's ways despite false accusations: **1 Pet 2:20-23**.

⁴ Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member, and ⁶ boasteth great things. Behold, how great ^a matter a little fire kindleth!

⁶ And ⁷ the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that ⁸ it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the ⁹ course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

⁷ For every ⁶ kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of ⁸ mankind:

⁸ But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, ^m full of deadly poison.

⁹ Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, ⁹ which are made after the similitude of God.

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

¹¹ Doth a fountain send forth at the same ³ place sweet water and bitter?

¹² Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

¹³ Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him ² shew out of a good ⁹ conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

¹⁴ But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

¹⁵ This wisdom descendeth not ^d from above, but is earthly, ⁸ sensual, devilish.

¹⁶ For where envying and strife is, there is ⁶ confusion and every evil work.

v13 Wise: Comes from knowing God: **Psa 107:43; Jer 9:12, 23-24**. **Knowledge:** Pre-requisite for wisdom: **Prov 3:13; 4:5-7; 9:10**. **Conversation:** Behaviour, way of life: **1 Pet 1:15,18; 2:12; 3:16; Gal 1:13; Eph 4:22; Heb 13:5-7; Phil 1:27; 1 Tim 4:12**.

v14 Bitter envying / strife: RSV "If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth." Motivated by the flesh: **Prov 14:30; 27:4; 1 Cor 3:3; Gal 5:15,21,26**. **v15 Earthly:** From man: **1 Cor 15:47; Phil 3:18-19**. **Sensual:** Base passions. **Devilish:** Demoniacal, mental instability and insanity like Legion: **Lk 8:30**. This **unclean spirit** is instrumental in bringing about Armageddon: **Rev 16:13-16**. It is **like frogs** because these animals lie in the mud. Frogs indicate a revolutionary spirit. In **Ex 8:8** the plague of frogs resulted in Pharaoh offering freedom and liberty, but it was a false promise. Just like our world today: **2 Pet 2:19**. The 3 lusts are described in **1 Jn 2:16** as **the world**. Frogs are predominantly flesh (*lust of the flesh*), with big eyes (*lust of the eyes*) puffing themselves up (*pride of life*). The results of revolution and uprising are evident in the world today. This spirit is devastating when let loose in the ecclesia. **v16 Confusion:** Vine: "revolution or anarchy". The world is full of anarchy at the time of Christ's return. But here it is in the ecclesia! This is **the end result** of boasting, condemning and envying. It is ugly and God hates it. A serious warning!

¹⁷ But the wisdom that is ^a from above is first pure, then peaceable, ^b gentle, and easy to be intreated, ^c full of mercy and good fruits, ^{2d} without partiality, and ^e without hypocrisy.

¹⁸ And ⁷ the fruit of righteousness is sown ^h in peace of them that make peace.

v17-18 DIVINE WISDOM: What a contrast! The solution to these problems. This is the **perfect character** of **Jesus Christ**. In **v17** is a summary of all of what James is exhorting us so far.

Contrasts: **Pure** (cp. defiling **v6**); **Peaceable** (cp. strife **v14**); **Gentle** (cp. hurtful, destructive **v6,8**); **Easy to be entreated** (cp. untamable, unruly, proud **v8**); **mercy** (cp. cursing **v9**); **good fruits** (cp. evil work **v16**); **without division** (cp. blessing and cursing **v10**); **without hypocrisy** (cp. sweet, bitter **v11**).

Pure: Uncontaminated, "pure in heart" **Mt 5:8-9**. God's word purifies us: **Jn 17:19; 2 Cor 7:1; Jas 4:8; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 3:3**. **Peaceable:** The opposite to the contention of **3:14-16**. Peace cannot come without purity 1st: **Isa 32:17; Heb 7:2**. "Blessed are the peacemakers": **Matt 5:9** **Gentle:** **Phil 4:5; Tit 3:2; 2 Cor 10:1; 1 Thess 2:7; 2 Tim 2:24**. **Easy to be intreated:** Persuadable, "open to reason" RSV. **Mercy:** An outworking to others of God's mercy to us: **Eph 2:4; Tit 3:5; Mt 9:13; 23:23; Lk 10:36-37; Jas 2:12-13**. **Good fruits:** Good soil, roots, plant: **Mt 13:3-8; Jn 15:4-5; Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10; Jas 2:11-12**. **Without partiality:** without division, bias or prejudice. No respecter of persons: **2:3-9**. **Without hypocrisy:** Not playing acting: **Psa 55:21; Isa 32:6; Mt 23:3,28; Lk 12:1-2; 1 Jn 3:18**.

v18 Fruit of Righteousness: Fruit the end of a process: **Heb 12:11**. We can cultivate the soil and sow the seed but God gives the increase: **1 Cor 3:6; 2 Cor 9:6-10**. Known by their fruits: **Matt 7:16**. **Sown in peace:** **Prov 11:18; Gal 6:7**. See notes on **1:17**.