

James 26-08-30a

Greetings. Welcome to Sunday Morning Services here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 30th of August 2026.

We're in the book of James chapter 3. We'll ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and investigation of his word and we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to spend this time together to be encouraged and built up through fellowship and mutual intercession and we're grateful that our family is centered in your word, in the presence and power of your spirit, and in the work and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for him.

We appreciate his focus and his faithfulness and his central emphasis on your will in the exemplary life that he led, recorded for us in the gospels and explained to us in the epistles and the culmination of which is found in the revelation. We are endeavoring to represent him on this earth as his body and we pray that as we look at this portion of your word this morning that this inspired scripture will contribute to that goal. We pray that in all things our Savior will be glorified.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. James has done a wonderful job of introducing our need, which is a need for wisdom, in chapter one.

This is what sustains us through testing and pressure, hardship, adversity, oppression, just the friction of life in various areas. The wisdom that comes from above is what God grants us in his grace. Because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are qualified to receive this supernatural enablement.

So in chapter one, we know that the testing of our faith produces patience and we are tested in many different areas. All of these areas require wisdom from God. He went on in chapter one to remind us of the perspective we should have when we undergo trials and to understand the difference between the negative influence of our own nature and the positive influence that God provides through the wisdom that is from above.

That is, in a nutshell, the introduction to this relatively short letter. We are here, we are vexed, we are set about with many pressures and trials that want to draw us into the world. This introduction is important to understanding chapter three.

Context enables us to make sense out of what might otherwise be inscrutable or in some cases appear to be contradictory or facile, a simple truism that we can think of many exceptions. But context tells us where this information is aimed. So here we are, as we sit with our Bibles before us, with this section of God's word at the focus of our attention, if we stop and remember who we are and what surrounds us by way of circumstance, we know that there is a lot of pressure.

Pressure to get things done, pressure to not have a bad attitude when things don't go the way we wish they would, our physical bodies don't hold up the way we thought they should or wish they

would. And it's tiring, it's challenging, it is one of our primary tasks to stay on an even keel, to remember who we are and why we're here, and to avail ourselves of God's provision instead of living life the way ordinary, unfaithful, uninterested people do. We ought to be different.

This wisdom that is from above returns again and again, and it should condition first of all how we think, then how we speak, ultimately how we act. And our actions ought to reflect those works that stem from our faith that we've seen in the last couple of sessions. Faith, acknowledging that God is there, Christ is our Savior, the future kingdoms are before us, we can acknowledge all of that, we can believe it, we can affirm it, but do we plow it back into our daily activity? This is of course a common theme in so much of the scripture that we study.

It was in full view in the pastoral epistles, 1st Timothy, Titus, 2nd Timothy. It has been in Paul's mind throughout the letters that he wrote that we have studied. It was in the forefront of the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Before the church age ever came into being, the Lord Jesus was reminding His audience with timeless truth that it is God's Word, God's wisdom, God's truth that is the focus. So we have to remember this when we come to chapter 3. Chapter 1, we've all got problems, God's wisdom is available, ask for it, He will grant it. Chapter 2, when that wisdom comes into our soul, it ought to work itself out in terms of discipline in our conversation and inspiration in our actions.

We come to chapter 3, 1st Timothy, my brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a mature man, a complete man, a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Then in verse 3, it says, indeed, there's a text note there. There's a bit of a scramble in the Greek here. And without going into that, I will just say that I think when the dust settles, the word that should be here is when.

It's difficult to know, but when works well. You can leave what's there. It's not super important, but when we put bits in horses mouths that they may obey us, we turn their whole body.

You can just leave out the word and there. When we put bits in horses mouths that they may obey us, we turn their whole body. Look also at ships.

Although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles.

If you think about this for very long, the analogies begin to raise questions. I get that we control a horse with a bit and bridle. I understand rudders and ships, but our tongue, in what way does our tongue determine how our body acts? I don't say right arm, reach out, right hand, grab that

doorknob and twist.

I don't control my body with my tongue. We could think metaphorically and say, well, what comes out in my conversation reflects my attitudes and that determines what I do. And so there is a representative element that is true.

However, context, context, context. What is the context for this whole line of discussion, this whole line of argument? How does it begin? What does verse one say? My brothers, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. Remembering that James is quite early, very early after Pentecost, before the Gentiles, before the Jerusalem council.

James has not yet been martyred. These are early days. And so there is this gradual change, I would say evolution, if I use the word carefully, from the synagogue meeting to the church meeting, from the synagogue, we saw in the last chapter, to the ecclesia, the church.

But teachers function in this group setting. That's clear. He says, be careful about very many becoming teachers.

There is stricter judgment. Why? Why would there be stricter judgment on a teacher? This is a sobering principle for anyone who begins to suspect that this is what God wants them to do. You say, wow, you know, double, double discipline here.

