

**“Have you checked to see what hell is like?
(James 3:1-6 NIV)**

(1) “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. (2) 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.

“(3) When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. (4) 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. (5) Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

“(6) The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

In this text, James referenced something that commonly happened 2000 years ago and still regularly occurs.

**As societies break down, it worsens.
It is, in fact, a chief contributing factor to total collapses of decency and order.**

It ensues today with increasing frequency and intensity.

According to James, no one perfectly deals with it.

To what do I refer?

Our text reads: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers . . .”

**The English word “didactic” comes from the term James used for teachers.
Years ago I thought it might be fun to write humorous children’s literature and poetry.**

I wrote a few stories and submitted them to children’s book publishers.

Editors rejected them stating that I was too didactic and preachy.

They thought I excessively lectured and sermonized—too overtly tried to teach kids Christian principles.

Being moralistic came so naturally, I hardly recognized it in myself.

To a great extent, isn't that what happens at Academy Awards, on talk shows, and in political debates?

Everyone with any type of platform lectures others.

Society suffers an instruction glut.

That is why James advised followers of Jesus to ease up on instructing others: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers . . .”

Few persons practice what they preach.

James then warned us: “You know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

If we condemn others, we set a high bar for ourselves by which God will judge us.

Continuing, James say:

“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.”

Regarding the same matter, Paul cautioned: “Even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”¹

We need to move on but we must carefully underline these principles:

- Only those with spiritual maturity should try to help the fallen person.
- The purpose is restoring the person, not blaming, not finger pointing or accusing.
- **Look first at yourself, James tells us.**
- **If you presume to teach others, you will be judged by a higher standard.**

¹ Galatians 6:1 NASB

His elder brother Jesus said: **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**²

It is difficult, James says, to keep our own selves in check, let alone judge others.

Regarding self-control, James made two comparisons:

First, you can guide a big horse using a tiny bit in its mouth.

Second, large ships can be steered using comparatively small rudders.

“Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body. . .”

An internet site revealed that the average male tongue weigh 70 grams, the average female 60 grams.

Figuring that there are 28 grams in an ounce, the average guy’s tongue

weighs about 2 ½ ounces and a gal’s, slightly little over two ounces.

Our tongues contain substantial protein but they are mostly water and fat.³

That 2½ oz. of water and fat goes on many ego binges, “it makes great boasts.”

That fat, watery protein part brags way out of proportion to its size, doesn’t it?

In each person’s body are two oz. of tissue that frequently spark firestorms of evil.

“Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. (6) The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

My failure to control my tongue has caused me and others great misery.

When we were dating, it really complicated my relationship with Norma.

James: **“It (the tongue) corrupts the whole person.”**⁴

² Matthew 7:1, 2 NIV

³ A Bing search revealed: “Other facts: the tongue is 60-74% percent water, 16-18% protein, 15-24% fat!”

Note the last phrase of verse six: **“and is itself set on fire by hell,”** meaning, “it is at the hands of hell (gehenna).”

It is as if hell controls us.

James warns us that the Lord takes what we say very seriously.

Why is our speech such a grave matter?

God, our Creator set guidelines for us.

He specified what Adam and Eve could and could not do:

This Paradise garden is filled with trees, he told Adam; two special trees stand in the center of it.

“The Tree of Life: you may eat its fruit.”

The other tree in the middle of the garden “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil):

“Do not even touch it. In the day you disobey me, you will die.”

⁴ The word translated “corrupt” means to blemish or stain. The term translated fire or flame is the Greek word from which phlox, a colorful flower is derived.

Along came the talking snake.⁵

The final book of the Bible is *Revelation*, which is filled with symbolic language.

Most *Revelation* passages are in figurative language and are difficult to understand.

Yet Revelation unmistakably identifies one being:

“The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”⁶

Many *Revelation* signs puzzle us, but there is no mistaking here: The dragon=the ancient serpent=the devil=Satan.

In the garden, the devil asked Eve: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

Eve: God told us we could eat from all the other trees but he forbade us to eat

⁵ These details are found in Genesis 2 & 3).

⁶ *Revelation* 12:9 NIV

from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We are not even supposed to touch it or we will die

The devil: “You’re not gonna die. You’ll be just as smart as God.”

When you were young, how many times did someone tell you: **“Go ahead, do it, Nothing’s going to happen to you.”**

If you did it, you immediately knew that you were a changed person and that nothing would ever be the same again.

Adam and Eve felt the change; they experienced guilt and tried to hide.

I am confident that you could directly trace the rising occurrence of depression in people of all ages to the fact that many have given up following God’s standards and simply go along with the world’s views.

God’s ways are right, they promote good health, and they assist us to have better relationships with others.

The Bible’s stresses: we must distinguish between two opposing ways of life:

Either we follow God and obey his word.

Or, we follow popular human opinions.

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the need to follow God’s word.⁷

Our society is using standards of judgment the Lord has never approved or permitted.

It is not our job to change society.

God will judge the people of our time as he has judged people of past generations.

Jesus never assigned us the task of straightening or correcting societies.

He commissioned us to call individuals to repent and to live as Christ did.

Here is what the Law of Moses said about judging a matter.

“You must not convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of only one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

⁷ The Old Testament provides repeated stories and examples of the misery societies and individuals bring on themselves when they disobey God.

16 “If a malicious witness comes forward and accuses someone of a crime, **17** then both the accuser and accused must appear before the LORD by coming to the priests and judges in office at that time.

18 The judges must investigate the case thoroughly. If the accuser has brought false charges . . . , **19** you must impose on the accuser the sentence . . . intended for the other person. In this way, you will purge such evil from among you. **20** Then the rest of the people will hear about it and be afraid to do such an evil thing. **21** You must show no pity for the guilty! Your rule should be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.⁸

“It’s the seriousness of the crime that makes judging a person on the testimony of a single witness necessary,” say those who disregard Scripture

The seriousness of the alleged crime makes it even more necessary to have more than one witness.

Note another fact about this God-given law.

We are not speaking about three separate persons making accusations.

This text requires two or three witnesses to a single matter.

Otherwise if a judgment is rendered, there has been something akin to a kangaroo court.

In the New Testament, Jesus affirmed this same requirement for witnesses.

“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. **16** But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.”⁹

Consider these facts:

- Jesus was crucified because false witnesses testified.¹⁰
- Stephen, the first martyr, died after false witnesses gave testimony.

⁸ Deuteronomy 19: 15-21 New Living Translation

⁹ Matthew 18: 15, 16 NLT

¹⁰ Ibid, 26:59-61

I doubt any of us will ever give that kind of witness—that is—falsely accuse another.

There is a matter, however in which Christians almost daily err.

If we repeat unconfirmed negative info about another person, we might be guilty of another serious offense—gossip.

We often joke about simply repeating facts.

In Romans chapter one, Paul listed many unsavory types of behavior.

The list ends with: **senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless.**

Do you know whom he listed first in the category of folks who are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice?

It is gossips.

Gossip places us in pretty bad company doesn't it?

How bad is it?

Let me end with a shocker.

While ago we read from Revelation 12 and saw four ways to identify Satan.

One of those “names” was the devil.

Perhaps you know that the word devil means “malicious gossiper.”

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The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

We have seen enough hell on earth.

Hell sponsors flimsily based accusations, finger-pointing, and everyday gossip.

I pray that all of us want to be filled with the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be heaven-bound, helping others along the way.
God calls us in Christ to do that.

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