

GOSSIP

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INTRO: Our subject this morning is gossip. I have never preached a whole sermon on this subject and I have not often spent more time on one message than this one. You may find yourself disagreeing with me on some points, and I would be happy to discuss any of those; but before you do so, study those points.

Now, somebody finish this saying for me: "Sticks and stones may break my bones," but???, "but words will never hurt me." To this Proverbs 18:26 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Our subject this morning is not an easy one. It is gossip.

In talk about gossip or in thinking that someone else is a gossip it is first important to have a clear understanding in one's mind what one means. I would guess that well over 90% of Christians who use the word gossip could not clearly define what they mean. And if they did, they might find that their definition is just that, their own definition. If they should study the English dictionaries, they might find that their definition does not reflect how dictionaries define it. It may be that many have never checked dictionaries. And anyone who studies dictionary definitions will find it is still hard to express in your own words what gossip is. If you don't believe this, don't study the word gossip, just sit down and write out what you think it means and then check several dictionaries, and then try to define once more.

Having listened to a number of messages on gossip, I find that when preachers preach on gossip, they quite often do not define precisely what they mean by it. There may be a lot of truth in what they say, but there is no clear definition of gossip. From what they say, we generally get the idea that gossip is very sinful, but what qualifies as this sinful, harmful talk is not clearly spelled out.

So, as we begin, let me see if I am right about something regarding this word gossip. Don't think too hard just say what comes to mind. When I say "gossip" for how many does something bad or negative come to mind? For how many does something positive come to mind? hands up. My conclusion was it would be viewed as negative. If we view it as negative and we think of

someone as a gossip, then it is important to define what we mean by this word.

My wife listened to a message recently on slander and she had me listen to it to see what I thought of it. It takes me a long time to think things through but though I could not answer right off what I thought I said it always does us good to have to think how important the words that we speak are.

I wonder how many of you have had the experience I have had. It is this: before I said something I had this niggling impression that I should maybe not share it. It is as if my conscience was warning me. Maybe what would apply here is the saying, "If in doubt leave it out." I suspect most times I should have taken that advice. There is no place where we as readily fall as in spoken words. The book of James says that if anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man and can control the whole body. That leaves all of us out.

I. IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

A. Gossip

Since I say definition is key, I ask, what is gossip? Let me just say that just as you cannot define a Greek or Hebrew word from an English dictionary, so you cannot define an English word from the Greek or Hebrew of the Bible. It must be done from an up-to-date English dictionary. Let me say further that neither the Greek NT nor the Hebrew OT has a word that corresponds exactly to our English word gossip.

Let me define the meaning of the English word "gossip" and do not write me off until you have listened to the whole message. This is a definition you will be able to remember: *Gossip is people informally talking to people about people.* It may be one or more people talking to one or more people about one or more people. This talk may be good or bad or neutral. Often, we may make a judgment about the character of the person spoken about from such talk.

To define a word in any given language one has to go to the dictionaries of that language, and because words change meaning quite quickly one has to have an up-to-date dictionary.

You may be interested to know that the word gossip originally comes from an old English word, godsibb. A Godsib was a godfather, godmother, or a baptismal sponsor and literally meant a person related to someone in God, from the words God and sibb. A godsibb is spiritual relative. Many words change meaning over time and later it came to mean a close friend, or a person with whom one shares intimate things one would not share with just anyone. How many of you have such a friend or friends whom you tell things about other people you would not tell almost anyone else?

Well, later the word godsibb became the word gossip. Still later the word came to mean "idle talk" which we might call chit chatting, and it seems to me that over time it came to include someone who shares such personal information with other people which was given by a friend to a friend. This is a betrayal. Now the word gossip came to have a bad meaning as well as simply chatting.

How many of you have looked at dictionary definitions and you saw that a certain word was given more than one possible meaning? I studied many definitions of gossip which I will not give here but let me just say that as it is used today, in general, definitions of gossip include harmless small talk, or it can mean malicious speech or speech that betrays another. Some add that it may be neutral as well. If you do not agree with that, you must study a number of different dictionary definitions.

