James 3. The Tongue and its Control.

By Charles Feinberg

Announcer:

The Bible Institute of Los Angeles Inc., half century old Christian Training Center of the West, presents Verse by Verse with Dr. Louis T. Talbot, Biola Chancellor and one of America's great evangelical leaders. Now once again your radio Bible teacher Dr. Louis T. Talbot. This week in the absence of Dr. Louis T. Talbot, Biola Chancellor, we take pleasure in presenting Dr. Charles L. Feinberg, director of Talbot Theological Seminary and Professor of Old Testament. Dr. Feinberg is the distinguished author, Bible conference speaker, and radio minister. And now, Dr. Feinberg.

Charles Feinberg:

We're happy to greet you again today, friends, around the word of God on this broadcast exposition of the word of God. This series on the Epistle of James We've come to the third chapter of the Epistle of James and those of you that have your Bibles with you, we trust you will open to that epistle immediately after the Epistle to the Hebrews and we shall be looking at the third chapter, a very important chapter, right in the middle, in the heart, of the Epistle of five chapters. This third chapter is a very important one. Shall we look to God in prayer? Our Father in heaven how we thank that all of our life in Christ is of real moment to thee and thou art concerned about every single feature of our life, of our thinking, of our doing. All of our service, testimony, and witness for thee we thank thee that thou has redeemed us at Infinite cost. The gift of thy beloved son the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we pray that as we look into the word, we may
first of all be sure that we are properly related to thy Holy Spirit, that our lives are not harboring known and unconfessed and unforsaken sin, but that with clean hands and clean hearts made so by the we may be approaching thy word that thou mayest teach us of the things that are near and dear to thy heart. Granted our father to all in radio land, we pray in Jesus' blessed name, amen.

Turning then, friends to the third chapter of the Epistle of James. This wonderful chapter as the whole book is on a very very timely theme. The tongue, the tongue. This is the most detailed and pointed chapter in the Bible on the tongue and its control. Now nothing could be more practical in all the realm of the Christian life. There are very few members of our body that get us into more trouble and more difficulty or can be a source of more blessing than the tongue. So this eminently practical epistle speaks about the tongue.

Now the tongue of the believer and now there are several other mentions of the tongue in the Epistle if you'd like to take them down there, in the first chapter, the nineteenth verse read, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath". Slow to speak. Then verse 26 of the first chapter, "If any man think of himself to be religious while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, his man's religion is vain". In the second chapter and the Twelfth verse, we have another word concerning the tongue. Chapter 2:12, "so speak ye, and so do as men that are judged by a law of liberty". The matter of speaking again. So the first chapter has two references on the tongue. The second chapter, the twelfth verse, the third chapter, the ninth verse, actually the whole chapter is on it. Verse 9, "Therewith bless we the Lord and Father, therewith curse we men who are made after the likeness of God". And then in verse 16, "for where jealousy and faction are there is confusion and every vile deed". Then the fourth chapter and the eleventh verse, "Speak not one against another brother. He that speaketh of against the brother or judges his brother speaketh against the law and judges the law but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a
doer of the law, but a judge. Then in the fifth chapter, the ninth verse, "Murmur not brethren one against another that you be not judged. Behold the judge standeth before the doors and verst well but above all things my brethren, swear not neither by the heavens nor by the earth nor by any other old. But let your yay be yay and your nay nay that ye fall not under judgment". So we have in these several references about a better than a half a dozen references in the Epistle, mentions of the tongue. But as we've just indicated, the most detailed and most minute chapter in the Bible on the tongue and its control, the different features of it, its many advantages, the many difficulties that arise from it, the blessings that can come from it, and the harm that can come from it as well. All these features are here in the third chapter of the Epistle of James. The chapter easily divides itself, the first two verses are speaking of the necessity of control. "Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment. For in many things we all stumble. If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man able to bridle the whole body also". "Be not many of you teachers", now that temptation in speaking too much was that they would want to set themselves up as teachers of others, instructors of others, guides to bring others supposedly into a deeper knowledge of truth than they had at the time.

