

James Lesson 5 Article

Thoughts from Proverbs on Human Speech

1. Human speech enables us to communicate to others how we feel about life. Therefore, it reveals who we really are (Prov. 18:2; 4:23, 20–27). Speech is the acid test of the person (Prov. 23:7).
2. We are social creatures. We are concerned with acceptance and affirmation. We need it from God and from our fellow humans. Words have the power to meet these needs in both positive (Prov. 17:10) and negative (Prov. 12:18) ways.
3. There is tremendous power in human speech (Prov. 19:20–21)—the power to bless and heal (Prov. 10:11, 21) and the power to curse and destroy (Prov. 11:9).
4. We reap what we sow (Prov. 12:14).¹

James 3:2 — None of us has become perfect (Phil. 3:12). None of us does everything right.

None of us is so wise that we always speak the right word or so strong that we always do the right thing. Remembering this keeps us humble.

James 3:5 — James does not mean to glorify the power of the tongue, but rather he wants to show how even a very small part of our body remains out of our control, so long as we try to control it in our own strength.²

Power to direct—the bit and rudder (vv. 3–4).

The word “helm” in v. 4 is “rudder,” the part of the ship that steers it through the water. We often think that our words are unimportant, but the wrong word can direct the listener into the wrong paths. An idle word, a questionable story, a half-truth, or a deliberate lie could change the course of a life and lead it to destruction. On the other hand, the right word, used by the Spirit, could direct a soul out of sin and into salvation. Just as the horse needs a guide, and the rudder needs a pilot, so our tongues need the Lord to control them.

Power to delight—the fountain and tree (vv. 9–12).

It is impossible for a fountain to produce both fresh water and salt; and it is impossible for a tongue to speak both blessing and cursing. How often we “bless God” in our praying and singing, and then “curse men” in our anger and impatience! See Prov. 18:4. Christians must allow the Spirit to give forth the “living waters” of the Word through their tongues. There is something wrong with the heart when the tongue is inconsistent. Likewise, a tree cannot bear two kinds of fruit. See Prov. 13:2 and 18:20–21. The “fruit of the lips” (see Heb. 13:15) ought always to be spiritual.³

¹ Utley, R. J. D. (2000). *Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude* (Vol. Volume 11, pp. 41–42). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

² Stanley, C. F. (2005). *The Charles F. Stanley life principles Bible: New King James Version* (Jas 3:2–5). Nashville, TN: Nelson Bibles.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (pp. 727–728). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.