An article by TIME titled, "The Science Behind Why People Gossip - And When It Can Be a Good Thing" it says: "Gossip. All humans partake in some form, despite the age-old adage, '*If you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything at all.*' Whether it's workplace chatter, the sharing of family news or group texts between friends, it's inevitable that everyone who talks, well, talks about other people. In fact, a 1993 observational [study](#) found that male participants spent 55% of conversation time and female participants spent 67% conversation time on 'the discussion of socially relevant topics.'" "

"People tend to think of gossip as synonymous with malicious rumors, put-downs or the breathless propagation of a tabloid scoop. But researchers often define it more broadly: as 'talking about people who aren't present,' says Megan Robbins, an assistant professor of psychology at The University of California, Riverside. 'It's something that comes very naturally to us' – an integral part of conversation, information sharing and even community building.

"It's not necessarily negative," adds David Ludden, professor of psychology at Georgia Gwinnett College and the author of *The Psychology of Language: An Integrated Approach*. "It can be positive or neutral."

Here is the Collins Dictionary definition:

1. Noun

Gossip is informal conversation, often about other people's private affairs.

2. Verb

If you gossip with someone, you talk informally, especially about other people or local events.

3. Countable Noun

If you describe someone as a gossip, you mean that they enjoy talking informally to people about the private affairs of other people.

Wikipedia says: **Gossip** is idle talk or [rumor](#), especially about the personal or private affairs of others.

When we talk about Justin Trudeau having divorced his wife that is gossip about someone's private affairs.

One writer wrote that defining gossip is like trying to nail jello to the wall. Anybody who studies this and seeks to write out a definition will learn the truth of that. So here is how I define gossip: "Gossip is people chatting with people about people." In other words, it

is not talk about the weather or work or machinery or any other such topics. Then further, gossip may be good, bad, or ugly. The key* ingredient that determines if the gossip is bad is the speaker's motivation for passing on information.

When in casual talk about other people one says, "I have heard..." or, "Rumor has it..." such talk is often OK. When that is passed off as truth by another when it has not been verified, then, I believe it is not good even though it may later prove to be true.

Dictionary.com says the noun gossip means, "1 idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of others." According to this definition it may simply be idle talk. We all do this. But if it involves personal or private affairs of others, now it can easily slip into that which is not proper. When divorce happens that is a private and personal affair, but it is not wrong to repeat that someone has divorced if the motivation is not malicious. A lot of things we talk about our politicians are private matters, but it is not wrong to talk about those. Or we may speak of a rumor. You might say, "I heard a rumor that our prime minister is not going to run again." If that is a rumor going around, that is OK. But when we pass rumor off as fact, now it is wrong.

Now, how do I know when gossip is bad? As I see it, the greatest distinction between gossip that is OK and that which is not, is one's motivation for saying what one says about another. When I speak of another and my purpose is to make them look bad to the person I am speaking to, this is very sinful. It is defamation of character and it can ruin another person's life. When I pass along that which has not been verified, this may also be very bad, if I do not say that this is unverified.

Let me just say this, that generally when we speak about gossip, we do not have harmless talk in mind; we are speaking about something negative without realizing there is such a thing as chatting with others which is classed as gossip. I read and listened to and heard a number of pastors speak about gossip without giving a

clear definition. By the way they spoke of it you could determine that what they had in mind was harmful talk. When you listen or read about gossip, a key thing is to look for a definition.

In defining the English word gossip, it must be done from English dictionaries, not from what we think it means. Numerous pastors will tell you that the Bible does not include the word gossip, and in my research that is what I have concluded as well. That is why when we accuse another of gossip and we mean malicious talk, we need to make clear what we mean. When some modern Bible translations do include the word gossip, they are translating a word that may include bad gossip, but the biblical words translated as gossip by some translations are broader than just gossip.