That's one of the temptations in speaking too much. But he warns them, "be not many of you teachers". We're all prone to fail, so teaching others and failing ourselves increases our condemnation. Just as the apostle Paul indicates in the epistle to the Romans, you remember at the beginning of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans he has a word to say wherefore, "thou art without excuse all man whosoever thou art the judges. For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself for thou the judges dost practice the same things", and he goes on to say in that same second chapter and the twenty first verse of Romans, "thou therefore that teachest another teachest thou not thyself?" We're all prone, as I say, to fail so if we teach others
and fail in our own lives, we certainly increase our condemnation. Now there is the gift of teaching. But James is speaking against the assumption of this office on one's own initiative. One takes it purely on his own and the scripture says there is heavier greater judgment for such a one.

Some folk are wholly unaware that the Bible does speak of degrees of punishment and degrees of reward. In Luke 12:42-48. We read that a servant who knew little will be beaten with a few stripes but one who has known much, who's had much entrusted to him, who's had a great deal of honor or a great deal of privilege given to him, much more will be required of him. Verse 2 tells us, "For in many things we all stumble. If any stumbleth not in word, the same as a perfect man able to bridle the whole body also". The responsibility that comes with knowledge is being underlined. Many folk want knowledge. They are not always clear that more knowledge, the more we know of God's will, the greater the responsibility is to do it. And I like the definition that Dr. W. H. Griffith Thomas gave years ago of responsibility. It is our response, God's response, to God's ability. Our response to God's ability is the best way for a Christian is to spell, to define, to understand responsibility. Our response to God's ability. Now in the 39 psalm in the first verse we are told about this matter of sinning with the tongue. I said I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue. I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me. And so we have if any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man able to bridle the whole body also. Even Moses, the meekest of man fail in this particular think of it when God called him there in the third chapter of exodus. It was a most difficult thing to get Moses to swerve one step toward the wonderful position God had in mind for Moses. He would not take it. He said I am of slow speech, I have no ability along this line, I am not eloquent, I have not been eloquent before this, and certainly I haven't gotten any more eloquent since I've been talking to thee. I'm not gaining in that matter by the moment. I just will not go. And yet Moses became so
fluent in speech, and at the wrong time, we're sorry to say, that scripture indicates he spake unadvisedly with his lips so that God had to tell him that he could not go because he smote the rock and did not honor God before the people. Neither he nor Aaron could enter in to the Holy Land. Even Moses then, the meekest of men, failed in this particular. He failed in the matter of the tongue and if we read numbers the twelfth chapter correctly when Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses because of the wife that he took, we read that Moses answered not a word in his own defense. He made as though he did not hear the whole contention. But the scripture goes on to say very carefully that God hearkened and took note of the accusation and condemnation of both Aaron and Miriam. Even then he didn't speak unadvisedly with his lips. But when it came to a time of failure, he failed right there. If he were going to have failure in his life, strangely enough, it was in this very particular where Moses thought he had no competence at all, where he couldn't speak. Now the perfect example, as always, is our Lord Jesus Christ. There was no gall found in his mouth. When he was before his accusers he opened not his mouth. He knew always the absolute control of the tongue of speaking. He knew it must be employed for the glory of God. It cannot be used for ourselves. It must not be used in self-vindication and condemnation of others. Washington Irving said once, "a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows sharper with constant use", and how true that is. Justin said by examining the tongue of a patient, physicians find out the diseases of the body and philosophers, the diseases of the mind. The mo-, the most ferocious monster, we can well believe, the most ferocious monster in the world has his den just behind the teeth. Now the author of that's unknown but it certainly is a splendid and true statement that the most ferocious monster in all the world has his den, his lurking place, his lair just behind the teeth. What he said Give not thy tongue too great liberty, lest it take thee prisoner. The great Joseph Parker, the preacher of England, said, "Never throw
mud. You may miss your mark. But you must have dirty hands". And someone as well said, "When you speak, when men speak ill of you, live so that nobody will believe them". When men speak ill of you live so that nobody will believe them. There's a necessity for control I believe everyone will concede that. That we must be careful that we do not heap to ourselves greater condemnation in seeking to teach others, to impart to others, that which we do not have in ourselves and if any stumbles not in word, he's the perfect man. Who is he? He's able to bridle the whole body also.