Not sure that's a direction I really want to go. Why? Why are teachers subject to stricter judgment? It's pretty obvious. You are affecting others with what you present.

You need great caution, need confidence that what you are presenting is from the word of God. This is why I think verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book study is the most constructive way to study scripture. That's the way it was given to us.

And if you stay in the scripture and focus on the word, that's where the power is. This is what the Holy Spirit interprets for us, clarifies for us, reminds us of, inspires us with, guides us using this light from the word of God. This is why we are a Bible church.

I don't want to get focused on denominational politics or national influence. We have our hands full understanding, remembering, and applying the word of God. When we ask for wisdom and God grants it, it generally is going to come through his word in the presence and power of his spirit to lead us into all truth.

So where do we get this truth? God has appointed apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers for these communication functions. Some of them have functioned and fulfilled their office and we don't need apostles anymore. We don't really need prophets anymore.

Pastors and teachers still a functional gift. Don't have too many, James says. Why? They receive

a stricter judgment.

Their responsibility is great because if they're not careful, this small member can redirect the entire body. Do you see now why we talk about the rudder and the ship or the bit and the horse? A small influence, small in size, in my view, small in importance in many ways, can have an effect on large things. A small fire can set a big forest on fire.

The emphasis here is on teachers, pastors and teachers in the church. Because this man, if he does not stumble in word, we all stumble in many things. And notice James says we.

He's an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and he says we stumble because we all do. None of us is perfect in the moral righteousness sense. By the standard of the word of God, we all stumble we're trying to walk, we catch our toe, we trip.

It's not a perfect, graceful, elegant, admirable walk. We trip and stumble and especially when the ground is uneven. That's what he was talking about in chapter one and even in chapter two.

We have to be careful. We have to watch where we're going. Watch our steps.

If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a mature man. Not perfect, but mature. What is the context for not stumbling in word? This is rightly dividing the word of truth.

This is a teacher who is the tongue which guides the whole rest of the body. And this understanding helps us parse some of what is said as the argument unfolds. We put bits in horses mouths that they may obey us and we turn their whole body.

Which is more important by the way, the horse or the bit? The bit is a means of guidance, but what you really want is to go somewhere or do something with the horse. Pull a buggy. The bit isn't what counts.

It's what the horse does that counts. The bit is a means to an end. Same thing with ships.

Look at ships, verse four. They are large and are driven by fierce winds. All of us suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and unforeseen circumstance and the suffering and the kinds of afflictions that can ruin us in terms of hope, in terms of practice of our faith, in terms of expressing love.

Circumstance can waylay us, distract us, deflect us, deceive us. We want the ship to arrive with its cargo. The reason people have ships is to get out on the sea and mine its resources.

Fishing was well in view. James and John were fishermen, as were Simon and Andrew. A lot of time spent by the Sea of Galilee.

So we understand ships and what their purpose is. But the ship needs a rudder to keep it on course. A rudder without a ship is pretty useless.

So is a ship without a trustworthy rudder. So the emphasis here is the trustworthiness of communication that is influential. Driven by fierce winds, verse four, these ships are turned by a very small water wherever the pilot desires.

Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles. This boasting turn, boasting is most of the time a negative.

Paul says, I will boast in your faith when he's talking to certain churches. But boasting of self is generally a sign of arrogance and misdirected attention, focusing on self. It's a form of subjectivity.

But what's the idea here? One of the ways you can identify the untamed, unruly, undisciplined tongue is that it makes much of itself. James is warning the group about teachers. You shouldn't be flitting like a bee from flower to flower to flower and sampling a great many, not many teachers.

Find a few that aren't steering the ship into the shoals, that aren't setting the forest on fire, that aren't yanking a horse into the briars or over a cliff. You have to evaluate teachers, evaluate the tongue and its effect on the body. If the body winds up going astray, what would be examples of local churches going astray? You can get politically involved and make the church an arm of political influence or political projects.

We need to get our favorite candidate elected. We've, as a church, are going to go try to push this issue across the finish line and have a law changed or get somebody out of office and doing it as a group. The purpose of the group, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with community interest and activity.

There's nothing wrong with a lot of projects. There are good projects and bad projects. This is looking at the body of believers, the local assembly, being guided into wrong things by a tongue, by the teacher, by the pastor.

Thus, the initial exhortation, let not many of you become teachers. There's greater judgment because when a teacher messes up, the whole ship can hit the rocks. The whole horse can go into the ditch.

The entire forest can burn down. So we pray for our pastors and our teachers. We evaluate our pastors and teachers.

And if we find that we are not being led into the word of God, focusing on the plan and purpose of God in our lives, the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, His incredible work in both His life and His death, the plan of God as it spans the centuries, Israel, the church, the millennial kingdom of the Son, the eternal kingdom of the Father. If we are not constantly looking at those things, looking

unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and who is now seated at the right hand of the Father. If the assembly in the church begins to turn its attention elsewhere, in the same way that subjectivity, eyes on self, eyes on people, and eyes on circumstances are bad for an individual, it's equally bad, if not worse, for a group.