For example, I listened to a message on James 4:11 which says in the NKJV, "Do not speak evil of one another." The speaker's translation said, "...do not slander..." The word here translated *to speak evil of* or *slander* is *katalaleo*. But literally it says, "Do not speak against one another." Speaking against one another is a lot broader than simply bad gossip.

Now let me ask you: When you have spoken with others about others in the past, did you ever do it to make the person you were speaking to think less of the person you were talking about? Was your motivation to tear down the character of the one you spoke about? That is sin. It has the potential of ruining another person's life and it can spread like cancer and be as deadly. Life and death are in the power of the tongue! When I have malice in my heart when I talk about others, this is sin! I have been gossiped about and slandered many times, even very recently.

If gossip is people informally talking to people about people, that means gossip is not necessarily bad. What it tells us is that gossip always has to do with informal talk between two or more people about another person or persons who are not present. Now this talk may be true, or rumor, or speculation, or reports from others, but whether it is bad or not is determined mostly by what motivates the speaker. When it is bad gossip, it is "People maliciously talking to people about people who are not there." In this triangle of

people, there is the speaker or speakers; the listener or listeners, and the one or ones spoken about who are not present."

Let me add that I believe one can gossip maliciously simply by changing one's tone. If I repeat what someone said to me and use a different tone, I can be malicious. If I say, "He said to me, 'Why do you always have to say things like that?'" but what he actually said was, "Why do you always have to say things like that?"

Now we may not all agree that gossip may be positive or neutral, but we will all agree that there is such a thing as bad gossip; and in general, that is what we mean, and that is how I will be using the word in the rest of this message. By the way, if you think that the word "gossip" always means something bad, check several English dictionaries of today's use of the word.

B. Slander

Now, because of time I have to keep short a discussion on slander. In legal language there is a difference between slander and gossip. Let me just say this: Slander is a lie about others with the purpose of tearing down the character of the one spoken about. The difference between slander and libel is that slander is spoken and libel is the same thing in written form. Slander and libel are defamation of character.

Gossip may be good, bad, or neutral; slander is always bad. I may lie about another to tear down their character by passing along that which I have heard but which I have not checked out and which is not true, but it is still slander. One may take another to court for slander, but not for gossip.

I listened to a preacher speaking on James 4:11 which says in the NKJV, "Do not speak evil one against another." His version said, "Do not slander one another." Now the verse literally says, "Do not speak against one another." It might include slander or bad gossip, but it means to not speak against another at all. Now we understand that it would mean any kind of malicious talk so the word "evil" is added in the NKJV.

There is so much more to be said here, but for the sake of time for the next point we move on.

II. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Leviticus 19:16 says:

16 'You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

The word for "talebearer" is *rakiyl* (7400), and it comes from the word meaning to go about. It has been translated as a talebearer or a slanderer. TWOT says both these words are too light. If so, the idea of slander is likely best.

Psalm 15:2-3 says this:

1 LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

2 He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart;

3 He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;

The word translated "to backbite" is *ragal* (7270), meaning "to go on foot." Since backbiting is done with the tongue, not the feet, it carries the idea of going about saying things about others. Certainly, negative gossip or slander could be included in this word but it is not limited to that.

In English backbiting is making derogatory or spiteful remarks about another behind their back. It can be as simple as saying, "Oh, don't listen to him!" Or, "She doesn't know what she's talking about!"

Proverbs 11:13

13 A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

The word translated "talebearer" here is *hawlak* (1980), with almost the same meaning as before since the word

hawlak means "to walk", so we get the idea of going about and talking. And then this verse qualifies how the writer views the meaning when it says it is one who reveals secrets. This person goes from place to place, revealing things about others that should be sealed.

In English a talebearer is one who maliciously gossips or reveals secrets. This word comes close to the English word gossip when gossip is malicious but it cannot be used in any good sense.

Proverbs 11:9 says:

*9 The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor,
But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.*

The sin here is hypocrisy and hypocrisy affects how one speaks and it could be anything from slander to gossip to backbiting and any other form of bad speech.

