



[James 3:14-16](#)

(14) But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. (15) Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. (16) For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

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I like to tell stories, and my family has told me more than once that I sometimes exaggerate things. I always justified it as good humor and in fun. I have come to learn, however, the exaggerations, boasts, or little white lies that "spice up" stories or humor can often hurt and damage others. Sometimes someone hearing the story remembers the situation, and it was not as funny or, from his perspective, happened some other way.

Boasting is usually successful only when another is put down, and though everyone may laugh, the victim may be recoiling from what feels like jabs and insults. Sarcasm and teasing often produce the same results. James refers to boasting and lying as assaults against the [truth](#). One may not realize how true this is until he feels the sting of sarcasm directed toward him. I [love](#) to tease and be teased, but I am realizing increasingly that people can become carried away in their words, violate the truth, and do severe damage.

An old saying runs, "Everyone loves a clown but no one wants to be his best friend." Laughter helps people to relax and bond more closely together in shared experiences, but it is good to learn to look around to see if someone is no longer laughing. Many years ago, a dinner party with several good friends also included a minister and his wife who had just been transferred to our city. It was our first occasion to dine with them, and it was a very pleasant evening. Most of us, knowing each other well, had a long evening teasing, joking, laughing, and putting each other down. We never noticed anything amiss with the new guests.

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The next week at church, however, we heard a sermon about the damages of put-down humor and how it has absolutely no place in a Christian's lifestyle. The new minister talked about how even the most subtle humor can tear relationships down and cause doubts about another's affection or respect. Such humor includes referring to one's wife as "the old ball and chain" or "the biscuit-burner." Such names and teasing—as "good fun" as they may seem—diminish our friends and family, do not express the kind affection we really feel for them, are not true, and thus are lies. A Christian should never lie, not even in fun. All of us were shame-faced and sorry we had left such a negative impression, and we apologized to him, his wife and to each other.

Test: Are we teasing and boasting to another's pleasure or his discomfort? Is it true and factual? If it is not, it is a lie, and no matter how funny it is, it is [sin](#). Sarcasm belongs in the same category: If it is not true, it is a lie. Even if it is true, how are we expressing it? Does sarcasm express love, [gentleness](#), [peace](#), and [mercy](#)? Can we tease one another righteously? I would like to think so, but I am still working on learning how. Without [God's Spirit](#) guiding our words, our tongues remain subtle, merciless, and destructive weapons.

James concludes by telling us directly that these forms of speaking are not godly [wisdom](#), but "earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there" (verses 15-16). The fallout from communication based on our human, selfish motivations is evident about us. The state of [the world](#) and the way it functions are often actions and reactions of crushing blows of words. Governments, businesses, sports teams, even schools, churches, and neighborhoods communicate with each other in wars of words. Our world—this "Information Age"—is practically devoid of godly, righteous speech, relying on the sensual, material, selfish pursuits that drive [Satan](#) himself. How much does it affect us and our communications with one another?

— Staff

To learn more, see:

[Are You Sharp-Tongued? \(Part Two\)](#)

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[Control of Tongue](#)

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[Tongue, Control of](#)

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