Because there is a group pull. There is a group influence. And if part of the group begins to go down a road, it can be infectious.

Look at the screaming fans of the Beatles back in the early 1960s. This wasn't each individual person, largely teenage girls, somehow becoming so infatuated with John, Paul, George, and Ringo that they couldn't think straight. This happened in groups which became mobs and became unthinking and intensely emotional in this mania that occurred.

Some of us remember it. That's what groups can do. There is mob violence.

There's mob rule. This is what happens on the internet today. If you spend too much time on the internet listening to too many different influencers, quote unquote, these are tongues.

And if they are not mature, if they're not grounded and centered in God's Word, they can lead large groups of people astray, deceive them, motivate them in bad directions. All kinds of bad things happen when something starts trending on the internet that isn't true. False rumors.

There are examples of this, large and small. I will give you an innocuous example. In Vietnam, there are internet savvy individuals who post rumors.

Dolly Parton passed away recently, and there is a set of reports on the internet that she sued one of the news networks and David Muir and or The View and one of the ladies on there, Joy Behar. Long articles with details about Dolly Parton going on those shows, being insulted, getting infuriated, and suing them for \$50 million. It is completely fabricated.

Hundreds of thousands of people have believed these stories, and there's not an ounce of truth. She never went on either one of those programs, was never insulted by either one of those or any other figures on them, and never launched a \$50 million lawsuit. So why do they perpetrate these falsehoods? It shows up in search results.

If you want to try this as an experiment, as an illustration of the principle that is in the Word of God, search Dolly Parton lawsuit and watch what comes up in the top of your search results. Half or more of those results are complete bogosities, but so many people have repeated them that the algorithms treat them as true. This is also an illustration of the danger of believing the internet in general or AI in particular.

We have to be cautious. We should be people of truth. The completely reliable, never failing source of truth is the Word of God.

Should it matter to me if somebody sued somebody at some time? I have been distracted by a falsehood. I have believed a lie, and entities in Vietnam get hits and clicks on their websites, on their followers and such. Ultimately, there is monetization involved because there's ads, and all of this ends up being money-driven.

These alleged improprieties and such sell. It captures the interest of people. Our interest as believers and as a fellowship of believers should be centered on the truth.

We will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. It is the law of liberty. There are so many ties between James and the Lord Jesus that it becomes increasingly clear that he sat daily under Jesus' teaching and, like his brother John, absorbed it and is reflecting it as God uses him to present these truths.

So think about this now in the corporate sense. It's introduced in the context, not as, you really need to be careful with your tongue. We know this already.

There are replete proverbs and examples in the Old Testament of people who let their mouth get away with them. Jephthah comes to mind. This is talking about the group.

So, my brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

There's a double entendre here. Someone who, any one of us that develops self-discipline in the speaking arena, if we learn to suppress our impulse to say what we shouldn't say, to end up wishing that the words could come back, that's a sign of maturity. Little kids say the first thing that comes into their mind, famously so.

There was a gentleman named Art Linkletter that had an entire TV program back in the 60s about the unfettered things that little children would say in public. If we bridle our tongue, as a general rule, we have the self-discipline to control many other things. Bad habits, excesses in our activities, or our eating, or our exercise, or whatever it may be.

We lead a balanced, productive, and God-glorifying life because self-discipline, self-control is at the other end of the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Love is at one end, self-control is at the other, and everything else is in between. True principle.

But in this context, it expands to cover the body of Christ, the local assembly of believers, that's us as a group. The Holy Spirit, through James, is telling us to be careful. How are we influenced both individually and collectively? So, if a group is careful and doesn't stumble in the Word, doesn't start making issues out of things that aren't the Word of God, that aren't God's focus and God's purpose and God's will for us, that's a mature man, i.e. a mature group, able to bridle, able

to steer and direct the whole body together, unified, not divided, not scattered, not misled, not subjective, because of focus on communication, the Word, both individually and collectively.

We put bits in the horse's mouth, they turn the whole horse, ships, the rudder. Even so, verse 5, the tongue is a little member. Remember, although we're talking about the influence of what is spoken, it is the content of the teaching that is at issue.

The tongue itself is a little piece of the body, and you don't normally even see it. Hopefully, people aren't sticking their tongues out at each other. The tongue is a little member, but can boast great things.

Remember, this is the style of Proverbs. James is very much in an Old Testament mode of communication, and so he will say a thing which is aphoristic. It's not true in every case, under any condition.

It is true in its context. The unbridled tongue will boast great things. Unbridled pastors will self-promote.