Proverbs 10:18 says:

*18 Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, And whoever
spreads slander is a fool.*

The original word is *dibbah* (1680). The onlinebible says the word translated "slander" carries these meanings: "1a) whispering 1b) defamation, defaming 1c) evil report, unfavourable saying." Certainly, this word can carry the meaning of gossip or slander, but again, it is not limited to that. It is used in a good sense of Joseph who brought a bad report of his brothers to Jacob. There are times when we know things that we have an obligation to report to the right people and there are times when we do not do that for fear of what it may cost us.

When this word is used in a bad sense it speaks of defaming others or speaking maliciously about them.

Psalm 34:13

*13 Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from
speaking deceit.*

When it says, "Keep your tongue from evil..." this speaks of anything that is not good. When it says, "And keep

your lips from speaking deceit," it means treacherous or deceitful speech. This can include gossip and slander but it is broader than that.

Matthew 5:11

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

To revile means to criticize strongly. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 speaks of Christians who are revilers. Then this verse speaks of saying all kinds of evil against one falsely. To speak all kinds of evil could include slander but it could mean other things as well.

Ephesians 4:29

29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

This word "corrupt" according to the onlinebible means: 1) rotten, putrefied 2) corrupted by one and no longer fit for use, worn out and 3) of poor quality, bad, unfit for use, worthless. Certainly, that would, among other things, include bad gossip and slander but it could include much more.

James 4:11 says:

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

In the immediate context of the verse, verses 1-10, and then the following context, verses 3:13-4:6 you find it is speaking of professing Christians and when you read about these Christians one wants to ask, "Are they really Christians?" The word *evil* as I have mentioned is not in the original word. The word translated "to speak evil against one another" is *katalaleo*, and it means to speak against. This word occurs again in 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:16. Only in James 4:11 does it speak of believers speaking against believers.

In 1 Peter it speaks of unbelievers speaking in this way about believers. It is shameful when Christians speak in this way about other believers. Here is what we must weigh through when we speak about other believers; would my speech be acceptable to God? I have heard things said by Christians to Christians about Christians that only unbelievers should ever speak. I have read and heard Christians speak like this of others.

The NIV translates the word *katalaleo* as slander. This word certainly may include slander, but it is in no wise restricted to that. This word is also used in 1 Peter 3:16 and 4:15 and speaks of how unbelievers speak of believers.

1 Timothy 5:13 uses the word like this of widows:

13 And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.

The context speaks of widows who are idle, which means they do not work. The word "tattlers" speaks of those who bubble over with useless talk. The NKJV calls them "gossips." The online bible says it is silly or foolish or frivolous talking. The word "busybodies" according to the online bible speaks of leaving out that which is important and being caught up with trifles, or all kinds of little things. But then these words are explained to mean that they speak things, though they be trifles, they ought not to be spoken. Many trifles may be spoken about, some are not good to speak about.

Romans 1:28-30 says this:

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,

30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

In verse 30 we have the word, "whisperers." It is used in 2 Corinthians 12:20 as well. You can tell from the Greek word what it means. It is *psisthuristes*, pss pss pss. What is whispering? It is what you do in the presence of other people, telling one or a few something you don't want the rest to know. The ESV translates this as gossip but again it is broader than just gossip and could include anything else that is not good. Whispering, like gossip, is not always bad but in this context it clearly is.

Verse 30 has the word "backbiters." It is again the word *katalaleo*, to speak against. I am not sure this is correct, but Vine's Dictionary says: "This word is closely related to *psisturistees*, (whisperers). The difference is that the whisperer says bad things or things damaging to the character of another without the one slandered hearing it. The backbiter does it in front of the other person in a hidden sort of way, clandestinely." It is the same word translated "to speak evil of" or to slander in James 4:11.

My conclusion is this: There is no word in the Bible that speaks of gossip in a good or bad sense or slander in the way we use them. However, both can be included in certain biblical words. But while gossip may not always be wrong, slander is always wrong. Gossip may not always be malicious, slander always is.

