

# The letter of James

## Chapter 3:1-18 **THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM**

"The tongue of man is a twisty thing, there are plenty of words there of every kind"  
Homer *The Iliad*

"Speech is a mirror of the soul, as a man speaks, so is he"  
Publius Syrus *Maxims*

"Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue."  
Proverbs 17:28

"The tongue breaks bone, though itself has none" 13<sup>th</sup> Century proverb

"A woman's strength is in her tongue" J. Howell *Proverbs* 1659

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"  
19<sup>th</sup> Century proverb

"Let the lie come into the world, even dominate the world, but not through me."  
Alexander Solzhenitsyn



## Chapter 3:1-12 High Fire Danger

1. What previous verses in his letter does James now expand on?
2. Some commentators think verse 1 is just a provocative way of catching his audience's attention, not related to James' main theme. Is it related?
3. If we thought from the earlier part of the letter that James puts more emphasis on WALK than TALK, we now see he takes TALK very seriously too. Do you think James exaggerates the power of the tongue? (See also Proverbs 10:19 and 18:21) Discuss..
4. List some of the ways that the tongue can be used destructively. (See also Psalm 5:9; 10:7; 12:2-3; 15:3; Proverbs 6:17; 17: 20; 26:28; 52:2)
5. In noting that the tongue can both bless and curse, James also echoes the Old Testament Wisdom Literature. See Psalm 35:28; 37:30; Proverbs 10:19-20; 12:18; 15:4 and 31:26.
6. What do you think James really means by comparing the person who speaks both blessings and curses to a spring that brings forth both fresh and brackish water?

## Chapter 3:13-18 Living Free Amidst Lies, Hype and Spin

1. What is the connection between this section and what has gone before?
2. James links wisdom with living a good (lovely or attractive) life (v.13). What would such a life look like?
3. Clearly wisdom is central for James in the life of faith (see also Chapter1:2-3). Is this his own idea, or where does he get it from?  
(See Prov. 1:7, 8 and 9:1-6; Luke 1:17; 2:40 and Matthew 7:24; 11:19; 13:54; 24:45)
4. Can you identify "worldly" (unspiritual, ungodly) wisdom operating in your workplace/home/church? In what sense are selfish ambition, bitterness, envy, boasting, partiality, hypocrisy etc. seen by the world as "wise"? How might the Gospel of Jesus be regarded as an antidote to "worldly wisdom"?

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This study was written by Denise Cooper-Clarke of St. Columbs Anglican Church Hawthorn (Vic. Australia) and may be reproduced for small group Bible studies.