Now the nature of the control is in the next important words, in the next ten verses. Verses 3-12, we have the nature of the control, the necessity for control, verses one and two, the nature of the control, verses 3-12. "Now if we put the horses' bridles into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn about their whole body also. Behold the ships also though they are so great and are driven by rough winds are yet turned about by a very small rudder whither the impulse of the steersman willeth. So the tongue also is a little number and boasteth great things. Behold how much wood is kindled by how small a fire and the tongue is of fire. The world of iniquity among our members is the tongue which defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the will of nature and is set on fire by hell. That is Gahanna for every kind of beasts and birds of creepy things and things in the sea is tamed and hath been tamed by mankind. But the tongue can no man tame. It's a restless evil. It's full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we the Lord and Father and therewith curse we men who are made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing". My brethren these things art not so to be. Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter? Can a fig tree, my brethren yield olives or a vine figs? Neither can salt water yield sweet. Now the nature of the control is beautifully given in a number of ramifications. You may read literature all you will but you'll never find anything so
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solidly placed, so masterfully given as the Spirit of God has given the nature of the control of the tongue here to the Apostle James in his Epistle in chapter 3:3-12. In verse 3 we have it in the animal world. How do we have the tongue control? How do we control animals in the animal world? The three comparisons, first of all with the tongue. Three comparisons with the tongue on the part of the bit, verse 3. On the part of the rudder verse 4, and fire in verse 6. Now in the animal world, how do we accomplish how do we bring about control? Well, with horses we put a bridle in their mouths. We control them. There is a control of an animal that is as potent as a horse. We have tremendous engines now, great mechanical power that is unleashed and it seems as though our scientists are able to give us newer and greater engines all the time, but they are all according to HP. That's horse power. A horse is a tremendously powerful animal. Now, we put bridles in the horses so that they may obey us. And with that we turn about their whole body. Think of it, it's in the mouth the method of controlling a horse, as great an animal as that is, we control it with a bridle. Very interesting, control it with the bit. That in verse 4 for we have it in the mechanical world. How does control come about? Well with the ship they're great, they're driven by rough winds, and yet interestingly enough the control, in this case, again, is with a very small instrument. A very small rudder. Yet are they turned about by a very small rudder. You'd think it was impossible that a little bit of a mechanical device like that could turn about what many call today, a city on water. But that's true, turned about by a very small rudder, wither the impulse of the steersman will it. Wherever his desire is he can do that. Interesting that in the animal world there is a means of control. This is being compared with the tongue. Now, you remember, adding the fourth verse, that which is in the mechanical world, and now in the human realm in verses 5-12, so the tongue, the tongue is being compared to the bit and to the rudder. And later on it will be compared of course to the fire in verse 6. So the tongue also is a little
member. It has that in common with a bridle for horses and with a rudder for a ship. It's a little member and boasteth great things you marvel sometimes when you look at the tongue though it is a small member of the body, not as large as the hand for instance, certainly not as large as the foot, not as large as the whole face, but that little member can be so boasting and in the end time, you'll remember, in the book of Daniel, in the book of Revelation we find out from the word of God just exactly how boastful the ungodly the beast and the antichrist can be and the end time they speak great blasphemies against God, boasteth great things. How much wood is kindled by how small a fire? The description then of the tongue is that it's small. It's not only small but it's boasting. In direct contrast to its size is its many, many large protestations and its boastings. And then verse 6 tells us it's fiery. The tongue is a fire the whirl of iniquity among our members is the tongue. Think of it, a world of iniquity. And you just read the newspapers, read the things that have been said in recent hours, in recent days, and months, even years, and in the history of man. What a world of sin among our members is the tongue, the things that have been said. The things that have been stated against God, the things that have been said against man. How defiling is the tongue? Not only fiery, but defiling. The scripture says it defiles the whole body. How it defiles, how we get a good impression of an individual and then in an off guard moment, that individual unleashes his tongue. He lets go all the venom as the poison of asps is under their lips.