Let me add one word here about something I have heard sometimes. It is when one person accusing another of talking too much. You might wish to think this through, but I believe that when we are serious this accusation should not be made. Why not? There is no measurement or definition of what too much talking is, and the accused may have no idea of what the accuser means. A person who makes this accusation should simply say what they mean, like, "You are a gossip" or "You are a slanderer" or whatever they mean.

If an accusation of gossip or slander is made the accuser should always say on what ground they make that accusation. As I see it, someone who accuses another of talking too much is not willing to tell the other person that they are a gossip or a slanderer. Be honest and say what you mean and give evidence for what you mean. Just to say to someone, or to tell the church someone is a gossip or talebearer or talking too much or anything else without evidence is wrong.

Let me just mention that there are words for a person who talks a lot, which does not mean he talks too much because nobody knows what too much is. These words are loquacious, garrulous, or voluble. If you visit with these people, you don't need to say much. Give a topic and sit back and listen. But these names are not listed as sins.

Because of time I will not include two matters other than to mention them, but in concluding this point let me mention two things: First, there are negative things we may and sometimes should share about another, but this point may need a whole message. There are negative things about others that should be made known to the right people and we might fail to do so, not because we shouldn't but because we are afraid to do so, or we don't want to become involved. I know of such a case, where in a church meeting a brother should have shared some negative things about another, and he did not. Let me give one example of this in the Bible, and that is Joseph telling his dad about what his brothers were doing. These are things the dad had a right to know.

The second issue I leave out because of time is in what cases repentance are in order. Some types of speech we use require repentance in order to be clean. For example, if a certain person comes to mind in hearing a message like this, repentance may well be in order.

III. HOW TO DEAL WITH A GOSSIPING CHRISTIAN

One point I want to deal with is how I think a gossip in the church should be handled. If we are negatively gossiped about or slandered by unbelievers because of our faith, Jesus said we should rejoice and be exceedingly glad. But what should one do if one feels another Christian is a gossip? If such a person is gossiping about myself, then it may be well to kindly approach someone we feel is a gossip.

Paul writes in Romans 15:14:

14 Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

But if the one we feel is gossiping is gossiping about others, I would make the recommendation I make to any Christian who knows of another Christian who is involved in

serious sin. I recommend, at least in most cases, do not approach the person yourself. Take it to the church leaders and have them look into this. And why do I recommend this? First, it is not your issue, personally; and if you approach the person, you may make a personal enemy. And second, if it is a matter like gossip or greed or envy or jealousy, it could be that the church leadership would not agree with your conclusion.

And if one brings this to the church, what is essential is that one needs to have what one views as clear evidence of the allegations. And then one should come in the spirit of meekness. It is possible that the accuser is wrong, or that the accused has very good answers for those allegations. Some people are what I would call supersensitive on the subject of gossip, and they may not be right in their conclusions, so gentleness or meekness is in order.

Let me give you what I see as an important Scripture for a difficult cases like gossip or greed, or a number of other kinds of cases. You will want to turn to Galatians 6:1. The apostle Paul says this:

1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Let me say first that this passage is taken by some as referring to someone caught red handed in some sin, that is, one Christian finds another in some sin. I think that the nature of this verse does not allow that interpretation and the sharp contrast between this verse and such Scriptures as the case of 1 Corinthians 5 or 2 Thessalonians 3 give evidence for this.

Let me point out a number of things. First, I take the original word translated *overtaken* to mean this person was *inadvertently* overtaken by something that is wrong. Then note that this instruction is prefaced with an "if." The instruction is given in case something like this happens. Then note further that this is addressed to Christians about another Christian. It says, "Brethren."

Further, the person is overtaken in a "fault" according to the KJV or a "trespass" in the NKJV. There is a difference a difference between a sin and a trespass. Let me explain.

Of the word translated "trespass" Robertsons Word Pictures says: "Literally, a falling aside, a slip or lapse... rather than a wilful sin." A trespass is when you do something wrong inadvertently. The use of this word here indicates to me that this is one who is inadvertently overtaken in a fault or trespass. In the OT it is called a sin of ignorance.