They'll be making an issue of themselves instead of the focus of their gift, which is to bring to the forefront and bring to people's attention the promises and principles and doctrines of the Word of God. A gathering of believers should result in people coming away, not thinking about the communicator, but thinking about what was communicated, chewing on fresh insights, new understandings, review of old, timeless, and important truths, a fresh appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. People who come away shouldn't be dazzled by personality or personal charisma or sense of humor or quirks or whatever else it may be.

It's the tongue. It's not the literal tongue. It's what the tongue brings out.

It's the words that come forth that make the tongue important. It's a small member. But notice, it boasts great things.

And if it starts boasting great things, they better be, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. If you want to celebrate, celebrate God's grace, God's provision, God's plan and purpose, God's spirit, God's Word, God's Son. So what is it boasting of? Well, if you're setting a big forest on fire with it, it's not doing its job.

And this goes all the way back to chapter one. You remember that this was introduced in verse 19. Every man should be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath, because the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

And this fire that is kindled in the forest is usually representative of people getting angry, getting indignant, getting their back up, reacting to things that are presented in the news, something the government does or someone in the government or someone overseas, and getting wrapped up in current events and emotionally responding. Instead of trying to set things in the perspective of

the Word of God, you have this anger reaction. So you come to verse 26 of chapter one.

If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, his religion is useless. That's the individual. Now we're looking at the same principle in a group.

You will notice that there are prominent churches whose pastors will speak on national programs. And what that pastor says winds up characterizing or representing the entire group. If he gets excessively political, if he starts opinionating, he reflects on the entire group.

It can be divisive. It shifts attention to the wrong things. So there shouldn't be many teachers, and the ones that are there need to be characterized by discipline in what they communicate, focus in what they communicate.

So you pick up in verse six. The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. Not every tongue in every circumstance is a world of iniquity.

What kind of tongue is being spoken of in this context? This is the boasting tongue. This is the one that sets the forest on fire. There have been controversial denominational leaders.

Often they are pastors as well as leaders in their denomination. And they bring discredit to the name of Christ by raising issues, by talking in great swelling words, and then failing personally on television, in television ministries where they are the issue. And so when they sue up, the whole world knows it, and it reflects badly because they are not practicing the principles of the word of God, but they are considered representatives by the world.

This makes it that much more difficult for people to identify what is genuine Christianity, what is genuine biblical truth, what the Lord Jesus really has done, and who He is as Savior, and ultimately God the Father and His plan and purpose. All of that gets set aside, and the distraction of this tongue that is boasting great things, that tongue can be a world of iniquity. It is so said among our members that it defiles the whole body when it malfunctions.

You can see the context is so important here. The tongue does not always defile the entire body, but it can. It does not always represent great iniquity, but it can.

It does not always set a forest on fire, but it can. So this is a particular set of circumstances that require caution. So what do we take away from this? As we close our first session, we have wonderful access to the teaching, to the interpretation, to the explanation of the word of God in this day.

There are scores of sources of teaching, of viewpoint. We prayerfully seek out, all of us, seek out sources of God's wisdom that are reliable. They will be characterized by a lack of self-promotion, by focus on the word of God, and getting out of the way of the word of God, and letting the word

of God be the issue.

We will come away, having been exposed to these tongues, to these teachers, a relatively few of them, with a greater appreciation for Jesus Christ, a greater love for the Heavenly Father, a greater appreciation for the overarching plan and purpose that began in Genesis and culminates in Revelation, and that will steady us. It will stabilize us. It will give us self-discipline.

Exposing ourselves to the disciplined and effective communication of God's word will result in us living effective and disciplined lives, both individually and as a in our conversation, in our attitudes. We will bring our whole body into submission, in the same way that the body of Christ should be in submission to its head, who is Jesus Christ himself, and the word that he has given us in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to guide us, to keep us on the narrow road headed to the straight gate. So the fascinating thing about James chapter 3 is it's a two-edged sword.

One side is the application for us individually. The other is to look for association with fellow believers, local assembly, or an assembly in whatever localized form it pertains, such as ours, that reflects discipline, caution in what is said, and watchfulness in the effect. If there starts being too much heat, there's liable to be a fire.

This is in our personal communications with believers in our periphery. So we take to heart not only the individual need to be disciplined and to be aware of what our tongue is doing, but also in whatever group setting we find ourselves. And in this day and age, it goes beyond a mere group that meets locally for worship.

It is any believers with whom we have frequent contact. That's our group. And what characterizes that fellowship, that conversation, that association? Is it discipline? Is it grace and peace and truth? Or is it stirring the pot, fanning the flames, focusing too much in this world, ending up in subjectivity? If we're mature, we're centered and focused.

It's the fruit of the Spirit from beginning to end, love, self-control. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll move forward in chapter three.

We're making good progress in this book, and we will be finishing it in the not too distant future.