We read in the third chapter of the book of Romans, oh what defiling element it is, we can no longer see the individual in the same light. He has defiled the whole picture of his being. And then verses, and the scripture says, is set on fire. It sets on fire the wheel of nature. It can just burn up everything around about us and it sets on fire- it is set on fire by hell. It can be motivated more easily by Satan seemingly than any other part of our body and it's contrasted with animal life for every kind of beast, in verse 7, and birds, creeping things, things in the sea is tamed. You
go to our great zoos, you go to our great aquariums, our great centers of marine life in different parts of our country and you'll find that there are creeping things in the sea.

You go to our zoos and you find beasts and birds tamed, they've been tamed by mankind. But, Scripture says in verse 8 that the tongue can no man tame. It's a restless evil, that's the sixth part of this description. It's small, it's boasting, it's fiery, it's defiling, it's untamed by man, it's a restless evil. Yes, and it's a deadly poison, full of deadly poison. And with that tongue all the scandal that can be sent abroad, the flame of rumor, character assassination. Oh I'm sorry to say that Christians are often just as guilty of that as unbelievers are. It's full of deadly poison. Well you say wait a minute, doesn't that eighth verse say no man can tame it? Well we'd better throw it up as a useless job. It's true. No man can tame it but God is greater than man. And if we put it under God's control, he can certainly take care of this restless evil. This thing untamed by man, this which is a deadly poisoning. And then there is the issue of the mixed results that come from the tongue in verses 9-12. Blessing and cursing therewith blessed with the Lord and Father and how comely that is. How proper that is, man should be blessing God. And yet think of it, we turn right around and with that same tongue we cursed men, men who are made after the likeness of God. That shouldn't be, blessing and cursing. Why out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter? There is another mixture, sweet water and bitter, and a fig tree and an olive tree. Can a fig tree yield olives or a vine figs? A fig tree and a vine tree are opposite. Fig tree and an olive tree are not the same and does salt water yield sweet? Neither can salt water yield sweet. Salt water and sweet are separate things. My, that would be a great boon to our land and to a number of our states. If salt water could be made to yield sweet water, the great deal of the water problem of our country would be solved. It would be a wonderful boon.
But you don't get salt water just naturally and normally, salt water does not yield sweet. There we have the tongue. The wide scope of power in the tongue for evil. It sets on fire the whole wheel of nature, the orb of the course of creation. And yet, many things can be tamed and God gave that to man to tame animals. He was to have control, it's a modified control now, but nevertheless there is some control over the beasts and birds and things in the sea. All that could be tamed and have been tamed by man, he can do so much outside of himself. And he can tame for instance he can keep an elephant in captivity. And yet his tongue is just one, one small part of what would be the size of an elephant. And yet he cannot control that, it's restless it's always seeking expression and so the apostle James says, did you ever see anything like that in nature? No such thing occurs as this in nature. Such contrasts such working across purposes, such paradoxical carrying on. Going one way and then another way. This way and then that way, tearing down what you build up and trying to build up what you're tearing down. No such thing occurs in nature, the untamed tongue is grossly inconsistent with faith. Just take the example of the Apostle Peter: in one breath he says when the Lord Jesus says, "who do you say that I am?", "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God". Our Lord Jesus commends him, "flesh and blood hath not revealed this, this to thee Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, but my father which is in heaven". And before long Peter says when he hears the Lord Jesus is to go to Calvary, he says, "far be it from thee Lord. This shall not be unto thee". And the Lord Jesus has to say that's from Satan, "Get thee behind me Satan! Thou savors not the things of God, but the things of man". The tongue reveals what's in the deep recesses of the heart. Mark down Mark 7 and read that after the broadcast, read it carefully, prayerfully, quietly, and apply it to your own heart. Mark 7:20-23, it's out of the heart, and out of the mouth, out of the tongue that there come these many, many displeasing things that God would not have in your life and mine. Nature itself rebukes