I would say that such matters as gossip, greed, envy, jealousy and there may be others, might well qualify as someone overtaken in a trespass. Can one inadvertently be overtaken by greed? Yes. How about gossip? Yes. And there are other things. For example, a Christian might take on a certain job and another believer thinks a Christian should not have a job like that. I believe this verse cannot mean a serious sin like adultery because such a sin calls for immediate excommunication (1 Cor. 5).

Now note ever so carefully that it goes on to say, "...you who are spiritual restore such a one." Notice very carefully that it is "you who are spiritual", plural, not "he who is", or "he who thinks he is spiritual", singular. Consider as well that verb "are" is plural. That is correct because in the Greek the pronoun "you" is plural. This means that restoring such a person is to be done by more than one person and it is to be by those who are deemed spiritual. I would suggest that such a case should be brought to the attention of the church leaders and spiritual members should be set out to look into this matter. It is not one person going to accuse another of such a trespass, rather it is done by several spiritual Christians.

Now note something most important. The plural of the first part of the verse, "you who are spiritual" is changed to the singular, in the second part of the verse which says, "considering yourself", singular; and further, lest "you" singular, "also be tempted." Who is this singular person? I propose this singular person is the person who has found another Christian in a trespass. The advice here is that he is not to approach the person in the trespass himself, and the reason given is that if he does, he is in danger of falling into the same temptation.

Then note further this restoration effort is to be done in the spirit of gentleness. Again, we are given the idea this

is not a case of serious sin. Nee and it needs to be handled delicately and carefully.

Last, note that the purpose of spiritual persons talking to the person overtaken in a trespass is to *restore* such a person. The word "to restore" used here is used in the NT in such cases as fishermen mending their nets. It means to fix. The onlinebible dictionary says that ethically, which is our use here, it means: to strengthen, perfect, complete, make one what he ought to be.

I might add that in our church constitution we deal with this passage.

Now there are sins easier to identify, like adultery, or even slander; but things like gossip or greed are very hard to identify clearly and must be handled very carefully by more than one person, and such persons as are deemed spiritual. How do you determine that someone is greedy? How do you determine that someone is a malicious gossiper? Such cases need spiritual people to look into them and evidence must be given.

III. WHEN REPENTANCE IS IN ORDER

Now I was going to give a longer point on when repentance is in order. I must do so only very briefly. First, with regard to slander.

A. In Slander

If I have slandered another, that is I lied about another in order to lower the listener's view of the one I slandered, repentance is always in order.

B. In Gossip

So, we ask, when is repentance in order in gossip? If I listen to a message like this or the Holy Spirit in any other way brings someone to mind that I have wronged by telling things about them, in order to bring the listener's view of their character down, repentance is in order. Have I talked to another to bring their view down about another Christian? If my motivation was not good, I need to repent.

Have I passed on to another something as fact which I did not verify, and my motivation was to influence the one I was speaking to bring their view down about the person I was talking about? Repentance is in order. There is more needed here but this will have to suffice for now.

CONCL: In conclusion, let me give my definition of bad gossip once more: So here is how I define gossip: "Gossip is people chatting with people about people." Here is how I define harmful gossip: "Bad gossip is people maliciously chatting with people about people." The intent of the speaker is to tear down the character to the one spoken to, of the one spoken about. The information may be true, unverified, rumor, or reported by others, with the malicious intention that the listener should conclude a certain negative view or views about the person being spoken about."

How do I know I need to repent for gossiping? If my motivation was wrong in sharing certain information with certain people.

Have I slandered another? I need to repent! Have I spoken to another in order to bring down their view of someone not present? Again, repentance is in order. And if you are wrestling right now with a case, come before God until you know what to do. If repentance is in order, then take care of it.

And last, it is always good to think through how I talk about others to others. James 3:2 says:

2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

If we can control the tongue, we will have complete mastery over our whole being!