man in regard to double issues from the tongue. John Wesley the great Methodist preacher, oh that God would give us many like him. John Wesley was preaching, he was wearing a new bow tie with two streamers hanging down from it, which is quite a popular thing in the West now in our day, it was in his day in England. He was wearing a new bow tie with two streamers who were hanging down from it, and there was a sister in the meeting who didn't hear a word about the Lord Jesus Christ. But she sat with a long face, as if she could eat oatmeal you know out of a vase, and she sat with a long face and saw nothing but those two streamers. When the service was over she went up and said to Wesley, "pardon me, Mr. Wesley, will you suffer a little criticism?" "Yes", said Wesley. "Well", she said, "Mr. Wesley your bow tie is too long and it is an offense to me". He said, "Do you have a pair of shears?", and after he received the shears, he handed them to her and he said, "You'll know how my tie would look best. Would you mind snipping it to the right size?" She reached over and clipped the streamers. Then he said, "is that all right now?" She said, "Yes it certainly is. That is much much better". He said, "Do you mind letting me have those shears? Would you mind a little criticism? Your tongue is a great offence to me, it's a little too long. Please stick it out while I take some off". Of course she resented the suggestion. James says that if we would control the tongue, we would be able to control the whole body. Let's all see God every morning to have Christ possess us that our tongues will be under his control. Speaking only words of kindness and wisdom there will always be plenty of people who do the scolding and fault finding and backbiting and to be said sorry, don't worry about that. The devil will get someone to do that. A still tongue shows a wise head. Not all look at the benefits of control. In verses 13-18, "who is wise and understanding among you, let him show by his good life his works and meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart glory not in lying or against the truth. This wisdom is not a wisdom that
comes down from above but it's earthly, it's sensual, it's devilish. For where jealousy and faction are, why there's confusion in every vile deed. But the wisdom of this room above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy, and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace. Wonderful word. The benefits of control manifests itself in the wisdom of a life of good works in verse 13. It avoids the evil of factional bitterness and verses 14-16. And it procures for us heavenly wisdom verses 17-18. The Apostle asks, "Who is wise?" all would like to be considered that, but few are so that he tells them not to lie against the truth, to boast of that which the life doesn't show is practically lying against the truth of the Gospel. The wisdom that's not a wisdom that comes from above is earthy, sensual, animal like, natural. Man's three enemies are here: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Look at the wonderful seven characteristics of true wisdom. It's that which comes from above, pure, first of all peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy, good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy. First is with reference to God and the others with reference to man, first pure and then all the rest flows out of it. Read 1 Corinthians 13 in connection with that, and Galatians 5:22, and it comes from righteousness and returns to righteousness. A decent and honest lady who had more than forty years earned a livelihood by taking in washing was asked how it was she was so well liked by those who came in contact with her. She said, "I make it a practice never to say in one house what I hear in another". No wonder there was peace. No wonder there was righteousness. Let us practice friends what we now know our God and Father. Make this real to our hearts we pray, in Jesus name amen.

[Hymn sung]

Announcer:
You've been listening to your radio Bible teacher Dr. Louis Talbot Chancellor of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles Inc. Address all mail to Dr. Louis T. Talbot 558, South Hope street Los Angeles 17, California.

[Hymn continues]